



Diary of a Journey around the World
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Foreword

This journey would not have been possible without the help of my brother Severin Lenel, who acted as my "base station" in Switzerland, looked after my bank accounts, paid all the incoming invoices and received the DVD's with my photos. Furthermore I would like to extend my thanks to Rene Hochstrasser, who kept my website alive, allowing me to write my diary every day online and to receive my e-mail. A big hug for Doortjie Castagno, who proof-read and corrected my diaries. Thanks to Jarek and Halina Pyra who saw me to the airport and bought a bicycle box for me, when the airline suddenly decided that they want the bicycle boxed instead of wrapped. Thanks to Dubi who received the bicycle and took it back to Thal, when I my sore back did not allow me to continue cycling. And thanks to everyone, who let me stay at their place, be it relatives, acquaintances or fellow couchsurfers. Thanks also to all those who kept in touch by e-mail. I took almost 30'000 photos with my tiny little Samsung A-503 camera. Not all of them came out well, but some did. If I added all of them to this file, it would get too big. For this reason, I just added a few examples at the end.

South Africa

Beginning of October 2006 Only a few days till I start my journey. My luggage is far too heavy. The airline called today telling me that all the tools have to go into the luggage which is already too heavy. Even the Allen Keys! On the other hand, the hand luggage has lost so much weight that I dared to buy some chocolates for my relatives in South Africa.

During my journeys, people kept asking me whether I was a millionaire to be able to afford such an expensive journey. But in actuality, the journey itself was not all that expensive. In most countries I spent on average a bit more than 500 USD per month for my cost of living and bus transfers. The real difficulty of such a journey is the management of the current liabilities at home. Had I remained registered in Switzerland, I would have spent on taxes, at earnings zero, already much more than my cost of living. On top of that are medical aid and insurances. The logistics of such a prolonged absence from home are not to be underestimated: Somehow my credit card had to be charged to my account. Somebody had to receive the DVDs with my pictures. Internet access to the accounts changes, government offices want something, although you are not at home. Invoices have to be paid. Had my brother Sevi not volunteered to assist, I could not have done the journey.

05.10.2006 Thal-Johannesburg Early in the morning I drained the geyser, the water pipes, removed the fuses of my cottage and closed the blinds. It was still dark outside and I left the cottage in complete darkness. I hope I did everything right, as I would not be able to see whether this was the case. I then posted the ISDN NT and caught the train to the airport. At the airport, my old friends Jarek and Halina Pyra were waiting for me. Without them, I would never have managed the check-in. I had to negotiate for an hour until my bicycle and my pannier bags were on their way to good old SA. After a very pleasant stay at the airport restaurant, I said goodbye to Jarek and Halina and went with Dubi to his place near the airport, where I had to maintain a few websites. My flight will leave 10:30 pm.

06.10.2006 Johannesburg The flight to Johannesburg was pure joy. We were not only served an abundance of delicious meals and drinks, there were no problems whatsoever. During the stay in Qatar I was so tired that I slept through. Arriving in Johannesburg, all my luggage was there and my bike was undamaged. Only my pannier bags had been opened and not re-closed again, but nothing was missing. I was heartily welcomed by Sheryl and Eugene Buckley and then I just sank into bed and slept. The following day we went shopping at Balfour Park Shopping Centre and I got a fright: the price level has risen to the regular Swiss price level. The Balfour Park Shopping Centre is one of the buildings I had taken part in constructing, so I went and knocked on one of the fibreglass panels, only to discover that it was still the one I made twenty years ago. Tomorrow I will go to Home Affairs to have my passport extended.

08.10.2006 Johannesburg Visiting Mark and Clare Cresswell in Parktown North. Took a walk through Emmarentia park where there was a luscious African wedding.

09.10.2006 Johannesburg Sheryl took me to Randburg to Home Affairs. I apply for a new passport. No problems encountered. Then I cycle to Marlborough to apply for a renewal of the driver's licence. No such luck, the deadline has expired. I will not get a new licence, unless I get an exemption from the Department of Traffic. I then cycle to the bicycle shop in Orange Grove where I buy some spares. Cycling in JHB starts getting fun, as I am now overtaking taxis (texxis) right, left and centre.

16.10.2006 Johannesburg I am still in JHB. Last week, I spent a fortune on vaccinations. On Thursday I get the second Cholera shot. Saturday, I am invited for lunch by Apostolos Giannakopoulos, a maths lecturer at the University of Johannesburg. On Sunday, Sheryl, Eugene and I go hiking on the Suikerbosrand. On Friday I will hopefully leave for Pomeroy and Durban.

20.10.2006 Johannesburg I am still in JHB. Yesterday, I got the last vaccinations. The people at Travel Clinic

Bedfordview were so helpful, they even printed the health risks for me of the countries I will visit. My departure is delayed as I am a bit behind with installing the new PC of my brother-in-law. I will have to do that this weekend. We are also planning to install new halogen lights in the lounge and this requires at least two persons. Yesterday, I cycled all over the JHB CBD and made photos. I was not assaulted! I then went to see an exhibition of the projects of the IT students at Johannesburg University. It was particularly impressive how much technical expertise was shown by the black students.

21.10.2006 Johannesburg We leave early in the morning to Benoni in order to buy the necessary utensils to fit a multitude of lamps. We start with the outside lights, which are easy to fitted. We then move to the 11 halogen spotlights in the lounge. The work between the crossbeams in the dusty roof is quite hard. We only finish around midnight. Eugene and I have sore backs from working in a crouched position in the roof. All the lights work fine.

22.10.2006 Johannesburg Today we went to the St. George Hotel in Irene near Pretoria for lunch. There was an impressive Greek buffet with typical Mediterranean mezzos and lots of meat and seafood. Afterwards, we went to Doornkloof, the farm where the great former South African Prime Minister and war hero Jan Christian Smuts stayed in a modest tin house. As my back is still terribly sore from yesterday's lamp fitting, I will not be able to leave tomorrow.

23.10.2006 Johannesburg-Leandra Left JHB at 6:30, great difficulty to find out of JHB without using the freeway. Have to do many detours. Lunch in Devon, one hour's rest. Pitched the tent between Leandra and Roodebank at Dries van Eedens Farm "Kurumakati". He was very friendly and even gave me supper and a warm bath.

24.10.2006 Leandra-Perdekop Early in the morning Dries offers me coffee. I pack my things and continue. There is a stiff breeze. Back- and neck pain. I battle until I reach Standerton, have something to eat in the "Oriental Plaza". Talk to a young man searching for work in Secunda. One hour's rest, then continue to Perdekop. One hour's nap under a tree. I am toiling with the many rises, terrible backache. In Perdekop I find an almost deserted, but very reasonably priced hotel. I enjoy a hot bath. I am so glad that I have not forgotten all of my Afrikaans. It opens all doors for me.

25.10.2006 Perdekop Today I will do nothing, because I am tortured by backache. Huge breakfast. Perdekop is pretty much deserted. The garage is only coasting along, the take-away is mostly closed and the panelbeating shop is covered by weed, as it has been closed for years. The huge NGK (Nederduits Gereformeerde Kerk), holding space for a congregation of 600, is only visited by 30-50 Churchgoers on Sundays. The massive congregation building and the pastor's house are no longer in use. The owner of a modern supermarket which offers many bicycle spares, tells me, that the "Goldfields" packaging business, the only industry in the village, belongs to her son. I am later told, that all the businesses are owned by either one of the two Bangladeshi families, except the "Sonlig" Take-Away and the butchery which still belong to whites. Apparently, after 1994, an ANC city council was elected and the great exodus began. Even the hotel, where I stay, used to be very impressive. Today, most of it has been closed down, as there are no more customers.

26.10.2006 Perdekop-Dannhauser At five o'clock in the morning I have packed everything and loaded my bike. The good woman who manages the hotel has made a huge pack of sandwiches for me. I continue cycling. I am still tortured by back- and neck pains. The road goes steep up and down. I arrive exhausted in Volksrust, where I sit on a bench and have my sandwiches. In dense fog I cycle in direction Laing's Nek. There is road construction over 7kms where there are robots and one-way traffic. As I am so slow, I witness three changes of directions until I am through. This is pretty dangerous in this fog. Earlier than expected I reach the pass. Afterwards I am descending rapidly to Newcastle. I eat a large curry in a restaurant, where I can take the cycle inside. From Newcastle I cycle in direction Dannhauser, where I planned to sleep. When I turn at the first sign "Ballengleich", a farmer calls me. I get closer and he explains to me that the road was a dead end. He then invites me to a cooldrink. I return to the N11, which is still taking many kms until I get to the Dundee offramp. Soon I discover that the road is getting steeper and steeper. I push the steepest parts. When I arrive in Dannhauser, I am completely exhausted. At the police station, they tell me, that there was no accommodation. It is two hours until Dundee, where there is accommodation. So I have to cycle on a terrible dirt road to the Municipal Campgrounds. A storm is raging. I meet Hennie and Chris, who are fishing there, and am invited to some Castle Lagers. Then I pitch then tent, get inside and fall into a unsteady sleep.

27.10.2006 Dannhauser-Pomeroy I get up, pack my things and find out, that my glasses are missing. I seek everywhere, but find nothing. I look through all my things - nothing. In the end, I unpack my sleeping bag, and inside there they are! Completely undamaged. Now I've lost an hour. I continue cycling up and down. In the next village I notice that there were two B+B's. Grr. I cycle up and down till Dundee, where I eat a snack. Then I continue to Helpmekaar. On the way there, a farmer gives me a cold beer. As I ask him about the person to whom he speaks in Zulu, he tells me that he was working in the fourth or fifth generation for him. Helpmekaar consists only of a few ruins of shops, a police station, the building of the Boerevereniging and a house that is for sale. The road climbs steeply another time until it is straight for a certain distance and then descends to Pomeroy, which can be seen from far. I am heartily welcomed by Zeb Badat. He is the Imam of Pomeroy and right now he does his optional six extra days of fasting. He insists putting me up in the hotel and gets me a huge lunch. When he returns, we talk about God and the world. We then go to the Mosque. It is situated in a former shop, right across from his business. He speaks about the Hadj that he has made with his family.

28.10.2006 Pomeroy-Camperdown Zeb insists on taking me with his bakkie to Pietermaritzburg, as this stretch of road was too dangerous because of the many thugs in the area. I am taken to Camperdown, to Ismail Lockhat. He is about the same age as I, runs a farm, has a wife, two very pretty daughters and a son, who is already very interested in breeding animals. I can sleep in a caravan, quite a luxury for me! We have long and good talks.

29.10.2006 Camperdown-Durban Five o'clock in the morning I get up, say goodbye to the Lockhats and start cycling to Durban. I try not to hit the freeway. The Valley of a 1000 Hills is beautiful, despite the mist. Several times I get lost as the signs for M39 suddenly vanish and I take a wrong turn. Once I suddenly find myself in Everton and have to cycle all the way back, then I find myself on the road to Kwa Mashu and have to return to New Germany. From Pinetown there are no more signs. I follow a cyclist and find myself suddenly on the freeway. As I am already there and there is anyway no alternative, I cycle through until the Mayville offramp. A last confusion as I turn the wrong way into Jan Smuts Highway, then I recognise everything and find the house in Hugo Road easily. My mother-in-law gives me a hearty welcome and even insists on washing my clothes.

30.10.2006 Durban My first day in Durban. The weather is hot and humid. My successes with Internet and Home Affairs are poor. I cannot log into my homepage and Home Affairs tells me to call next week again. I install a Firewall and an Antivirus Program on the Internet computers of Postnet. Haroun, the owner of the shop, is very happy about that.

3.11.2006 Durban I am fetching a bicycle box from a cycle shop in the Pavilion Shopping centre. Going there is a major problem, as it is virtually impossible to get there without hitting the freeway. On my way back I cheekily cycle down the freeway. The big bicycle box is like a kite. I hold on to it while the big lorries pass me, while the box almost sweeps me off the road. It is constantly airborne.

6.11.2006 Durban-George I get a flight to George (on the garden route) to wind up my last legal case. The bus to the airport doesn't show up. Only after the second call they pick me up with half an hour's delay. In George I was invited by Thomas Casanova, an enthusiastic Swiss golfer who owns a huge farm here. Splendid ostrich steaks for supper.

9.11.2006 George The continuing backaches get unbearable. I am forced to see a Chiropractor.

11.11.2006 George Today I spent at the railway museum in George. This was extremely interesting for a steam enthusiast. Not only were there an immense number of South African steam engines in excellent condition on display, near the entrance were also two locomobiles. In the museum is also Africa's largest model railway on display, although this was for us Europeans quite moderate, particularly with a view to details. There were German Faller-houses in a South African landscape, which does not entirely tie up. But there were many South African model engines and coaches on display. It would be tedious to describe all the steam engines in the museum, although there were enormous South African Garret-Engines (with a steam-driven bogie in front and in the rear) as well as tiny shunting tractors with motorcar engines. Very impressive were the numerous working steam 1:8 scale models, unfortunately all in glass cabinets so I could not take any pictures. Completely unexpectedly I found a wonderfully preserved collection of vintage cars. Most impressive were the four rare Borgwards, two Isabella Coupés, a S100 and a Pullman. A funny sight was the railway bus which had a cattle compartment in the rear half. Interesting was a model of a steam engine whose twin steam cylinders drove a lateral transmission which in turn drove all the axles via sprockets. Behind all the glitzy engines I discovered an old steam engine with a saddle-type boiler.

12.11.2006 George My work in George is done, the settlement about to be signed. I will probably have to return the bicycle to Switzerland, as my back might be better, but still far from well. I don't want to remain on a string, I want to continue my travels, whether with or without bicycle. Today I cycled with a borrowed bicycle to Herolds Bay and back, just in time before strong gales started.

13.11.2006 George-East London By bus from George to East London, where I visited my old friends Lu and Aubrey Holdstock. They welcomed me with open arms. Both are now retired, their son Andrew is running the farm, where he plants tomatoes and green peppers. Lu has started a project on day-care for black children. Aubrey does a lot of fishing, often catching huge fish. The farm is still a paradise, where bushbuck and whales can be watched from the lounge window.

14.11.2006 East London-Durban I spend the day at the Holdstocks. They take me to East London where I catch the 22:00h bus from East London to Durban.

15.11.2006 Durban I am back in Durban, arriving by bus from East London.

16.11.2006 Durban After having another fit of debilitating back pain, I have sent the bicycle back to Switzerland, to Dubi who is living the closest to the airport. It was quite an expense. I hope that one of my neighbours can store it until I return. I then bought a bus ticket to Maputo, the bus is leaving tomorrow morning.

Mozambique

17.11.2006 Durban-Maputo Today, the taxi was - to my greatest surprise - really on time at 75 Hugo Rd and took me to

the bus station. The “Pantera Azul” was a once very comfortable bus which was obviously bought from the scrapheap. It left on time. There were no problems at the border posts. We crossed Swaziland and then entered Moçambique. We had one breakdown in Swaziland, but it was fixed in no time, so we arrived only an hour late, which is on time in Africa. I took a taxi to the Pensao Fatima, where all the travellers stay. Maputo has changed completely since I have been here last time. Before it was a war-ridden Russian-type economy where no shops and no private enterprise was allowed. There were only a few cars, mostly old or of Russian origin. Today it is a bustling city with a thriving economy. I noticed that they finally accepted the fact that most cars are of South African origin and hence drive now on the left side of the road. All over, English is spoken and many ads are in English. South Africa has finally conquered Moçambique, and this time in a very nice way!

21.11.2006 Maputo I am enjoying Maputo very much, the city has improved a lot since I was here last time, twenty years ago. I visit the Museo de la Revoluçao, which is still as scruffy and socialist as it was 20 years ago, I think that nothing has ever changed in here. Otherwise the city is on a good track, maybe with better prospects than South Africa.

22.11.2006 Maputo-Tofo Beach The guard does not wake me, of course, I only awake at 5 by the noise of a door, far too late. I shower quickly and pack my belongings. It is 5:25, the taxi to the bus station leaves at 5:30. At the gate there are no other travellers, so I have to pay 200 Mt for a ride with a 30-year-old, completely creased Toyota Corolla to the bus station. Arrived at the bus station, I cannot leave because the door wouldn't open from inside. A cheeky guy just grabs my bag and tells me that it is his duty to get me to the right bus. I can only follow him. I buy a ticket to the bus to Inhambane. The guy asks for 150 Mt. for the luggage. As I find out that everyone else gets a receipt, I keep demanding one too. I find out that the luggage is only 50 Mt. I take the 100 Mt from him and give him 20, which is still far too much for his cheek. He complains a bit and then leaves me alone. The bus ride in the 30-year-old, completely dilapidated bus, is slow. Has to be, because the bus lacks shock absorbers which the first pothole sorely reveals. In Xai-Xai there is a short stop, then it continues without stop. As I have to pee, I just get outside when somebody drops. The bus would almost have continued without me, all I can do is shout “espera, espera”. After 8.5 hours ride we arrive in Inhambane, where a Chapa to Bamboozzi's is waiting. At Bamboozzi Beach I pitch my tent and go into Tofo to organise supper. But Tofo is dead at night, so that I am forced to return in complete darkness to Bamboozis. There I meet the two Norwegians from the bus from Durban. We grudgingly shell out 160Mt for the Pizza Buffet . The Norwegians make a new record of 12 and 11 pieces of Pizza, which makes the cost look a lot better in retrospective. I have to give up after 9 pieces.

23.11.2006 Tofo Beach Early in the morning I take a bath in the sea. Then I book an ‘Ocean Safari’ which strains my budget at a cost of 1'000 Mt a lot. At 10:30 we leave with a rubber dinghy and search for hours for the whale sharks. This in the searing sun, without any shade. Eventually we find one, but my goggles keeps filling up with water. When I eventually see the whale shark, it is so near that I almost bump into it. It is a small specimen, only about three meters long. Afterwards we do some snorkelling on the reef, which works fine in the meantime. I see a manta and some colourful fish, but compared to Kenya nothing in particular. I then realise that I caught a bad sunburn, despite the sunscreen lotion. I probably don't improve it with a walk along the beach to Tofo. There are a few interesting animals at the beach like crabs, squids etc. I spend the afternoon opening a coconut with a penknife and eating its contents. A terrible sunburn prevents me from sleeping.

24.11.2006 Tofo Beach-Vilanculos After a sleepless night, I got up early and packed my belongings, which was not so simple with the sunburn. I then walked along the beach to the village, where I got on the Chapa to Inhambane. There I deposited my backpack at the Port Authorities and went to see the city. It still features a lot of decaying buildings and is dominated by the Priests' Seminary and the modern Cathedral. The Internet café was not online, so that my mails have to wait. I fetched my luggage and took a water taxi to Maxixe. Many businesses in Maxixe seem to belong to South Africans, there were even “ons praat Afrikaans” signs. I boarded a bus to Vilanculos. I had to wait for an hour until it was ready to leave. It was packed with luggage and crossbeams. At 16:00 we arrive at an Intersection 20 km outside Vilanculos. The driver gives me 20 Mt. for the Chapa into Vilanculos. There is no Chapa, but a Chinese with a delivery truck, who takes me at breathtaking speed into town. I check in at Baobab Backpackers and pitch my tent. As the banks are already closed for the weekend, I have to exchange money at a lousy rate on the black-market. I then want to eat something and go to the market, where 5 blacks pull me in different directions until I decide to follow one and end up eating rotten goat's meat in a makeshift tin shack. I survived it. Of course, I had to invite my ‘guide’ to the same meal. During the night, I suffer from a combination of disco noise, a noisy generator nearby and a terrible sunburn.

25.11.2006 Vilanculos-Beira At 04:00 I get up, roll up the tent and board the bus to Beira. It leaves 05:00 sharp. The driver is perfectly organised, he keeps a list of his passengers, so no seat is overbooked. He drives very responsibly and seems to know everyone on the way. He gives one policeman his regards to the colleague. When he realised that one of the passengers has a live chicken in his backpack, he gets very agitated, because he is running a decent bus and does not transport livestock. He asks the passenger to leave the chicken behind or leave. Fortunately, we are already in Beira, so the passenger gets away with it. In Beira we drop. With two Argentineans I walk all over Beira to find a cheap pensao. We don't find anything. While they are continuing, I move into the ‘Savoy’, which might only be a shadow of its glorious past, but the cheapest place in town.

27.11.2006 *Beira-Quelimane* A long Chapa ride from Beira to Rio Zambese. At Rio Zambese, we have to cross the Zambesi River by ferry. On the other side, I continue in a Yellow Bus. In Quelimane the Pensaos are so expensive, that I decide to accept the offer to stay against still quite substantial payment at the place of a guy that I just met in the street. They stay in the servants quarters of one of the Portuguese villas. It is very hot. The air-conditioner which he has installed makes the place either freezing or hot. There is neither water nor lights.

29.11.2006 *Quelimane-Nampula* Bus ride from Quelimane to Nampula, put up at the Residencial Monte Carlo, it rains, the electricity trips.

30.11.2006 *Nampula* Nampula is a bustling capital of the north. The shops are full of Chinese goods, especially copies of Honda 50cc motorbikes called 'Ahomda', for which a set of 'Honda' nameplates is readily available. I visit the Ethnological Museum. The entrance fee of 100 Mt(!!) for the lousy two rooms of banalities, leaking rainwater and with a guide whose main duty is to prevent taking photos and to explain in all detail and with great enthusiasm the circumcision rites.

1.12.2006 *Nampula-Pemba* At 04:30 I arrive at the bus station and the bus is nearly full. The ride in the overcrowded bus is tough, because there is no leg space. Arrived in Pemba, I visit the dismally dilapidated city. The locations are huge and the beach is covered in refuse and excrement. There is a strange contrast between the beautiful Portuguese houses, which were built for eternity and the adjacent reed hovels. It just visualises the extent of the population explosion in this country. A group of English and American Christians invite me for tea and cake.

2.12.2006 *Pemba-Ilha de Mocambique* At 04:00 I walk to the nearby bus station, where I find a Chapa to Nampula. It still circles till 05:00 in the area, until it is full and the roof loaded with wooden beams, about 500 kg of rice and the luggage. It arrives at 10:00 at Namiala, where I change Chapas. The Chapas to Ilha are regular lorries, where the passengers are exposed to the sun, obviously without glasses or hat, because of violent draft. It takes three hours for the 80 kms. The boy taking me to Cassia Luis wants a tip - quite difficult a task as change is not easily available in Mozambique. I shop around for half an hour, until I find a shop that lets me buy a coke with a 100 Mt. bill. In the evening, a well dressed and English speaking gentleman appears, introduces himself as Philip, Luis' brother, and Manager of the Rest-House (to sink this in, he commandeered the guards around). He told me that he was on his way to the pharmacy to buy medication for his kids, but the bank was already closed. If I could not give him some of the accommodation fee in advance. As I had not yet paid, I agreed and paid him 300 Mt. Before handing over the money, I asked the guard, whether he was really Luis' brother. The guard readily confirmed. As soon as Philip had left, the guard asked me 'Why did you give money to this man?'. I start getting worried. When Luis returned, I told him what happened. He immediately knew, because his cousin (not brother) had done this thing previously and got away with it. His real name was Victor-Hugo, he was not working for Luis and had probably already spent the money for his drug habit. We go looking for him, but as he has no permanent address, we cannot find him. I am very upset with myself to have lost so much money with this stupid trick, even when it was only around 15 CHF.

3.12.2006 *Ilha de Mocambique* I get up early, buy tea and scones at the market and go to the citadel. It dates from the 17. Century, the chapel even from the 16th Century and is the oldest building on African soil. At the entrance, someone wants to charge me 50 Mt. entrance fee. I insist on a ticket and refused payment. When I left the citadel, he kept on insisting. I am just about to leave when the real guard shows up. I pay him, get my ticket and he opens the chapel for me as a bonus for insisting on a ticket - the earlier guys were impostors. The chapel is much better preserved than the rest, and has some graves of Portuguese noblemen. When I went to the Internet café, it was online, but so virus-ridden, that no mails could be sent out. I buy lunch at the market. Two hours later, the guards invite me to join in at their lunch consisting of Nsima and seafood. In the evening, I fear rain, so that I roll up the tent, because tomorrow I don't want to leave with a moist tent.

4.12.2006 *Ilha de Mocambique-Nampula* When I got to the taxi rank at 04:00 am, there was already a lot of activity. The 'Tanzaniano' was so crammed full that I battled not to get a cramp, sitting in an awkward position for 4 hours to Nampula. When booking in at the Parque, I met Lewis again, whom I had earlier met in Ilha. We bought train tickets. Afterwards I went shopping. A pickpocket put his hand in my pocket and when I tried to grab him, he ran.

5.12.2006 *Nampula-Cuamba* Louis and I get in time to the railway station and find to our surprise space in a compartment in the second class car. Then the people start streaming into the train, with loads of luggage and even more children. Only when the train is completely full, we realise what the letters on our tickets mean: We are assigned to a particular compartment and may not remain where we are. We change compartments, but, alas, there is a guy who is obviously moving a household and has used all the available space for his luggage, plus 8 adults and 5 children in the compartment. When I ask him whether he has tickets for this compartment, it turns out, that he has not. He changes compartment, but leaves his luggage behind. The woman next to us cannot cope with her three children, who keep crying, throwing around food and shitting all over the place. There is no way to remain in the compartment. In the crammed passage I meet Ignatius, a Malawian from Liwonde, who was educated by Father Felix from Kachebere - what a coincidence, he was the was the missionary who picked me up 20 years ago in Lilongwe and let me stay at his mission until I was well again. At noon, we have lunch in the dining car where most people have either already passed

out or are trying hard to drink themselves to do so. The train labours on the inclines but eventually makes it to Cuamba. As it is getting dark and we would not be able to cross the border the same day, we take a room at the Pensao S. Miguel. There is neither electricity nor water. A terrible thunderstorm unloads over Cuamba. We are so glad to be in the dry and enjoy food and drink, while the rain falls hard outside.

Malawi

6.12.2006 Cuamba-Monkey Bay Early in the morning I wake up with an upset stomach. Food poisoning! I am struck with diarrhoea. Nevertheless, Louis and I board the 05:00 Chapa to Manyanga. It takes another two hours to be filled up, apart from the official payload of rice, a full household is loaded, including a double bed, 30 paying passengers and 6 children. The ride is slow and the sun is hot. The 70 km ride takes 4 hours. When a spring broke, the driver did not seem to be too perturbed. Then we are unloaded at the market and told to walk the remaining 5 km to the Malawian border. At the border there are no problems and we quickly find a pickup truck to take us to Mangochi. What the Chapa was lacking in speed, this one is making up. 40 minutes later we are in Mangochi where we board the bus to Monkey Bay. The bus is sizzling hot but it just would not leave. I can hardly breathe. Eventually they tell us, that the clutch was broken. But no refunds. I get very agitated, our money is scarce. Eventually they start refunding the tickets and we jam into a minibus, backpack on our knees. On arrival in Monkey Bay, it is already dark. A Guide wants to take us to the Venice Beach Rest-House, but after 40 minutes walking without even getting near, I call the exercise off. We return to Monkey Bay and book in at the Hakuna Matata Backpackers, a good choice as it is under South African management, reasonably priced and offers good food.

7.12.2006 Monkey Bay We visit Cape Maclear. The tiny fishermen's village has grown into a village with countless tourist accommodations and about 10'000 inhabitants. Mr. Steve is not in, he is attending a funeral.

8.12.2006 Monkey Bay-Salima At 10:00 we board the Ilala. It was a good choice that I did not buy the expensive 1st class ticket, as it is not a problem to walk up to 1st class for a chat. In Chipoka I am taken ashore with the dinghy. The waves shake the little nutshell terribly. I walk a couple of kilometres to the main road where I immediately find a minibus to Salima. In Salima, I put up at the WW Chakwera Resthouse right next to the bus station.

9.12.2006 Salima-Lilongwe I am taking a minibus from Salima to Lilongwe. It takes a long time, I only arrive at 09:00 hours.

11.12.2006 Lilongwe A boring Sunday in Lilongwe. Everything is closed. Out of boredom I move to the Lilongwe Golf Club, where I pitch my tent. As soon as I have pitched it, it starts thundering. But it never rains, even not at night, but loud disco music and myriads of mosquitoes don't let me sleep.

12.12.2006 Lilongwe-Blantyre Trying to call Home Affairs in Randburg, whether my passport is ready. The phone place is closed, because they are moving premises. The Post Office is on strike. All the phone places try to sell cellphone airtime, but there are no landlines. Eventually, I return to the phone place, where they allow me to make the call, although they are moving. No luck, Randburg doesn't answer the phone. I return at noon and get through. The passport is still "being printed". No use trying further. I hop on a minibus to Blantyre. When the bus stops at a market, I buy an egg and pay for it. Before I can take it, a crazy beggar woman grabs it and runs away with it. We arrive at 19:00 hours. I check in at Doogles.

Zimbabwe

13.12.2006 Blantyre-Harare Bus from Blantyre to Harare, meet Shinya, a Japanese world traveller and Simon Tete, a Zimbabwean businessman on the bus. Simon invites us for the next day over to his place.

14.12.2006 Harare Shinya and I explore the city. In contrast to Johannesburg, Harare is not dilapidated and still looks clean and well maintained. There are not street hawkers and the houses seem to be well maintained. There is even some construction work. The Zimbabweans seem to cope quite well with hyperinflation and everything seems to be available, although at a premium. In the afternoon, Simon invites us first for lunch and then to his place, where we watch a video and eat supper. He then even takes us back to our place.

15.12.2006 Harare-Masvingo-Harare Early in the morning I take a taxi to the bus stand, where I get a bus to Masvingo. During the bus trip I feel worse and worse, until my bowels seem to boil over. Diarrhoea! I ask the bus driver to stop and quickly do my thing. When I get back on the bus, a policeman travelling with the bus wants to charge me with "public nuisance". I explain to him, that I did not do it on purpose. The bus gets to Masvingo and I have to wait for about an hour until the minibus to Great Zimbabwe takes off. From where it drops me, I still have to walk for another 20min to Great Zimbabwe. The entrance fee is 15 USD, only payable in foreign currency. The ruins are really spectacular, especially the mountain fortress. When I return to the main road, I get a lift from a policeman right into Masvingo. But, alas, there are no buses back to Harare in the afternoon. For two hours I try to hitchhike, but of no avail.

I then hop onto a army hearse, with four others, whose bus was stranded in Masvingo. The ride is slow. 20km outside Harare the driver stops and asks for 1'000 Zim\$ (0.4 USD) more than previously concluded. We have to pay. In exchange for that, he takes us right into the city centre, where I catch a taxi back to the Rest-House. I have to share a room with two pleasant youngsters.

16.12.2006 Harare Today I should have travelled to Lusaka. But I have to cure my Diarrhoea and will stay for one additional day in Harare, particularly as it is pleasant here.

Zambia

17.12.2006 Harare-Lusaka Take the minibus to Mbare and from there the Zupco (pronounced Soupko) bus to Lusaka. A 3 hours wait at the Zambian border, because the "traders" have to negotiate a price for the smuggled goods. 100km from Lusaka a mutiny amongst the passengers; some are not happy with the drivers speed. After half an hour, they get a consensus and we continue. In Lusaka, I check in at the Chachacha Rest-House.

18.12.2006 Lusaka Lusaka is frightfully expensive, although in comparison to before, there is free enterprise again. I don't know how the Zambians cope with these prices, unless they earn big bucks. I buy a ticket for the Tazara. Absolutely surprising and very nice is that Zambia seems not to be so crime-ridden anymore and everyone says that Lusaka is quite safe - I remember the days when I was robbed in Lusaka's Cairo Street in broad daylight. Today this seems to be a lot better. The Zambians are very pleasant and really try to make my stay comfortable.

19.12.2006 Lusaka-Kapiri Mposhi Woke up 04:00. No water, the guard has to switch the pump on. Taxi to the bus station. Buy a bus ticket. The conductor wants 20'000 Kwacha for my luggage. I demand a receipt. When he refuses to give me one, I refuse to pay. A pastor holds a sermon before the bus takes off, this is innovative, the people can't run off. Arrival at Kapiri Mposhi um 09:00 Taxi, shared with little Mwaka and her mother the Mzungu way, e.g. I pay 5/6 of the cost. I feel sick, take a nap. T-Bone-Steak for lunch. The train leaves at 16:00. We are only two in the compartment. I am suffering from flu.

Tanzania

20.12.2006 Kapiri Mposhi-Mbeya I feel a bit better. Tea and cookies from the platform vendors for breakfast. No problem crossing the border. It keeps raining. I arrive at 16:00h in Mbeya, take a minibus to the city centre. A bearded bloke by the name of John follows me and sells me a bus ticket to Sumbawanga for 17'000 Tsh. Noah goes out of his way to help me to acquire Tanzanian shillings, but plastic money fails to work. As all the Rest-Houses are fully booked, I have to check in at a new and expensive one, but get a fabulous room with shower and toilet. I have to decline an invitation from Noah for supper, as I have to go to bed early. I feel quite sick.

21.12.2006 Mbeya-Kasanga The alarm clock rings at 04:00h, at 04:30h I am at the bus station. Beardy John is already awaiting me, telling me that he has swapped me to a different bus. He gives me a Sumby Bus line ticket, with a price tag of 19'000 Tsh. I board and the bus leaves in direction Tunduma. After dawn, I realise that the 1 (one) is written with a different pen. John cheated me for 8'000 Tsh. We hit a terrible dirt road after Tunduma. After 10km, the rear right spring support breaks off, the rear axle shifts. It is easy to see that the eye of the spring has broken off a long time ago and the spring was just shoved in loosely in place. It is fixed within a short time. The crew seems to be experienced in this kind of problem. The drive is slow because of the bad mud road, which is tarred only before and after bridges. It is raining continuously. I feel sick. 16:00 we arrive in Sumbawanga. Will I be in time for the ship in Kasanga? I look for a bus to Kasanga. Although it is late, I find "Lulus Xpress". First I have to tip one of these guides that attach themselves to me and keep asking for money. The bus takes off, the road is terrible. It is at least not raining. After 4 hours we arrive in Matai. In a unlit Restaurant I buy rice and chicken and eat it on my newly found seat in the bus. There is comments about everything I do in the bus: Mzungu eats rice, Mzungu eats chicken leg, Mzungu farts, Mzungu burps. A short time after Matai, the spring support breaks off, the bolt slipped out. Confusion, someone is banging with a hammer to give the impression, that the problem is taken care of. As it gets dark, they are glad to use my batteryless torch. I make the proposal to use a tube as a lever to put the spring back into place. Everyone is laughing at the out-of-place comment of the Mzungu. As they are not a bit further after a lot of banging, the driver asks me, how I meant it with the lever and we get the spring back within no time. It started to rain hard, the road is becoming a riverbed. We only advance very slowly. After two hours we have merely made 20km. The pin of the spring packet comes loose again, but this time they know how to get it back in.

22.12.2006 Kasanga At 3am the bus is driven into a ditch, which has in the meantime become a stream. All attempts to get the bus out fail, particularly as the driver gets the bus further and further in the mud. At 6am, I fetch my backpack from the roof carrier and start walking towards Kasanga. At 7am I arrive in Kasanga, meet a boy named Gody, who insists on taking me to the jetty. For his unwanted services he wants either my glasses or my batteryless torch. As I say no, he tries to steal the torch. It is raining cats and dogs. When the Liemba arrives eventually, I jump on, but have to

discover, that it is on its way down to Mpulungu. In Mpulungu, I am assigned a cabin, which is directly next to the loadbay. I put 52 USD in my purse to pay for the passage. The paymaster is not in his office. As I walk back, I am bumped by 3 little boys, maybe 10 years old and I feel a hand in my pocket. The purse is gone. I run after them, a crew member searches them, but they have already handed the purse on, it cannot be found anymore. 80 USD and 10'000 Tsh are gone, the timing was ideal, usually the purse was empty.

25.12.2006 Kigoma, Arrival in Kigoma. An attempt to find the chimps of Katonga fails. In the evening Emmanuel, who I met in town, shows up and offers a guided tour to the chimps. As he demands money beforehand, I decline. He says OK, you can pay the project manager directly, let's go. Suddenly, he ushers me into a taxi, we ride for a very short distance and of course nobody is there. I am asked to pay an outrageous 7'000 Tsh. I pay just to be able to leave.

26.12.2006 Kigoma, The taxi driver must have bragged with his rip-off. In the minibus to Ujiji, the conductor tells the passengers how I was ripped off which is followed by laughter. To me he says "easy come, easy go". I could have punched him in the face, but I keep quiet. Visiting the Livingstone memorial. By Dalla-Dalla (Minibus) to Katonga, walking back.

27.12.2006 Kigoma-Dodoma The train only leaves with 5 hours delay, as the engine has broken down. The coaches are all trashed and seem not to have had any maintenance in the past years. At 8pm I change the compartment, because I managed to extend my ticket from Tabora to Dodoma. The road between Tabora and Dodoma looks awful and I am glad not to be in the bus.

28.12.2006 Kigoma-Dodoma Tea for breakfast in the dining coach. As I have to go to the loo, my glasses get hooked and fly off, bounce twice to go exactly into the hole of the toilet pan onto the rails. Shocked! As I return to the compartment, suddenly a parrot appears from under the seat. I am not hallucinating, the parrot was transported by one of the passengers in a far too small box and the intelligent bird managed to break free. In Dodoma I put up in the Saxon Resthouse. Since my last visit, Dodoma has improved a lot, and has now a large, almost pedestrian-only shopping area.

29.12.2006 Dodoma-Dar-Es-Salaam After a speedy and enjoyable bus-ride on the excellent tar road from Dodoma to Dar-Es-Salaam, I put up in the "Pop In Hotel", whereby Hotel is an exaggeration. I order a new pair of glasses which can be collected on Tuesday. Thank God I had the prescription scanned on my USB Stick!

30.12.2006 Dar-Es-Salaam A lazy day in Dar-Es-Salaam.

31.12.2006 Dar-Es-Salaam-Bagamoyo When I get to the ferry terminal for Zanzibar, I am told that the 12:30 ferry does not run because it is a public holiday. Because I am bored, I decide to take a trip to Bagamoyo, cross over to Zanzibar by Dhow and return on the fast ferry. I catch a minibus to Mwenge and from there to Bagamoyo. In Bagamoyo I get terribly lost. At the end, I put up in the "Pop Juice" Resthouse, which is very cheap and very clean. I view the fortress, Stone Town and the Karavan Sarai. When I eat fish for lunch, a fishbone gets stuck, but I manage to put a finger down my throat and push it out. For supper I go back to the fish market, where I chat with youths and eat little fried fishes, which are delicious. Abdul, the guy who has promised to organise a ride to Zanzibar does not show up, but this does not matter much as I have in the meantime found out about the departure time and mode.

1.1.2007 Bagamoyo I leave the Resthouse early in the morning, around 5am. When I come to a particular dark spot in stone town, near the "Block House", two persons grab me, one of them wielding a ca. 40cm long knife and say "Gimme money". I frantically grasp my daypack with all my valuables, but they tear at it, shake me and eventually, when I don't let go of it, push me to the ground where they cut it with the said knife from me. There are a lot of bystanders who just watch stoically, some of them assisting the robbers by holding me. Lost are not only all my photos, my two cellphones and my money (I have only about 8'000 Tsh. left [USD 6]), but also all my travel documents, e.g. passport, SA ID book, vaccination booklet, everything. The police insist that it was my own fault, as "Bagamoyo was known to be dangerous". This is obviously not true. I suspect them to know exactly who has done it. They refuse to investigate the matter. Two tour guides, Peter Junior and Kenny, help me through the day, Kenny even offers me lunch at his house. A hotel owner, Helen, gives me 10'000 Tsh. to get back to DSM. At another hotel, I am allowed to use the Internet for free to cancel all my cards. Peter Junior soon finds out - by listening to town talk - who had done it, but he is not able to get hold of the guy. We probably never will. Apart from the tour guides, the people of Bagamoyo are very cynical about it and profess that a Mzungu generally deserves this kind of treatment.

2.1.2007 Bagamoyo-Dar-Es-Salaam I return in the morning to DSM. The Swiss Embassy is closed, unfortunately. The South African Embassy turned out to be of little help, they just sent me to make some photographs - I would not know how to pay for them. With Helen's money, I am able to go to an Internet café and print copies of my passport and the purchase documents of the Travellers Cheques from my backup USB stick. This enables me to cash them, although at an ugly low rate. So I have money again! I use the money to pick up my new glasses - wonderfully well made!. Then I can eventually eat a decent supper again. But the events don't let me sleep for the second consecutive night.

3.1.2007 Dar-Es-Salaam At 8am I ring the bell of the Swiss Embassy, where I am very friendly received and immediate unconditional help is offered. I will receive a new passport and a new ID card. I may also use the Embassy as a postal

address. This enables me to solve the worst problems. Sheryl writes from SA, that the person who wrote out my vaccination certificate is on leave, which is going to delay my departure by at least a week. I go to Bagamoyo and pay one of the tour guides to launch a search party for my belongings to Lugoba, where the two robbers live.

5.1.2007 Dar-Es-Salaam A boring day in DSM, a bit of checking whether my cellphone or my camera are somewhere for sale.

6.1.2007 Dar-Es-Salaam-Bagamoyo-Dar-Es-Salaam Travelled to Bagamoyo. My search party had no success. Myriam, the lady I sent to Lugoba, says that the two criminals had already sensed their names were known and had fled to DSM where they allegedly hide in a resthouse. Lunch with Kenny, a very friendly tour guide who has gone out of his way to help me in this matter.

7.1.2007 Dar-Es-Salaam Buy a new (second-hand from Europe) jacket to replace the stolen one.

9.1.2007 Dar-Es-Salaam A new South African passport and a vaccination certificate arrive via DHL from my sister-in-law in JHB.

10.1.2007 Dar-Es-Salaam I assist Mell, a 71-year-old American, to take English examinations at the English Fountain College, earning 3500 Tsh. In the afternoon I blow them by buying a pair of second-hand pants, as my other pair has become too wide for me. Upon noticing that the belt holders were missing, I have to have them sewn on. The pants are now really good. In the evening, I feel a flu coming up.

11.1.2007 Dar-Es-Salaam The flu has me in it's claws, I feel terrible.

14.1.2007 Dar-Es-Salaam A hell of a fight with the receptionists of the hotel. While I was sick, they continued taking my money, but made no recordings of it. Now they want the money for that period again. I refuse to pay. As usual in Africa, the dispute is only postponed, but not yet resolved. I am still very sick, so I take a Dalla-Dalla to Mwenge, where I have my blood tested for Malaria, although a running nose and sore throat are not typical for Malaria. No malaria detected.

15.1.2007 Dar-Es-Salaam Today I have to humble myself to the Tanzanian Immigration Department. After writing a letter explaining why I had to get a replacement entry stamp to the minister, filling in a form, handing in the loss certificate in original and a copy of the passport and waiting two hours, I am awarded with a replacement entry stamp. I then proceeded to DHL where I am eventually given the package with a replacement camera from my brother, which was there since Friday but was not delivered because of the public holiday on Friday. I am still feeling very sick, but I shall move on to Arusha early tomorrow morning.

16.1.2007 Dar-Es-Salaam-Moshi Early in the morning I get up and catch a Dalla-Dalla to Ubungu Bus Station, where I just scrape on the 07:00h "Buffalo"-Bus to Moshi. After a very comfortable ride (the bus has excellent seats) we reach Moshi at 15:00h, where a local guide takes without hassling me to the Haria Palace Resthouse. I get a beautiful room for the night. I am still feeling a bit sick, suffering from a bad cough.

Kenya

17.1.2007 Moshi-Nairobi I join Teru at 6am to the bus station, where there is to my great disappointment only a Dalla-Dalla to Arusha. A guide takes us through the bus station of Arusha to a dilapidated bus. There is enough time for a quick breakfast. The bus leaves only at 09:30, leaving a black cloud of smoke behind. At 11:00 we arrive in Namanga, where we check out of Tanzania. We are then ushered to an exchange office, where they use a tampered calculator, which works out 25% less. I protest, and there is a hell of an argument, but I get the difference of 500 Ksh. paid out. Teru has also been cheated. We have lunch at the border post, but the bus just doesn't want to leave. We leave only at 2pm. I get a coughing fit and have difficulty to breathe, because micro-dust from the buses exhaust keeps getting into the interior of the bus. We only arrive at 5pm in Nairobi, where we take a taxi to the Backpackers. My cough stops as I leave the bus. Supper with Ludwig from Ingolstadt in the restaurant nearby.

18.1.2007 Nairobi Went in the morning to the Ethiopian Embassy, applied for a visa. With Teru into town, withdrew some money. Back to the Ethiopian Embassy and collected the visa. Walked to the Yaya centre, where I bought a money belt and batteries. Back to the "Backpackers", then to Easy-Coach, but they don't have a direct bus to Nanyuki anymore. I am told to go to Eastleigh. With the Matatu No. 9 I rode to Eastleigh. I was appalled by this terrible, apocalyptic dump in the midst of town. Eventually found the buses to the north. Back to town, went early to bed.

19.1.2007 Nairobi-Isiolo I wanted to go to the Sudanese Embassy. Washed my clothes. Then I am told that the Sudanese Embassy never issues visas in Nairobi. I pack the wet clothes, take a Matatu to town. A friendly Kenyan lady helps me to find the bus to Isiolo. I leave on a minibus in direction Isiolo. In a steep incline, the minibus overheats and stalls. We wait, eventually we can continue. At Karatina, the driver first misses the bus station and has to turn back. Somebody tries to wrest my sliding window open, I hold against it. At a petrol station we change the minibus, but my backpack is getting badly torn in the process. As we arrive in Nanyuki, I get a seat in the minibus to Isiolo, but have to pay 80 Ksh. extra "for my backpack" which is of course a Mzungu-charge. In Isiolo I check into the Jamhuri Resthouse. I have

supper and buy a few bananas to constipate me. The guide for the transport introduces himself.

20.1.2007 Isiolo-Bubisa At 4am the guide knocks at my door: The lorries to Moyale have arrived. I quickly dress and go with the watchman and the guide to the main square, where I buy some extra water. Then I have to pay 3'000 Ksh. - far too much, as I was told later - and can board the cabin of the modern Mitsubishi truck. But I have no seat, I have to be on the sleeping berth, as the seats are already taken. We travel for 10km, then the left springs have to be realigned. The repairs take almost two hours. The road is terrible, corrugated, sand and big stones. After the last rainy season, the road has not been graded, so that there are still deep ditches in the road. We see Zebras, birds, ostriches with blue necks, Duiker and hares. There is hardly any traffic, now and then another white Fuso truck or a police or army Landrover. We overtake once a French Unimog. Already at 10am we stop at a village where I quickly eat a plate of "Wali Nyama". The springs are repaired again. We wait. We only arrive at 6pm in Marsabit. I am very surprised, that this remote spot has two petrol stations and many shops and hotels. We pass a huge volcanic crater. Stopover in Bubisa, where we have tea. We continue until midnight. We then stop at a resthouse, where we get 6 hours of precious sleep. With Abdi, the driver, I have become friendly in the meantime, so that we can share a room.

Ethiopia

21.1.2007 Bubisa-Moyale At 06:00 we continue. The track is getting stonier and more rugged, but we are also travelling much faster, up to 60km/h. Stopover for breakfast at a restaurant, where we can get tea and omelettes - wonderful. We continue through increasingly green and denser populated areas. The first electric power lines appear, we go up a steep incline and enter Kenyan Moyale. I say goodbye, grab my backpack and go to the border. There I meet Frank Blume, a German cyclist who has pedalled from Germany to here. As he doesn't speak much English, I translate for him. We quickly exchange our money, then I go to the Ethiopian side, where the immigration has already been closed at 11:45 for lunch. My backpack is quickly searched, then I walk to the bus station, where I am told that the bus will leave at 11am. I check into the Hotel Abreham for 10 Birr only, and get a nice room. The loo is terrible, though. At a restaurant, I get a real Ethiopian lunch. I return to the immigration and get the passport stamped. Supper is cabbage with the same, in the meantime, a bit sour omelette called "Injera".

22.1.2007 Moyale-Hagere Maryam When I wake up, it is shortly before 7am. I get ready and go to the bus station. But the bus to Shashemene has already left. They meant 11am Swahili time, which is 5am our time. I return to the hotel, where the small blue bus is still parked in the yard. It is bound for Haraga Maryam, which is as well. I jump on and we leave in the almost empty, but heavily loaded bus. We make a long stop for breakfast in Mega, then another long stop for lunch. They order a big pot with mutton for 10 Birr for me - delicious. Unfortunately, the bus leaves before I could eat all of it. We continue through a green landscape and beautiful pine forests. Haraga Maryam is at the foot of a treed hill and is a busy city with many shops. I check in at the Dawa Hotel, where they initially want 30 Birr, but let me stay for 20, which is still a lot for the not so nice room and no showers and a terrible loo. At supper, I ask how much it is, they say 10 Birr, but when it comes to paying, they want 20 Birr. I end up paying. Loud disco noise until midnight does not let me sleep.

23.1.2007 Hagere Maryam-Addis Ababa At 05:20 I went to the bus station. The direct bus to Addis Ababa is already there. I get in and stow my backpack under the seat. At 6:30am we leave. When we stop for breakfast, my travel-mate offers soup. Then we continue. Lunch after Sheshemene. I get vegetables and bread - delicious! At 6pm we arrive in Addis and get into rush hour. I take a taxi to the Baro Hotel. For supper Spaghetti Bolognese, what a luxury! Then to the Internet café.

24.1.2007 Addis Ababa Went early in the morning to the Sudanese Embassy. They only open the door at 09:30. I am told, that I need a letter of recommendation from the South African Embassy. I go to the Tourist Office, but a "guide" clings to my heels and as I want to buy a map, he tells me not to buy it, he knows a better place. We end up at a tourist market, where they want to sell me the map for 200 Birr, whereas the real price is 68 Birr, still far too much. I return to the hotel, where I am told that I can stay. I return to the Tourist Office (this time alone) where they tell me how to get to the South African Embassy. I go to the South African Embassy, where they have to fingerprint me for the letter of recommendation.

25.1.2007 Addis Ababa Still no electricity. Went to the Mercato: Narrow alleys, desperate living quarters. Fetched the letter of recommendation from the South African Embassy, but get lost on the way there and waste a lot of time. Meet Louis, whom I trekked with in Malawi, at the Baro Hotel.

26.1.2007 Addis Ababa Went to the Sudanese Embassy, applied for a visa. Bought bus ticket to Harar. Louis joins me. Long talk with two Dutch travellers, Neill and Sanna, who are touring Africa with their Landrover.

27.1.2007 Addis Ababa-Harar The taxi to the bus station leaves at 04:45. Boarded the bus to Harar. Arrived after 11 hours in Harar. Meet Craig and Karen at the Tewodros Hotel.

28.1.2007 Harar Woke up by the sounds of the broadcast Church service of the nearby Orthodox Church. Breakfast at

the pastry shop. Move to the tourist Hotel, where they have terrible double room, but water. Walk through the old town, whereby Louis pretends to be my guide, so the locals leave us alone. Once I am mistaken for a Russian, and I start speaking Russian only to the locals. In a narrow alley of the old city, a man ultimately demands money from me. As I refuse to pay, he blocks my way and grabs at my pockets. I push him away and run off. Without Louis nearby, it might have ended in a robbery. For lunch meat and Injera. In the evening to the Hyena-Man. He feeds the hyenas every day, against hard cash. I may feed the hyenas, too. Afterwards to a restaurant, where we eat supper. Disco noise up to 02:45 does not let me sleep.

29.1.2007 Harar Visited the exhibition "Pictures of New York" (!). Walked around the historic city walls. Visited the museum, first we pay the entrance fee, then we are asked to leave the museum as they were closing. Louis just stays and starts asking many questions. At last the curator has to come in. Louis explains why he does not want to leave and the curator is most understanding and explains to us the Harar house in depth. Visited the recycling market. Supper with Karen and Craig.

30.1.2007 Harar-Addis Ababa At 05:00 to the bus station, the bus is already full. Lunch with fasting food which is very tasty. Many police checks with partially crude search methods - clothes are just thrown into the dirt - delay the journey. Arrived after 19:00 in Addis, Minibus to Piazza, where all decent hotels are fully booked because of the conference of African Unity. We have to put up in the dreadful Hotel "Abrehams".

31.1.2007 Addis Ababa I wake up at 01:00am with stomach pains. Dysentery! I couldn't have found a worse place, the loo is far away and pathetic. The dysentery is getting worse. At 06:00 I take medication, at 08:00 I pack my things and walk to the nearby Baro Hotel, where I am given a room immediately, due to the circumstances. Not a moment too early, because I spend the rest of the day on the loo. At 13:00 Louis visits me and gets me water, sugar and salt. The diarrhoea stops. I read a lot.

1.2.2007 Addis Ababa Go to the Internet café, but no connection. Go to the Egyptian Embassy, apply for a visa. Bananas and bread for lunch. The Iranian Embassy tells me on the phone that the visa will take at least two week. Maybe I should try in Cairo.

2.2.2007 Addis Ababa Meet a Swiss, Thomas Laemmli, substitute supreme judge in Schaffhausen. Collect the Egyptian visa - free!

3.2.2007 Addis Ababa Sick, malaria test negative.

4.2.2007 Addis Ababa With Victor Kolozsi, a Hungarian, to the Kiddo Michael Church in Yeka and from there with a guide to the rock-hewn Washa Mikael Church, which was destroyed by Italian bombs. I am still sick.

5.2.2007 Addis Ababa The Sudanese still let me wait. Went to the SA Embassy to order letters of recommendation for Iran and Pakistan. As I still feel sick, I went to a clinic. Diagnosis: Amoebiasis. I get medication. Back to the SA Embassy, pick up the letters of recommendation. Went to the Iran Embassy, handed my papers in. Supper with Thomas Laemmli at the Orosopo.

6.2.2007 Addis Ababa Dysentery at night. The Sudanese still let me wait. The Iranians want to see me again. Meet Guenther, who cycled all the way from Zürich.

7.2.2007 Addis Ababa Sick. With Victor to the Iranian Embassy.

8.2.2007 Addis Ababa With Thomas to the National Museum.

9.2.2007 Addis Ababa Relapse. Dr. Negash is not in. Analysis at Arsho Labs, buy Bactrim in place of Daprim, but it doesn't help much.

10.2.2007 Addis Ababa Buy chocolate, because the treatment with 6x2 Tinidazole and 12x2 Deprim does not help.

11.2.2007 Addis Ababa I am fasting. I am feeling rotten.

12.2.2007 Addis Ababa I don't eat for the second consecutive day.

13.2.2007 Addis Ababa Dr. Negash says that I am fit to travel. I eat oat porridge for breakfast, plain rice for lunch and Spaghetti(!) for supper, with James and Louis.

14.2.2007 Addis Ababa I buy a bus ticket to Lalibela, tomorrow I shall leave.

15.2.2007 Addis Ababa-Dessie By taxi to the bus station. We cannot drive in, because a dead beggar is blocking the driveway. I meet Yannes, a German Traveller. The bus leaves with one hour delay. Greasy Spaghetti for lunch. Around 17h we arrive in Kumbulcha. I have stomach pain, diarrhoea is starting. The road to Dessie is a bad dirt road with lots of fallen rock. Suddenly, we are at the top and see the modern city of Dessie (pop 135'000). Put up at the Omega Pension with Yannes. Despite the diarrhoea I catch some sleep.

Lalibela, located at 2'500 meters above sea level is the second-holiest city of Ethiopia and was intended to be a New

Jerusalem for the Orthodox Christians of Ethiopia when Jerusalem was captured by the Muslims. During the reign of Saint Gebre Mesqel Lalibela (12th/13th Century), who commissioned the spectacular complex of 11 rock-hewn Churches, Lalibela was known as Roha. Many features have Biblical names, even the little stream is known as the River Jordan. Lalibela served as the capital of Ethiopia from the late 12th Century to the 13th Century. The first European to see the Churches was the Portuguese explorer Pêro da Covilhã (1460 – 1526). (source: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lalibela>)

Author Graham Hancock believes that Lalibela is much older than previously thought. He reckons that according to a new survey work carried out by a British archaeologist, three of the Churches may have been carved 500 years earlier as fortifications or other structures of the Aksumite Empire. (source: <http://www.grahamhancock.com/news/index.php?node=4952>)

16.2.2007 Dessie-Lalibela The bus leaves at 06:00. I only eat cookies. We arrive at noon in Woldia. Then a steep ascent along hillsides, until another valley opens up and we climb another steep road. On the highland everything is densely populated, although the ground seems not to be so arid. Eventually we leave the highland, get into a desert-like valley and climb the other side up. At 20:00 we arrive completely exhausted in Lalibela, where I put up at the Asheten Hotel.

17.2.2007 Lalibela My guide knocks at my door at 07:00, we climb quickly to the Asheten Maryam and Asheten Mikael Churches. The two Churches are not very impressive, the promised ceremonies are already over. The guide wants to sell me a tour to another Church, but I prefer to see the Saturday market. It is packed closely, there is salt from Danakil and from the sea, Teff for Injera, donkeys, honey and many more goods. Visit Bet Gyorgis, Bet Meskel, Bet Maryam, Beit Danaghil, Bet Mikael/Golgotha/Selassie Chapel, Tomb of Adam, Bet Medhane Alem, Bet Gebriel und Rufael, Bet Merkurios, Bet Ammanuel, Bet Abba Libanos. The Churches are all hewn into solid rock, partially with 30m deep ditches around them. Supper with Danny, a Chinese-American from LA, at the Magenagna Hotel.

18.2.2007 Lalibela Breakfast in a cafe, then to the Church service at Bet Medhane Alem. Saw the Lalibela cross made of 7kg solid gold, the south western group of Churches and Beit Gyorgis revisited. Supper with Ronan and Neill, two Irish tourists. Meet Victor, the Hungarian at the restaurant.

19.2.2007 Lalibela-Mekele At 05:00h to the bus station. The expensive seat reservation was worth the money, the bus was packed and I got the best seat. A monkey climbs onto my lap and does not want to leave me. I return the protesting monkey to its owner. The drive is marvellous. In Woldia I am so fortunate to find the bus to Mekele waiting for passengers. I even get a dry spot for my backpack. Heavy rains during the drive through the mountains and highlands, but Mekele is lit by the evening sun. It is much cleaner and better built than Addis. At supper I meet Meles and Rahel, two modern Ethiopians.

20.2.2007 Mekele To the Derg Bombing Monument, then to the Monument of the Revolution, a ball on a 30m high and elegant stand. At the museum there is a trade exhibition, which I decide to visit. Very impressive are the very sustainable projects of the German GTZ. The best of the museum are the vehicles parked outside. Tibbs (meat!) for lunch, despite Lent. Then to the market. Stomach pains and diarrhoea make me run back to the hotel.

21.2.2007 Mekele-Adigrat Around 7:00 to the bus station, at 08:00 I arrive in Wukro, leave the backpack at the Tourist Office and view first and foremost the rock-hewn Church “Cherkos”. I then manage to get onto a bus to Teka Tesfay, where I get a 16-year old boy, Mulu, to be my guide. Later he is joined by Abreham, who gets the keys for the rock-hewn Churches. I first view Petros and Paulos, then Mikael Milhaizengi and at last Medhane Alem Kisho. Petros and Paulos is being renovated with little historical respect, rather altered, but then the Church is still very much in use. Mikael Milhaizengi is not as good as Medhane Alem, which reminds in size, type and detail of Lalibela. Bread and scrambled egg for lunch in Teka Tesfay, then minibus back to Wukro, got my backpack and jumped on a bus to Adigrat. The driver offers me the front seat - super! The drive is marvellous, the mountains remind me of Table Mountain (Cape Town). We stop in Freweyn and there is confusion, as a nearby minibus driver spreads the word, that our bus was to turn back because of lack of passengers. As the driver returns, he denies the rumour and all the passengers return. In Adigrat I put up at the clean and proper Tana Hotel for 20 Birr only. I have a walk through town, chat with pupils at the soccer stadium. Viewed the Holy Saviour Catholic Cathedral. Supper at the Amazon Restaurant, then another long chat with people on the road.

22.2.2007 Adigrat-Debre Damo The bus leaves the bus station only towards 07:00am. After an hour's drive - the Chinese are about to rebuild the road, there are red Steyr lorries and XCMC construction machinery all over the place, I am dropped at the sign which reads “Debre Damo 11km”. I start walking, from all over children are shouting “gimme, gimme” or “gimme Birr” or “gimme pen”. At about half the way to Debre Damo, a army UAZ gives me a lift to the army base, on the border to Eritrea. From there I still have to walk around an hour in the scorching sun. The girl, who is carrying a 20kg bag of Teff on her back next to me does not seem to mind, while I suffer under the weight of my high-tech backpack. Arrived at the base of the monastery, where one has to climb 15m of vertical volcanic rock, I am so pooped, that I have to drink 2lt of water and have the backpack hauled up. The backpack is pulled over the sharp volcanic rocks, so that it gets damaged in many places. Only half an hour later I am ready to ascend via a leather rope, a

pro-forma hip belt to secure me (held by a single 80-year old monk) and the toes in the pores of the lava rock. Halfway up I have to have a short rest, I am still too dehydrated. Eventually I am on the top, where the leather rope ends far too short and one has to find out, that from there, there are no visible grips in the wooden doorframe. Eventually arrived, I have to pay the entrance fee, then I get a tour of the Church. Two boys hope for a generous tip and start following me. I am put up at a monk's - Gebremikael - house. I then go to the Church service, which starts at 12:00 and ends at 15:00, mostly monotonous singing in the holiest of the holy (which stays closed), some bell ringing and some incense, two times a short reading from the Bible, in the end the Church is being circled three times in marvellous dresses. I then walk through the Monks town, 80 monks, many of them very young, are said to still live here. A monk invites me to eat Injera (Injera = Ethiopian national dish, tortilla made of Teff) and drink self-made sorghum beer. I meet John, a monk who speaks excellent English, we chat until sunset. Back at Gebrezemikael I get supper, Injera with honey and spice sauce. He also shows me where to do my "business", on the rim of the mountain, because there are no toilets up here. We see the lights of Adigrat, Bizet and Enticho in the distance. I have difficulty falling asleep, my stomach is rumbling.

23.2.2007 *Debre Damo-Enticho* I get up at 05:30, but my monk is still at Church service which started at 02:00. I pack my belongings and wait for him. He comes back quickly but leaves straight away again. I cannot disturb him, but I have to leave on time, or the sun will scorch me. At 06:45 I leave 20 Birr and the apparently very appreciated empty water bottle and go to the entrance point. I am very afraid of the descent via the leather rope. This turns out to be unnecessary, because I know the footholds now and the descent is easy. Nevertheless, I am relieved to arrive at the bottom. I grab my backpack and start marching in direction of the road. A boy approaches me and tells me that I may not pass here and points out a path about 20m further on. For this service he demands a lot of money and is not at all happy with the usual 1 Birr. I walk this path, but it ends in a steep slope without any visible continuance. I fight my way through sharp volcanic rock and eventually get back to the road, just at the ford over the stream. After a total of 2.5h walking and carrying my backpack I arrive the main road, where I first and foremost buy Pepsi and cookies at a shop. I soon find an Isuzu truck who gives me a lift up to Enticho. I drop there, although this is still a bit off Yeha, because I need water and food. I then put up at the "Debre Damo Hotel" and leave my luggage in the room. Carrying only my camera and half a bottle of water, I quickly find a bus in direction Adwa. But the conductor has no clue where Yeha is. The other passengers explain it to him. From the Yeha turnoff I walk another 5km, passing a minibus which had rolled onto its roof, until I reach Yeha, where I first have to pay 50 Birr entrance fee and am then shown the odd collection of exhibits of the "museum". I then view the temple, whose seamless blocks of limestone give proof of a supreme workmanship. I find to my great surprise a Mikwe, which could be a sign of Jewish influence. In good mood I return to the road, where I find immediately a bus back to Enticho. One of the passengers even offers me his seat! Back in Enticho, I walk around town. There is a power failure, only candlelight. For supper I eat the local dish "Tegamino", which consists of beans with loads of garlic. When the waiter refuses to give me the correct change, the owner of the restaurant comes to my table, apologises and hands me the difference. His name is Abreham, he lives in Orlando, Florida and works during the day in Disneyland and during the night as a taxi driver. As I still feel hungry, I go to the "Segen" Restaurant, where I eat fasting food, the only menu available. Long chat with local youths.

Aksum, located at an altitude of 2'130 metres at the northern end of Ethiopia's Tigray province, was once the centre of the Aksumite Kingdom. From its peak around the year zero, it slid into decline after the 7th Century, when Arab traders were contesting its trade routes. Eventually Aksum was cut off from its principal markets in Alexandria, Byzantium and Southern Europe. The people of Aksum were forced South and their civilisation declined. By the end of the 10th Century, the kingdom had vanished. The city suffered from the collapse of the empire and was eventually deserted until it gained importance as a religious centre. Aksum remained the place where Ethiopian kings were crowned, until the time of the last Emperor Haile Selassie in the 20th Century. Today the ruins tell of its former grandeur. The best preserved steles are found in the Northern Stelae Park: Landmark is King Ezana's Stele (20.6 metres high, 2.65 metres wide, 1.18 metres deep, weight of 160 tonnes). The great stele (33 metres high, 3.84 metres wide, 2.35 metres deep, weight of 520 tonnes) is supposed to have fallen and shattered during construction. Another stele (24.6 metres high, 2.32 metres wide, 1.36 metres deep, weight of 170 tonnes) was cut up into three pieces and looted by the Italian army in 1937, returned to Ethiopia in 2005 and reinstalled on July 31, 2008. There are three more minor stelae. The purpose of the stelae is not quite clear, but is generally regarded as grave markers. The far more primitive Judith stelae, located west of town, are interspersed with mostly Fourth Century tombs. Apart from the stelae, Aksum offers some more sights: The St Mary of Zion Church, built in 1665, which is said to contain the Ark of the Covenant; the archaeological and ethnographic museum; the Ezana Stone written in Sabaeen, Ge'ez and Ancient Greek in a similar manner to the Rosetta Stone; King Bazen's Tomb; Queen of Sheba's Bath, a historic water basin; the Fourth Century Ta'akha Maryam and Sixth Century Dungur palaces, the monasteries of Abba Pentalewon and Abba Liqanos and the Lioness of Gonedra rock art. In 1980, UNESCO declared Aksum's archaeological sites as World Heritage Sites. (source: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aksum>)

24.2.2007 *Enticho-Aksum* When I get up at 6:00am, I first have to organise the key for the shower and a bottle of water. The taps have been dry for a many years. I then go to the bus stop, where the bus is already waiting. I forfeit the breakfast at the Segen Restaurant and jump on. I have to bargain the fare down to the regular 15 Birr. Unfortunately the bus only goes as far as Adwa. There, I am pushed into a completely empty bus to Shire. It only leaves after 1.5h. When

I arrive in Aksum, it is already 11:30h. But I am dropped directly in front of the Kaleb Hotel, where I put up. I then quickly go to the Tsega Restaurant, which is recommended by the Lonely Planet, to have lunch - overcooked macaroni for a ferengi-price. I then rush to the Tourist Office, where I arrive at 11:55 and buy a ticket for the stelae. The Tourist Office is difficult to find, it is located in a shack next to a dilapidated villa and obviously there are no signs whatsoever, probably to enable the local guides to earn a bit of money. I visit the northern stelae field, whereby I am particularly impressed by the workmanship of the Ezana Stele and the accurate construction of the tomb of the false door. I then walk to the tombs of the Kings Kaleb and Gebre Meskel, whereby the latter is much better built. On the way back I wait at Ezanas Scriptures at a nearby restaurant, until they open up. I then return to the northern stelae field, but the mausoleum and the tomb of the brick walls are still not open, probably not open to the public anymore. I then walk to the Archaeological Museum. Inside, I have to sit down, as I have had too much sun. I have to return to the hotel. During the night, I have to get up time and again, as I have drunk too much water. Disco noise keeps me from sleeping.

25.2.2007 Aksum-Shire Early in the morning I take a minibus to the "Lioness of Gonedra". A boy gladly shows me - against adequate payment - the quarry of the stelae with the unfinished stele and the Lioness of Gonedra. According to local belief, Archangel Gabriel is said to have fought with a lioness and eventually threw it against a rock, whereby it imprinted itself on that rock. The picture of the lioness is little lifelike, though... Afterwards I quickly find a minibus to the ruins of the Palace of the Queen of Sheba. Impressive is the throne room with its show-stairs. Across the road I visit the Judith Stelae field. These stelae are of inferior quality except one broken stele, probably the one of Judith herself. Back to town, breakfast in a cafe with terrible cake and excellent coffee. Then to Ezana Park, where there is another multilingual script table of King Ezana. The Tomb of Bazen is closed, unfortunately, and I do not succeed to cheat my way in. The two St. Maryam of Zion Churches and the building of the Ark of the Covenant would be an entrance fee of 60 Birr. As I am only interested in the Ark of the Covenant and this building is never opened, I just have a look from the outside without paying, which was tolerated to my greatest surprise. I then return to my hotel, pack my things and try to find transport to Shire. Not so easy, because the buses are full and the lorries want double the usual fare of 15 Birr. After an hour, I find a lift with an empty Isuzu-lorry, the drive is speedy and comfortable. In Shire, I put up at the Jerusalem Hotel, the dirtiest place I have ever seen, in the rooms there is sheep dung stuck to the floor and there is no water in the bathroom. I eat at the Shire Restaurant, very tasty food and no ferengi(Amh. for foreigners)-prices. I climb the hill of "Enda Selassie" where two Churches are situated. The guard asks me for money, I give him 2 Birr, but then he tells me that he does not have the keys for the Church! Walked through town, meet a young artist who prints "Chelsea" T-shirts with self-made templates, so that they look like the real ones. Had a long chat with some youths at the hotel. Went to the market. I am then shoved by one of the youths into a strange shebeen, where Tera (trad. Sorghum beer) is served. Back to the Shire restaurant, where I get, despite Lent, fried liver with bread, a feast! African shower, as there is no water at the hotel.

26.2.2007 Shire-Zarema The day starts with stomach pain and gas - the liver was probably not such a good idea. At 05:00am I am at the bus station, but it remains closed. Only at 06:30 it is opened, why was I told to be there at 05:00? A incredible rush to the buses, but my bus, No 4066, is not being opened. Suddenly everyone crams into the smaller bus nearby. They say, that 4066 is not leaving today and I had to pay 20 Birr extra for the smaller bus. After a short while a rush back to the 4066. From there a rush to a similar sized bus, where I even manage to get a front seat. I have them stowing my backpack on the roof-rack, when a further rush back to the 4066 starts. I have to have my backpack taken off again, of course against full payment, and stow on the roof-rack of 4066. At 08:00, with two hours delay, the bus leaves. Shortly afterwards the outer right rear tyre blows out with a loud bang. The driver doesn't bother to stop. At 11:00 we stop to refill water, the bus needs 25lt of water per 100km. The conductor has to climb into a deep ravine to fill the canisters. I notice with horror, that both front tyres are losing the profile, the steel belt of left tyre is already worn through. I would have liked to take my backpack off the roof-rack and leave the bus, but here, in the middle of nowhere and without water? I get in again and am frightened to death, because there are many narrow hairpin bends. If one of the front tyres blows out, the bus will fall several hundred meters vertically into the abyss. At Adi Arkay, some 65km from Debark, the problem is partially solved: The two good rear tyres are mounted onto the front axle. But we cannot continue, the right tyre is leaking air. It has to be taken off again and the tube mended. In the meantime it is 18:00h. The drive continues utterly slowly through narrow bends. At 21:00h we arrive in Zarema. I am angry, because we are only one village from Debark away. I fetch my backpack from the roof-rack, but by the time I get it, all beds are already taken. I am very grateful that Birhane, a passenger and retired teacher, somehow manages to organise a bed for me. During the Derg government, Birhane was unjustly accused to be a member of the TPLF (Tigray Peoples Liberation Front) and locked up for four years in one of Ethiopia's notorious prisons in Addis Ababa.

27.2.2007 Zarema-Debark Birhane wakes me at 05:30, I quickly dress and gather my things. The bus is already waiting. We drive off, but after a short while the engine overheats. They fill up the water. We continue slowly. They have to refill the water another three times. The road is set with sharp stones. The scenery is marvellous: Flat and pointed mountains, high fields and deep valleys. I should be happy to have had the opportunity to see this during daylight! Suddenly there is green forest, where previously the slopes were steppe. Birhane tells me, that in his youth, all the slopes were teeming with greenery, there were luscious fields of corn in the valleys and deep rivers where there is only a trickle of water today. We arrive in Debark at 10:00h. I put up at the Simen Park Hotel. Eventually shower and toilet! I meet Mark, a

player of the French horn, born in California and living in England. The Tourist Office tells me to return at 17:00h for the “Simien Mountain Trekking”, because if there is a group, I will be able to join them. With a guide from the hotel, Happy, I buy food and a paraffin stove, all at double or triple the normal price. Back at the Tourist Office I am told, that there was nobody else and I had to go on my own the next day. A scout, Addis, is introduced to me and immediately again exchanged against Messiah. I tell the official again, that I had read in the “Lonely Planet” that scout and mule-man have usually far too little food, and to tell them to take along sufficient food. He tells me that this was no problem, I only had to buy food for myself. I meet Barbara and Tina at the hotel, two German girls who I had earlier met at the Tourist Office. Long chat, they invite me for supper.

28.2.2007 Debark Of course the scout does not arrive on time at 06:00h, but only an hour later. Mule-man and scout have little food with them, as I have to find out at the first stop. 10 small loaves of bread for 5 days. The mule is a bit lame on the right hind leg. But the ascent is quick. On the way we see a group of Gelada Baboons. I walk into the group and make photos, very much angering a professional cameraman. We arrive in Sankaber at 13:00h. I want to cook lunch and have to find out after half an hour, that the three supports of the paraffin stove have corroded off. I use stones instead and the food immediately starts to boil. The Spaghetti-Vegetables-Borshtsh is very tasty and just the right food for my strained stomach. A bird tries to open the food bag of my scout and mule-man. I chase it off. In the afternoon, Joey and Martina, an Irish couple, arrive, as well as Simon, a Briton and Sharon, an American lady. We chat until late at night. I find out that my scout and mule-man have run out of food and prepare food for them.

1.3.2007 Debark I get up, roll up the tent. We walk from Sankaber in direction Geech. Lunch near a mountain stream. Now, that we are a group of “Ferengi”, we are enjoying it immensely, because we can have lively discussions. In Geech, I buy two eggs and make rice with vegetables and egg. Rains and hailstorms. I am afraid that my tent is damaged, but it holds up. In the tent I have to find out, that paraffin was poured over my backpack, it stinks terribly. My scout refuses the rice, because there is egg in it and he is not allowed to eat this during Lent. All the better, so there is more for myself. On top of that, Simon gives me a chicken leg. We chat until dark. The night is icy cold.

2.3.2007 Debark Got up early. Cooked tea and spaghetti, as a breakfast for myself, the scout and the mule-man. I wash my backpack, to reduce the stench of the paraffin. Walked over the ridge to the view point of Imet Gogo. Back to the camp. I prepare food. The mule-man comes up with a tremendous story, the mule had run away (the lame one, yes!) and he had to hire another mule for 40 Birr, which I was to reimburse now. I don't believe a word. Ice cold night.

3.3.2007 Debark The tent is riddled with ice drops. I get up early and prepare my breakfast, roll up my tent. I change my plans: I will not return to Sankaber as planned, because Simon and Sharon have promised a lift from Chenek to Debark. At lunchtime, a raven eats from my hand. On the way to Chenek, we see a family of baboons. I approach them until they bare their teeth. The night in Chenek is very cold.

4.3.2007 Debark Ice on the tent. Climbed a viewpoint at 4'200m. On the way there, we see Ibex and baboons. At the viewpoint we see Ras Dashen, Ethiopia's highest mountain. We return to Chenek, where the Landcruiser of Simon and Sharon is waiting. But now a drama unfolds: it was planned that the Landcruiser would give me and my scout a lift back to Debark. But because the car is filled with trade goods, the driver refuses to take us along (although there is still space). This angers Sharon, because she is not used to the fact that somebody who is paid for his services, is only prepared to do just the absolute minimum. She declares it as a question of principle and refuses now to ride in the vehicle. The by chance passing head of the Tourist Office only renders the situation even worse: He declares that the driver is 100% right and tells us off. On top of that, he tells the bus driver not to take us back. We walk about 20km, until a passing Landcruiser pickup truck volunteers to take us (on the loadbed) into Sankaber. The subtle negotiation of Martina eventually bears fruit, so that he is willing to take us for 60 Birr p.p. back to Debark. The road is terribly bumpy, I get blue marks which will be sore for weeks. Beers and supper back at the Simen Park Hotel in Debark. In the end an argument with the local “guides” who sold Joey and Martina a 4x4 ride to Aksum for 250 Birr p.p., but have to admit after my questioning that it was just a ride on a Isuzu truck, which usually costs around 100 Birr.

5.3.2007 Debark-Gondar I am leaving before the others at 06:15. The bus is waiting for another hour, until it leaves completely overcrowded. We arrive at 11:00h in Gondar, where I get a nice room at the Roman Hotel for 60 Birr. I eat lunch and meet Pierre, a Frenchman whom I met first in Harar. I then go to the Royal Enclosure, which I walk counterclockwise. It was originally built by the Emperor Fasiladas. The impressions are overwhelming, it is unbelievable what culture has existed in the midst of Africa. The palaces are huge and the style compares to European and Indian buildings. There must have been an incredible abundance of wealth. I call the Sudanese and the Iranian Embassy, both visas are not yet ready. I then walk to Fasiladas Pool, a huge swimming pool in Olympic size, for several hundred persons, and the Mausoleum of Zobel, the Horse of Iyasus, which carried him from Sudan back to Ethiopia. The Roman Hotel is quite noisy, but this is made up by the marvellous Tibbs Wate (Eth. meat dish, during Lent!).

<p>Gondar was founded by Emperor Fasilides around the year 1635, and grew as an agricultural and market town. The Emperor built seven Churches of which Fit Mikael and Fit Abbo were built to end local epidemics. The five Emperors who followed him also built their palaces in the town. In 1668, as a result of a Church council, the Emperor Yohannes I ordered that the inhabitants of Gondar be segregated by religion. This caused the Muslims to move into their own</p>

quarter, Islange or Addis Alem. During the Seventeenth Century, the city's population is estimated to have exceeded 60,000. Gondar, instrumental for the development of an Amharic culture, became a focus of national pride. The town served as Ethiopia's capital until Tewodros II moved the Imperial capital to Magadala in 1855. It was plundered and burnt in 1864, again in 1866 and 1887 and in 1888, when the Sudanese invaders set fire to almost every one of the city's Churches. Gondar was further developed under the Italian occupation from 1936. In November 1941, Italian forces made their last stand here against the British (source: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gondar>).

6.3.2007 Gondar-Bahir Dar Early in the morning I buy two loaves of bread, eat breakfast and walk in direction Empress Mentwabs Kuskuum Complex. I walk far too far, because there is no signpost. A friendly Ethiopian puts me on a minibus and I have to ride a long way back. From there I walk another kilometre. The remains of the Palace built by the Empress Mentewab, Bokaffas widow, are pretty impressive, although they have been extensively damaged by English bombs in 1940. I am also taken to the coffin with the three skeletons of Iyasu II, Mentwab and Iyoas. By minibus back to Piazza. Walked with some detours to the Debre Berhan Selassie Church. There are beautiful paintings, particularly on the ceiling, and paintings of the devil and of Muhammad on a camel led by the Devil. Back to the Roman Hotel, where I enjoy the fantastic Tibbs Wate for a second time. Because the waiter tells me there is no more bread, I quickly run to the bakery across the road and buy a roll. He does not appreciate that, because he did still have bread, he was just trying to economise. Minibus ride to Bahir Dar, had to take part in the Ferengi-game: They first asked me for 40 Birr, while everyone else was paying 30 Birr. I gave them 30 Birr, they were complaining and putting on pressure, but eventually they succumbed. I put up at the Delot Pension, a new building, for a mere 20 Birr per night in a clean room. Subar wants to take me on a boat ride tomorrow at 08:00h. Long and pleasant chat with Teshome, the owner of a brand new Chinese motorised bicycle. Then walk on the shore of Lake Tana, Internet café, back to the hotel. With Alex, Demes, Marya and Katya to the Tana Restaurant, where we eat excellent fish for little money. Night-cap at the Ghion Hotel.

7.3.2007 Bahir Dar Subar does not appear at all. I wait until 09:15, then I go on my own to the jetty and organise a boat tour for 70 Birr. We visit the island Monastery of Kebran Gabriel, where a monk shows us the museum and the Church. Then to Entos Eyesu, where we see how woollen yarn is spun and processed. These islands look pretty uninhabited from the lake, completely covered by coffee- and papaya trees, the buildings can only be seen when immediately in front of them. To the outlet of the Blue Nile and the Debre Maryam Church, which is unfortunately not opened. Back in Bahir Dar, a "guide", Abeba, offers me a minibus to Tis Isat for 50 Birr. At the juice cafe I have a mixed fruit juice, then I visit the market. I then call the Iranian Embassy, who tells me that my visa will be ready from tomorrow. To the Internet-cafe, some typing. At another juice-cafe I meet two German cyclists, who have cycled here from Berlin. Supper with Heike, Susanne, Katya and Alex.

8.3.2007 Bahir Dar Rode by public bus over a bumpy road to Zege. Had someone explain directions to Ura Kidhane Meret Monastery. On the way I am followed by an Ethiopian, who seems to ignore all my talking that I do not want him as a guide. Arrived at the monastery, I am shown the Church and the museum with several Ethiopian Emperors' crowns. Beautiful paintings in the national colours of Ethiopia. As I am done, my self-confessed guide is already waiting for me and wants money. I ask a monk, who speaks English, to translate, that I do not want him as a guide and offer him 2 Birr if he leaves me alone. Eventually alone, I walk to the monastery of Beta Gyorgis, which also has some colourful paintings, but behind a wall of wood and cowdung. Nearby is the Monastery of Beta Maryam, which is built similar to Beta Gyorgis, but has beautiful paintings on the ceiling crossbeams. I walk back, at times children follow me and shout "money, money". I don't think that they know what it means. Back in Zege I find the bus already waiting to leave. I jump on and make it almost to Bahir Dar. Shortly before town, the connection of the gear-stick, which has far too much play, gives way and we have to stop until it is fixed. When the bus also has to refuel, I get off and walk to the nearby juice cafe, where I have a delicious fruit juice to rehydrate myself.

9.3.2007 Bahir Dar By bus to Tis Isat (Tis Abay), then walked in direction Blue Nile Falls. At the Portuguese Bridge, a would-be guide starts to follow me. On the volcanic tuff rocks, I walk up to the middle of the waterfalls. Crossing back by ferry, then bus back to Bahir Dar. Meet Katya, Susanne and Alex at Tana Restaurant. Chatted to Subar and Teshome. Excellent supper at the Al-Hanan Muslim Restaurant.

10.3.2007 Bahir Dar Got up early, rented a bicycle, rode to the Memorial, then uphill. Somebody tells me that I was wrong for the palace of Haile Selassie. I turn around, downhill, where I ask a group of cyclists for directions - and get another unwanted guide. He does not want to let go of me. As he demands money, I give him 2 Birr for leaving me alone. I ride around the palace, find an open gate and enter the premises. An armed guard is alerted, he wants money, we cannot agree on a price and I thus take no photos. I return to Bahir Dar and have a last meal at Al-Hanan Muslim Restaurant. At the lakeshore I meet Achim, a shoe cleaner boy of Jewish origin. On the way to the hotel I meet Teshome again.

11.3.2007 Bahir Dar-Addis Ababa I am awake already at 03:00am. The minibus to Addis Ababa still picks up people in Bahir Dar until 04:30. I am mostly asleep. Breakfast in Debre Markos. The road to the Nile Gorge is terrible. Arriving at the bottom, the driver notices that a stone had pierced the oil sump. They fix it with Araldite. I sit next to an accountant,

Eremia, with whom I have a merry chat. We arrive at 17:00h directly at Piazza in Addis. I get a good room at Taitu Hotel.

12.3.2007 Addis Ababa To the Sudanese Embassy, because Mr. Walid has promised me a transit visa when I called him. During lunch break to the Iran Embassy. Burned photo CD-ROM and sent it to my brother. Back to the Sudanese Embassy, long and drawn out process, in the evening I am told that I could only pick up my passport the following day in the afternoon. Meet Daniel, an Israeli-Austrian, at the Taitu Hotel. Meet Per, who offers me a lift to Khartoum by Landcruiser.

13.3.2007 Addis Ababa To the airport to see whether they sell Sudanese Dinar - but they don't. On the way back I am picked up by the "minibus of the pickpockets". They ask me to do different tasks like pushing the seat in front of me in order to have a quick grab at my camera. When they don't succeed, they make me sit in front and ask me to put back a ceiling beeding which they tear down time and again. Eventually they grab at my camera, I pick it up immediately and they stop the minibus, kick me out, but - typically Ethiopia - not without returning my fare! I post the parcel for Sheryl and return to the Sudanese Embassy, where I pick up my passport, go to the Iranian Embassy, where I hand it in and am promised to have the visa the next day. I pop in at the Swiss Embassy and have a enjoyable chat with Mrs. Eichenberger, get a pile of NZZ newspapers which are a delight for me after five months without news.

14.3.2007 Addis Ababa Minibus to the Hilton Hotel, after long discussions I was able to withdraw the equivalent of USD 100 in Birr. Now I have some money over to buy gifts! Walk to the Government Shop, where I buy gifts. Long search in vain for padded envelopes, ended up using cardboard to pack the gifts. To the post office, long and drawn out process to send the parcels off. To the Iranian Embassy, but the visa has not yet been issued. Back to the hotel, meet Sam, who is making wells in southern Sudan. Buy 9'500 Sudanese Dinar from him and sell him my solar charger, for which I have no further use. He needs a cellphone, which I assist him to choose. At Piazza I am spit upon and when cleaning it off, the man's left hand glides into my pocket. As I grab it, he gets such a fright, that he tears half of my pocket off and runs away. I would have liked to clobber him. Sam and I find a cellphone, have supper at the "Omar Khayyam" Restaurant.

15.3.2007 Addis Ababa Got the Iranian visa after a long wait, but only for 20 days instead of the requested 60 days. Back to Piazza, met Per. Tibbs (fried meat and injera) for lunch! I have only 200 Birr left, hopefully enough until Metema. Supper at the "Omar Khayyam".

16.3.2007 Addis Ababa-Gondar Departure at 07:00h with Per, Lionel and Peter in Per's Landcruiser. As one tyre is losing air, it has to be fixed beforehand. Fast drive to Bahir Dar. Fish for supper at the Tana Restaurant. Dropped Peter at the Delot Pension. Noticed, that the Landcruiser's lights are not working. Because of the many onlookers, we had to move to the Ghion Hotel, where the problem can be fixed. Drove to Gonder, where we put up at the Mentefraw Hotel, which has passable rooms but terrible toilets.

Sudan

17.3.2007 Gondar-Metema-Gedaref Wake up at 06:00h, have tea and gluey samoosas for breakfast. The road to Metema is a terrible gravel road. We arrive at 11:45h at the border to Sudan, but are sent 35km back to Shehedi, where we have to have the Carnet de Passage of the Landcruiser stamped. An official is called from his lunchbreak and stamps the carnet without visible pleasure. Long and drawn-out immigration formalities on the Sudanese side. Continue on a brand-new tar road to Gedaref, where we arrive at 18:00h. Have Falafel and fruit juice, drive a bit out of town where we camp in the bush, the hotels are far too expensive in Sudan. The wind shakes my tent violently during the night.

18.3.2007 Gedaref-Khartoum We get up at 05:00h, pack our belongings in complete darkness and continue driving. 200km from Khartoum, there is no open space along the main road, everywhere houses. We arrive at 11:00h at the Blue Nile Sailing Club in Khartoum. Immediately we proceed to registration (a Sudanese speciality that all foreigners have to register their passports within 3 days, at the cost of 40 USD). But we cannot register, because we need a confirmation of the Blue Nile Sailing Club. The manager has to be called, he has to come in and issue the letter. Back to the registration office, we have to wait for ages until we are done. Then to the railway station, bought a ticket for the ferry, but the train ticket may only be bought tomorrow morning from 6am. Eventually I can pitch my tent and have a stroll in the city centre. Khartoum has changed completely, while it was mainly single-story mud houses 20 years ago, it is modern multi-storey glass-and-concrete buildings today. I buy dates, back to the camp, we work out my share in the fuel costs of the Landcruiser. Fuul for supper.

19.3.2007 Khartoum-Wadi Halfa I get up at 05:00, roll up my tent and walk to the station. A dog almost bites me, which alerts a policeman, but he lets me pass. Khartoum is asleep, safe and beautifully lit up. Yet the railway station is in complete darkness. I wait for an hour at the ticket sales office, everyone is very kind but inefficient. I get my ticket without problems. The train arrives on time, I buy 6 loaves of bread and have some tea. The train leaves on time. Fuul (beans) for lunch at the dining car. A child throws a stone through the open window of the coach and aims at me, but a woman behind me is hit. The entire coach cries with her, but not for long and it is all forgotten and history. At Atbara I

eat Falafel from a stall at the station. A travel companion offers me a coke. I have to spend the night sitting up.

20.3.2007 Khartoum-Wadi Halfa After a not very relaxing night we arrive in Abu Hamed. I am invited by some travel companions, who have brought lots of food with them, to join in their lunch. So far along the entire length of the railway track there were houses. We now traverse the Sahara, there are no more houses. After station No. 6 the Indian-made engine overheats, we have to wait for an hour. Shortly afterwards a second breakdown, which takes only half an hour. At 20:30h a third breakdown, whereafter everyone goes to sleep and hopes, that the problem solves itself in the morning.

21.3.2007 Khartoum-Wadi Halfa I am completely nervous, here is a crammed train with hundreds of women, children and old persons, the engine is overheating and they want to postpone solving the problem for tomorrow, where we certainly will get 50°C deg in the shade. I cannot sleep. At 04:00h I hear hooting and we are woken up. At 04:20 the train moves for 10 minutes, obviously a train engine was sent from Wadi Halfa. At 05:00h the train starts to move in direction Wadi Halfa. We arrive shortly after 08:00h in Wadi Halfa. Wadi Halfa has changed dramatically, there used to be a few houses in the desert, now there is a big city. I walk to the ferry, but am sent back to the souq. There I can do my exit paperwork, but have to pay the sum of 2100 SDD just to leave the country, almost all my money left. I eat lunch with the Sudanese from the train and take my last 100 SDD - far too little – for a Landrover to the port. After completing more incredibly complicated exit formalities, I pitch my tent on deck of the ship and fall, after two almost sleepless nights, asleep immediately.

Egypt

22.3.2007 Wadi Halfa-Aswan I wake up early, roll up my tent and get ready for Aswan. Unfortunately, I have no money left, so no breakfast. The ferry arrives in Aswan. The immigration formalities are extremely disorganised, first the women are seen to, and because the women and children are always travelling on the passport of the husband, every husband has to be called individually and has to fight his way through the crowd. Eventually it is my turn, but the entry stamp is not getting me any further, because it is impossible to go ashore. Only at 13:00h the first few can leave the ferry, I have to wait for another hour. Ashore again numerous luggage checks, in the end a policeman has to hold a long two-way-radio conversation until he is authorised to open the gate for me. Numerous taxi drivers want to drive me into Aswan, first for 60 EGP, then for 40 EGP. I ignore them, continue walking up to the village, where I immediately find a collective taxi for 10 EGP. Arrived in Aswan, I first look for the Marwa Hotel, but cannot find it. The friendly gentleman from the Tourist Information then advises me to put up at the Noorhan Hotel, which is pleasant, modern and clean for 15 EGP per night. I go to Egypt Air, but they tell me that they cannot make bookings for flights to Iran, because they do not serve this destination. I would have to go to Cairo to do the booking. A travel agency confirms this information. I eat Kofte, Salad and Tahina - marvellous. Have a stroll through Aswan, which has become a modern, clean and friendly city, it used to be quite filthy before.

23.3.2007 Aswan I get up early. Something is wrong with the time, because Aswan is still asleep. I look for an Internet café, but they are all still closed. Eventually I find one, in a remote part of town. The owner wants to see my passport. I give it to him, to write the particulars in to his journal, but suddenly he leaves with it. I get a scare and tell him very sternly that I want it back. He just wants to make a copy. I tell him that I do not authorise this. Eventually I get my passport back. I do not really get round to read my mails. He tells me, that he has to make copies of the passports of all foreigners, but I tell him, that every foreigner would be alerted if his passport is suddenly taken out of the shop and that I would not know what he wants to do with the photocopy. He invites me for a cup of tea to make up for this. I then take the ferry across the river and visit the Tombs of the Nobles, which were not so extraordinary as in reality in my memory. I am completely surprised what pieces of art have been hewn into the rock and the astonishing similarities to Lalibela and Tigray. Back to the East Bank and ferry to Elephantine Island, where I meet Peter, a German from Biberach, now living in Hamburg. Visited the museum and the excavations which are done by Germans and Swiss. Back on the East Bank, I have to drink a lot of water and eat a lot of Kofte. Then I buy a train ticket to Cairo.

24.3.2007 Aswan-Cairo Train journey to Cairo, arrive in Cairo around 20:00h, put up at the Sultan Hotel, a homely backpackers haven at the Tawfiqqya Souq. Eat Pizza with Koichi, a Japanese from Hiroshima.

25.3.2007 Cairo I pick up my new Swiss passport at the Swiss Embassy. I then go from airline to airline, but they all tell me that I have to buy a return ticket, or else the Iranians won't admit me into the country. Visit the Khan-El-Khalili Bazaar in the evening. I investigate the possibilities to take a ferry from Dubai or Kuwait into Iran. The Internet says, that the ferry from and to Dubai might not operate anymore, at best at irregular intervals. Kuwait Airlines tell me that the flight to Kuwait is almost as expensive as a return ticket to Tehran. Worn down from the bleak prospects (being marooned in Kuwait would mean spending around USD 100.00 per night for accommodation) I buy a return ticket to Tehran from Etihad Airways.

26.3.2007 Cairo To the Indian Embassy, applied for visa. Bus-ride to Giza, where I visit the pyramids and the Sphinx. According the Graham Hancock, the pyramids were not built by the pharaohs, but by a previous culture 13'000 years

ago.

The pyramids are located on the Giza Plateau, on the outskirts of Cairo. The Great Pyramid is the only remaining monument of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World. The necropolis consists of the Pyramid of Khufu (the Great Pyramid or the Pyramid of Cheops), the somewhat smaller Pyramid of Khafre (Chephren), and the smaller Pyramid of Menkaure (Mykerinos). East of the pyramids is the Great Sphinx, facing east. Egyptologists reckon that the head of the Great Sphinx is that of Khafre. Construction took place around the 25th Century BC. Most scientists presume that the pyramids were built by moving huge stones from a quarry and dragging and lifting them into place. Another theory proposes that the building blocks were manufactured in-place from a kind of "limestone concrete". The sides of the Giza pyramids are oriented north-south and east-west (Source: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Giza_pyramid_complex).

Authors Graham Hancock and Robert Bauval reckon that the pyramids are much older, as their relative positions were correlated with the relative positions of the three stars in the constellation of Orion as they appeared ca. 10,500 BC.

27.3.2007 *Cairo* To the Pakistani Embassy, but visa is refused. Walk across Islamic Cairo to the Fortress of Salah-Ed-Din and the to the Ibn Tulun Mosque, which is unique in its grandeur.

28.3.2007 *Cairo* I feel a flu coming up and stay at the hotel.

29.3.2007 *Cairo* The flu has me in it's grips. In the evening I visit the Khan-El-Khalily Bazaar and buy some equipment for my further travels.

30.3.2007 *Cairo* The flu gets very bad. I nevertheless visit Old Cairo, the Coptic quarters and the Coptic museum. I cannot sleep because of my running nose and my cough.

31.3.2007 *Cairo* Still flu. To the Internet, then to the Egyptian Museum.

1.4.2007 *Cairo* Visit the pyramids of Saqqara (Djoser, Ti) and Abussir. Feeling better.

2.4.2007 *Cairo-Luxor* The Indian visa has been granted but is by mistake a business visa, so I have to wait while they change it. Visited Bab Zuweila, the city walls, then the catacombs of Coptic Cairo and the Ben Ezra Synagogue. The interior of the Synagogue is beautiful and it's layout very uncommon, having the reading desks at the centre and the benches for the congregation along the walls. Very unfortunate that the Synagogue has been profaned as a tourist attraction and it is not even required to wear a kippah anymore. Then visited the Aqueduct, very impressive with its enormous height. Back at the hotel I meet Clare from Taiwan. At 21h I go to the railway station where I board the train to Luxor. Pleasant ride, this time without the nuisance of air-conditioning.

3.4.2007 *Luxor* Arrive in Luxor. Check in at the Fontana Hotel. Visit the Luxor Temple and Karnak. Book for a tour of the West Bank for tomorrow.

4.4.2007 *Luxor* The minibus picks us up dead on time. Drive to the West Bank, via the Nile Bridge. Visit the Colossi of Memnon. Then to the Valley of the Queens, to the Tomb of Amenhotep III, son of Ramses III, who died in childhood (QV 55), tomb of Titi, wife or daughter of Ramses III (QV 52) and the Tomb of Khaemwaset, another son of Ramses III who died in childhood (QV 44). To the Valley of the Kings, tomb of Ramses IV (KV 2), tomb of Tutankhamun (KV 62), very impressive with its steep access and its cartouche-shaped burial chamber and the tomb of Tawusert and Setnakht (KV 14). Then to the Hatshepsut-Temple in Deir-El-Bahri. Back to Luxor by ferryboat. Had lunch together at the Amoun Restaurant. Wanted to buy a train ticket back to Cairo but they are all sold out, so I only get a ticket from Aswan to Cairo on the 6th during the day.

The tombs of the Valley of the Kings, located on the west bank of the Nile, were constructed between the 16th and the 11th Century BC for the kings and powerful nobles of the New Kingdom (18.-20. Dynasty). The wadi consists of two valleys, East Valley (where the majority of the Royal tombs are situated) and West Valley. The valley is known to contain 62 tombs, ranging in size from a simple pit to a complex tomb with over 120 chambers. The Royal tombs are decorated with scenes from Egyptian mythology and give clues to the beliefs and funerary rituals of the period. All of the tombs seem to have been opened and robbed in antiquity, but they still give an idea of the opulence and power of the rulers of this time. The valley has become famous for the discovery of the tomb of Tutankhamun. In 1979, it became a World Heritage Site, along with the rest of the Theban Necropolis (Source: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Valley_Of_The_Kings).

5.4.2007 *Luxor-Edfu-Luxor* Exactly as I am told, I am at 06:30h at the railway station, but they don't sell any train tickets. Instead of that, they tell just to get aboard the train and get the ticket there. I try to board the 07:00 train, but they would not let me on without a reservation, which the ticket office has just refused to make. I return to the hotel, have at least the breakfast in full, then I return to the railway station and successfully make it on the 08:15 train to Edfu. Of course, I have to pay a considerable fine on the train for not having a ticket... Arrived in Edfu, I take a taxi to the Horus Temple and visit it. It is the most impressive of all Egyptian Temples, because it's structure is mostly intact, except that many murals have been destroyed. It is also the newest of all temples, being completed in 57BC. Returning

from the temple was pretty difficult. At the railway station they told me that the next train ran only at 15:00h. I went to the minibus station, but they told me that they were not allowed to transport tourists and sent me to the bus station. Halfway to the bus station, there was a police roadblock where I was stopped and told to wait for the 17:00 bus. I did not intend to do so and walked away, against the orders of the police, returned to the railway station and about 15:30 there was really a train to Luxor. Back in Luxor, I visited the Luxor Museum, which has some excellent statues found recently at the Luxor Temple as well as two mummies (Ramses I and Ahmose I) on display.

6.4.2007 Luxor-Cairo Train journey from Luxor to Cairo. Meet a German photographer-cum-political-scientist and an American engineer, Ingo and Dan. Check in at the Sultan Hotel. Meet Ronald, a German traveller, again.

7.4.2007 Cairo A day of rest, after a large breakfast I send off a CD-ROM with my pictures. Alec takes me to the book market, where I buy some second-hand books.

8.4.2007 Cairo-Alexandria By train to Alexandria, put up at the "New Wellcome House". By tramway to Qait Bai, where I visit the impressive fort. Walked to the Ras-el-Tin Palace, but it is not open to the public. Visited the tombs of Anfoushi, but they were not very impressive. By tramway to Kom-El-Shufaka. Visited Pompeii's Pillar and the two nearby Greco-Roman Catacombs. Walked to the Catacomb of El-Shufaka, where a circular staircase leads about 15 meters below the ground to a magnificent, huge system catacombs of Greco-Roman times. Then walked to the Roman amphitheatre which was a waste of money, because most sites are closed, only the amphitheatre itself is open to the public. In the evening I travel by minibus for about 20km to Muntazah Palace, a beautiful park with a former Royal Palace in a weird Turco-Florentine style situated by the sea.

9.4.2007 Alexandria-Cairo To the library of Alexandria, a super-modern wedge of glass and steel. Then to Anfushi to the Abu el Abbas el Mursi Mosque and to the shipbuilding yards. Via the souqs back to the hotel and then to the railway station. Take the train back to Cairo.

Alexandria, with its 3.9 million inhabitants, is the second largest city of Egypt and extends approximately 20km along the Mediterranean coast, with El Anfushi on the north-western and El Montazah on the eastern end. El Anfushi lies on the northern peninsula between the East and the West Harbour. Alexandria's wooden shipbuilders have settled in the El Anfushi Bay, which has direct access to the open sea, without a natural breakwater. Even from afar, you can see the huge luxury yachts that are entirely built of wood. Coming closer, one is bound to notice that from the model ship (which serves as a kitschy lamp) to the deep-sea motor yacht, everything is built here. Everyone is very friendly and willing to interrupt work for a little chat, even though the communication is somewhat difficult due to my lack of knowledge of the Arabic language. The construction of most ships is identical: On a straight keel, the hydraulically bent (with a hydraulic press, the pieces of wood are cold-pressed into shape) bow and stern are built up. In larger vessels, the bowsprit consists of thin wooden slats glued together. In the area of the drive-shaft, a solid piece of wood is set under the ribs. On the keel, the ribs are set, composed of at least three parts: a central section and two curved side parts. For larger vessels, the ribs are built double, i.e. from at least six parts. The individual parts are bolted together with metal bolts. On the inside of the ribs there are slats as distance holders, in the finished ship they will be removed again. On the outside, wooden planks are nailed (for larger vessels screwed) on. Some ships with rather square hulls were fitted with planking made from waterproof laminated plywood. In the end everything is sealed with rubber sealant. It is interesting that even medium and large motor yachts are built from wood. I was allowed to come on board of a particularly sleek motor yacht and marvel at the interior. Impressive the extraordinarily beautiful inlaid floors and doors. It is obvious that the Egyptian shipbuilders have a lot of experience in the construction of wooden speed boat hulls and that they make a professional and stable impression.

10.4.2007 Cairo Visiting the pyramids of Dashur. On the way to Giza, a lady pays for my bus ticket! I easily find the minibus to Dashur. The walk to the Red Pyramid is about 8km. I visit the three very impressive burial chambers with the stepped ceilings. I then walk about 2kms to the Bent Pyramid. Unfortunately the burial chamber is not open. At this entrance fee! I walk back to the main road and get a minibus to Haram and from there to Ramesses Street.

Iran

11.4.2007 Cairo-Teheran I update in a terrible rush the VSD home page, whose contents I just received this morning. To Nasser square, where I wait for a long time for a bus. After an hour in the packed bus I arrive all sweaty at the airport. Flight to Abu Dhabi, watch stupid movie about Apartheid times. Short break in Abu Dhabi, then with an almost empty B777 to Tehran. All banks at the airport all closed except one, so I have to go back through customs to exchange some money. As there is no public transport from Imam Khomeini Airport, I have to take a taxi to the Mashhad Hotel.

12.4.2007 Teheran By underground to Navvab, there I looked for an hour for Jamal Zade Street. To the Pakistani Embassy, but they are closed. By bus and taxi to Etihad Airlines, they promise a unproblematic reimbursal of the unused flight back. In the (shared) taxi to Vanak square I meet Amir, who even pays for the ride. By underground to the US Den of Espionage (former US Embassy). To the bazaar and the Imam-Khomeini Mosque. Find freezer bags to pack

my things waterproof and get them for free. The Golestan Palace is closed today.

13.4.2007 Teheran To the Golestan Palace, then to the Jewel Museum, which is closed. To the National Museum, meet the Mexican, who lodges in the same hotel as I do. We look for a copy shop, but find instead an excellent sandwich place. In the afternoon I walked around town, went to Park-e-Shahr.

14.4.2007 Teheran To the Pakistani Embassy, but the visa is again refused. I have to apply in Johannesburg (!!!). To the Carpet Museum, then to Haram-e-Motahar, to the Behest-e-Zahra, a huge cemetery for the dead of the Iraq war and those for the army killings in Mekka. Visited the Imam-Khomeini Shrine, a huge factory building, looking quite impressive from outside but less from inside. To Rey, where a friendly woman shows me the way to the Imamzadeh Shah Abdel-Azim Shrine. A wonderful building, decorated with millions of little mirrors, with three coffins. Long talk with a religious Iranian in the shrine.

15.4.2007 Teheran To Etihad Airlines, where I get the refund for my return ticket without any problems. Then I go to Sa'ad Abadi, where I visit the white and the green palace of the Shah Reza Pahlavi. From there to the Jewels Museum, which is heavily guarded, situated behind a double set of strong-doors and features a unbelievable wealth of jewels, mostly of the former Shah.

16.4.2007 Teheran Early in the morning I go to the Western Bus Station to catch a bus to Chalous, but alas, the road to Chalous is closed and I only wanted to travel the beautiful road. So I return to the hotel, go to the nearby Firouzeh Hotel where I reinstall the Windows XP, because their password has been lost and could not be retrieved. Afterwards I visit the aquarium, where many fish tanks are empty, and they keep all the deceased fish in spirits!

17.4.2007 Teheran-Qom-Kashan Took the Metro to the Southern Bus Terminal, by bus to Qom. At the shrine a policeman stops me, I may not enter. I try to deposit the backpack at a hotel, meet a mullah there who promises to help. He helps me to deposit the backpack and gets me into the shrine. Like the other worshippers I touch the doors and cling for some moments to the grid of the Shrine of Fatimah. In the courtyard I just have to sit down and enjoy the beautiful sight. Suddenly the policeman who refused me initially sees me and escorts me - extremely politely - out of the shrine. So I have to carry my backpack to the house of Imam Khomeini, where he stayed before his exile in Paris, a house which is not spectacular outside but very spacious inside. Short chat with the Mullahs, whom I meet inside, because of their limited English not very informative. A long way to the bus station, then bus to Kashan. There I meet the owner of an Internet café, Hadi, who puts me up there. I won't refuse this! A stroll through town, two "guides" lead me onto the roof of the bazaar, which is really very impressive, because all the beautiful buildings are made of mud, straw and dung. On my way back I meet Reza, who wants to invite me to his home, but I cannot accept as I am already invited. I repair Hadis Photoshop and then a customer arrives with a Windows problem. He, his brother and I sit on his Honda CG 125 and we drive to his home, where I eventually manage to repair the problem and get a delicious supper in exchange.

18.4.2007 Kashan-Isfahan The mosquitoes sting me all over at night. Hadi organised a delicious breakfast and helps me to get a bus ticket for 1400h. I then went to the Bazaar, but I promptly get lost looking for the historical houses. Not for nothing, as I bump into the old city walls which are very impressive. I then visit the house of Tabatabai, the house of Abasian, the house of Bouroudi and the old Hammam, where I can also go on top of the roof. I just make it back in time, but learn that the bus is leaving 30 minutes later. The bus journey to Isfahan in the old but excellently kept Mercedes bus, takes three hours. In Isfahan I put up at the Amir Kabr Hotel, where they are fully booked, so I have to sleep in a store room in the cellar. I visit Imam Square and take some photos.

19.4.2007 Isfahan In the morning both my arms are covered with fleabites. To the Imam Square, the bazaar, Jameh Mosque. For lunch berian with ayran, the local dish. To the Imam Mosque, then Sheikh Lotfollah Mosque and Qapu Palace. The Madrasa ye Chahar Bagh is closed. To the Zayandeh River, where I visit the Si-o-Seh Bridge, the Chubi-Bridge and the Khajin-Bridge. At the Amir Kabir Hostel I meet Kim from Spain and Dmitri from Russia.

20.4.2007 Isfahan At breakfast I meet Harry from Ireland. Went with Dmitri to the Madrasa ye Chehar Bagh. Dmitri has a press badge, but I am made to pay an outrageous 30'000 Rials, far too much for the not very spectacular place. Split from Dmitri and go by bus to Manar Jamban, see the not very impressive Shaking Minarets - they can be shaken a bit as they seem to be built on wooden planks. On the way back I get a bus ticket given by an Iranian. To the Chehel Sotun Palace. Met two Germans, who are travelling with a Mercedes lorry. They just had a puncture. By bus and Savari to the Sharestan bridge. Long chat with two young Iranian women. In the bus back, two old men have a brawl, people around me say that they are sorry that I had to witness this.

21.4.2007 Isfahan-Yazd With the first bus to the bus station, by 0700h bus to Yazd, arrived at 1100h. By Savari to the Silk Road Hotel. To the bazaar, then the Lonely-Planet City Walk: Amir Chakhmakh complex, Yazd Water Museum (with lots of interesting information about the Canat water distribution system), Hazireh Mosque, Jameh Mosque, water reservoir with 4 badgirs (wind towers), Khan-e-Lari (historical house), Alexanders Prison (was neither built by Alexander the great nor a prison), Tomb of the 12 Imams, Madrasse-e-Kamalieh, back to the Amir Chakhmakh complex, took pictures of the sunset. Visited Amir Chakhmakh Mosque. Visited a nameless shrine in Imam Khomeini Street.

22.4.2007 *Yazd* Chatted with a French couple, Milos and Sophie. To the bakery, the baker gives me three loaves of bread for free. Bought Feta cheese, sat on a bench in the sunshine and ate breakfast. Went to the Bogeh-ye Seyed Rokamdin Mosque, then to the Zoroastrian sacred places Ateshkadeh and by Savari to Abuzar Square. Walked from there to the Towers of Silence. Met two students. We collect the rubbish and burn it. Back by bus. To Dowlat Abad Garden, then to the Imam Zadeh Mosque. Chatted with Tomas from the Czech Republic. To the Internet café, burned files up to 2564 to CD-ROM.

23.4.2007 *Yazd-Kerman* By first bus to Kerman, arrive at 12:00h. By taxi to the Hotel Omid. They only have an expensive double room, but the other hotels are even more expensive, I have to take it. To the Bazar-e-Vakil (lawyers bazaar). The Hammam-e-Ganj-Ali Khan is closed, unfortunately. To the Jameh Mosque. The Moshtri-ye-Moshtak Ali Shah is closed, but a student leads me to the beautiful Imam Mosque. To the National Library, which was once upon a time a textile factory, then to the Museum of the Holy Defence. They want 10'000 IRR entrance fee, but I remain firm until I can enter at the official 3'000 IRR. Interesting is mainly the installation in the courtyard, depicting a battlefield in the Shatt-el-Arab. At the end they show a movie, I don't understand anything but the old woman next to me is weeping bitterly. Back to the Moshtri-ye-Moshtak Ali Shah, which is now open. On the way back I meet Martin from Munich at the Jameh Mosque. We have a drink and then have chicken for supper. At the hotel we find out that our rooms are adjacent. Chat until midnight.

24.4.2007 *Kerman-Rayen* Got up at 0600h, walked to Kermani Square. Took the Savari to Mahan. The Aramgah-e-Shah Ne'matollah Vali Mosque in Mahan is still closed. I buy bread and yoghurt cream and have a big breakfast in the square of the Mosque. As the Mosque opens, they want 25'000 IRR entrance fee. I don't pay, as the access to the yard is free and there is little more to expect inside the Mosque. At the former Karavan Sarai next door I meet Maryam, who is in the process of establishing a tourism promotion agency for Mahan. She shows me the roof with an impressive view over Mahan and offers me tea. Then to the nearby historical house, which is a bit dilapidated, but has the charm of the original condition with its two badgirs. As I walk to the Bagh-e-Shahzade, a bakkie stops and offers me a lift. I visit the beautiful garden with the impressive water features. I then walk to the main road, where I spot a traffic sign with directions. I had not yet arrived, as a beautiful Peugeot car stops and offers me a lift. At the Rayen Turnoff I drop and immediately get a lift by a Savari to Rayen. The driver does not even want to take money. A policeman takes me to the doorstep of the Rayen Arg Tourist Hotel, where I get a beautiful single room for little money. I then visit the Arg (citadel), whose architecture made of clay bricks is very impressive. I meet three Germans from Nuremberg, who are travelling in a Magirus Deutz lorry from Nepal back to Germany. On the way back I am spontaneously invited to a funeral meal at the Mosque.

25.4.2007 *Rayen* Wanted to buy bread, but I cannot find the bakery. Back to the hotel, where the three Germans give me a loaf of bread. To the gaming cafe (no Internet), could type my diary on USB-Stick, they did not even want money for it. To the post office, but the parcel is too heavy, I have to post it in Kerman or Bam. As I order a sandwich for lunch, a teacher pays for it, the Iranians are so extremely welcoming! To a hill at the outskirts of the village, an obviously drug addicted man wants me to give him a US Dollar. Meet Reza, the Landrover mechanic, who offers me an Ayran and an ice-cream and whose brother drives me by Landrover all over the village. Stroll amongst the beautiful, but partially crumbling mud brick houses. A different Reza loads me onto his Honda CG125 and shows me the highlights.

26.4.2007 *Rayen-Bam* At 07:00 I buy bread and cream for breakfast, then I walk along the road and immediately find a lift with a Paykan-Bakkie. At the Intersection, it stops, as soon as I have jumped off the Paykan, a blue Kia Pride stops and gives me a lift to Bam. Ali, the water engineer, even offers me a fruit juice! By taxi I get to the Akbar Guest House. I walk to the post office, cannot find it but somebody takes me there with his car. It takes an hour to post my diary and the CD-ROM. To the Arg, where I climb the wall, although this is not allowed. The Arg is completely destroyed because of the Earthquake in 2003 and I doubt it can be reconstructed, it would have to be rebuilt from scratch. Meet Ruth and Mohamed. We walk through Bam, take a taxi to the bus station. I buy a ticket to Shiraz. Back to the Resthouse, where I meet Nicolas from France and Tayfun from Germany (who has learned to speak fluent Farsi). I am invited to a plate of spaghetti, later we go to the bazaar, to the Internet café and buy food for supper.

27.4.2007 *Bam-Shiraz* I want to buy bread but it is Friday and everything is closed. I have to walk up to Imam Khomeini Square to find bread. Back to the Resthouse, chat with Mr. Akbar. Twelve Tanzanians arrive, I wonder what they are doing here? They all profess to be tourists, but when I ask them about the Arg, they don't even know what I am talking about. It even gets more suspicious as every one of them gets in with the owner of the Resthouse and discusses something with him behind locked doors. Probably some drug trafficking. I buy a watermelon and get a honey melon for free - my lunch. At 1330h I start walking to the bus station. When our bus overtakes in oncoming traffic, the police stops it and cautions the driver. They drive behind the bus and have to caution it again until the driver drives reasonably. I complain, that the air conditioning is set to 17°C deg and I have to wear a fleece jacket.

28.4.2007 *Shiraz* We arrive at 0300h in Shiraz. I get rid of the taxi drivers and try first to sleep outside, but it is too cold and I find a place in the waiting room. I wake up at 0530h walk into town. The Zand Hotel and the Esteghlal Hotel are too expensive, I put up at the Arvand Roon Hotel, still far too expensive for the shabby room. Have to extend my visa.

Make photostats of the passport, search a long time for the Aliens office. I am sent back to pay the fees into the main branch of the bank. I get there and back by Savari in less than an hour. To the Bazaar-e-Vakil, to the Vakil-Mosque, to the Arg Karim Khan, then meet the four Germans from Munich again (Michael, Martin, Basti and Florian). They have a problem with their radiator fan. I am not allowed to enter the Shah Cherag Shrine, because I am not a Muslim, although I see many tourists inside. By bus to the Hafeziyeh shrine, then to the Quran gate, the Khajeh Kermani, the Shah Shajah tomb and the Qaleh e Karimkhani (second fortress of Karim Khan). Witnessed terrible accident, a car comes off the road and gets completely demolished. On the way back, the owner of a tent shop greets me like an old acquaintance; he wants to practise his English.

29.4.2007 Persepolis Today I am visiting Persepolis. Bus to Marvdasht. Because all Savaris demand 10'000 IRR to Naqsh-e-Rostam, I refuse to take one. An elderly Iranian shoves me into a bus, even pays for my bus ticket and after a couple of stops, I have a wide choice of Savaris for 3'000 IRR each. At Naqsh-e-Rostam I marvelled at the excellently preserved rock-hewn tombs and the Kaaba Kartosht. A brand-new Renault lorry takes me to Persepolis. Visit the Xerxes-Gateway, the unfinished gate, the Hall of the 32 Columns, the rock-hewn tomb of Artaxerxes II, the rock-hewn tomb of Artaxerxes III. Meet Reza. Central stairways, viewed Palace of the 100 Columns, Apadana Palace. Visited the museum but it is not very impressive. Viewed the Xerxes-Palace and the Tachara-Palace. By Taxi back to Marvdasht, by Minibus back to Shiraz. Meet Florian, later I say goodbye to Florian, Basti, Michael and Martin, they leave tomorrow.

30.4.2007 Pasargan Confusion at the bus station, whether I have to take a minibus or a big bus to Saadatshahr. Buy a ticket for the big bus at 0930h. Meet four travellers from the Czech Republic, as I want quickly want to visit the Molk Mosque, but the Mosque is closed. By bus to Saadatshahr. Immediately find a Savari to Pasargad, quite cheap, because the bus driver explained exactly where to find it and how much to pay. In Pasargad I marvel at the tomb of Cyrus, the private palace (Palace P), a further palace and the Gateway Palace and the irrigation of the Royal garden. The "Throne of the Mother of Solomon" is a ruin of a palace on a hill. When I walk back I find the same taxi again, it drives me extremely fast back to Saadatshahr. I have a hamburger and the owner of the place gives me a orange lemonade for free. By minibus to Marvdasht, somebody drives me with a Honda CG125 to the other bus station, where I get a minibus to Shiraz tomorrow.

1.5.2007 Shiraz Visited the Khan Madrassa, chatted with the Mullahs. Visited another Madrassa in Otfalikhan Street. To the Nasir-ol-Molk Mosque, then through the side entrance from the Bazaar to the shrines of Shah-e-Cheragh and Sayyed mir. This time no problems to enter. To the Atiq Jameh Mosque. Revisited the Saray-e-Moshir at daylight. To the Aramgah-e-Sa'adi, then direct bus to Meydan Eram. Paid expensive entrance fee for the Bagh-e-Eram, 40'000 IRR. Chat with pupils, which does not please the teacher. Meet Fatimeh, Fatineh and Mehdi, they invite me to Faluda with lemon juice and nastaram (rosewater).

2.5.2007 Firuzabad To the Karandish terminal, but the bus leaves from Modarres terminal. Quickly got there, found a bus to Firoozabad. Dropped at the Qaleh-e-Dokhtar, climbed the mountain, viewed the huge fortress with the massive domed tower. An air of spring: the odour of herbs, a cuckoo is heard. As I want to walk to Ardeshir Palace, a motorbike stops and gives me a lift. View the Ardeshir Fire Temple, very impressive the huge domes and the first Iwans in Persia's history. Engineer Mohamed invites me for lunch: Chicken and Rice! I walk in direction Shahr-e-Goor, two motorcyclists take me along as a second pillion rider! The tower is massive, the staircases were on the outside. By Savari back to Firoozabad, where I am shoved in a taxi, which is supposed to be free. This is, of course, not the case and as we cannot reach a deal, I get into a Savari in direction Kherkher, I get the driver to agree to 10'000 IRR. Arrived in Khercher, he wants 50'000 IRR, although another passenger pays him 2'000 for the same distance. I give him the agreed 10'000. The Masjid Imamzadeh Seyed Davood Kherghe is pretty eroded from the outside, as it is entirely made of mud bricks. The inside is completely preserved, though. I meet two young men, one of them sings beautifully. I return to the road and wait for a Savari back, all of them are full. The two young men want to give me a lift, but they ride in the wrong direction. Eventually a Savari stops. In Firoozabad I find a bus to Shiraz. In Shiraz I am shoved into a Savari which apparently goes to Shohada square, but I get wary as it turns off to Karandish Terminal and drops all other passengers. The driver refuses to drop me and drives me all across town, eventually arriving at Shohada Square and asking for 20'000 IRR - the fare from Firuzabad to Shiraz. I give him the right fare of 2'000 and leave the taxi quickly. That shall teach him.

3.5.2007 Shiraz-Bushehr I want to buy breakfast, but the bakery is closed and I have to walk far to another bakery. Now I am too late for the bus. Drag my backpack as fast as possible to Hossein Square, where I immediately find a Savari to Amir Kabir Square. The driver is nice and even charges only the regular fare. I get into the bus to Bushehr, which leaves immediately. In Bushehr I have to take a taxi to the city centre which is far from the bus station. The Sadi Hotel is fully booked, but I find a pleasant room overlooking Enqelab Square at the Pars Hotel. View the city which shows no life, all shops are closed. After a nap back to the now bustling city. Near the bus booking office, I meet Ahmad Mezafat, who lived for 35 years in Appenzell.

4.5.2007 Bushehr The hotel owners offer tea and bread for breakfast. Stroll through Bushehr, have tea with the locals. Bushehr's old city is completely dilapidated, the buildings are crumbling, everywhere there are construction works but

nothing is completed. A pity, because the new parts of Bushehr give a much cleaner and tidier impression. Repulsive are the open sewers, just a ditch in the middle of the street. The enormous heat makes them emit a just so enormous stench. From 12 to 17h Bushehr holds siesta because of the midday heat. Visit the Anthropological museum, the Taheri- and the Amiriyeh House. Call Ahmad, he wants to meet me at 1900h, but he doesn't turn up. While walking through the harbour district, a lad blocks my way and demands money and my bag. I behave as if I did not understand him and suddenly he runs away. With the Japanese girl Sachi to the police to register her passport (but confusion: The Iranians think that she is my wife) and then for supper to the Golestan Restaurant.

5.5.2007 Bushehr to Bandar-e-Charak Stroll through the eastern part of Bushehr, which is much more modern than the western part. It is terribly hot. 1400h I go to the bus office, but now they say that the bus leaves from the terminal 20km off here. Take a taxi there. During the bus journey, which takes me past kilometres of refineries, I fall asleep.

6.5.2007 Bandar-e-Charak-Kish Island As I wake up, the bus has already passed Bandar Charak, the conductor has not woken me up as I asked him to do. Bandar-e-Lengeh I recognise on my own and ask the driver to stop. It is 01:30h. The only hotel is closed, the night bell out of order. I lay down on a bench and sleep a bit. At 05:30 a beggar wakes me up and demands money. I walk to the bazaar and buy bread, then to the Terminal of the Valfajre-8 ferry. Unfortunately, the ferry has been discontinued, I have to return to - Bandar-e-Charak! A lorry takes me to the Savari-Terminal, where I find a Savari to Bandar-e-Charak. I arrive at 08:30h, but the last seat on the boat has just been taken. They still let me board, just out of the books. The ride to Kish is rough, the boat jumps on the waves and hits the water hard. After an hour I arrive at Kish, where an expensive taxi takes me to the Salar Kish Hotel, which is fully booked. Eventually I find a bed in a migrant-worker-suite for 100'000 Rial in the Venus Hotel (a strange name, obviously chosen by non-English speakers...) and share it with 7 Indians. I walk through the various shopping malls, which are crammed with goods of mixed quality, mostly identical with goods on the mainland. On the southern end of Kish I find a huge, deserted and crumbling holiday complex.

7.5.2007 Kish-Bandar-e-Abbas Checked out of the Venus-Hotel, walked to the port. I need an exit permit, have to wait until the customs open up. When I get the permit, I just about make it unto the last launch to the mainland. Boat ride to Bandar-e-Charak. From Bandar-e-Charak by Savari to Bander-e-Lengeh. From there by ratty bus to Bandar-e-Abbas, where we get dumped outside the city. Taxi to Abuzar Square. All hotels are frightfully expensive, around 100'000 IRR. Eventually I find two Iranians, who will share their room with me (against carrying part of their cost). Long drawn-out procedure to buy an air ticket to Dubai. Terrible supper.

8.5.2007 Qeshm Changed to the Mosaferkhuneh Bouali, they have at least a room available. To the fish market, then to the harbour where I catch a covered ferryboat to Qeshm. In Qeshm long discussion about the taxi fare to Laft, eventually we agree on 100'000 IRR. Drive to Laft, view the picturesque Bandari fishing village with its multitude of Badgirs. Watch them building wooden dhows at the beach. Back to Qeshm, view the not very attractive Bazaar. Sudden diarrhoea, no wonder after the disgusting supper last night. Go to the almost completely demolished Portuguese Castle. In a cellar, I find next to two Portuguese cannon barrels, a tethered donkey. Back to Bandar-e-Abbas. I am almost completely broke. Had the backpack repaired, the Chinese crap is starting to break all over. Showed my visa to the travel agency. Pastry for supper (it constipates...), wonderful!

Dubai

9.5.2007 Bandar-e-Abbas-Dubai Get up at 0500h, take a taxi to the airport. Waiting, waiting, solving Sodukos. At 07:30h they start checking in, but I do not realise this because they do not announce it and they don't check in at one of the regular desks but one in a side alley which I cannot see from my seat. At 07:40 I get uneasy and ask the flight information attendant when my flight gets checked in. Only then I am led to the side alley and can check in my luggage. The flight with Aria Air is almost empty, only 10 seats are occupied. After about an hour's flight we arrive at Dubai's cheapie-terminal 2. I take ages in passport control, maybe because my Swiss passport is brand-new? They take many copies but eventually let me pass. I take a taxi to the youth hostel, but I find out it was in walking distance to the airport. If only I had had a travel guide or a map! The Dubai YHA is ultra-luxury, but this comes at a premium, namely 20 USD per night. After many futile attempts I eventually manage to convince a bus driver to take me to the city centre, where I am window-shopping and enjoying the commercial atmosphere of Dubai. At a bookshop they tell me, if I am not happy with their choice, it is not their task to tell me about other English bookshops. I go to the Internet café and find out that the English bookshop is by the name of Magrubys at the City Centre Shopping Mall. To the City Centre Shopping Mall. Find Air Arabiya, buy a ticket for the 14th to Ahmedabad. Find Magrubys Bookshop, buy a Lonely Planet travel guide of Dubai and of India. Walk across Al Makfoum bridge and marvel at the view. On my way to Bastakia, I jaywalk and the car driver, instead of being angry at me, stops and offers me a lift. The lady's name is Simmy, she is from India. At Bastakia I first visit the fabulous Museum in the Old Citadel, then I visit the beautiful old city, all in Iranian style with Badgirs, in the cool evening atmosphere. While strolling, I stop at the Philately House, where I meet an Egyptian who invites me for tea. Eventually I have to take the bus back to the Youth Hostel. The bus takes more than an hour in the ever congested traffic. I chat a long time with Li and Li from Korea, whom I met on the bus, and with an Austrian

roommate, so I only get to bed at midnight.

10.5.2007 Dubai Fabulous breakfast at the youth hostel, it really does compare to a 5-star-hotel. By bus to town. When the bus is stuck for 20 minutes in the same spot in traffic, I get out, and the problem is solved. From this moment, traffic is moving again. I walk across the Al-Makfoum Bridge to the computer Street Khaled-bin-Al-Waleed and go the Al Ain Shopping Center, where I am also able to shop wildly: An ultra-slim USB-memory stick (as a replacement for the too small Sony), a miniature SD-Card-Reader and a new battery charger as replacement for the piece of junk I had to buy in Tanzania). Therefore my equipment is up to date again, enabling me to make a complete copy of USB stick. By bus to the Burj-Al-Arab Hotel, but oops, as I want to drop, it does not stop but continues and only stops after 4 km. I have to walk back 4km in the scorching sun. Shit! The Burj-Al-Arab is impressive, but I cannot even get to the driveway, security guards stop all tourists. Then to the Madinat Jumeirah, a Hotel complex in the Iranian style, with Badgirs and artificial water basins, beautifully done. Back by bus, chat with the Pakistani driver. Walked to the Heritage area, but everything is closed. Through the pedestrian tunnel from Shindagha to Deira. To the Internet café, my new purchases tested and filled with data. By dhow back to Bur Dubai. Visit Sheik SAeed al-Maktoum house with photo gallery, stamps- and coins collection. The Heritage Village and the Diving Village offer little of interest. Back through the pedestrian tunnel to Deira, had an Indian supper. To the Gold Souq bus station, the queue for the 13 bus is long, I join at the end. As I have eventually made my way to the driver he says, despite the bus being only half full, "full, take next bus". I wait for half an hour. Two buses come in but don't take passengers. Eventually a bus opens its door, but a security guard says "queue up". I am pushed out of the queue and stand there swearing. It makes no sense to join at the end, as there won't be another bus. I run to Sakhla bus station and wait for Bus No. 17. Two buses arrive, but don't take passengers. The third opens its doors. After 2.5h Odyssey I eventually arrive at the youth hostel.

11.5.2007 Dubai Wrote diary, washed clothes. Terrible blisters on my feet because of yesterday's walking. Chatted all day long with Stefan and Elise.

12.5.2007 Sharjah By bus to the Al Sabhka Bus Station, visited the Al-Ahmadyia School and the Heritage House. Bus to Al Ghubaiba Bus Station, minibus to Sharjah. Visited Heritage Area in Sharjah, Al Husn Citadel (torn down and reconstructed), then the Heritage Village (everything reconstructed). Visited the Heritage Museum. Bought new torch. Back to Dubai, met Stefan. We have an ice cream and later supper. Big struggle to get a bus back.

13.5.2007 Dubai After great difficulties - no bus wanted to take passengers - I found a bus to town. Exchanged defective USB stick, but had to pay 20 Dh. on top. Strolled through the city, had a chat with a salesman of the Chinese car company "Deer", whose car (which is a licensed copy of the old Toyota Hilux Doublecab) is only 9'000 USD!

India

14.5.2007 Dubai-Ahmedabad Went to town, Creekside Park, then walked to the Internet café, applied via Internet for the Australian visa, had some Indian food, spent two hours at Western Union, went back to the Internet. Li and Li, with whom I had made an appointment for 20:30h are a few minutes late, because their bus did not run for a long time. We take a taxi to Sharjah Airport, which is 7.50 AED cheaper than if ordered through the Youth Hostel. And on top of that we can share costs. The check-in has a huge queue, but because I don't have a trolley I am sent ahead. Until I passed all checks, it is almost 23:55, boarding. Then I have to go to the loo quickly and when I return, everyone has already boarded. But no sweat: I am well in time. We leave on time. Sharjah looks fabulous from the air.

15.5.2007 Ahmedabad The airplane touches down two hours later, but in India it is already 04:00h. We wait for a long time to leave the plane. I quickly get through customs, am waved through. Outside, I wait and doze for an hour because I don't want to arrive at the hotel at 05:00h. At dawn I walk towards the bus station. The Tuk-tuks queue up at the roadside asking whether I really don't want a ride. Eventually, I realise that I am starting to pose a traffic hazard and as the offers are nearing the bus fare, I gladly board one. I quickly get to the Hotel Rupali, where I am given a nice single room with bath. The weather is hot, but not as humid as Dubai. I go to the Sidi Saiyad Mosque and the Bhadra Fort, have some samoosa and tea, but suddenly get so tired, that I have to return to the room and sleep a bit. At 11:00 I start sightseeing, beginning with a personal tour of the Bhadra Fort, then to the Old Palace Gate Teen Darwaja, to the Rani Sipri Mosque, by Tuk-tuk to Kankaria Lake, which was built in 1451, then by Tuk-tuk to Dada Hari Wav (one of the step wells) and to nearby Mata Bhavanis Well, which was difficult to find. Walked about 5km back to the hotel.

16.5.2007 Ahmedabad Overslept, only woke up at 09:00h. Went to the Gandhi Ashram, where there is an exhibition on his life, and to the City Museum. It is 42°C hot, I have to return to the hotel.

17.5.2007 Ahmedabad-Junagadh I catch the 09:30h bus to Junagadh. Next to me is the cheerful Kadar, an electrical engineer from Ahmedabad, who speaks excellent English. He drops at Rajkot. As I want to drop two stations before Junagadh in Gondal, because there is an interesting car museum there, the conductor won't let me, so I stay till Junagadh. I get a nice room at the Relief Hotel.

18.5.2007 Junagadh Climbed Girnar Hill (10'000 steps up!), visited the temples, took part in a ceremony, returned, was

completely exhausted on my return, although the weather was favourable. Ate a large Indian meal, then to the Ashokan edicts, 100 Rupees entrance fee for nothing! To Uperkot Fort, visited the cannon, the Jama Masjid, the Navaghan Kuva stepwell, very impressive with its enormous depth, the Adi Kadi stepwell, like the former one filled with rubbish, but an Indian ladles some water onto his head! Then the Buddhist caves, a waste of money for the 100 Rupees entrance, the water cisterns and the garden. Visited the Mahabat Maqbara Shrine, climbed one of the minarets.

19.5.2007 Junagadh (Gondal) By bus to Gondal, visit the car museum with fantastic cars like Corvettes, Cadillac's, Rolls Royce's and the like. Visit the Palace of the Maharajah and his railway coach, the Durbar Palace in town. Back to Junagadh where I visit the zoo and see the Asiatic lions.

20.5.2007 Junagadh-Diu By bus to Una, but 10 km before Una the gear-stick breaks off. We continue in first gear until another bus takes pity on us and offers us a ride. It is by chance the bus to Diu. In Diu the super Silver Hotel is not interested in backpackers anymore, so I put up at the Sao Tome Guesthouse. The island of Diu and the mainland town of Ghoghla are a former Portuguese colony, which was taken back by India in 1961, by some coercion. It still has many Portuguese-style houses and churches, but it has been thoroughly Indianised, which also means crowding all over the place and rubbish even on the beach. On the other hand, the authorities started to do the most necessary maintenance works on the Portuguese Fort. At the guesthouse I meet Dan from London. We have supper at the seafront and eat from little food stalls.

21.5.2007 Diu I visit the Church of Sao Paulo, the Portuguese Fort, the Nagar Seth Haveli (a particular beautiful house), the Zampa Gateway, the (artificial) Zampa waterfalls (which are out of order), the St. Francis of Assisi Hospital. In the afternoon I met an Indian chap and went with him to Jalandhar beach and the Khokha Memorial (with an app. 4m long beautiful model of the sunken man-of-war) and the Gangeswar Temple. Supper with Olli from Australia and Dan from London.

22.5.2007 Diu-Mumbai Dan and I have a cosy breakfast at the Heranca Goesa Restaurant and then we slowly proceed to the bus station. The bus was supposed to leave at 10:30; at 11:00 it pitches up. There are many seemingly unnecessary stops everywhere, passengers are taken on or leave the bus. Every now and then we stop for food and water. Twice, someone asks me very friendly whether he may stow his huge bags in my leg space. I reply as friendly that he may not. Eventually it gets dark and I fall asleep, with my legs between the heads of the people sleeping on the floor of the aisle.

23.5.2007 Mumbai When I wake up it is 5:30 and we have just crossed the city limits of Mumbai. Two hours later we arrive in the city centre. We take a taxi - we know it should be 50 rupees, but the driver wouldn't go below 70. But foreigners always pay more. We put up at the dormitory of the Salvation Army Red Shield House. Then we go to Victoria Station and inquire about trains, but for me to Aurangabad, a bus costs the same and the times are more convenient. We visit the High court, the university, both in Victorian style, and the 120-year-old Kneset-Elyahood Synagogue, which is, unlike any other Synagogue, open to the public and even has a name plate.

24.5.2007 Mumbai Breakfast at the Salvation Army, then to the Gateway of India, to the Crawford Market. At lunch, I am asked to pay 1 (one) Rupee for a dish of chapati and gravy and cannot believe it is true! Swapped two of my books against a tatty copy of "War and Peace" of Leo Tolstoy. Visited the Mumbai Cathedral. Washed my clothes. Mumbai is much more expensive than any other city in India. On the other hand, it offers much more infrastructure, which attracts also the wealthier tourists. Went by bus to Chowpatty Beach, had some Bhel Puri and got some more food free of charge.

25.5.2007 Mumbai To the Internet café. Fantastic lunch at a street stall for only 15 Rupees. To the main post office, great difficulty to find picture postcards (found out later that they were sold inside the post office!) and ended up buying some at inflated prices, sent the DVD with my pictures and the postcards to Switzerland. To the Taj Mahal Hotel, viewed the lobby. Chicken tikka for supper.

26.5.2007 Mumbai I get up early, pack my things and take the bus to Crawford Market. I find the bus company only after a long and tedious search. Then I am told: My bus is not leaving 9:00 in the morning, but in the evening. I had explicitly asked for a ticket for 9:00 in the morning. Now I have to somehow kill a full day in Bombay! But I have already seen everything. Bombay is full of Victorian buildings, from around 1870, extremely ugly but very special in a way. Once you have seen one of them, you have seen them all. I walk aimlessly through town. I sit in the bus company's office until they tell me to leave. I stroll through town to the Victoria Terminal, where I buy Idli for supper, sit for a while at the cricket grounds, stroll through Crawford market. At 20:00h I return to the bus company. At 21:00h I am taken to a waiting bus. It is completely empty, but about an hour later it leaves. We load passengers in the suburbs and get stuck until midnight in Bombay's traffic! I fall asleep.

27.5.2007 Aurangabad At 08:00h our bus arrives in Aurangabad. I take a Tuk-tuk to the Hotel Tourist's Home, where I put up and enjoy a shower and fresh clothes. Buy an Ellora tourist bus ticket. Shortly before 11h the tourist bus picks me up. Our first visit is Daulabad. This is the enormous fortress which Aurangzeb had built, when he moved the capital from Delhi to Aurangabad, but only for 6 years, afterwards the inhabitants had to walk back to Delhi. The double gates, the (rock-hewn!) water barrier around the core fort which is still filled with water and the rock-hewn tunnels are very

impressive. Unfortunately, we have far too little time. We continue to the Grishneshwar-Temple, one of the Hindu's 12 holiest places. I have to take off shoes, belt and shirt. Upon leaving I burn my feet on the hot stone slabs. We continue to the Ellora caves, the first one were hewn around 600AC. We visit the Buddhist caves No. 10 and 12, the Hindu Kailasa Temple No. 16 and the Jain caves No. 33 and 34. The rock-hewn temples and monasteries are incredibly impressive, exact details, naturalistic statues of persons, and everything double as large as in Lalibela! We don't stop in Khuldabad, because Aurangzeb's tomb is supposed to be inaccessible at the moment. In Aurangabad we visit the Bibi-ka-Maqbara, also called the Mini-Taj-Mahal, which resembles the Taj Mahal really very much and is made of white marble. At last we visit the Panchakki, a water reservoir which is fed from a Qanat-type subterranean water conduit and drives a propeller-driven flourmill.

It is not quite understandable why the Indian authorities have embarked on a foreigner-bashing entrance-fee policy. While Indians pay 5 or 10 rupees, us foreigners have to pay 100 to 250 rupees, in the case of the Taj Mahal even 750 rupees. This is utterly unfair and will keep many budget traveller from visiting the major sights. I wish they would follow Iranians example and do away altogether with foreigners' entrance fees.

28.5.2007 Aurangabad I visit the Aurangabad caves. As the Tuk-tuks want far too much to take me there, I get a Tuk-tuk to Bibi-ka-Maqbara, from where I walk the short distance. I visit the caves No. 5, 4, 3, 2, 1 and then 6, 6a, 7, 7a, 8, 9, 10. They are by far not as impressive as the ones in Ellora, but the mere fact that they are here is exciting. No 6 and 7 are former monasteries, with monks cells. I walk back, stroll through the old city.

29.5.2007 Aurangabad-Jalgaon Today, I am visiting the Ajanta caves. Got up at 04:45, met two Taiwanese girls on the way to the bus station. Took the 06:00 bus to Ajanta, we arrived already at 08:00! A store owner offers me tea. I am amongst the first this morning to enter the caves compound. It is raining. The Ajanta caves were only discovered in 1819, when a British hunting party found them by chance. The caves are beautifully preserved, with some of the painting still intact. The first temples were cut into the rock around the year 200 BC. Some of the temples are entire monasteries with monks cells. By rattling public bus to Jalgaon. The trains to Kolkata are overbooked, I only got a standby ticket for tomorrow 04:50h. Strolled through Jalgaon, which is just another big Indian city.

30.5.2007 Jalgaon-Kolkata I get up shortly after 04:00h and go to the cloakroom. But all knocking and shouting is without effect, nobody is in. My train is leaving at 04:50h. I go to the enquiries counter and complain. They tell an employee to assist me. He first tries to knock, but without avail. We then go to the platform, where we find the luggage-wallah in a merry chat from platform to platform. Slowly he walks back to the cloakroom, I get my backpack eight minutes before the planned departure. The train has not yet arrived. Eventually I find out where my coach is going to stop. Then the train arrives, I board it, find my bunk and lay down to sleep. At 08:00h I wake up. A very pretty Indian girl, Zainab, who is studying engineering in Delhi, boards and gets onto the available seat in our compartment. In the evening I want to buy cookies as the train stops at a station. A fellow passengers, a successful art director from Mumbai, accompanies me onto the platform. As I am just about to pay, the train hoots and starts moving. We run to the train and board the moving train. Not so easy with three packets of cookies in one hand and change in the other. As I want to go to bed, a woman asks me to swap berths because she cannot climb to one of the upper berths. I gladly accept as my berth is anyway too short for me.

31.5.2007 Kolkata As we approach Kolkata, the ticket inspector tells me to change trains, as the train is going to Shalimar station. I get into a terribly crowded local train. As we arrive in Howrah, I get into a taxi. It takes off like one with an automatic gearbox, the clutch is gone. In the middle of the traffic lanes on Howrah bridge, the Hindustan "Ambassador" dies completely. I walk back to the station, get my taxi money back and take a ferry across the river. But then I get terribly lost and make a huge detour, until I eventually find Sudder Street and the Youth Hostel of the Salvation Army. I am soaked and have to drink 2lt of water immediately.

1.6.2007 Kolkata Walked in direction Victoria Memorial, visited Elliot Park on the way. The Victoria Monument is closed, but it can be viewed from outside. Visited the nearby St. Paul's Cathedral. Wanted to visit the adjacent Academy of Arts but it was closed. These Victorian buildings are incredibly pompous and as much ugly. Went to the Asiatic Society. After 40 minutes of formalities I am admitted to the Museum. It is remarkably good, with Ayurvedic scripts in Sanskrit, scripts in Partian (Arabic writing) and many colonial scripts. The paintings are less attractive, but a stone with an inscription by Ashoka, about 2'200 years old, is interesting. Then to the Indian Museum. Imagine it like a museum somewhere, which has been dormant for 70 years. Many exhibits are unchanged for the past 70 years, covered in dust, with antique labels. At the zoological section there are many skeletons, hunting trophies and tatty stuffed animals. The food- and textiles section is slowly crumbling away. The dioramas can hardly be seen beyond the dirt on the glass windows. You can hardly see that the food samples have rotted away, because the glass containers have become opaque. Below a table is a batch of paintings of former (English) curators. Well done and obviously a few years younger, is the exhibition of the various Indian tribes. In the right wing of the museum is a beautiful but unsystematic exhibition of historic Indian sculptures. Slightly absurd is the Egyptology department, with a real mummy! But the texts are excellent, I wish they had had some of this quality in Egypt. The fossils hall has become a fossil itself. The animal dioramas at least make the children happy. I had four hours of great amusement. I then visited the Motherhouse, which

is the house Mother Theresa used to live in and where she was buried. There is a little exhibition of her life.

2.6.2007 Kolkata Did the Lonely Planet Walking Tour: New Market, but was still closed; Fort William, but it is in the meantime completely screened off, not visible from outside; Eden Gardens, were still closed at 9am; Sahid Minar, a 45m tall tower; Tipu Sultans Mosque, which appears bigger from the outside than what it is inside; the Raj Bhavan Building, not open to the public and at last BBD Bagh, a murky pond in the centre of town, where the boys bathe nevertheless. Bought a railway ticket to Bodhgaya at the Foreign Tourist Office, after a long wait. To Millennium Park, but it was unimpressive, then by ferry across the Hooghly River (which is basically moist bacteria) to Howrah Station, where I get an excellent meal for only 19 Rupees. By Bus No. 55 to the Botanical Garden, which has become a wilderness, is devoid of any maintenance, has knocked-over trees all over the paths, but is somehow idyllic-decadent. Saw the 250 year old Banyan tree, whereby the main trunk has decayed and only the branches with their aerial roots survived. By Bus C6 back to Chowringhee, walked the remainder. Ugly blisters on my feet, because the socks are permanently wet in the humid heat. By Metro to Jatin Das, to the Kalighat Temple. A tout gets me into a shop and wants to make me believe that the temple is in that shop! I just walk away. Within the temple, I am spotted by one of the official hard-currency-tourist-hunters. I get a ultra-fast tour of the temple, have to throw a rose inside the shrine, then I am taken to a oversized Bonsai tree, where I have to throw four roses in, and hang the remainder plus two rings on one of the branches - I choose the highest one, because none of the Indians can reach it. I am then asked for a donation. The Lonely Planet guide says, it is 50 Rupees. In the meantime, the utterly brainless tourists have pushed the tariff to 2'500 Rupees (60 USD, I can easily live for a week on that), so that after long negotiations, I won't get away with less than 200 Rupees and look stingy despite the high amount. Afterwards, I am still asked to pay 20 Rupees for the flowers and another 20 for the guide.

3.6.2007 Kolkata Today I want to visit the Ramakrishna Complex at Belur Math. The Ramakrishna sect professes that it unites Indian, Christian and Muslim elements. I take a bus to Esplanade, where I first have to have my bag repaired, which is starting to fall apart in the moist heat and then wait for a long time for a bus to Belur Math which says this in English: "At Belur Math, it is not allowed to make any pictures" (the one above was made from the ferry). I visit the large Sri Ramakrishna Temple, which was built in honour of Sri Ramakrishna (1836-1886), then the Holy Mother Temple, built in honour of Sri Sarada Devi (1853-1920), the spiritual consort of Sri Ramakrishna, the Temple for Swami Vivekananda (1863-1902), the foremost disciple of Sri Ramakrishna and the Temple for Swami Brahmanananda (1863-1922), the first president of Ramakrishna Mission. Then I visit the Ramakrishna Museum. Here I realise that the sect is just swimming in money, the museum seems to have unlimited funds at it's disposal. I take a ferry across the Hooghly river, a shifty affair as the boats have round shells which roll terribly. At times I believe that we will capsize. At Dakshineswar I visit the Kali Temple. There is an incredible crowd, I can only see the statue of Kali from a distance. By bus to the marble palace. I would need a permit by the Ministry to visit it, but against the promise of bakschisch I am nevertheless let in and am shown through the Palace which was built in 1835. The Raja Rajendro Mullick Bahadur would probably urgently have needed an interior decorator, everything is terribly over-furnished and the sculptures probably already then tasteless. From Rama via Queen Victoria to Jesus, everything is there. By underground back to the Salvation Army. By bus to Howrah station, the conductor demands double fare because of my backpack. Long search until I find out on which platform and where my coach will be. Train leaves on time, I soon fall asleep.

4.6.2007 Bodhgaya When I get up at 05:15, the train stops somewhere. Is it already Gaya? I ask the other passengers. The next station. Drop at Gaya, get into a Tuk-tuk to Bodhgaya. It first drives to the bus station, where it hopes to find more passengers, but cannot find any. I get fed up and change the Tuk-tuk and after a short while, I am in Bodhgaya. Before 8am I am at the Shanti Resthouse and start sightseeing immediately. First to the Mahabodhi Temple, where the Bodhi tree, under which Buddha had his enlightenment, is worshipped. Get rid of an unwanted guide. To the Namgyal Monastery, which features a huge prayer wheel, to the Chinese Monastery, the adjacent Shechen Darjeeling Monastery, the Thai Monastery, the Karma-Temple, again with prayer wheel, the Daijokyo Monastery, the Indosan Nippon Temple and the Bhutanese Monastery. By horse and cart to outside the town situated Vietnamese Monastery, which is a beautiful pagoda. On the way back I meet Toru from Japan and we have lunch together. Do my laundry. By horse and cart over the Sujala Bridge to the Sujala Stupa - on the later-date brick Stupa is only a tree - and to the combined Buddha/Hindu-Temple, where the girl Sujala offered Buddha a bowl of rice milk. Permanently, "teachers" try to convince me to visit some "school for the poor" in the hope on a huge donation.

5.6.2007 Bodhgaya-Gaya-Varanasi I have an early breakfast and try to find a Tuk-tuk to Gaya Main Station. But there are none, nobody wants to go to the station. The fares asked are astronomical. I decide to take a Tuk-tuk to some school somewhere in Gaya. After one hour of tiresome travelling (the Piaggio Ape, a Vespa-mobile designed for three people, had at times 14 passengers) I arrive and take a bicycle rickshaw to the station. After a long time queuing up I get my ticket, but at the Enquiries counter I am told that I will only get at 14:15 a train to Mughal Sarai, 13km from Varanasi. For the remainder I was to take a taxi. Gaya is a terribly dirty city, at the moment even more, as they are digging the dirt out of the open sewers and let it dry on the road. For lunch I order Thali, but I get the same thing as everyone else just with the difference of having to pay 2.5 times as much. I complain and get in the end a small discount. I could have

afforded to pay the few extra rupees, but then the next tourist will meet the same fate. Such behaviour should just not be tolerated. Eventually my train comes in. I cannot see any coaches with seats so I sit into a sleeper class coach. The conductor tells me to leave, but the other passengers tell me to ignore it. And right, he never mentions it again. In Mughalsarai I wait and wait for the connection. Eventually, I give up. An auto-rickshaw driver offers me a 30 Rp ride, but it is a scam, he just wants to get me into the rickshaw and then charge 150 Rupees. I catch a Tempo (shared three-wheeler) to Varanasi. The last bit I do by bicycle rickshaw, Ahmed, invites me to share his rickshaw to Godaulia. Trying to find the Resthouse with the Lonely Planet map, I get completely lost and have to ask a guide to take me there. I was more than 1 km off the track.

6.6.2007 Varanasi I wake up at 04:50am, because a cow makes a helluva noise. I get up and start, after a breakfast of Idli (made from pulses and rice), to visit the Ghats (stairways to the river). Particular impressive are the burning Ghats - Manikarnika Ghat, where one can watch the burning from a close distance and with all gruesome detail. For instance, the feet regularly fall to the ground and have to be put back on the fire with huge bamboo pincers. Suddenly I notice that my stomach develops diarrhoea. This is the first time, since I have arrived in India, but it is severe. Probably the idli were contaminated. No surprise in this filth! I then visit the Golden Temple (Vishwanath Temple), whose name derives from the 800 kilos of gold used to gild the roof. Non-Hindus may not enter. I stand in a queue for an hour, just to walk around it. Disgusting that one has to take one's shoes off and then wade through a sauce of cowdung and human piss. In the afternoon, I walk about the northern Ghats, visit the Durga Temple and make a boat trip on the Ganges river.

Varanasi is maybe the dirtiest place I have ever visited. The roads are plastered with cowdung, human urine and excrement, dog turds, thrown away food, rubbish, the usual plastic bags and bottles, sewage seeping out of defective pipes or purposely let out into the streets. I could not believe my eyes when I saw some untouchables actually sweeping up the dirt in the early morning. But by 8am, the roads look exactly the same as they looked before. The dirt, being everywhere, penetrates into everything. Your food, your clothes, your shoes, your body, everything is to a greater or lesser extent contaminated. Under these conditions it is impossible to stay clean. Even the bottles of mineral water are covered with a layer of filth when you buy them.

7.6.2007 Varanasi-Satna My indigestion has improved. I pack my things and wait for the hotel manager to settle my bill. By bicycle rickshaw to the Main Station. There, as I am buying a railway ticket, the phone rings and the ticket sales official hands it to me. It is the stationmaster, informing me that the train to Satna will be five hours late. I have little choice but to accept it. I then want to photostat the relevant pages from the Lonely Planet travel guide. The Lonely Planet is an obnoxiously bulky and heavy book, it is impossible to carry it. I try 9 places without avail, the one copier is broken, the other only manages blurred copies. Only the 10th attempt is successful. The weather is terribly hot. I am already on my third litre of liquid. Initially they said, that the train would leave at 13:00h, but as I get back to the station, it says 15:30h. It is too late to change to the 12:30 train. I take a rickshaw, called "Helicopter" by the rickshaw wallah, back to town. At first, the old man is still full of jokes, but after 1/3 of the distance he gives up. I pay him the full fare and walk the rest, back to the Manikarnika Ghat. Immediately one of the touts steers towards me. I see that there are many film cameras around, so I tell him that under these circumstances I see no reason for not making a few pictures myself. The film crew had paid him a substantial bribe, he replies, if I paid him one too, I would be allowed to take pictures. 150 rupees, the modest man demands. I walk away and he screams "50 Rupees" after me. About halfway to the station I take a rickshaw, which was not necessary, because at the station it still says 15:30 as departure time, but by 16:00h there is still the same, wrong train at the platform. I go to the Tourist Office, there I am told that the new departure time was 16:45 and the platform not defined, I had to watch out on which platform the train arrived. At 17:00h the train arrives eventually. The journey is dead slow, we have lowest priority, wait in shunting yards for hours. By midnight we should have been in Satna, but we are only halfway to Allahabad. There, an Indian family "Flodder" (Dutch comedy about a catastrophe family) boards. Obviously they have waited for a late train without a conductor. Into the compartment, in which only two berths were available, they put: 6 persons and 3 children, 27 huge pieces of luggage plus 7 50-kg-bags of rice or something. Already for the luggage, two berths are used up plus all the available stowage space. The paying passengers don't mind and even voluntarily give up their berths, which are immediately annexed by the "Flodders". In the end it is my turn, but my anger scares the "Flodders" so much, that they voluntarily allow me to return to my berth.

8.6.2007 Satna-Khajuraho I sleep for an hour from 1am to 2am, then I dig out my backpack from under the "Flodders" ricebags and wait in the passage between the toilets, everywhere else people are sleeping on the ground. At every station I try to determine whether it is Satna. The train is eleven hours late in the meantime. I was too early, though, to look out for Satna, we have come less far than what I thought. Eventually a fellow passenger who also wants to go to Satna tells me that the next station was Satna. The train stops again. I wake him and ask him to read the Hindi sign. "Yes, it is Satna" he replies. But all the doors are barricaded with sleeping passengers. Until one door is cleared, the train is moving again. I want to stop the train, but there is not even an emergency brake. In my frustration, I kick against a cover. It is only a thin masonite sheet, which immediately gets a huge crack. The train continues. Everyone looks at me, because it was not Satna main station, but some suburb of Satna. But at least, when we really do get into Satna, the door is now accessible and I can drop. My nerves are on edge: Diarrhoea, eleven hours delay, Flodders. At Satna, I first sleep

an hour in the waiting room, then I take an auto-rickshaw to the bus station and board the first bus to Khajuraho. I arrive at 10am, obviously relieved that I made it. I put up at the Hotel "Yogi Lodge", where I first take a long-awaited shower. Hire a bicycle, visit the Jain Museum, the three Jain Temples Adinath, Parsvanath and Shantinath, then the Ghantai Temple. An Indian who obviously is under the influence of drugs wishes me all the worst because I don't hire him as a guide, quite an exception because usually the would-be guides remain friendly. To the Duladeo Temple, probably the most perfect of all temples here with a few erotic figures, well hidden between the multitude of other figures. Outside the village I find the Bijamandala and the halfway excavated Chaterbhuj Temple. Back to the village, to the Brahma-, Javari and the beautiful Vamana Temple. After searching for a long time I find the insignificant Hanuman Temple. Return the bicycle. Drank all in all seven litres of water.

9.6.2007 Khajuraho Today I visit the western enclosure, the temples with a multitude of erotic figures, also called the Kamasutra Temples. I visit the Lakshmana-, Lakshmi-, Varaha-, Kandarya Mahadev-, Mahadera, Devi Jayadamba-, Chitrugupta-, Parvati-, Vishvanath- und Nandi as well as an unnamed temple. It is 46°C in the shadow, I almost melt. I cannot buy the train ticket because of the power failure, the computer is off. Visited the Archaeological Museum.

10.6.2007 Khajuraho-Orchha By 5am-bus to Orchha. From the turnoff to Orchha I have to take a Tuk-tuk, which is loaded with 10 passengers! Put up at the Fort View Hotel. Started immediately with sightseeing: Raj Mahal, Jehangir Mahal, Camel stables, Khana Hamam, Rai Praveen Mahal, Chaterbhuj Temple (looks more like a Mosque on the inside), Palki Memorial, Pool Bagh, Hardol Memorial, Sawar Bhardo Pillars, Chhatris (Cenotaphs). Visited the Ram Raja Temple. Long chat with local youths.

11.6.2007 Orchha-Agra Early in the morning I take a Tuk-tuk to Jhansi, then tried to find a bus to Agra. The first bus only leaves at 12:30, so I decide to take a Tuk-tuk to the station. There, the train to Agra has just come in, I have to go to the chief booking officer in order to get a ticket immediately, without the hour-long wait in the queue. As the train is a few minutes late, I still manage to catch it in time. The ride is tough, 2nd class is very crowded. Up to Gwalior there are no seats. In Dholpur we pass an erosion landscape. At 11am I arrive in Agra, where I put up at the Shanti Lodge. I buy a frightfully expensive entrance ticket for the Taj Mahal - 750 Rupees which is 19 USD - and visit the monument which is completely built from marble (probably alabaster) and adorned with inlays from semiprecious stones. Afterwards I have to rest, the heat gets me. Watched a monkey opening a garbage bag and searching its contents.

12.6.2007 Agra By bicycle rickshaw to the fort. The fort is huge, I visit: Colwyns Tomb, Diwan-i-am, Diwan-i-Khas, Takht-i-Jehangir, Nagina Masjid, Anguri Bagh, Musamman Burj, Khas Mahal, Mina Masjid, Anguri Bagh, Jehangirs Palace, Hauz-i-Jehangir, Amar Singh Gate. Then to the Jama Mosque, which is in poor, dilapidated condition. Wanted to go by rickshaw to Chini-ka-Rauza, but the driver doesn't know where it is. Upon asking bypassers, it turns out that he is terribly lost. Now he wants triple the fare, so I get off and walk the short distance to Itimad-ud-Daula which, with its white and pierced marble structure with semiprecious stone inlays, has a wonderful light look. Walked to Chini-ka-Rauza, but it is in a terrible condition. Back by Tuk-tuk. Mohammed Imran shows me his marble inlay factory, which is of course of greatest interest to me after the sightseeing I have done.

13.6.2007 Fatehpur Sikri Ride early in the morning with the first bus to Fatehpur Sikri. On the short way there I see four terrible traffic accidents. Fatehpur Sikri was the capital of India during the reign of Moghul Akbar, but only for a few years, until it had to be abandoned because, despite the ingenious water supply system, the water resources dried up. At the entrance a guide gets hold of me and tells me, that he will not leave me anymore, whether I pay him or not. As I know from earlier experiences that such encounters invariably end in a huge fight about how much is to be paid, I fix a price with him and let him go ahead. At least he gets me rid of all the other would-be guides, which is almost worth the money. I first visit the huge Mosque with the tomb of Shaik Salim Chishti - the entrance gate of the Mosque is 54 meters high - then he wants to tell me that I could see everything without paying the horrendous entrance fee. The only thing I learn, is that I have to pay the entrance fee for sure, because I cannot see a thing from outside. I pay the entrance fee, go inside and am not disappointed: The palaces are of incredible beauty. Everything is built in the Iranian style, which means also cool and practical. I also walk to the west gate of the city walls, which were built very wide in expectation of a huge capital, and back to the bus station, where I have to wait for a long time, until the bus leaves. On the bus I meet Mark from Nijmegen, with whom I have a very pleasant conversation.

14.6.2007 Agra-Jaipur By Tuk-tuk to the Sakura Hotel, buy a ticket for the Rajasthan State Bus to Jaipur. It is extremely expensive, 280 Rupees. If I had known about it, I would have taken another bus. The bus is completely dilapidated. Yesterday's accidents are still on the road, they have not been removed. The air-conditioning of the bus fails after half the distance. Although I have a better seat on my ticket, I get the shittiest seat and after arriving in Jaipur, the bus stops at every corner for the Indians, but when I want it to stop for me they tell me that they won't, so I have to walk a kilometre back in the scorching heat. I thus arrive in a stinking mood, which is even more aggravated by the lousy and overpriced choice of hotel rooms. Grumbling I put up at the Ashiyana Guest House. Walk into "pink" town. There are gem stores everywhere, it seems to be the main trade here. Climbed the Iswari Minar Swarga Sal, a solitary minaret. Afterwards to Hawa Mahal, a former Harem, which is not breathtaking. Fail to find a tailor, who could repair my pants. Have an excellent supper (Rajasthan Thali) at a small restaurant.

15.6.2007 Jaipur Early in the morning by cycle rickshaw to the base of Nahargarh, then climbed the citadel towering high above the city. The wall is very long and ingenious, but the buildings are insignificant. Walked back to town and to the Royal Gaitor, the cenotaphs of the Maharajahs of Jaipur. The cenotaphs are small tombs made out of white marble, whereby the bodies of the honoured persons are of course not buried, because they were Hindus and their bodies were burnt. By cycle rickshaw to Jantar Mantar, an astrologic observatory with many strange looking buildings (see picture above). From there to the City Palace, which was not worth the absurd high entrance fee, as it is basically a tourist bazaar with a motley collection of some belongings of the Maharajah. I then go to the train station and book a ticket for the 05:00 train to Delhi tomorrow.

16.6.2007 Jaipur-Delhi I get up at 03:30h and leave the Resthouse. Despite the early hour I immediately find an autorickshaw to the station. There I learn that my train will be delayed. The departure gets delayed more and more and eventually the train arrives at 06:00am. In the compartment, a woman is sleeping, using up three seats. I wake her up, she is very upset about it and tells me resolutely, that I am to take another seat. After about 1/3 of the journey, more passengers board the train and suddenly there is no seat for me left any more. It looks as if I had to stand up for the remaining 4 hours of the journey. I fight with those passengers who blame me for not having a ticket. One passenger acts as a mediator and - oh wonder - it turns out that the resolute woman is the one not having a ticket. I get my seat back, but she just bullies somebody else off his seat and remains in the coach. As the ticket inspector comes in, he complains about her not having a ticket, but he does nothing about it. In Delhi, there are hovels on both sides of the train track, mountains of garbage and a vile stench of human excrements and putrefaction. The passengers breathe through handkerchiefs. When we eventually arrive in Delhi, it is not the New Delhi train station, but the Old Delhi train station and we have two hours delay. I have to take a auto-scooter to the other train station. With the heavy traffic, this takes up an hour. I check in at the Downtown Hotel, where I easily get the best room since I have arrived in India, it has TV and an evaporation cooler, but this comes at a premium. I am so tired that I have a soup (my stomach is giving me trouble) and go to sleep.

17.6.2007 Delhi When I get up, it is raining cats and dogs. The monsoon has come, although two weeks early. I buy breakfast and try to buy an umbrella, not an easy task because in this huge bazaar, only three shops sell umbrellas, of poor quality and at inflated prices. After buying such a 3-day-umbrella (I hope it lasts that long) I get moving, wading with my boots in the gooey mixture of rainwater, dirt and rubbish and getting splashed soaking wet by the ruthless motorists, in direction Connaught Place, where I meet an old man named Ivan. He said he was limping, because a motorist had knocked him and just continued without stopping. Since then he could not work anymore in his job as a shunter with the railways. A Swiss named Sergio had paid for the necessary surgery. If I did him the favour to visit three particular shops, he would get a free lunch. I do him the favour and drag myself through a curio shop, a tea shop and a carpet shop. I learn here, that the price level of Tokyo's Ginza can easily be exceeded by a factor 5 or 10. I then say goodbye to him and rather give him some rupees myself than buying something so he gets a commission. I visit the government area, but I don't get any further, there are police roadblocks everywhere. After long negotiations I take an autorickshaw to the railway museum. A good decision, because now it stops raining and their collection is really excellent, even if the condition of many engines is poor. I find many Swiss-made train engines! From there I take an auto-rickshaw to the tomb of Safdarjang. After half the distance, it becomes clear that the driver has no clue where it is and asks a bypasser. Although he gets accurate explanations, he just does not continue. Idiot that I am, I still pay him half the fare and walk from here. Then an Odyssey starts, because I walk up to the bus station, but there is no bus to this destination. Eventually I grasp that the tomb is not at all known in Delhi and I ask for a landmark nearby, Jor Bagh. Eventually I get to know where the bus there departs - a few blocks further - and quickly find the right bus. Safdarjangs Tomb is the last of the Mughal tombs, built from much cheaper materials and without the genius of the previous ones. The condition is poor, like most buildings here. By autorickshaw to Humayums Tomb. When I arrive, I don't have the exact fare and the driver refuses to give me the full change. This upsets me. Humayums Tomb is not more impressive than Safdarjangs, also dark and without the glamour of the white marble tombs. The many pigeons destroy many of these buildings with their excrements, but they are not reduced by the government, the people even feed them! This is completely incomprehensible. After a long search and after having found the Khan-I-Khana Tomb by chance, I eventually find the tomb of Nizam-ud-Din at the end of a huge devotional bazaar. He obviously is still revered today. The tomb itself is not worth mentioning. From here by bus to India Gate, where a huge fun fair takes place and even a Sikh brass band is playing. By bus back to New Delhi station.

18.6.2007 Delhi It rains cats and dogs when I get up. By the time I have crossed over the station, I am soaking wet. Try to get a bus to Qutb Minar, without success. By underground to Chawn Bazaar, then to the Jama Masjid, which is very unattractive in the pouring rain. Walked to Delhi Gate of the Red Fort, but no entry. With great detour to the main entrance, but there it says: Mondays closed. To the Digambara Jain Temple, walked down Chandni Chowk and by Metro back to New Delhi station, where I purchase a ticket to Dehra Dun. After a long search, I find the bus to Qutb Minar, about 15km south of Paharganj. There I visit the Alai Minar, a never completed attempt to build a tower double the height of Qutb Minar, the ruins of the Quwwat-ul-Islam Mosque which seems to include elements from Hindu temples as there are figurines here and there, Iltutmish's tomb, Alai Darwaza (a gate), Imam Zamins Tomb, the Qutb Minar, a tower 72.5m tall built in 1193! The seven meters tall "iron pillar" in the court of Quwwat-ul-Islam Mosque was

initially erected outside a Hindu temple in Bihar in memory of King Chandragupta Vikramaditya, who ruled from 375 to 413. Up to this very day it is not known how the pillar was made and why it never corroded. On my way back I immediately get a bus. Suddenly there is screeching tyres and a bang - a head-on collision on the oncoming lane. Picked up my repaired trousers from the tailor.

19.6.2007 Delhi I get up late, take a Metro to Chandni Chowk, walk to the Red Fort (Lal Qila, built 1638-48). It is not raining. I visit the Lahore Gate, the Diwan-I-Am (Hall of public audience, with a marble throne), the Rang Mahal (former Harem), the Khas Mahal (palace), the Diwan-I-Khas (Hall of private audience, with beautiful marble ornaments, where the peacock throne stood that I have seen in Tehran). The Hammam and the Moti Masjid were closed. Visited the Indian War Museum, the Museum of Archaeology in the Mumtaz Mahal and the Museum of the Indian Independence. In the last museum suddenly a power failure, so that I end the visit prematurely. Back to Paharganj, where I purchased an air ticket for the 14th of July to Bangkok. Some youth wants to show me the underground market, and where do I end up? At the same carpet shop as two days ago. I just walk away. Back to the hotel, where I may even take a shower. Across the as usually overcrowded flyover to the Metro station, where I get a train to Chandni Chowk and walk to the Old Delhi train station. Wait on platform 7, but there is no train. A railway employee tells me, the train now leaves from platform 4. I walk there, but only see platform 3. Eventually I find out that the western part of platform 3 is platform 4. When the train arrives, it goes right through to platform 3, so I have to run through the crowd to my coach. In the compartment I meet two boys and two girls from the USA, which are on a proper India trip, they are styled like real Sanyasins.

20.6.2007 Delhi-Dehra Dun-Mussoorie I wake at 6am but we were not yet in Haridwar. We arrive there at 8am, the Americans get off. Only at 10am, with two hours delay, we arrive in Dehra Dun. I walk to the bus stand and board the bus to Mussoorie, but all the seats are already taken. At least I can put down the backpack. We are speeding around the hairpin bends to Mussoorie. When we arrive, there is dense fog and the monsoon starts. Torrential rains hit the town. I flee to a hotel lobby. When it rains a bit less, I walk to the Broadway-Hotel. Disappointment: The rooms are despicable and incredibly expensive. He wants 400 Rupees, we end up at 250, still 150 too much. I get some snack, chat with a Frenchman and have a nap. Then I walk - despite the leaden tiredness - the Camels Back path and take a telecabin to Center Point - which is useless, because there is no view from there, they have built sales stalls all around it. On the way back I witness, how a Vespa driver, who has made his way around the barrier into the pedestrian zone, crashes into a little boy, so that the boy makes a somersault. The father of the boy complains to the driver, who wants to continue immediately, but nothing else happens. For supper the smallest pizza on earth: 10cm diameter, microscopic cheese film. Mussoorie is the Indian Davos, a bit cleaner than the rest of India, extremely touristic, at least during the hot season and extremely expensive. There is little to see here, it is situated on a mountain ridge and much cooler than the places in the Platteland.

21.6.2007 Mussoorie-Dehra Dun-Chandigarh African shower, because the lousy room doesn't even have a shower. Then to the bus station. I find a good seat on the bus. As the bus takes off, the ticket inspector comes running and requires exactly my seat. I have to get into the already crowded aisle with my huge and heavy backpack. The ticket inspector obviously enjoys his display of power. A family with a child takes it on the lap and offers me a seat - very uncommon in India. The bus races around the hairpin bends and one after the other the passengers start vomiting out of the window. As we get to Dehra Dun, almost all are vomiting. Must have looked strange. I take a tempo to the new bus station and buy a ticket for the bus to Chandigarh. Until it leaves, I chat with the fruit juice salesman. Suddenly I see my bus driving away. My backpack is in there! All for nothing, I mixed up the buses. The bus drives through a beautiful, green, treed landscape, along rivers and dams, through mountains and valleys. Unfortunately, the hooter of the bus is so loud - and the driver hoots ceaselessly - that I get a pain in my ears. When we stop for lunch, I plug my ears with paper handkerchiefs. We arrive around 17h in Chandigarh. It is a beautiful planned city, built by Le Corbusier and cleaner than elsewhere in India, but also much more expensive. I have to walk with all my luggage to a photocopy shop and make copies of my passport, before I can put up at the "Transit Lodge" at the bus station for a dorm bed. Meet Roger from England at supper.

22.6.2007 Chandigarh Visit the High Court of Punjab and Haryana, built by Le Corbusier (like the entire city) and may inspect one of the courtrooms. The wall-carpet by Le Corbusier has suffered: a number of openings were cut into it for the air conditioning. Everything is heavily guarded by Sikh military, so it is difficult to sightsee. I then visit the Nek Chand Rock Garden, which is a lovely, cool and playful artists' paradise, with many water features, built completely from garbage by a former road inspector (see pic above). Next to the Sukhna lake, where I had lunch. My boots split open, I will have to replace them. Meet Narinder Singh at the Travel Lodge.

23.6.2007 Chandigarh-Amritsar After having slept too long for the 4am bus, I take the bus to Sector 43 Bus Station and take the ordinary bus to Amritsar. I arrive already at 11am and take a rickshaw to the Golden Temple. I am ushered to the free dormitory for foreign tourists. Visit shortly the Golden Temple, then I return to the bus station and get on the bus to Attari on the border to Pakistan. There I wait two hours, until we are driven in an incredible rush to our places in the stadium. There we wait for another two hours, until the martial ceremony of the "Closing of the Gates" takes place. The ceremony mainly consists of long drawn out commands and marching in army step. Then the flags are lowered and

the gates thrown closed. The Pakistani gate is thrown with such vigour, that it bounces open again.

24.6.2007 Amritsar Visit the Sikh museum in the Golden Temple, then the Akal Takhat, then I stand for an hour in the queue to visit the Hari Mandir Sahib, the actual gold-plated (780 kg) Temple. Inside, the gurus are singing, which is broadcast in the entire temple area. I even get to the roof, from where I have a good view over the temple area. In the afternoon first to Ram Bagh, but I end up in the wrong Ram Bagh, the market. By rickshaw to the right Ram Bagh, but the museum is closed due to renovation. Meet Christian from Dresden, who works in India for a company manufacturing small DC motors. We share a rickshaw to Mata Temple. The rickshaw wallah has no clue where Mata Temple is and first rides to Ram Bagh market to ask for directions. The temple is not old, it was built in honour of Lal Devi. Apparently women who can't bear children will be cured after a visit to this temple. One starts by creeping through a artificial cave, then there is a kind of Hindu Disneyland with many life-size figures behind glass. In the end one has to wade through a cave filled with water. Afterwards we took a rickshaw to Sri Durgiana Temple, which is more or less a Hindu copy of the Golden Temple of the Sikhs, also gold plated, also made of white marble, also in a tank, but somehow dilapidated. I get bad diarrhoea.

25.6.2007 Amritsar-Dharamsala-McLeod Ganj In the morning I listen to David and Shekinah, two not-so-young hippies from Germany, who travel happy and without any money around the world, singing to the sound of their guitar. Then I walk to the bus station, where I learn that the bus to Dharamsala leaves on 12:20. I walk back to the Golden Temple, pack my things and take a rickshaw to the bus station. The bus leaves on time. We drive through a beautiful, green landscape. After about half the distance, an incredibly dirty child which is standing next to me, vomits all over the bus floor. The father tries hard to ignore this and holds the child so clumsy out of the door, that it also vomits all over the entrance of the bus. When the father still does not clean it after an hour, the conductor stops the bus, hands him a water bottle and a newspaper and tells him to clean the mess. What a courageous conductor! We arrive on time in Dharamsala, where I get a bus to McLeod Ganj, the Tibetan colony in India. I first follow a tout, who wants to take me to a "cheap and nice hotel" but when we walked for 10 minutes and he showed me some place in the far distance, I turned around and went to the hotel to which I wanted to go before. I get a tiny but clean and cheap room.

26.6.2007 McLeod Ganj There is a thunderstorm when I wake up. I eat breakfast at the hotel and wait for the rain to cease. Visit the Tsuglakhang complex, with the Tsuglakhang Temple and the Kalachakra Temple. Made a kora (ritual circuit) around the temple complex, on a lovely footpath in the forest. Visit the Tibet museum and then the Tsechokling Gompa, a bit underneath the village in a steep incline. Walked back through the forest. Feel without any power. Buy iron tablets. Try Tibetan momo (dumplings).

27.6.2007 McLeod Ganj-Dharamshala-Manali By jeep I get to Dharamsala, but the driver forgets about me and turns the jeep around, until I protest loudly and get off. By slow bus to Palampur, there I get onto the direct bus to Manali. I get the best seat, right next to the driver. From Mandi, which is picturesquely situated on both sides of the river Kullu, through the increasingly narrow valley, across the dam, for kilometres through a tunnel which ends in the midst of Kullu. One-way traffic, but a bakkie parked right in the road prevents lorries from crossing. We take an hour to pass this obstacle. In Manali I get a beautiful, cheap room at the Jungle Bungalows (sic!) Hotel. Fantastic supper at Tibet House. Afterwards dysentery.

28.6.2007 Manali The dysentery keeps me up all night and in the morning I go to the Lady Willingdon Hospital, where they detect a infection. On the way back I meet Bruno and Sophie from France. Visit the old town. Spend the evening with Bruno and Sophie.

29.6.2007 Manali Walked to town. Internet. Bought a bus ticket and a waterproof bag for tomorrow. Chatted with Bruno and Sophie.

30.6.2007 Manali-Keylong Went to the laundry shop and fetched my bag. The Internet is down in all Manali. Thus to the bus terminal where I learn that the bus leaves an hour later at 14:00h. Comfortable drive through an incredible mountain landscape, climbing almost vertical mountain slopes with hairpin bends. Next to me is Austin from Arizona, who will start a internship at an aid project near Leh. We arrive around 20:00h in Keylong, where I find a cheap dorm bed at Drabla Guest House and eat Thugpka at a Tibetan Dhaba.

1.7.2007 Keylong-Leh At 03:00h the others get up, which wakes me too. I stay for another hour in bed, then I discover that there is not a drop of water in the house. The bus is already loaded, my backpack has to go on top and there is neither canvas nor ropes. This was to be supplied by the passengers! A German organises a rope from a lorry driver. Suddenly I find out that I left my moneybelt at the guesthouse and run back. It is still where I hid it. Upon running back, I fall over a little wall - I am in the meantime almost blind at night. Fortunately, only my knees get scraped. The bus rides again through fantastic landscapes to Lachlang Pass (5050m) and via the More Plateau, where horses and sheep are grazing, to Taglangla Pass (5350m). I have a slight headache, but feel otherwise elated. Then very fast through narrow river gorges with green crop fields to Leh. A tout takes me to his hotel, but it is a dump for 150 Rupees. I walk to the Old Ladakh Guesthouse, but it is full. So I end up in at the Tak Guesthouse across the road, which is terribly dirty, but cheap and - what is quite important - has running water.

2.7.2007 *Leh* Walked to Leh Palace, on the way there I visited the - unfortunately locked - Soma Gumpa and the Chandazik Gumpa, as well as a third gumpa with a 25m tall Buddha statue. Visited the palace, but spent 100 Rp entrance fee for nothing, because it is empty and in renovation. The building is made of clay bricks, little branches and wooden crossbeams. Everything is decayed and has to be replaced. The murals are unfortunately damaged by scribbling. Walked to the (closed) Namyal Tsemo Gumpa and the Victory Fort. There I meet Sabine, a bio-technician from Germany. Back to the Resthouse, but a change to the Old Ladakh Resthouse is not possible, they are overbooked. Eat at the "Norlakh" Restaurant Momo (Tibetan ravioli), visit the new Soma Gumpa right next to it. Walk towards Shanti Stupa, but get to the Sankar Gumpa. From there it is not far to the Shanti Stupa, which was built recently by the Japanese. It is raining. Visited also another, less important stupa.

3.7.2007 *Leh* It is raining and ice cold. By bus to Stok, to visit the summer palace of the Rajah of Ladakh. As I want to drop, the conductor tells me: "Not here". The bus drives right to the end of the valley. A local tells me "you have to go back". I drop exactly where I wanted to in the first place. Visit the palace, a museum with a few interesting and a few not so interesting exhibits. Get a glimpse of the top modern furnished part that is still used. Walk the 6km to the main road, as there are no more buses. Get a bus to Leh and from there to Spituk, where I visit the gumpa, which has an outstation of a prayer room on the summit of the hill. Climb down to the village, it is raining cats and dogs. Walk to a dilapidated restaurant, where I get momo. When I ordered, I was told 20Rp, but when I paid I was to pay 40Rp. I got angry, but they stay stoical. A local tells me that 40Rp was the right price. Only a few people speak English here! Cannot find a bus to Phyang, but a lorry stops, says that he rides to Phyang. But he drops me on the main road, many kms from Phyang and asks an inflated fare. I see the monastery in the distance, but I walk more than an hour there. There, I join a group of Germans. We visit the small temple, the prayer rooms in the main building and the large temple. I walk in the pouring rain to the main road, where I get a lift by a lorry. Nine people are in the cabin! At the airport I get dropped - free! By bus back to Leh. I want to get my pants from the laundry, but the laundry wallah cannot find them anymore. Eventually he appears with my trousers and still has to iron them in order to dry them. During supper I meet Anchu, an Indian mathematics teacher. We stroll through town, he shows me his hotel room, which is much better than mine. Upon walking home I fetch some change at the tea shop and meet Marius from Urnaesch, whom I already met on the bus from Manali. He travels without money around the world and plays his drums when in need of food money.

4.7.2007 *Leh-Alchi* I eat breakfast and walk to the bus station. At 8am I find a minibus to Nimmu. I get the best seat right next to the driver. In Nimmu I see the Zaskar and Indus river joining right from the bus window and can thus stay on until Basgo. There I visit the ruined fort, then the Old Chamba Gumpa, which is incredibly well preserved and offers excellent murals. Then, in the ruins of the fort, the Sar-Zung Temple, whose murals are blackened by the smoke from the oil lights. A small temple is not locked. I return to the road and wait more than an hour for the bus. It is completely overcrowded, I have to stand. Unfortunately we pass the turn off to Likir without me noticing. I drop at the turnoff to Alchi and start walking the 4km to the village. But a French couple in a jeep stops and gives me a lift. I drop at the Choskor Resthouse only to find out that it has gone out of business. I have lunch at a Dhaba (food stall). In the meantime the gumpa is closed. I meet the French couple again, they offer me a lift to Lamayuru, but I still have to visit the Alchi Gumpa. Deposit the backpack at the camp site, chat with a shop owner and then it is 14:00h and the Gumpa opens up. I visit the Kagyur Lakhang Gumpa, with many books and a golden Buddha statue, the Sumrtsek Temple with three large Buddha statues whose heads can hardly be seen because they are hidden in the roof. Then the Vairocana Temple with a large Buddha statue in a side room, the Lotsa Temple with many small Buddha murals, partially badly damaged by leaking water and the similar Manjuslim(?) Temple. The new temple is locked. The stupas can be entered and have interesting murals in the inside. Find a cheap and bright room at the Lotsava Guesthouse. Stroll through the village. Complete power failure.

5.7.2007 *Alchi-Kargil* Got up early, walked as the crow flies to the bridge by sliding down the steep, sandy hill. Just in time, because the bus arrives at 7am sharp. In the bus I meet Lucien, an art painter from Zermatt, who has been living in India for a long time. I drop in Lamayuru and leave my backpack at a restaurant. Then I climb the hill to the gumpa. Shortly afterwards a monk opens the door. The inside is not remarkable. Funny is the collection of toy animals in the back room. Via a steep flight of stairs we get to another temple room, which has blackened and partly damaged murals. The view on the valley is fantastic. I hitch-hike a lorry, together with two French Canadians, in direction Mulbekh. On the way there we pass a tragic accident, a lorry loaded with hay has tumbled down the steep slope. In Mulbekh I drop and meet by chance Lobsang, the monk in charge of the gumpa. I deposit my backpack at his cell, then we drive with his motorbike to the gumpa. Unfortunately, the service road is blocked by a deep ditch. We first try unsuccessfully to build a bridge from branches, then to push the motorbike through the ditch, but Lobsang is too short to hold the heavy motorbike. It works, when we change places. First I drive with Lobsang on the pillion, but he doesn't trust my driving so we change again. Arriving on top, we first visit the Serdung Gumpa, for which we don't have any keys. Then we visit Gandentse Gumpa. The murals are only about 100 years old and sealed with a thick layer of varnish. The wooden cupboards have just been replaced. We then visit the much older Lotsava Lakhama Temple. Unfortunately, the interesting paintings have almost completely been blackened by the centuries of oil lamp smoke. In the centre of the temple is a small stupa. We return to Lobsangs cell, where I fetch my backpack. I then go to Chamba statue. Across the road in the cafe is Lucien with two more Swiss. I quickly visit the rock-hewn, about 25m high, Maitreya statue. Then us

four Swiss chat and have some food. With a lorry, manned by three Sikhs, I get until before Kargil, where the police stop us and order us to take the bypass road. I drop and the policeman organises a lift to town for me. I walk quite far to the bus station, where I conclude an agreement with the conductor, who is being shaved at the barber's shop, to be there tomorrow at 01:30am. A tout takes me to Izhar Palace, where I get a dorm sleeping place on the floor. I meet a group of French. We decide to have a drink together so I am being treated to a bottle of mineral water. Then I want to explore Kargil and we separate. The weather has turned bad in the meantime, a rainstorm is starting. All over town, corrugated iron sheets are being torn off and banners shredded. Then the electricity cuts out. Some shops have generators and petrol lamps. I taste Rjuma, a white sausage for one rupee only. When the electricity returns, I eat Thugpka at a Tibetan restaurant.

6.7.2007 Kargil-Srinagar I am woken up at 1am by the alarm clock and walk to the bus station, take the backpack to the roof, pack it into the remains of my waterproof bag. I get my favourite seat next to the driver. The bus takes off. I may stretch out on the berth and continue sleeping. At 4am tea stop in Drass. Afterwards, the road deteriorates and it vibrates a lot. My bag falls off, all my batteries roll out. I put them back, but the same happens again, this time they roll to a poorly visible place. One battery is lost, I am very angry at myself to have lost it so stupidly. The bus rides through greener mountain slopes, with ice in between. The road is very poor, partially also flooded. The infamous one-way is along an almost vertical rock slope. At the bottom, tea break in wonderful sunshine. We stop outside the village of Kangan, as there is a "Strike". It is more of a riot, because last night a civilian was killed by a soldier. After a short while personnel carriers with policemen and an ambulance drive up. We hear shots. Then the police opens the road again for the steel avalanche of traffic. A lorry and a jeep have broken windscreens. We continue and get to the heavily militarised Srinagar. We ride on the separated right lane, which poses some problems for the oncoming traffic. Some touts for the houseboats enter the bus. I get to Shabir of the houseboat Zulekha, near Zero bridge. I bargain the price a bit down - the location is poor - but the room is beautiful. Go to town, eat Chowmen, climb to Sankaracharya hill and get into the temple, without taking off my belt which is usually demanded. On the way down I get a lift by two friendly Sikhs, NP Singh is a banker and Tanbir an IT specialist. They invite me for tea. Both want to visit Switzerland, I gladly invite them when I get back. Then a ride with a Shikara (local rowing boat) on Dal lake, passing water-lily fields, swimming gardens and fields, to the swimming market. A salesman on a shikara wants to sell jewellery, two boys flowers. A promised steamboat turns out to be a motor boat, equipped with a car engine. After a few photos of the sunrise over the houseboats I have supper, where I meet Adil Hassan. He explains to me the tensions in Kashmir, but he keeps looking left and right if anybody listens in. This is because Srinagar is heavily militarised, every road secured in the entire length by soldiers, also the river shore where my houseboat is, has barbed wire.

7.7.2007 Srinagar I get up late, take the bus to Jama Masjid, but it rides around Hari Parbat Hill. I drop and a student wants to take me to Jama Masjid. As we get there, everyone says that the situation is too hot, it is unsafe for a Westerner. Apparently there are riots in town, last night two youths were killed by the security forces. I see smoke, all shops are closed. We walk to Sultan Arfaen Shrine. A bunch of youths with a black flag runs past us with loud bawling. At the shrine everything is quiet. We go to the students hostel. From there, we try to reach Dargar, but the few buses that still get through, are terribly crowded. I take a bus back to Dal Gate, stroll along the Boulevard, eat lunch at a terrible restaurant and take a bus to Nishat Bagh, one of the beautiful and about 500 years'-old Mughal gardens. It is a bit in need of repair, but some of the water features still work. Then first on foot in the wrong direction, thereafter by bus to Shalimar Bagh, which is a much better preserved Mughal garden. Back in the houseboat I meet a group of Indians from Bangalore and Mysore.

8.7.2007 Srinagar There is a thunderstorm when I wake up. Walked in the pouring rain to a restaurant, but they didn't even have tea. Near Dal Gate I find one that offers something like breakfast. It is raining cats and dogs. Despite the poor service I have two breakfasts in order to stay longer. When the rain gets a bit less, I walk in direction Old City. First I visit the Chaskir Zaim (?) Mosque, then I walk in direction Jama Masjid. All shops are closed. Visit the Kanqah-e Moulla Masjid and the Naqshah Ban Mushqil Kusha Shrine. At the square in front of Jama Masjid, a group of youths is just busy showering a Maruti 800 with bricks and rubbish. As the unskilled driver eventually manages to turn around, the youths run screaming after the vehicle, which then collided with another Maruti 800 driver, also awkwardly trying to flee. Both vehicles are showered with bricks and rubbish. Reason is apparently that the night before, a 17-year-old youth was shot by security forces. I find refuge in a side alley and crack some jokes with the locals, who have long ago got used to this kind of unrest, also called "disturbances" or "tensions". As the situation seems to get quieter, I walk to the Masjid - across the mob! - and view the strange combination of Victorian jigsaw work and a pagoda roof. On my way out of the mosque, there is already a mob assembling again. I walk to the tomb of Zain-ul-Abdin, which I find without problems. Although the gate to the surrounding graveyard is locked, I can open it. The tomb in the Mughal-style is unfortunately in poor condition. As I want to leave the graveyard, the angry mob is racing down the little alley to the graveyard, where a bus got stuck because the vehicles behind would not back out. The bus is showered with stones, I hear glass breaking and steel denting and I thus go back out into the graveyard, where I wait quietly and unnoticed for a few minutes. Then the mob is quiet again and I can easily walk across it and out of the alley. But I notice that the youths are led by a 30-35-year-old man in a blue tracksuit. The people lead me into all kinds of side alleys, as they do not want foreigners to witness the unrest. I end up at Khanyar police station, where the mob is already

waiting. As nothing more happens, I keep walking, eat Koefte, chat a long time with the son of the owner of the restaurant, who is about to get his degree in Mathematics, but wants to take over his father's restaurant. Then I continue to Ganderbal Road, where I meet, when taking photos, a Kashmiri, who quickly calls his uncle Abdul Rashid Ganai. Ganai invites me to his house, we have tea, a fantastic lunch (the second for me), then he shows me his quite impressive stamp collection. He wants to know how to sell it and I recommend Ebay. On the way back - in the meantime in full sunshine - I am molested by a few youths who were obviously inspired by the riots. When one of them wants to search my bag for valuables, I threaten him with my umbrella and they disperse quickly. At the Internet café, the connection is dead, but I meet Stefan Suesse from the Canton of Argovia.

9.7.2007 Srinagar-Delhi In the morning to the bus terminal. I am seated next to a obese Indian woman. We ride through India's longest tunnel, the 2km long Jawahar Tunnel. I change to a seat next to the driver in order to see more. Many oncoming vehicles and bicycles show a red flag, they are pilgrims to the Hindu Shrine of Amarnath. There are many buses with soldiers, probably to reinforce Srinagar. Before Ramban suddenly standing traffic jam. It shall last for six hours. At 3pm I leave the bus and buy some food at a restaurant at the roadside. This moment, the queue moves and I have to hurry eating. Apparently a lorry loaded with rocks has capsized and the undisciplined driving habits of the Indians led to a complete collapse. As we continue, I get acute diarrhoea. Fortunately, the bus has a toilet, but it doesn't flush!

10.7.2007 Srinagar-Delhi When I wake up, we are only in Jalandhar, deep in the Punjab. Speedy drive along eternally incomplete highways. Arrive at 3pm at the Kashmir gate in Delhi. I take a Metro to Paharganj and put up at the Downtown Hotel, this time even cheaper than last time. See a doctor, Dr. Sharwan Kumar Gupta and have an expensive health test done. I want to know why I keep being so tired. Eat a lot, have to produce something for the samples.

Road traffic in India is generally most chaotic and dangerous. When you think the Middle East is bad - India is even worse! There is no set rule which side of the road one has to drive on. Officially it is the left side, but even on roads where the lanes are separated by a fence, vehicles may use the oncoming lane, if it gets them ahead faster. I have seen so many head-on collisions because of driving on the right side of the road. The traffic is an image of the true character of India: Social Darwinism, survival of the fittest. Nobody yields for anything lesser than his own vehicle, so the hacking order is: Lorries-Buses-Cars-Threewheelers-Motorbikes-Bicycles-Pedestrians. As vehicles cut each other off and wildly attempt to manoeuvre themselves into the best position, they constantly touch and scrape against each other. Nobody cares about the bent metal and scratched paint. If there is an accident between two unequal vehicles, it is always the lesser that is to blame. One never sees them exchanging addresses after an accident. The way the vehicles get past each other is like sleepwalking. No-one looks at the road in front of him, but somehow people must have a sixth sense on what the vehicles nearby are doing. Overtaking is a permanent feature of Indian traffic and preferably done while there is oncoming traffic. The oncoming vehicle is subsequently forced to the shoulder of the road or off the road altogether. Obstacles in the road, like a capsized lorry, will usually force traffic to a complete standstill as no-one wants to let the other pass first, so the vehicles stand radiator to radiator in the bottleneck and none of them wants to back out. Parking is done everywhere, in the midst of a lane, in the middle of a road, double- and triple parking, but then the parked car is in risk of being hit. When a vehicle breaks down, it is usually repaired on the spot, even if it is the fast lane on a highway. Not even scooters are pushed to a safer spot. Everyone makes extensive use of the cell phone while driving, even in heavy traffic. If both hands are required, the cellphone is squeezed with the head against the shoulder. Speed limits are never adhered to, even less so if they are not explicitly given. You will often find vehicles buzzing at sixty km/h through a busy market. One rides as fast as the vehicle allows, and uses the hooter liberally. Neither head- and flicker lights are ever used. Only in complete darkness, some brave driver might use his headlights, only to switch them off when the light is sufficient to make out where the road is. Motorbikes are a real plague in India. Apparently, it has the world's second-highest motorbike-per-capita rate. Motorbikes are everywhere. They often seat five persons: Two adults (the woman in a lady's seat) of course both without helmets, and three children, one on the tank, one on the rack and one on the lap of the woman. Alternatively it may seat three to four adults, two on the saddle, one on the tank and one on the rack. Pedestrians should beware of roads, markets, pedestrian zones or houses which have a concrete ramp for motorcycles! They will have to give way as soon as a vehicle hoots at them. Which might happen in the lounge of a house if someone is driving his motorbike through. Strangely, sometimes one can even see motorbikes in temples, although pedestrians have to take their shoes off.

11.7.2007 Delhi Take the last samples to Dr. Gupta. Then I want to visit the Toilet Museum. Try to get Bus 781 to Mahavir Enclave. On the platform there is a bag which looks like a body bag. Suddenly somebody comes up, opens the bag and there is indeed a body inside. Then the bag is again deserted. The bus does not arrive, I take a rickshaw to Delhi Gate Bus Station, but same story. Walk in direction Metro, where I see Firozshah Kotla from outside. By Metro to Uttam Nagar East, there long wait for the bus. By completely overcrowded bus to Mahavir Enclave. It is 4pm in the meantime. The Toilet Museum has an exhibition of historic toilets (from Harrapa around 2500 BC to the Incinolet which incinerates the remains automatically) and many sample toilets for rural India. By bus to the Rajendra Place Metro station and back to Delhi station. To Dr. Gupta, who tells me that I have no sickness and prescribes me a comprehensive and expensive vitamin cocktail. Big shock at the Internet café: All my data from my USB flash memory

is deleted by a virus. It takes hours to restore them. Create Dubi's website.

12.7.2007 Delhi At 9am I get on way in direction Friends Colony West, to see the dentist. I have to make a root canal treatment. She sends me to the ATM machine and the pharmacy. Her equipment is ultra-modern, the treatment without problems or pain. I'm done by 2pm. Catch a racing-bus back to Paharganj, it takes half the time as usual but not without being thrown left and right! Buy a travel guide of SE Asia.

13.7.2007 Delhi At 9am I get back to Friends Colony West, to have the root canal treatment completed. At the post office, where I pop in, I am offered a cup of tea. The postmaster is from Kashmir, we talk about the area. The dental treatment is without problems, though painful. Afterwards I buy some stationery and the Sikh owner of the shop gives me pen refill for free. Take a bus to the GPO and post the power supply and the DVD. Order a taxi for tomorrow and buy a book, Oliver Cromwell. Have a hearty supper, Chowmen and Momo.

Thailand

14.7.2007 Delhi-Bangkok I get up at 4am, get the taxi (which I had ordered and paid for the day before) to the airport, despite all touts saying that it would not turn up. Waited a long time in a queue until suddenly a monitor five desks further starts displaying my flight number. I change the queue, but when I get to the front I am told that it was not permissible to put the security check label into a bag (I have a waterproof bag around my backpack) and I have to go back and repeat from the security check onwards. The Air India flight leaves late. During the flight, we only get a skimpy breakfast, but no lunch. We arrive with even more delay. In Bangkok, it takes more than an hour to get to the front of passport control, but when I eventually get there a group of 20 Russians just rushes in front of me and screams something like "We had a problem!". I have to wait for half an hour until they are done. By the time I have completed immigration, the luggage claim of my flight is long over, and it takes another hour to locate my luggage. Eventually I get a bus to town, at an enormous cost (150 Baht!), but it takes three hours to get there. The hotel I wanted to put up turns out to be too noisy, so I have to look for another one. Most hotels are full, but eventually I find a room at the Merry-V Guesthouse. Completely exhausted and terribly hungry, I indulge in street food and eat three suppers in sequence, making up for the left out lunch!

15.7.2007 Bangkok By public boat from Tha Banglamphu to Tha Sathani. Then I took the expensive Skymetro - I had to try it out - to the National Stadium. Walked from there in direction Banglamphu, visited the Wat Suthat Temple with its fantastic murals, in the style of Hieronymus Bosch. Then to the Democracy Monument and visited two more temples. Back to the Resthouse, by boat to Tha Thewet, where I found a huge market. Ate some green deep-fried green jelly, what might it have been? At supper I meet Terrae from China, who speaks fluent English.

16.7.2007 Bangkok By bus to the Vietnamese Embassy, but got quite a fright: The visa is 2500 Baht (80 USD). Then for lunch first a dark meat soup, an hour later a whole fish. By boat to Tha Then, visited the Wat Phra Kaew (Grand Palace) Temple- and Palace compound. Fantastic architecture and great beauty of the buildings which are decorated all over with little colourful mirrors. Fantastic murals. All in pristine condition. The museums are boring. Upon returning, there is a thunderstorm over Bangkok.

17.7.2007 Bangkok Terrible toothache during the night. The weather is overcast and hot. First thing in the morning, I do the laundry, then by ferry across the Chao Phra River and to the Royal Barges Museum. marvelled at the barges, the most impressive one is Suphannahongse Royal Barge with a width of 3.17m, a length of 46.15m, and depth of 0.94m, manned by 50 oarsmen and 14 crew. Built in 1911 for King Vajiravadh (Rama VI). The others are about the size of the Keabi Prab Muang Mana, width 2.10m, length 28.85m, depth 0.56m, 36 oarsmen and 17 crew, built 1967. Then had a stroll in the Khlong market, took a boat to Chinatown, visited the Thieves Market (today shops for tools and music instruments), had to hurry to get to the Vietnamese Embassy on time, used the Skytrain. Got the visa. Back by bus. It starts raining cats and dogs.

18.7.2007 Bangkok-Kanchanaburi I get up late, my clothes which I washed yesterday are at last dry. Go to the Thonburi Railway Station - I discover it has been moved 1km west and thoroughly downgraded - buy a ticket to Kanchanaburi and spend the time at some temples, amongst others the 25m high Buddha statue. Just about escape from the 20 Baht Tuk-tuk scam. When I walk with my backpack to the ferry across the river, a torrential rain starts. I subsequently catch the wrong ferry and have to walk a long detour, with all my luggage, to cross over a bridge to Thonburi Station. Ride by Death Railway to Kanchanaburi. There I stay on the train and drop at the Bridge Station, walk across the "Bridge over the River Kwai" and whistle the "Colonel Bogey March" from the movie picture, which automatically comes to my mind thinking of the bridge over River Kwai. At the station there two fantastic Japanese steam engines and a Japanese lorry converted for rail use with an air-cooled diesel engine. I get a room on a raft on the river Kwai at the C+C Guesthouse.

19.7.2007 Kanchanaburi Visited the Thailand-Burma Railway museum and the adjacent POW cemetery. Had a fabulous lunch.

20.7.2007 *Kanchanaburi* Slept badly, got up late, by bus to Hellfire Pass. 11km from Hellfire Pass I am dropped, I don't know what went wrong. I walk in direction Hellfire Pass, a motorcyclist stops and gives me a lift right up to the museum entrance! I visit the museum, which is almost identical to the one in Kanchanaburi, but free of charge. I then walk the most spectacular four kilometres of Death Railway. All the wooden viaducts have rotten away, the railbed is partially still there. A torrential rain shower starts, so I walk on the tarmac road in direction main road. A motorcyclist wants to give me a lift, but has too much load. I decline thankfully. He returns after a few minutes without the load and takes me to the Intersection. Useless waiting, no bus passes by. I start walking in direction museum. A bus comes, but doesn't stop. A second one fails to stop, too, despite my frantic winking. Even the local bus just ignores me. At the museum, having missed the last bus, I decide to hitchhike. Two plainclothes policemen stop and I jump onto the loadbed of their bakkie and we speedily get back to Kanchanaburi, where they even drop me in front of the Internet Café!

21.7.2007 *Kanchanaburi* Today is my day of leisure. After a cup of coffee to the Internet Café and completed the translation of a website. Explored the riverbanks of River Kwai. There probably a couple of hundred Karaoke barges moored in the port of Kanchanaburi, many of them double-storied. They all have a generator, a disco-sound-system, a DJ-desk as well as a kitchen running on gas. There is no engine, they are pulled by tugs (wooden hull and lorry diesel). Cannot sleep because of the coffee.

22.7.2007 *Kanchanaburi-Ayutthaya* As I have hardly slept, I get up later than planned. Pack my backpack and check out - unfortunately - of the cosy houseboat and march in direction bus terminal. After a noodle soup I feel fit for the bus journey. The journey to Suphanburi takes longer than expected, the same is true for the remaining part to Ayutthaya. As there are no cheap hotels in the "Lonely Planet", I start looking for one in the vicinity of the bus terminal and soon find a nice room for 100 Baht. Go to the market, eat something, then visit Wat Phra Ram, Wat Phra Mahathat and Wat Ratburana. Temples in the Khmer-style, impressive brick constructions, on the one hand destroyed by Burmese conquerors, on the other hand were the foundations built on far too soft ground (Ayutthaya is on an island in the river), so they settled unevenly which subsequently destroyed the buildings.

The Kingdom of Ayutthaya (Thai: อาณาจักรอยุธยา) existed from 1351 to 1767. Ayutthaya was friendly towards foreign traders, including the Chinese, Vietnamese (Annam), Indians, Japanese and Persians, and later the Portuguese, Spanish, Dutch and French, permitting them to set up villages outside the city walls. In the Sixteenth Century, it was described by foreign traders as one of the biggest and wealthiest cities in the East. The court of King Narai (1656-1688) had strong links with that of King Louis XIV of France, whose ambassadors compared the city in size and wealth to Paris. Before Ayutthaya fell to Burmese attack in 1767, its vassals included the Northern Shan states of present-day Myanmar, Lanna (Chiang Mai, Yunnan & Shan Sri (China), Lan Xang (Laos), Cambodian Kingdom, and some city-states in the Malay Peninsula (source: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ayutthaya_kingdom).

23.7.2007 *Ayutthaya* Rent a bicycle and start with a mammoth-sightseeing tour (there are more than 300 temples in Ayutthaya): Wat Khunsan, Wat Sawandawas, Wat Phra Mana, Wat Kho Phaya, Wat Ta Krai, Wat Cheong Ta, then I cross over the river surrounding Ayutthaya and ride about three kilometres out of town to the well preserved Chedi Phukao Thong, built by King Naresnan the Great on a basis built by the Burmese conquerors. Then back to town to the Temple of Sri Suriyothai (not antique), across another bridge to Wat Kattrathirat, where I get a large and excellent lunch free of charge, because there is some celebration and they just invited me too. From here to Wat Chai Wattana Ran (fairly preserved), to Wat Phutthasawan, Wat Nancuy, Wat Kunpom, by ferry across the river, to Wat Ket, Wat Phra Mongkorn Bophit with a 25m tall gilded Buddha statue made of bronze, which did thus not perish when Ayutthaya was destroyed, to Wat Phra Si Sanphet with the best preserved Chedis and the Royal palace, which is reduced to the foundations. Buy a train ticket to Phitsanulok. Cross the river by ferry. Return the bicycle.

24.7.2007 *Ayutthaya-Sukhothai* I take a ferry across the river, have a large breakfast. I first get on the wrong train, but I can get off before it starts moving. My train arrives on the same platform with a few minutes delay, hence the confusion. I get on. The second class is not worth the considerable additional cost, only airplane-like, utterly uncomfortable seats instead of the more comfortable benches in 3rd class. We arrive in Phitsanulok at 14h and I can share a Tuk-tuk to the far out of town bus station with two Dutch travellers. The bus to Sukhothai rides slow but steady on the excellent Thai autobahn. We arrive shortly before 16h in Sukhothai, where I share again a Tuk-tuk to the main tourist area. There I find a room for 100 Baht per night without problems. After unloading my luggage, I walk in direction town and meet Stewart, a Canadian living in Taiwan whom I already met on the bus. He is studying painting in Taiwan! We join up, have some street food and afterwards dinner in a small restaurant. In the end, we return to the night market and buy here and there some food and we each get an assortment of edible insects. The large crickets (about 5cm long) are the best, the black beetles are better than expected but the worms are a bit floury.

25.7.2007 *Sukhothai* When walking towards the bus stop, I meet Stewart again. We decide to visit the historical part of town together. By bus we get to Old Sukhothai. There we hire bicycles. We first explore the "Sukhothai Historical Park", where we visit the following temples: Wat Mahathat, Wat Sri Sawai (Khmer-style towers, Hindu-Temple), Wat Tra Phang Ngoen, Wat Sa Si, King Rankhamalaeng the Great's monument, Wat Chanasomkham, Luk Muang Shrine and

Noen Prasat. Outside this area we visit: Wat Traphang Tong (with many well-made elephants at the base), Wat Sorasak, Taphadang Shrine, Wat Song Koo, Wat Trapang Pan (destroyed), Wat Mae Chon (with large Buddha), Wat Phra Phai Luang, Thuriang Kiln (Kilns for ceramics), Wat Si Chum ("Mondop" with huge, well preserved Buddha statue), Wat Si Thon (Mondop), Wat Phu Pai und Wat Tuk (Mondop with destroyed Buddha).

The city of Sukhotai was part of the Khmer Empire until 1238, when two Thai chieftains, Pho Khun Pha Muang and Pho Khun Bang Klang Hao, declared their independence and established a Thai-ruled kingdom. Sukhotai expanded by forming alliances with the other Thai Kingdoms, adopting Theravada Buddhism as the state religion. Under King Ramkhamhaeng the Great, Sukhothai enjoyed a golden age of prosperity, stretching from Martaban (Burma) to Luang Prabang (Laos) and down the Malay Peninsula as far south as Nakhon Sri Thammarat. When Ayutthaya rose in strength, King Thammaracha II had to submit to this new power in 1378 (source: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sukhothai_kingdom).

26.7.2007 *Sukhothai-Chiang Mai* I get up very early and catch a bus to the bus terminal. There I buy a ticket for the bus to Chiang Mai and quickly gobble breakfast while the bus is already waiting. The bus journey is tiresome, as the suspension of the bus is old and worn. The bus stops only at places where food and drink prices are double. After 1pm we eventually arrive in Chiang Mai, where I quickly eat lunch, while waiting for the local bus to leave to the city centre. As the "Lonely Planet" has no reasonable hotel suggestions whatsoever for Chiangmai I look for one on my own and soon find the "Moonlight House" in Soi 8, which has single rooms for 120 Baht. As soon as I have unloaded my luggage and went out again, torrential rain starts. I return to the resthouse, do my washing and diary writing. Then I go to the market, but fail to find a tool to fix my breaking backpack.

27.7.2007 *Chiang Mai* Explore town, there are so many temples here: Wat Chiang Mun, Wat Mokhamptoa, Wat Kuankama, Wat Monthien (where they were preparing for the Chatokhaim celebration), Wat Dubpai, Wat Phabong Muang, Wat Phra Singh (where I was allowed to speak to the abbot before he started a ceremony with monks), Wat Muen Ngen Kong, Wat Chedi Luang (partially destroyed chedi with elephant base), Wat Phantao, Wat Chaiphakiat, Wat Tung Yu, Wat Pan On (photos of Buddhist sites instead of paintings on the walls), Wat Muen Lam (locked). In the afternoon first fruitless attempt to buy a sewing needle for the backpack, then brought it to a street shoemaker who mended the torn things all over.

28.7.2007 *Chiang Mai-Chiang Rai* I have to repack my completely overhauled backpack and then find a sawngtaew to the bus terminal. When getting there, there are long queues. After an hour's wait - with my heavy backpack on my back - I eventually get my ticket for the non-aircon bus to Chiang Rai. I quickly buy breakfast and then get on and ask to be dropped at Wat Rong Khun. The ride is much more comfy than with the more expensive A/C bus. At the Wat, I drop and visit the miraculously fantastically beautiful Wat Rong Khun, all white with little mirrors. The construction is not yet fully completed. I then quickly find a sawngtaew to Chiang Rai and after a short search I find Korea House, which offers excellent rooms for 100 Baht. @#\$% you, Lonely Planet! There are still loads of cheap rooms! Afterwards, I visit Wat Jedyord, Wat Mui Muang (with wooden Vihara), Wat Klang Wiang, Wat Mu Mar (preparing for the Piti Banjo Habalom Festival), Wat Phra That Doi Ngam Muang, Wat Phra Kaew, Wat Srikind and the King Mengrai Monument. In the evening a fantastic Korean dinner for little money. When I go to my room, I suddenly notice that I still have the keys of the Chiang Mai guesthouse in my pocket.

29.7.2007 *Chiang Rai-Chiang Saen* I go to the market, have a light breakfast and then go to the post office to express mail my key back to Chiang Mai. To the Internet café, the disk-virus has once more deleted my USB-Stick. In the meantime I have a batch file, the data is recovered within three minutes. The bus ride to Chiang Saen takes about 1.5h. There I put up at the J + S Guesthouse, once again for 100 Baht per night, a nice room and a splendid garden for relaxing. Explore Chiang Saen: Wat Chedi Luang (the ruins of the Vihara are still in use, they even covered them with a roof), Wat Phra Non, Prasat Khum Chum Saeng, Wat Pong Sanuk, the Mekong port with many Chinese freight vessels, Wat Pa Sah Hang Wiang, Wat Ku Kham, Chetawan Temple, Wat Phra Buat and the Mung Muang Temple.

Before I leave Thailand, a bit background information on this wonderful country: Thailand is highly developed (and has been since times immemorial). The infrastructure is similar to any European country. There seems to be a vast middle class and even next to the shacks one often sees a good car parked. Goods are readily available, not only from small, informal stalls but also from supermarkets. For instance, the 7-11 supermarket chain has convenience stores all over the country. The roads are of Western standards, between the cities there are four-lane highways. The Thai are very clean, so there are no problems with contaminated foodstuffs. Purified drinking water is everywhere readily and cheaply available. The Thai food is not only very tasty, light and healthy, there are hundreds of different kinds of dishes. Seafood is an important part of Thai food and very moderately priced. The Thai are mostly very devout Buddhists which is expressed in the many monasteries. Most male Thais spend some time once in their life as a monk in one of them. The architecture of these monasteries is amazingly beautiful, the quality of the Thai workmanship amazing, comparing to Japanese quality. The Thai King Bhumibhol is revered like a god and there are pictures of him everywhere, along the roads or on house walls. He is often pictured with his SLR camera around his neck, which he seems to take everywhere with him. Many Thais wear yellow shirts to show their allegiance to their monarch, who will

turn 80 this year.

30.7.2007 Chiang Saen, Golden Triangle Elections in Chiang Saen: All over loudspeaker-bearing bakkies, posters and flyers. I rent a bicycle and ride in direction Sop Ruak. On the way there I quickly visit Wat Khao Ban. In Sop Ruak (the actual Golden Triangle) I first visit the Wat Sob Ruak, which has a comic-strip like life of Buddha on the right wall and on the left wall the life of a person unknown to me. The Wat Prathat Phukao, towering over Sop Ruak, has the "Buddha of Chiang Saen" and a marvellous view on the Golden Triangle. Then the compulsory visit to the "Opium House" Museum, expensive and not very informative. Rode in direction Mae Sai. In Mae Ma I cannot pass the police roadblock, turn left in direction Mo Pang, visit Wat Syi Chaui on the way and later somewhere in between Wat Paton Tumbon Sridonmool. Back in Chiang Saen I visit the Wat Phra That Chomkitti with a marvellous view and an impressive gong. On the foot of the hill I visit Wat Suan Sanuk. Ride along the city walls and discover "Ancient Monument No. 16".

31.7.2007 Chiang Saen-Chiang Khong Early in the morning I go to the Sawngtaew (say: Saunketau) stand, but there are no passengers yet. Only at 10h we get the necessary 15 passengers together and can leave. Until 11:30h, we have only got 25km further to Hadbai. Here we are supposed to change the Sawngtaew, but for the other Sawngtaew there are no passengers. I quickly eat a noodle soup, but I could have taken far more time, there are definitely no passengers. After two hours I try to hitchhike, but there are no vehicles in direction Chiang Khong. At 14h the Sawngtaew is ready to return even without sufficient passengers - the only passengers are I and Lilly from New Zealand. In Chiang Kong I put up at the "Boom House". I should get stamps for a postcard, but the post office is closed already. But I can buy a stamp at a shop.

Laos

1.8.2007 Chiang Khong (Thailand)-Houay Xai (Laos) "Trittst im Morgenrot daher, seh ich dich im Strahlenmeer..." (Swiss national anthem). I get little of this, but torrential rains have been pounding the corrugated roof already all night long. In the pouring rain we slide down the murky shore of the Mekong to the ferry, whilst our boots are plastered with mud. The crossing is short. Then to the immigration. I try to change to my South African passport, because I would save a 5 USD visa fee, but the Laotians pick up that there is no out-stamp from Thailand, so I am forced to use the Swiss passport. I put up at the Manirath Guesthouse, where I get a comfortable room for 160 Baht. Laos is generally more expensive than Thailand, so this is a good rate. Visit the market, where I buy food stocks for the boat journey to Luang Prabang which is planned for tomorrow and then visit Wat Chomkhao Manirath Sanghu. Eat catfish for lunch.

2.8.2007 Houay Xai-Pak Beng Say goodbye to Lilly, walk to the jetty and buy a ticket to Luang Prabang. It rains cats and dogs. The boat leaves only 12am, with much delay. It carries mostly tourists. As I want to eat my food, it has already gone off. We are cruising through the dark green Mekong River valley, getting narrower or wider at times, sometimes it has a ugly, red-brown incision of a road. At times it is raining so much, that the shutters have to be lowered. The boat stops regularly to let passengers board and disembark. We arrive in Pak Beng at 18h. As I have to go to the loo, a Lao passenger tries to steal my bag with the (nota bene gone off) food. I can just pull it off him. In Pak Beng which is lit by the electricity of numerous generators, I put up at the Phoy Lat Da Resthouse. Walk around the village.

3.8.2007 Pak Beng-Luang Prabang Today would be my father's birthday. The boat leaves with an hour's delay. The river gets very narrow with rocky shores, then wider again. We arrive at 17h in Luang Prabang, just when the rain starts. A boy leads me to the Vong Champa Guesthouse, where I get a nice and cheap room. Visit Wat Bonsai and the night market, where I have supper twice.

4.8.2007 Luang Prabang Hire a bicycle, visit Wat Pha Mahathat, Pousy Market which is 2km out of town, Wat Visun Narath, with its collection of Buddha statues, then Wat Ahom Outana Thany just next door. Visit Wat Xien Thong (only from outside), Wat Khili, Wat Pak Khan, Wat Srimounkhoun Sayaram, Wat Ban Phon Heuang, Wat Srimun Khung, Wat Paphaimisaiyram, Wat Xienmouane Vajiramangularam, Wat Choumkhong Sourintharame, then in the Wat Thammo Thayaram complex on the hill the Prabang Phoutthalawanh Buddha statue, the Phousi Stupa, Pra That Chomsi, the Buddha Caves and the Imprint of Buddhas Foot. Far out of town on a hill, I visit Wat Phol Phao with the Santi Chedi, which has apocalyptic paintings on the inside and four levels. In the end Wat Manolom, where I have a long chat with the newly ordained monk Peng. Meet Terry from Australia, Jan from the Czech Republic and Elio from Israel.

5.8.2007 Luang Prabang At 05:30h I watch the "giving of the alms" ceremony of the monks. The donors kneel in a row in front of the monastery and throw little balls of sticky rice into the collection bowls of the monks. Then by boat to Pak Ou, the Buddhist caves. Great confusion as to who has to board which boat. I have to change the boat twice and refuse, when I am asked for the third time. We stop in a village where they make the "Lao-Lao" schnapps and - of course - put snakes and scorpions into the bottles. With great delay we reach the Tham Thing Buddha caves. The lower cave is quite spectacular, but the two stupas and the numerous donated Buddha statues are not really worth seeing. The upper cave is 85m deep, with a stupa at the end. We are back at 14h. I try the Internet, but my server is dead.

6.8.2007 Luang Prabang-Vientiane I get up so early that I can see the almsgiving-ceremony again. By Tuk-tuk to the bus station, quickly had a noodle soup and got onto the 06:30 bus to Vientiane. The bus drives on a narrow, but hard surface road, through marvellous, deeply green mountains, along villages which are stuck to the mountainside along the road, the houses are on platforms which are supported by pillars driven into the steep slope. We arrive on time at 4pm at Vientiane's Northern Bus Station, where I get a Sawngtaew to the city centre. After quite some searching, I find a cheap but lousy room.

7.8.2007 Vientiane Get up early, have noodle soup at a street vendor, where I meet Shane, an American-Malaysian didgeridoo player, with his little daughter. Then to the That Dam (black stupa), to Talat Sao market, which is not impressive at all, to the Patuxai, the "vertical runway", because it was built from concrete donated for a runway, and to the That Luang, the golden stupa, Lao's national monument. Back to the city centre, at lunch I meet the staff of a Mitsubishi dealership, we have a good time. Visit Wat Si Saket.

8.8.2007 Vientiane-Veng Viang It is raining hard. By Tuk-tuk to the Northern Bus Station. By bus to Veng Viang. Put up at Pan's Place, where I get an excellent room. Walked to the Phadeng and Jinnly Caves, slippery way up, got caked with mud. The caves are not spectacular, there are stalagmites and stalactites. Beautiful landscape, strangely shaped mountains. I feel sick with flu.

9.8.2007 Veng Viang Hire a bicycle, ride first in direction Luang Prabang about 15km, then back, through the village, to the island, then 10km in the other direction, past the two cement factories to the village of Khan Mak. When returning, I am surprised by a rainshower and get dripping wet. Seek refuge at a motorbike workshop. Have noodle soup to warm up.

10.8.2007 Veng Viang-Phonsavan Got up much too early, feel awful. It is raining. Have noodle soup, wait for the bus, which arrives 09:30. Long and winding drive through the rainy mountains to Phonsavan. Some passengers barf out of the window. In Phonsavan I am taken to the Sabaidee Resthouse, where I put up. Book a tour of the Plain of Jars for tomorrow.

11.8.2007 Phonsavan Noodle soup at the market hall. I am picked up at 9am by the tour bus and taken to site No. 1 of the Plain of Jars. Many huge stone jars are scattered about, the largest one weighs 6 tons. Some were damaged by the US bombs which were dropped in the area. It is up to today not clear as to what purpose the stone jars served. Then to a traditional lao-lao rice brandy maker, this time the stupendously simple principle is properly explained. We continue to Site 2 of the Plain of Jars, where the stone jars are longer and narrower. To the wreck of a Russian tank, lunch and finally Site 3 of the Plain of Jars. Spend the afternoon with Remy from France servicing his bike.

12.8.2007 Phonsavan-Xam Neua Went with Remy to the market and had a fabulous crab soup. By Tuk-tuk to the bus station and by 08:00 bus in direction Xam Neua. Tiresome drive with an inexperienced driver and a under-powered bus through the jungle roads. There are only few villages. We arrive 18:30 in Xam Neua. By Tuk-tuk the short distance to town, but fortunately it breaks down, or we would have been made to pay 5'000 Kip for the short distance. After a lengthy search I find a very nice and cheap room at the Pouthanou Guesthouse. Supper with the other travellers.

13.8.2007 Xam Neua-Vieng Xai After a breakfast in the market, I walk to the bus station and take the minibus to Vieng Xai. We arrive after a 1.5h drive. I put up at the Saylomyen Guesthouse, which is situated on a small lake. Vieng Xai was the hidden capital of the Pathet Lao, the entire provisional government and the strategic command and more than 20'000 people were living there up to the cease-fire in 1973. The caves were never seriously damaged, despite the incessant American bombardments. Vieng Xai was ideally suited because of its many caves and its proximity to Vietnam. Wander around town and visit the "Cave for Foreign Visitors". The official tour starts at 1pm: We visit the Kaysone Phomvane Cave, the Nonthak Vongvichid cave, the Siphandone cave and the Xanglot (Elephant) cave. Visit then on my own the Shop cave, but have to fight my way through dense bush. Meet Martin from Frankfurt, who is travelling with a Russian "Minsk" motorbike. Supper after a bit of confusion, at the market, with Martin and the two French travellers.

14.8.2007 Vieng Xai-Thanh Hoa Early in the morning to the market, had noodle soup. Walked to the Intersection. The totally overloaded Sawngtaew only pitches up at 08:30. The luggage is bound with a rope on top of the huge mountain of luggage on the roof. We squeeze inside, the first half hour I can only squat on my heels. In a bend, my backpack falls off but fortunately nothing seems to be broken. Arrived in Na Meo, the border crossing is quick, but my luggage is searched thoroughly. Then we wait in the village next to the bus. Apparently it is 20 USD for the short distance to Hanoi. Dien Bien Phu is off, there is no bus from here in this direction. I get a noodle soup, just then the bus is about to leave. I have to hurry. After 100 meters the bus stops again and loads two rows of bags with fermented roots into the passage. A Frenchman asks his friend over the cellphone, how much the ride really costs, it is 5 USD or 80'000 Dong. The bus driver sends all sorts of people to collect the 20 USD from us, but none of us wants to pay. The Frenchman negotiates 90'000 Dong, but when he wants to hand over the money, the deal is off again. Then he negotiates another deal, which also called off again. The driver lets us know that there is no alternative transport and whoever does not want to pay is free to leave the bus. It is very hot and raining. The negotiations continue. I am called outside the bus,

where an English-speaking Vietnamese explains that we had to pay the 20 USD, because it was nothing for us. It was a private bus, whereas the driver could set the prices at will. The Frenchman keeps negotiating. It is almost 2pm. The driver has just reverted from 15 USD back to 20 USD. I can't bear it any longer, I shake my fist and shout abuse at the driver. Everyone is horrified, the other travellers more than the Vietnamese. After this, there is an accord within minutes on 10 USD for half the distance. I pay reluctantly, the only one who pays in Dong, as I have no more USD. The ride leads us through dense bamboo jungle to Quan Son. Already from there we would have found plenty of transport. We continue through bamboo jungle. Sometimes there are people loading bamboo on lorries, but the bus just rides over them, squashing the bamboo tubes. Towards the coast, there are also trees, then it is forest, which is getting thinner. Beautiful ponds appear along the road. When it is completely dark, we stop somewhere, and I quickly eat rice and fish. The innkeeper speaks Russian, so we can communicate! As soon as I have swallowed the last bite, we continue. We arrive at 21:30 in Thanh Hoa and complemented out of the bus. I take a fantastic room at the Nha Nghi Mien Tay Xam Hotel.

Vietnam

15.8.2007 Thanh Hoa-Hanoi I get up, walk across the street to the bus station, catch a super-comfortable aircon bus to Hanoi. We arrive around 11:00h. A student not only takes me to the right bus, he even buys my ticket! After a short search I find a cheap and quiet room at the Thanh An Hotel at 46 Hang Ga Street. I visit the Huan Kiem Lake, the Thap Rua (Tortoise tower), the Ngoc Son (Jade Mountain) Temple, the Song Hong (red) River and the adjoining residential quarters, the Dong Xuan Market (mainly non-food) where I buy a new torch, the Hang Da market (mainly food) where I taste salad rolls and Tofu. When wandering the streets looking for the Internet café, which I could not find anymore, I meet Dan and Beth again. I travelled with Dan from Diu to Mumbai in May this year! We have supper together. Shock at the Internet café, as I can watch a virus installing itself on my USB-stick and deleting all my folders. Big argument with the cafe owner, who refuses me to change computers. I can retrieve my data at the hotel.

16.8.2007 Hanoi To the Lenin Monument and to the Kim Ma Bus Station, which has no buses to Dien Bien Phu, a misleading information of the Lonely Planet. To the Temple of Literature, a pagoda built in 1070, very impressive the excellent condition, the construction is mainly lacquered wood. To the Ho Chi Minh Mausoleum and the embalmed Uncle Ho. Then to the Ho Chi Minh Museum, which is devoid of any system and conveys no information whatsoever. Lunch near the botanical garden. A Vietnamese spontaneously offers me a beer. To the Botanical Garden, then to the War Museum, which again lacks any system and is still full of commie rhetorics. The weather is unbearably hot. When I get back to the hotel, I am blatantly accused of not having been to the room all day long. I am told that in the room above me, somebody had forgotten to turn off the tap, so that the water was dripping into my room. An obvious lie. They have thrown all my belongings out of the room and when I refuse to accept an almost double as expensive room at a far away hotel, they throw me out of the hotel like a criminal offender, in front of all the other guests, very humiliating. Oh, not to forget that they even tried to charge me half a day extra as I am kicked out after noon. It is almost 19h in the meantime, all the budget hotels are fully booked. I thus decide to try near the bus station, about 7km from the centre. When I have walked to the bus stop, about 4km from the hotel and want to take out the money for the bus, I realise that they have retained my passport at the hotel. I walk - with backpack and all - the 4km back to the hotel and ask, rather abrupt, for my passport. They throw a tantrum. They scream at me for being impolite, but eventually I get it back. I walk the 4km back to the bus station, get Bus No. 32 to Giap Bat Bus Station and put up at a nearby hotel. With great relief I take a shower and wash off all the sweat of the many kilometres of walking.

17.8.2007 Hanoi-Hue I get up, walk to the nearby bus station and inquire about the buses to Hue. I am far too early, the earliest leave around 8am. Eventually I find a bus for 120'000 Dong to Hue. It leaves at 08:00h. The journey is long and tedious, the bus has little legroom and is crammed with luggage, although it is a modern and air-conditioned bus. We stop, unlike the open-ticket buses, at cheap and good restaurants. I meet Lam, who is travelling to Danang. He offers me cudo (rice waffle with peanuts, ginger and sugar) and later supper, I give him my second watch. At the Intersection to Hue, 20km from town, I am dropped. I am forced to take a xe om (motorbike taxi) to town, which makes up more than the difference in price for the bus tickets! It is around midnight. Against the advice of the xe om driver, I put up at the Mimosa Guesthouse.

18.8.2007 Hue For the boat trips, I wake up too late. I walk to the citadel, which charges an exceedingly high entrance fee for the little that is still intact. Tasty meal for very little money. Visited the Tinh Tam- and the Tang Tan Lake. Got onto Tanh Long Bridge over the Ngu Ha Channel. Through the Dong Ba Gate, across the Dong Ba Canal to the not very impressive Tang Quang Pagoda which was built in 1970. To the Dieu De National Pagoda, but it is closed. To the Chieu Ung Pagoda, then back to the Dieu De Pagoda, which has now opened up. Women clad in grey coats are praying, their children get so excited when they see my camera, that I have to ask them to be a little quieter. To the Dong Ba Market, a pretty market with an abundance of food on offer. Meet Francesca, a sociologist from Italy.

19.8.2007 Hue-Hoi An I rent a bicycle and ride to the Tien Mu Pagoda, which includes an entire monastery complex. The monks are in prayer, as I get there. Across the railway bridge and past the railway station in direction Tu Duc Tomb.

On my way there I pass various pagodas and a graveyard, which I visit. The tomb is much better preserved than the citadel. A huge walled area, with canals and ponds, temples, tombs and a wonderful quietness about it. Back to the hotel and to the Tonk Toan Bridge. I have to hurry up with the bicycle, but I get lost nevertheless. As I arrive by the bridge, two ladies fight about the right to supply drinking water to me. Upon returning, I miss the Hue turnoff and ride for 2km into the void until I register my mistake. I have to return to Tonk Toan Bridge and start anew, until I find the turnoff. At the hotel I may use the shower and then the tour bus that takes me to Hoi An arrives. On the bus I meet Robert from Australia, who spontaneously gives me his address in Brisbane. In Hoi An I put up at the hotel suggested by the bus company, as their price is right. But it is poorly located, far from town. When having supper at a food stall, I am cheated, they only give me half a portion. Because I cannot communicate, I have to grumpily accept it.

20.8.2007 Hoi An Hoi An is much more touristic than Hue, it lacks Hue's charm. At 8am I get on the tour bus to My Son, where the ruins of the Cham people's Hindu temples are situated. The temples (built 400 to 1300AD) are not impressive, they were already damaged before the war, during the war the Vietcong used them as a stronghold and were heavily bombed, so little is left. Back to Hoi An. To get into the old city, I have to buy a ticket for 5 USD!! View the Japanese Bridge and the exquisitely preserved house of Hung Phung in the Vietnamese-Japanese-Chinese style. A nearby temple was unfortunately profaned, today it houses a bamboo wares factory. Visit the Museum of History and Culture, the Quan Kong Temple and the magnificent Phuc Kien Assembly Hall and a nearby temple. Confirm the bus ticket.

21.8.2007 Hoi An To the An Hoi Islet, to the excellent traditional concert at the Hoi An Handycraft Workshop, then to the market and to the Cam Nam Islet. Visited the Museum for Folk Culture, the Museum for Trade Ceramics, the Cantonese Assembly Hall and the Trieu Chau Assembly Hall. Bought a new moneybelt, as the old one was completely broken. Tedious search for an ATM machine. The tour bus shows up half an hour early, just when I am in the shower. I have to hurry up, I just about manage to catch it. The journey is very tedious as there is no leg-space and the seats don't go into reclining position.

22.8.2007 Nha Trang The bus arrives in Nha Trang only at 06am, I once again put up at the suggested hotel, as the price is excellent. I even get a maisonette room! Book a boat trip to the islands. We pass underneath the cable-car to Vinpearl Island to Mun Island, where we splash around a bit and have to pay 5'000 Dong extra for this. Then we get to Mot Island, where - in between the fish farms - we have a big lunch. Then we get a swimming bar with Vietnamese wine, which has little in common with wine except the colour and the alcohol contents. To the Tam Island, where we pay another 10'000 Dong entrance fee, but are not even allowed to leave the resort, where paragliding seems the only thing to do. Had a huge helping of fantastically prepared fish at a small, unnamed restaurant (Tran Hung Dao Str, across Quan Com Co Mo).

23.8.2007 Nha Trang I walk to the Dam Market, a big and well-stocked market with a huge choice of foodstuff. Then to the Po Nagar Cham Towers, four well-preserved Hindu temples (much better as those in My Son) of the Cham people. From here to the Long Son Pagoda, where there is a Buddhist celebration being held, to the Reclining Buddha and the big Sitting Buddha. Organise my airticket with Chawla Travel in Bangkok via the Internet, then I walk back to Hon Chong Promontory, some picturesque rocks and a beach in the north of Nha Trang. Have a long chat with a Vietnamese student. The bus picks me up half an hour late, around 20:30h. Fortunately, this bus has a little bit more leg-space than the last one and is not so full.

24.8.2007 Saigon (HCMC) The bus has a flat tyre around midnight, which delays us for two hours. We consequently only arrive around 10am in Saigon (officially Ho Chi Minh City, but nobody bothers to use this name). I take a cheap room at the Hai Hotel, again the uppermost in the house. A thunderstorm is looming. I eat something and walk to the extremely colourful and well-preserved Mariamman Hindu Temple, then to the Reunification Palace (which used to be the Presidential Palace of South Vietnam) and from there to the War Remnants Museum, a wild collection of American ordinance, socialist gibberish and truly striking photographs.

25.8.2007 Saigon (HCMC) I am at 7:45am at the office of the tour operator, who tells me to surf the Internet, as the bus was not yet here. Suddenly they say, that the tour bus had been here and missed me and I am put on the rear seat of a motorbike, which catches up with the tour bus and I change over. First we visit a souvenir manufacturing site, where they make trays from lacquered wood and mother-of-pearl. If I had returned home from here, I would probably have bought one. We then carry on to Cu Chi, where the Vietcong had dug tunnels all over the area, even under the American Commando post. This was reported to be the safest spot, as there were no bombs in this area. The tunnels are tiny, made for Vietnamese, barely accessible for Westerners. From there back to the dark, overcast Saigon, where the thunder is audible, but it still doesn't rain. I take a bus to Cholon Market, where they sell many Chinese goods, but not cheap. For us tourists by principle 50% more expensive. Outside the market I find an old woman, who sells a bowl of Pho at the local rate to me. I don't know who was more pleased, but she would even have gladly ladled out some more. I visit the Phuoc An Hoi Quan Temple, the magnificent Quam An Pagoda and the huge Thien Hau Pagode. Just as I had bought some cake and wanted to eat it, a thunderstorm broke loose. The bus did not see me in the dense rain and left me standing. Eventually, I manage to stop the next bus, waving madly, but I have to wade through ankle-deep water. I book

a ticket for the cheap and slow bus to Phnom Penh for the day after tomorrow.

27.8.2007 Saigon I wait at the office of the tour operator for the tour bus. Come back at 08:10 they tell me. When I am back at 08:10 they tell me that the tour bus left already. Once again I am sent by motorbike after the tour bus. We get to My Tho in the Mekong Delta. We change to a boat, ride to the Dragon Island, visit a coconut sweets factory, then a beekeeper where I get honey tea. Through the beautiful channels - with overhanging palm trees and ferns - by small dinghies. Lunch at a restaurant at Turtle Island. Ride with rowing boats through narrow channels of the island. Dessert with fruit at another restaurant. Back to Mytho, visit the Bonsai Garden. Back to Saigon. We arrive an hour early. I walk to the Dong Khoi area. Visit the Russian Market, a posh shopping centre. To the Ben Tanh Market, where I buy another T-shirt.

Cambodia

27.8.2007 Saigon-Phnom Penh Today is my birthday. I wait at the office of the travel agent for my bus to Phnom Penh. Power failure, I cannot even use the Internet. Suddenly the power comes back and with it also the Internet. To my greatest surprise, only a minibus pitches up, which takes us to the Cambodian border. The visa is easily acquired for 20 USD at the border, the formalities are without problems. On the Cambodian side, I first eat something, while waiting for the minibus. The ride to Phnom Penh in an almost new Mercedes minibus is quite comfortable. I put up at the Narin 2 Guesthouse and share the room with a Frenchman, Ben. In the evening, a thunderstorm breaks loose over Phnom Penh. We are both reading. Suddenly, there is a knock on our door. The staff informs us, that the floor has been flooded. And indeed, all my books, lying on the floor (because there is no furniture), my backpack, everything is soaking wet. 2mm of water has silently crept in from under the door.

28.8.2007 Phnom Penh Today I will dive into the tragic past of Cambodia. Rent a bicycle, ride 14km out of town to the Killing Fields of Cheoung Ek. From far away one can see the recently built Stupa filled with skulls and clothes of the victims. The Killing Fields are on a beautiful plot with shadowy trees. There are water-filled holes all over, like bomb craters, the former mass graves. The buildings were removed. I ride back to Phnom Penh, to the political prison of Tuol Sleng. A secondary school was transformed with the most primitive means into a prison, for one reason only: To satisfy the sadism of the torturers. Most of the inmates were never politically active. One could be arrested anytime and brought here. Pictures show the terror that took place here only 30 years back. Then to the museum, where mainly the statue of Jayavarman VII is worth seeing. The museum probably looks no different than it did in 1975 when it was closed. From here to the Royal Palace and the Silver Pagoda with its floors, all made of silver, and a emerald Buddha, similar to the one in Bangkok. Past Beat Richner's Kantha Bopha Hospital II to Wat Phnom, which gave the city its name. The Wat is not very exciting, but it has interestingly ornamented stairs from the bottom of the koppie and a huge Stupa next to it. In the evening to the Russian market, play foot-badminton with the Cambodians and have a chat with a US-Cambodian at a dumpling stall.

29.8.2007 Phnom Penh Change to a single room, as I want to stay one day longer. Rent a bicycle, to the central market, buy an new belt and a pants. Ride around Phnom Penh, around the Boeng Kak Lake without ever seeing it, across the Japanese Friendship Bridge to the island, explore it, find a beautiful monastery with a building in the shape of a golden ship.

30.8.2007 Phnom Penh-Siem Reap Have breakfast at the Psar O Russei Market, am taken by motorbike to the bus. Meet Kaya from Poland, whom I already met several times in Vietnam. The journey is extremely comfortable, the bus is airsprunged. They show a "Chinese Charlie Chaplin" movie. In Siem Reap, I follow a tout to the Garden Village Guesthouse. At the Old Market, I have a delicious curry for lunch. See spiders and little birds to eat. Walk to the northern end of Siem Reap, have a street hairdresser cut my hair. He even gives me a shave. Rent a bicycle for tomorrow.

31.8.2007 Siem Reap Got up at 5am, cycled in direction Angkor Wat. Had an excellent curry for breakfast. I caught the wrong road, there was no ticket office. Had to cycle back 3km. Visited the Angkor Wat at dawn, but everybody read the Lonely Planet, so there are crowds of tourists. Climbed the extremely steep stairs to the highest section (supposed to depict Mt Meru). Even up there are ritual water basins. Many detailed bas-reliefs. Then to Angkor Thom, visited the outstandingly interesting Bayon Temple. In the central section, there are stoically smiling faces everywhere. There are bas-reliefs on three levels. I take hours to see it all. Excellent lunch. To the Baphuon Temple, which was taken to pieces and then the war started and the Red Khmer destroyed all papers concerning the reconstruction. To the Preah Pittu group of Temples. Visited the Terrace of the Elephants with many elephant bas-reliefs. Behind is the Phimeanakas Temple, Palace of the King, with a steep ascent. Visited the Terrace of the Leper King, with a mysterious statue. Behind the outer wall there is a ditch with more bas-reliefs. Visit the Preah Palilay Temple, which is completely overgrown with trees. To the Night Market, eat excellent curry and rice sweets. In the evening power failure. I read with a torch until it suddenly breaks.

1.9.2007 Siem Reap I start cycling early in the morning. Shortly before the ticket office, a Cambodian stops me and asks

for money or I must return. As he is in my way and won't let me pass, I ride off the road and around him. Start at the Preah Khan Temple, which used to be a huge university. Today it is in a quite deplorable condition, many hallways and halls have caved in. Everywhere one can still see the bases of Shiva-Linga. Then to the Preah Neak Poan Temple, which consists of a tiny Temple in the middle of five pools with water features. To the Ta Som Temple, which is mainly known because of the huge tree on the north entrance. To the Eastern Mebon Temple, which is for some reason little known. It is a bit similar to Angkor Wat and has many detailed elephants for ornaments. Met a German couple, we exchanged travel experiences for a long time. Started cycling the long ride (25 km) to Banteay Srei. A tiny Temple, with incredibly well preserved, detailed bas-reliefs all over. Back to Ta Prohm, which impresses mainly because the trees are growing all over it. A proper jungle scenery. To Ta Keo, which consists of a huge, well-preserved pyramid. Thommanon is a tiny temple, well preserved and Chau Say Tevada is another one, which is currently being repaired by the Chinese. To Phnom Bakheng, a pyramid-shaped temple, situated on koppie. There are thousands of people marching up there, I take ages to get there. The view cannot be appreciated because of the many people. As soon as I am back at my bicycle, it starts raining. I make it up to Angkor Wat, there I have to seek shelter for half an hour. I cycle back holding my opened umbrella. Arrive soaking wet. Buy a huge supper at the night market and devour it at my hotel room.

What is Angkor Wat? There are an abundance of temples in the Siem Reap area, one of which is Angkor Wat. They were built from the year 700 onwards. Around the temples cities grew, around the year 1000 Siem Reap had a million inhabitants. The magnificent temples - they were mostly built as Hindu temples but later converted to Buddhism - are built from limestone, usually surrounded by a moat and a wall and have elaborate bridges for access. The temples consist of a multitude of buildings and passages. The largest temple complex is found in Angkor Thom.

2.9.2007 Siem Reap Cycle to Prasat Kravan, a well-preserved temple, pretty in the morning light. Then via a muddy path through the rice paddies to Bat Chum. On the way there, the chain drops out and a Cambodian helps me to get it back in. Bat Chum is not worth mentioning, all scaffolding. From here to Banteay Kdei, where I meet Alex, a Frenchman living in Vietnam, and have a long chat. Banteay Kdei is mainly memorable for its huge size. Back to Ta Prohm, which in comparison to yesterday looks different in the morning light. Make the compulsory photo of myself with a Spung tree root. Back to Siem Reap, visited the Khmer museum, but it is mainly aimed at children. The sky looks like rain, so I go to the Internet. As it still does not rain at 15h, I cycle back to Angkor Wat, quickly climb all three levels and walk along the fantastic bas-reliefs of the outer gallery. Upon returning, the chain drops out for the fifth time just as it starts raining. I swear quite audibly.

3.9.2007 Siem Reap-Battambang I look for a food stall for breakfast, but the only one which is open wants double the usual price, which I am not prepared to pay. I am picked up at 06:30, taken to a travel agency, where I wait until 07:30. Then I am picked up by a minibus and taken to the bus terminal, where the bus leaves at 08:00. Already the first 1.5h gone. The bus rides for an hour around Siem Reap, hence we only hit the road to Battambang at 09:00h. The road is known to be terrible, it is said that the airlines bribe the government to leave the road in this deplorable condition. There is some work everywhere to be done on it, but the planned reconstruction will certainly still take decades. We arrive at 14:00h in Battambang. I once again follow a tout and put up at the Chhaya Hotel. I walk to the Psar Nat market, where I enjoy a wonderful rice soup, then to Wat Papahd, where I witness a disrobing ceremony of a novice (he will probably continue his studies in a worldly institution), then after having concluded an acceptable fare, I make an appointment with the motorbike driver Sokaa to pick me up tomorrow at 8 for a tour. At the Wat Tam Rai I meet a student who invites me to take part in his English class. I agree and may indeed teach English for an hour or so. Everyone is very happy about it. The English knowledge of the pupils is very unequal, some speak it almost fluently, others don't understand a word.

4.9.2007 Battambang Meet Sokaa, have to negotiate the route anew, as I found out yesterday that I must get a bit more for my money. To Phnom Sompoe, a koppie. I am annoyed by the 2 USD entrance fee. Walk to the top, visit the Killing Caves, where the Khmer Rouge killed many Cambodians. Then to the Buddhist caves, in the end to the monastery on the summit. On going back down, I get the wrong path and pass by another cave with a statue. From here to Wat Banan, also called Mini-Angkor-Wat. A few fragments prove that it had once elaborate bas-reliefs. Today it is completely dilapidated. The middle tower is nevertheless still used as a Buddhist sanctuary. On going back down, I notice that the newly built stairs with its Naga balustrades is more impressive than the Wat itself. Visited the nearby, 150 years-old pagoda, but only from outside. To Wat Baydamram, the Bat Temple. Hundreds of fruit bats are hanging from a large tree by the Wat and squeak happily. They are under the protection of the monks and may thus not be hunted. I have to give Sokaa an advance of a Dollar, because he is not sure whether the one litre in the tank will last for the full journey. He buys me a bottle of water in return. To the Bamboo Train Station, They very ingeniously made a rail tractor for the transport of passengers on the disused railway line with a wooden frame, self-made axles and a lawnmower engine,. We eat cheap and plenty at a small restaurant. Then I say goodbye to Sokaa, go to my hotel, watch some Sat-TV while a rainstorm howls over Battambang, afterwards I visit the Psar Boeng Choeuk (market).

Thailand (Western Thailand)

5.9.2007 Battambang-Bangkok At Psar Nat everyone is still cooking, the food is not ready yet. I walk to the Psar Boeng Choeuk and have a last taste of the magnificent curries. By chance I walk past the dog meat section. Back to the hotel, the taxi pitches up and fetches me and an English girl, Joan. The road to Sisophon is known to be hard surface, afterwards it is the worst possible dirt road, muddy slime covering massive potholes. After two hours we arrive in Poipet. The border formalities are no problem. The promised minibus to Bangkok does not materialise, as there are not sufficient passengers. We take a Tuk-tuk to the bus station and get into the bus to Bangkok, which is just about to leave. We arrive at 14:30 at Bangkoks Northern Bus Station and catch Bus No 3 to Banglamphu. At Banglamphu, I say goodbye to Joan and put up at the Merry V Guesthouse, as last time. Then I walk to the market and have my badly damaged shoes provisionally fixed. Lousy Indian quality, the shoes are only three months old. In the Internet café, I sit next to a lady who is completely sick with flu. She is coughing, sneezing and spreading viruses. Probably I will now come down with flu one of the next days, too. I have no resistance at all against colds and flu.

6.9.2007 Bangkok My breakfast consists of a devilish hot bamboo curry. Then I want to take the ferry to the city centre, but the service is discontinued. Instead, I walk to Chinatown and buy re-chargeable batteries for the camera and a new torch, as replacement for the broken one. Walk to Wat Batum Khum Khaa, where the entire yard is lined with golden Buddha statues, one hand pointing to the ground, calling the earth to witness. From here to Wat Traimit, visited the golden Buddha which was for decades hidden under a layer of plaster of Paris. A monk gives me a orange-white bracelet. To Wat Mahaprutaram, where there is a huge reclining Buddha statue. I just peep in through the door, I have difficulty taking off my shoes all the times, my back is still very sore. By ferry back to Banglamphu, where I have my photos burnt to DVD-Rom, at a premium. The attendant has no clue how to do it, I have to guide him through the process. During supper I meet a German youth, Sebastian from Bad Toelz, who at the age of 20 developed a amazing rain-drop-size device!

7.9.2007 Bangkok-Nakhon Pathom-Kanchanaburi Diarrhoea in the morning. Take Bus No 30 to the Southern (Sai Tai Mai) Bus station, catch the bus to Kanchanaburi, but only up to Nakhon Patom. There I seek everywhere for a guesthouse, but nobody speaks English, it makes no sense to try asking the way. The Lonely Planet says nothing. I deposit my backpack at the bus terminal and visit the Stupa, the world's biggest. Then I fetch my luggage back and jump onto the next bus to Kanchanaburi, where I put up again at the C&C guesthouse in one of the houseboats. My shoes are breaking.

8.9.2007 Kanchanaburi I decide to do nothing today. Eat noodle soup for breakfast. Still bad diarrhoea. I only eat chocolate to stop the diarrhoea.

9.9.2007 Kanchanaburi-Bangkok Very early to the railway station, but the train is delayed by an hour. Slow drive to Bangkok, have a good meal. In Bangkok, I first walk to the Tourist Information to find out about the bus to the airport, then to the central guesthouse where I put up. Meet Sebastian again, we have lunch together. Buy new shoes, they are very cheap. Suddenly, the dysentery starts again. Now I know, it is going to be serious. Do some shopping in the afternoon, but keep returning to the rest-house in order to use the loo. If I didn't have to travel tomorrow, I would remain for a few days in bed. Buy Cipro (Ciprofloxacin).

Japan

10.9.2007 Bangkok-Tokyo I cannot sleep. At 4am I get up and catch Bus No 509 to Victory Monument, from there Bus 551 to Suvarnabhumi Airport. As there is no traffic whatsoever, I get there far too early. Check in. Although I promised myself not to eat, I cannot resist the fabulous meal offered. The flight to Hong Kong is quick. In Hongkong I walk to Gate 64 and wait for my flight, when suddenly Koichi, with whom I shared a dorm room in Cairo, sits next to me. So much coincidence! He is now working in Dubai and on a business trip to Japan. We are both extremely excited and have such a lot to share, the plane arrives in Tokyo before we notice. In Tokyo, Koichi is so generous to even come along with me up to Ueno and make sure I get onto the right subway train! Check-in at the New Koyo Hotel is not problem, the receptionist is just about to leave when I arrive. Sleep well on a futon bed.

11.9.2007 Tokyo Tokyo, I'm coming! By Subway to Ginza, which is still pretty dead at 8am. To the Tokyo International Forum, whose steel structure looks like a ship. The Sony-Building is still closed. To the Royal Palace East Garden, visited the following sights: Doshin Bansho Guardhouse, Hyahunin Bansho Guardhouse, Tenshudai Donjon Base, Ishimuro Stone Cellar, Fujimi-Tamon Defence House, Fujimi-Yagura Tower, Obansho Great Guardhouse, Ote-Mon Gate. To the Sony-Building, visited the exhibition of Sony products. Then to Shinjuku where I do the Lonely Planet Walking Tour: Studio Alta Building, Shinjuku-dori with its many shops, Isetan Department Store, Hanazono-jinja Shrine, Golden Gai bar district, Kabuki-Cho red light district (see picture above). At the hotel, I meet Erwan from France, we play a game of chess and I lose twice. I struggle with a flu which wants to start.

12.9.2007 Tokyo I am not good at getting up late and so I am already in the underground at 8am. This is quite useless,

because the shops open only at 10am and I'm going to visit shopping districts. Travel to Ikebukuro, a yuppie shopping district. Walk through the electronics shops and marvel at the incredibly perfect and cheap mini-notebook-computer (the smallest one is as big as a cellphone). Unfortunately I don't have enough space in my luggage to take one along, and all have Japanese operating systems, else I would have bought one on the spot. From here to Akihabara, the electronics shopping city. Overwhelming choice at bargain prices. There is a rainstorm, my already badly damaged umbrella gets torn up. To Asakusa, to visit the Senso-Ji Shrine. At the huge market around the shrine I buy a new umbrella. To Ueno, visited the park, the pond, the shrine within the pond, the Hanosama-Inari shrine and the nearby Kojahate shrine. From here to Shibuya, another yuppie-shopping district. Then to Roppongi, an area with a luxury complex, the Roppongi Hills, and many little bars in the other areas. Had to hurry to return to the hotel at 21h. To the railway station, took the night bus to Kyo to. Feel ill.

13.9.2007 Kyoto The bus arrives at 7am in Kyoto. Check in at the youth hostel, rent a bicycle, ride to the Kinkankujo-Temple, known for its fantastic Golden Pagoda which seems to float on the water. To the Ryoanji Temple, whose main sight is the Rock Garden, established in 1525, with specially raked gravel in-between. Visited a temple district in Taijiu. To the Imperial Palace. Impressive buildings, tight security. To the Chion-in Temple with its massive, heavy doorway, the largest in all Japan. To the Kyomizu-Temple which is swamped by tourists. It is situated on a slope on poles. Down in the valley there are three funnels with holy water (Otowa-no-taki). On a hill with a small temple, Jishu-Jinja, one has to be able to walk from one stone to another in 10m distance, to be sure of love. Visited the small Samenzaka Temple. At Ghion, I see a Geisha three times when cycling through the alleys, but I don't manage to take a photo. To the post office.

6.9.2007 Kyoto Rented a bicycle, rode to the Koshaji and the Nishi-Honganji-Temples which are just nearby. Visit the Higashi-Honganji-Temple, the world's largest wooden building. The huge hall is completely covered with a sheet-iron-scaffolding as it is under repair. Viewed the sleighs and the rope which is made from women's hair. To the ultramodern railway station, to the Tourist Information and then to the Roof Garden and the Skywalk in the roof. Bad diarrhoea and flu. I continue nevertheless, Kyoto is too exciting! To the Nijo Castle, with its beautiful Ninomaru palace where the rooms are adorned with valuable murals. To the Honmaru Buildings, the Honmaru Garden and the Seiryu-en Garden between the inner and outer wall, established in 1965. Across the river to the Konu-ji Temple, which is not open to the public. To the little impressive Ginkakuji-Temple, which makes up with a beautiful moss garden. It is raining cats and dogs, I am getting thoroughly soaked. Cycled along a canal to the picturesque Ootoyo Shrine with its rat statues, then to the Eikan-do Temple and the massive Nanzenji Temple. To the red-coloured Heian Shrine with its huge gateway.

15.9.2007 Kyoto (Nara) By S-train to Nara, to the Five-Tiered Pagoda, then to the Three-Tiered Pagoda. To the huge Nandaimon Gate and the Todaji Temple with its huge Daibatsuden Hall, also called the largest wooden building on earth (see above). Inside there is a large bronze Buddha, flanked by two smaller Buddhas and two grim Bodhisattvas. I feel terrible, my nose is running, I keep coughing, have fever and backache... but I continue nevertheless. Walk to the Nigats-do Hall, the Sangatsu-do Hall, the Kasuga Taisha Shrine with its many hundred stone lanterns, and the more modest Kasuga Wakamiya Shrine. To the New Public Hall, the Sagi-Ike-Pond, with the Ukimido Hall, the Ara-Ike Pond, around the old garden to the Sarusawa-Ike-Pond near the Five-Tiered Pagoda. Rest a bit in the sun, then to the Nara National Museum with its collection of Buddhist art. It is raining hard. Back to Kyoto, buy some medication at a pharmacy.

16.9.2007 Kyoto (Kobe) Contac is a blessing and I cannot understand that it has been forbidden in Europe! The flu is improving at once, the nose stops dripping, the cough stops. By the ultra-fast (and ultra-expensive) Shinkansen train to Kobe. Visit the Kitano area, where the European traders had their mansions: Efcharisto Orthodox Church, Ben's House, Yokan Nagaya, England House, Rhine House, Holland House, Austria House, Denmark House, Yamate 8ban Kan, Uroko-no-ie, Weather Cock House, Moegi House. Fantastic sushi for lunch. Visit the Nigashi-Yuenchi-Park with the earthquake memorial. To the Kobe City Museum, most exhibitions are closed, except the history of Western Influences in Kobe. At the Meriken Park, they still left some of the devastations of the earthquake, together with an exhibition. To the Kobe Maritime Museum, there are many ship models, amongst others a huge model of an antique men-of-war and an exhibition on the tasks of the harbour. They show a movie in 3D. To the Kawasaki Good Times World, where they show the history of Kawasaki and its activities and products. Many motorbikes, the first Shinkansen, a model railway, railway- and airplane simulators. By regular train back to Kyoto. Visited the 100-Yen-Shop.

17.9.2007 Kyoto (Osaka) By train to Osaka. The Kita area is like dead, because today is a holiday and the shops anyway only open at 11am in Osaka. Walked along expensive shops to Minami. Shopping arcades, Pachinkos (game parlours), many canals. Dysentery, but find refuge in the toilet of a commercial building. To the Amerika-Mura, where they cater for the needs of the young. By train to Ryokuchi-koen, walked to the Farmhouse Museum. Visit the rice granary from Dojima, Osaka; the house from Shinakawa, Gifu; the house from Settsu-Nose, Osaka; the Takakura granary from Amanu-Oshima, Kagoshima; the house from Akiyama, Nagano; the house from Totsukana, Nara; the Kabuki Theatre from Tokoshima, Kaguwa; the windmill from Sakai, Osaka. At the Magarya House from Nambu, Iwate, I am offered a cup of Green Tea. Visit the teahouse from Kitakawathi, Osaka; the Farm House from Tsuruga, Fukui. Get terribly lost on walking back to the railway station. Back to Kyoto. Buy black chocolate against my stomach aches. Until the night

bus to Tokyo leaves - at 22h - I chat with my roommates.

China

18.9.2007 Tokyo-Hong Kong I wake up a bit tattered, the bus arrives, walk through Tokyo's Main Station to the underground, ride to Ueno and get on the Airport Express. Arrive just in time to check in. The flight is without any problems, but although I didn't want to eat at all, I cannot resist the luscious menu. Contrary to my expectations, this causes no trouble at all. Arrive in Hong Kong, by bus to Kowloon, where I get a cheap room at a run-down guesthouse on the 11th floor of a high-rise building. Apply for the Chinese visa. Stroll through town.

19.9.2007 Hong Kong By ferry to Central, walk along the world's longest escalator to Midlevels, then along the pedestrian paths through picturesque jungle to Victoria Peak. On top there are two shopping centres. Admire the beautiful view. I admit, I ate at McDonalds (!), and took the cable-car down. To the Hong Kong Park with the big aviary, then to the 43rd floor of the Bank of China building. In the afternoon to Mong Kok, visited the various street markets.

20.9.2007 Hong Kong By ferry to Central, walked to the Sheung Wang Area, visited the street markets, there are dried lizards and innards, worms, up to the horn of the rhinoceros for sale, just about everything. Huge and cheap meal at the market. Back to Tsim Sha Tsui, collected the Chinese visa. Made a tour of the harbour, but it was not impressive, not worth the expense. By ferry back to Wanchai, visited the Convention and Exhibition Centre, then walked back Hennessy Road to Central.

21.9.2007 Hong Kong-Guangzhou Walked to the bus station, by bus to Guangzhou. The border crossing is without problems. The bus doesn't drop me at the bus station, but at a hotel in the east of Guangzhou. Tedious return by public bus, but I don't have to pay. Put up at the youth hostel, although it is frightfully expensive. Visit the Liurong Temple with the huge pagoda, the Guangxiao Temple and the not very impressive but old Five Immortals Temple. Large stores for toy wholesale in the city centre. Walk to Shamian Island, return by underground. At the hotel I meet Lewis and his wife from Malawi. He invites me for a beer, we have a lot of African experiences to exchange. His wife owns a chain of boutiques in Malawi.

22.9.2007 Guangzhou-Shenzen I just continue, where I stopped last night. By underground to Shamian Island and from there along interesting markets, where frogs and scorpions are sold, to the Temple of the Chen Clan, called "Chen Clan Academy". The only 1898 built Temple excels with its size and good condition as well with permanent exhibitions. From here to the Liuhuahu Park, consisting mainly of four lakes, then to the Yuexiu park, with a attractive hilly landscape and the famous Monument of the Five Goats, which are said to have descended from heaven and led to the founding of the city of Gouangzhou. By fast train to Shenzen, where I wait for Terrae, whom I have already met in Bangkok, but whose bus is now caught up in a traffic jam. By underground and taxi to a restaurant, where her friends and family are already waiting and we get a fabulous supper served. Afterwards, she even organises the train ticket to Nanjing and the hotel and Internet café for me!

23.9.2007 Shenzen-Nanjing Terrae picks me up shortly after eight for a breakfast tea, but this is another huge meal, again at the Seasine Restaurant! I am then shown around Shenzen by car, before I am dropped at Shenzen West Train Station. I get onto the train K26 to Nanjing. My travel companions in my compartment are very enjoyable and speak some English. We happily deplete our food stocks and chat all day long.

24.9.2007 Shenzen-Nanjing As I can only sleep sitting up (hard seat) I feel a bit awkward upon waking up. As I cannot get hold of Robi, I don't know whether he waits at the Main Station or the West Station for me. The train arrives at 14h, I drop at the West Station. Robi was indeed waiting at the Main Station. I call and Robi comes to the West Station. We are very happy about our reunion, he shows me his new restaurant "Bebbis Nanjing". I may sleep in his apartment. With Robi to a Chinese foot massage and Chinese dinner.

25.9.2007 Nanjing Get up late, by bus to the Mausoleum of Dr. Sun Yat-Sen. Visited the Mausoleum, the Sun Yat-Sen Memorial Hall, to the Linggu Pagoda, to the tomb of Tan Yankai and the one of Deng Yanda, to the Linggu Temple and the Beamless Hall. All buildings were built in the 1930s by the Kuomintang. By bus to the Ming Tomb, to the Zixi Lake and the beautiful alley adorned with stone-hewn animals. By bus to the Jiming Temple, which is very picturesque with its many beautiful buildings. To the Bell Pavilion and the Drum Tower.

26.9.2007 Nanjing-Suzhou To the Zhonghuamen Gate, a triple city gate with huge fortifications. Interesting is the hidden room for 3'000 soldiers. Along the channel to the Fuzi (Confucius) Temple. Fetched the backpack, back to Bebbis, ate Roeschti, then to the railway station and with a Shinkansen-clone to Suzhou. Long discussions with touts, they all want me to not use the bus. With the help of a local I still find a bus which takes me into the vicinity of the Youth Hostel. Check in at the Youth Hostel. Huge supper at the Yangyang Restaurant. Had to buy a new shoulder bag. While stitching up the old one, I noticed that the 65-year-old material of the other one is starting to fray everywhere.

Whenever thinking of China, most of us still have the Maoist nation of peasants and workers in mind. But getting there,

one is pretty surprised to find an ultra-modern welfare state with a tendency to Americanisation. Everywhere on the roads there are late-model cars, not the Suzuki minibuses like a couple of years ago, but large luxury cars. There are also many hyper-modern electro-bikes. The roads are excellent, with many freeways. The flats are built similar to ours, just with the difference that they come with every luxury thinkable like modern kitchen, household appliances, air condition. The public transport is well developed with buses, underground and trains. Everything is top-modern, it is usually possible to pay with touchless charge cards. There are huge and cheap supermarkets, but also appliance stores like in Japan (or Media market in Europe) and entire roads with speciality shops. Not to forget the many McDonald's, Starbucks and KFC. The prosperity of China is probably irreversibly established. This impression is confirmed by the many Chinese tourists who are generous with their money and who use the latest digital- and video cameras.

27.9.2007 Suzhou The mistakes in the bills of the Yangyang restaurant happen again: At breakfast, the invoice is wrong again. This time I complain and they very reluctantly agree to charge the correct price. To the Garden of the Master of the Nets, a Chinese garden with many buildings, something like a living area. Rented a bicycle, cycled first to the Confucius Temple, then to the Precious Belt Bridge, which has this name, because a precious belt had to be sold to cover the cost of its construction. It is said to be one of the best preserved historical bridges in China. Then to the Ruigang Pagoda and the Pan Gate, both situated in a beautiful garden. The goldfish can be summoned upon clapping hands and expect to be fed. Climbed the city wall. To the Twin Pagodas, which are already 1'000 years old and look beautiful in the evening light. I sit on a bench and eat sunflower seeds...

28.9.2007 Suzhou-Hangzhou By bicycle in direction Tiger Hill. The Shantung Road along the channel displays idyllic Chinese old city life. Quiet canals, humpback bridges, historical houses. To Tiger Hill, where I marvel at the 1'000-year-old Leaning Pagoda, several formal gardens, the musical- and artistic- and folklore performances, so that I am well entertained all day long. Back to town, bought the bus ticket. To the Xuan Miao Taoist Temple, visited the Main Temple, the Temple of the Gods of Money, the Temple of the Gods of Literature and the Avalokitesvara Hall. To the bus station, by bus to Hangzhou. In Hangzhou with a local bus to town, dropped off far too early, walked many kms into the vicinity of the Youth Hostel. Because of wrong directions I ended up at West Lake Youth Hostel, where they can only keep me for one night.

29.9.2007 Hangzhou I stroll along the lake, when I suddenly find the International Youth Hostel. Yes, they still have a dorm bed for me. I take a bus back, grab my heavy backpack and wait for a bus back, but nothing ever materialises. Eventually I decide to walk back. Visited the Qing-Temple, then huge and cheap lunch with Chinese dumplings. Walked on Su Causeway to Gu (Solitary) Hill Island. Visited the Zhejiang Provincial Museum with many historical finds, then climbed Gu Hill with its beautiful rock- and garden landscape. Walked on the dam to the "Viewing Fish at Flower Pond" garden, which I visited. Then to the Leifeng Pagoda, completed in 2002, today all steel and concrete, but the original foundations can still be seen in the basement. Adorned with beautiful three-dimensional woodcarving. To the Jingol Temple across the road, with huge and grim Bodhisattvas in the entrance hall and a massive bronze Buddha sitting on half a round sphere in the main temple.

30.9.2007 Hangzhou-Shanghai Walked to the train station, bought a ticket to Shanghai, got about the last seat available. Then took a bus around the lake. Got off far too early, but luckily I so discovered the completely ill-named Hangzhou Nursery, which is in fact a wonderful, free-of-charge park. I then got to the Vinyard Island where a bee flies into my mouth and stings my tongue, but with very little pain and swelling. I then climbed the koppie, where people were playing the Chinese violin and singing - terribly false, but with lots of fun. Good view from a rock plateau. Went to Baoda Taoist Temple, down to the lake again and visited the Stamp and Seal Museum. By bus back to town and by taxi to the railway station, where I got onto the train to Shanghai. The difficulties getting a railway ticket should have warned me. On arrival in Shanghai, I bought a railway ticket to Beijing, then I got on the underground, but it went straight through my station and stopped only on the other side of the river. I wanted to travel back, but it was impossible. No taxis either. The underground staff could not help me so I went to the bus station, took a bus to the ferry and then crossed the river by ferry. I then walked about 6km to the Youth Hostel, which was fully booked. But I may sleep on the sofa tonight. The reason for all this trouble is that China celebrates from Sept 30 the Mid-Autumn Festival, which lasts for a week and paralyses the country. Late at night I still find a room at the Hongkong Hotel, a bit pricey, but at least a place to sleep and to shower.

1.10.2007 Shanghai I cannot upload pics anymore, as my USB stick has been corrupted by a virus, nothing works anymore. The strap of my new bag breaks already. Rice and fish for breakfast, stroll on East Nanjing Road to People Square. Two Chinese girls approach me and ask me whether I wanted to join them to a tea exhibition. It turns out a tea ceremony, but fair enough, the question of the price is eventually answered: 700 RMB (100 USD). I turn the offer down. As I am going to the underground, a Chinese approaches me and asks me, whether I would have time to have a cup of coffee with him. He takes me to the most expensive coffee house, but again, he is fair enough to tell me that it will all be to my account, and I don't feel like spending 38 RMB (USD 5) for a cup of coffee (times two), whereas the gentleman quickly absconds. By underground to Lujazui, where I explore Pudong: Massive high-rises with offices. The riverside is mostly inaccessible, the remaining promenade inundated as the Huangpu River is very high. On my way back I have to ride on until People Square, as East Nanjing Road closes at 17h. Walk back through side alleys, see a

informal vegetable market, buy a new strap for my bag. Have freshly made noodle soup: Delicious.

2.10.2007 Shanghai For breakfast Chinese buns, did the Lonely Planet Bund Walk. Most buildings on the Bund are between 70 and 120 years old, built in the neo-Classistic style. Walked to the Yuyuan area in Old Town. Visited the markets. There are crowds of people, it is hardly possible to walk. The policemen get desperate as their authority wanes in the masses of humanity. Around 12 I return to the room, then I have to do something against my painful feet, so I buy a pair of air-cushioned tackies, with the hope that this helps. Back to the Yuyuan market, where I buy some small items, such as a sewing-tool, some thread, a buckle and for in case the repairs fail, a cheap belt. Repair the picture upload problem at an Internet café. By taxi to the railway station (there is no public transport from and to the Bund after 17h), the train is already “boarding” (in China a train is boarded like a plane, one waits at the gate until the train is called). It is a hyper-modern coach with all luxuries, Hard Sleeper, is probably the most comfortable sleeper coach I have ever been in.

3.10.2007 Beijing I slept very well. The train arrives 09:30 in Beijing. I first buy a ticket to Xian, unfortunately I only get Hard Seat. By underground to Dongshichitao, walked 3km to the Youth Hostel. I am not happy with my forced choice: Overpriced, unfriendly, filthy and far off any public transport. Take a shower, by bus back to town. At lunch I am cheated badly: Upon ordering “fried rice” I am served a saucer with boiled rice for the tourist price of one Dollar. As I cannot communicate, I pay and walk off. Stroll through the old city, rent a bike, do the Lonely Planet Cycling Tour: Nanchizi Daijie, the Imperial Archives are closed, along the moat and the south facade of the Forbidden City, along Dashizuo Hutong and its historical houses to Jingshan Park, where I enjoy a good view over the Forbidden City (the hill was made from the excavations of the moat). Along Gongjian Hutong to Qianhai Lake, then in Damienwai Daijie to the Drum Tower and the Bell Tower, into Maoer Hutong, then Banchang Hutong, past the Lusongyuan Hotel. To Fuxue Hutong, where I first mistake a school for the Wen Tianxiang Temple. The Temple is just about to close, but I can still take a picture. Back to Tiananmen Square, returned the bicycle, enjoyed the Tiananmen Square at night with its lasershows and lit displays, then by Bus 120 back to Chaoyang. Chaoyang is an elite area, there are no food stalls where I could buy a cheap supper.

4.10.2007 Beijing My roommates return, as I feared, at 02:30h with utmost noise. I try to get some more sleep. In the morning, I take a bus to town, walk to the Forbidden City, wait until they open at 08:30h and buy a ticket. There are hundreds of thousands of visitors. Everywhere there is a dense crowd, many of the important buildings can only be viewed for seconds from the flowing crowd. This is aggravated by the Chinese habit of taking pictures of their family in front of these buildings. In this crowd, a pickpocket empties my pockets, but luckily, there are only a few rechargeable batteries in them, I will be able to replace them in Bangkok. I enter the Forbidden City over the Golden River Bridge. Around the scaffolding of the Gate of Supreme Harmony, left to the Pavilion of Spreading Righteousness, visited the exhibitions on the left side of the Palace. The Hall of Supreme Harmony is also in scaffolding and not accessible. To the Hall of Central Harmony and the Hall of Preserving Harmony. Through the Gate of Heavenly Purity to the Palace of Heavenly Purity, the Hall of Union and the Palace of Earthly Tranquillity. Visited the Western Palatial Buildings, the Imperial Garden with the Hall of Imperial Peace and the Gate of Heavenly Unity, then the Eastern Palatial Buildings. After paying another 10 Yuan entrance fee, I was allowed into the Hall of Imperial Supremacy and the connected buildings, with their stone gardens some of the most beautiful areas of the palace. In there are exhibitions of the most valuable treasures of the Imperial family. On the way back to the Hall of Martial Valour with an exhibition of Imperial writings and paintings. In the meantime it is 17h, they close. But we, which means tens of thousands of visitors, cannot leave the Forbidden City anymore, because on the Tian-an-men Square, the Flag Ceremony has started and the police has everything cordoned off. After a long wait, the exit is eventually opened up. A rainstorm starts. To the Old City, eat a huge meal, then through the heavy rain to the bus and back to Chaoyang.

5.10.2007 Beijing It is raining cats and dogs. The bus to Simatai (the most picturesque part of the great wall) was thus cancelled. What to do with the day? I don't have the travel guide with me, thus walk to the Tourist Office, which I only find with difficulty, because a tree has completely covered the sign. The lady recommends to visit the Temple of Heaven and the Summer Palace. I gladly accept. By bus to the Temple of Heaven. I start with the imposing round Prayer for Good Harvest Hall, which unfortunately may not be entered. In the Eastern Side Hall they explain the impressive wooden construction with the help of a cut-off model. The hall was restored several times after burning down. From here to Echo Wall, which surrounds the also round Imperial Vault of Heaven. To the round altar, which is actually a round marble square. Saw the Imperial Kitchen, Music Hall and Fasting Hall (in fact a complete Citadel) only from outside, because they were closed. Walked in direction underground, had a modest lunch in a small restaurant. I got a fright when I got the bill, for the money I could have eaten in a very expensive restaurant. If only I could understand the language, they take advantage. Two hours ride by underground and bus to the Summer Palace. It consists of buildings and gardens around and on a steep hill, as well as a lake with islands and bridges. Walk over Suzhou Street (buildings alongside a canal) to the impressive Four Regions Temple in the Tibetan Style. To the Realm of Multitudinous Fragrance, passing the Tower of the Fragrance of Buddha to the Hall of Dispelling Clouds and its gate. To the Hall for Listening to Orioles, to the Marble Boat (Clear and Peaceful Boat), Bridge of Banana Plant, the Heart-Purifying Pavilion, the gate-tower of Cloud-Retaining Eaves and the Boat House. In the other direction, to the Hall of Happiness

and Longevity, the Purple Cloud Gate Tower, the Enchanted Garden of Harmonious Interests, along the Hall of Serenity to the Glazed Tile Pagoda of Many Treasures, the Shanxian Temple and in the end again to the outstanding Four Regions Temple. The rain has stopped, even the sun has come out a bit, it was beautiful, but now it is getting dark. By bus back to the underground, then again a bus, unfortunately I drop off too late and have to walk back a great distance. To the Youth Hostel, quickly fetch my luggage, buy some food stocks in a supermarket for the journey, by bus to the underground, then up to Military Museum, where I charter an electric bicycle-taxi to the railway station for a quite immodest price. Quickly eat a noodle soup and board the train. On the train, my travel companions give me all sorts of dried fruit to taste.

6.10.2007 Xian Anniversary: Today I am travelling for a year! The train arrives at 08:30 in Xian, I am a bit tormented, because in the Hard Seat there is not enough space to stretch and sleep decently. Attempt to buy a ticket to Shenzhen, but I am referred from one teller to the next, until the last refers me to an office in town. Walk with all my luggage far into town while it is raining very hard. As I have both hands tied up with luggage, I cannot use the umbrella. Soaking wet I arrive at the office, where I indeed get a ticket to Shenzhen. Thereafter I am again in the pouring rain and look for a bus to Bell Tower, but all the drivers say that they don't drive there. In the end I take a taxi, which is quite cheap. Check in at the Bell Tower Youth Hostel. Eventually a shower, clean clothes!

7.10.2007 Xian Early in the morning by bus to the railway station, with another bus to the "terracotta warriors", which are about 40km out of Xian. On top of the excavations, they have erected huge halls. I rent an audio guide, as my travel guide says little about the terracotta army. It was made more than 2'000 years ago for the first Chinese Emperor Qin Shi Huang. The halls are huge, but only the smallest part of the terracotta army has already been excavated. Part of the tombs which were covered with logs, burnt and was flooded not long after construction, causing the walls to collapse and damage the figures. The figures can only be viewed from a distance and even upon payment of 150 RMB extra for a VIP pass, one only gets 2m closer. In Hall 3 there was the "command centre" of the clay warriors, in Hall 2 there are four terracotta figures behind glass which can be viewed close-up. They are incredibly detailed, originally colourfully painted. In the museum, there are also two horse-carts at a scale 1:2 in unbelievable detail and ingeniousness. Remarkable is, that today it would not be easy to cast such filigree items in bronze. To the tomb of the Emperor Qin Shi Huang, which is about 1.5km from the warriors. It remains not impressive, as the only thing to see is a huge earthen pyramid planted with granaries, but the tomb itself has never been excavated. It is said that it is protected against tomb raiders with rivers of mercury. And indeed, an extremely high mercury contents is measured in the vicinity. By bus back to Xian. Discover, that - probably still in Beijing - my small, expensive little LED-torch was stolen from my bag. The zipper was suddenly open, the torch gone. Look in many shops for replacements, but cannot find anything. Will have to re-purchase them in Bangkok, although they were manufactured here. Write postcards and meet Ayako from Japan. We chat until midnight.

8.10.2007 Xian Buy a ticket for the city walls at the South Gate and start to walk the city walls, which are about 12m wide on top, clockwise. There is pouring rain and it is very cold. After four hours walking I am back at the South Gate. I eat a good lunch at a small restaurant and then walk to the main post office, where I post my cards. By Bus 610 in direction Big Wild Goose Pagoda, but alas, I caught it in the wrong direction and have to drop off. By chance I walk into a pharmacy the size of a large department store. Find the right bus and drop off at the Big Wild Goose Pagoda. Visit the Seven-Tiered Pagoda and the three temples behind (new, with etched copper and woodcarving ornaments), but don't climb the pagoda. Stroll a bit through town and the park, but then it gets too cold. I return to town, stroll a bit through the Muslim quarters and taste the sweets. For supper, one of those soups that are so acidic that they burn your gums, and two Chinese buns. Chat with Ellis from New York. The buns were not a good idea as I my stomach starts bubbling. By bus to the train station, the train leaves on 22:45.

9.10.2007 Xian-Shenzhen I wake up with diarrhoea. I race to the loo, but the train is in a station, the toilets locked. As the conductor sees my desperate situation, she opens one for me. No breakfast. The trains travels through rural China, where many improvements are visible, nothing appears poor anymore, everywhere they have built concrete roads and decent houses. A pity that Feng Shui is probably not observed anymore, many of the structures are ugly. The diarrhoea makes me visit the loo every now and then, not a very good thing in a train, where the toilets are by default primitive and dirty. By 14:00h, I still eat something and it holds, against all odds, but as I eat a noodle soup at 18:00h, it all starts anew, it was probably too spicy.

Thailand (Southern Thailand)

10.10.2007 Shenzhen-Hongkong-Bangkok I wake up and race to the loo, before all the rest of the coach. Is it improving? I am not sure. The train arrives in Shenzhen, but it is only 05:00 am, I have to wait for 1.5h for the Hongkong Railways to open. I speedily get through immigration, buy a ticket to Tsim Sha Tsui and get on a train. But upon consulting the map, I already drop off in Mong Kok. What a delight, a McDonald's! I put my luggage down, find a clean toilet, get something to drink and relax for a couple of minutes. Then I walk to the bus stop. The first A21 Bus ignores me. The second kicks me out again, because I don't have the exact fare. I break a bill at a nearby shop and manage to get on the

third bus. At 10am I arrive at the airport, where I shave and wash in the toilet, then check in my luggage. They promise big trouble in Bangkok, as I have no ticket back to Switzerland. This proves to be an idle threat, as I have none of those problems upon arrival in Bangkok. But another problem prevails. My stomach is running and nothing will stop it from doing so. I get back into town (from toilet to toilet), take the Public Bus which is a bit faster than the Airport Bus, thus I arrive at the Central Guesthouse around 19h.

11.10.2007 Bangkok As I wake up, the diarrhoea has become worse. By Bus No 3 to the Vachira Hospital, where they diagnose a gastro-enteritis. I am given antibiotics. To Chinatown, where I buy new batteries - 3800 mAh AA (they were of course forged, there are no 3800 mAh AA batteries yet, they had about 500 mAh!) - and a new torch. Back to Banglamphu, where I swap my China travel guide against one of Australia and sell a spare book. In the evening, I dare to eat a little bit. Buy a bus ticket to Krabi.

12.10.2007 Bangkok I dare to eat breakfast. But I am too exhausted to do anything, so I stay the day at the Resthouse and go around 17:30h to the travel agency. I board a modern bus, but the seats are uncomfortable and the air-conditioning has cooled the bus to 14°C. I still soon fall asleep.

13.10.2007 Bangkok-Ko Phi Phi We arrive at 5pm at Surat Thani, but I have to wait for 1.5h for the minibus to Krabi. Because of the cold and the uncomfortable seat, I feel like tortured and have a painful stiff neck. I am hungry and walk around the corner, where I find a stall which sells delicious Khaopia. It tastes so good that I eat two helpings. By minibus I proceed to Krabi, where we are dropped at the outskirts. The taxi to the ferry is supposed to cost 50 Baht per head, so we organise our own taxi for 20 Baht per head. Unfortunately, the ferry tickets are everywhere 350 Baht, a cheek as the same tickets are much less in Bangkok. On top of that, the ferry has just left and we have to wait until 3pm for the next one. In the meantime I have a meal at a food stall - there are some festivities nearby. After a rainy boat journey, we arrive at 5pm in Ko Phi Phi, where I find a cheap room at the "Rock" Backpackers. Eat at the market, probably not the cleanest, but food is dreadfully expensive everywhere else.

14.10.2007 Ko Phi Phi-Hat Yai Although it was raining hard during the night, it stops in the morning and I can explore the island. Ko Phi Phi is known as "James Bond Island" as one of the key scenes in an older James Bond movie was shot here. The picturesque rocks are still around. The island's infrastructure was almost completely wiped out by the Tsunami, but today only the debris which is still omnipresent, lets us remember it. Try to get to the western part of the island but cannot find the path. Probably it's already completely overgrown. I quickly find the path to the eastern part, where I climb the hill with the GSM aerial, the Top View Resthouse (which looks deserted) and a beautiful view. Climb the aerial, but cannot see more than from below. Walk to the other side until Pakman Beach and back to town. Around 13:30 I walk to the ferry, buy a ticket and after 35km boat-ride I am back in Krabi. I get a Sawntaew to the bus station, where I see the last Hat Yai bus just leaving the station. I stop it and get on. I have to stand for the first 20 min, but then some passengers drop and I have a seat. Arrive at 21h in Hat Yai, but cannot find a hotel room as everything is fully booked (probably meaning they don't take foreigners). I take a motorbike into town and put up at the Cathay Guesthouse.

Malaysia

15.10.2007 Hat Yai-Georgetown (Malaysia) The minibus to Georgetown pitches up around 09:10. Load my luggage and off we go. At the Thai border there is an enormous queue, it is the end of the Malaysian Ramadan and all the Malaysians who spent their holiday in Thailand, are flowing back to Malaysia. After passing the Thai border, the Malaysian border is quick and without formalities. The minibus is ferried to Penang Island, we arrive around 14:00 in Georgetown, where I put up at the 75 Travellers Lodge. I exchange my Thai Baht and am eventually able to eat properly. Go to an Indian restaurant and eat two helpings of curry and rice, no children's' helpings like in Southern Thailand, for only USD 0.25 per helping. Visit the Hang Jiang Ancestral Temple, whose breathtaking woodcarvings have been restored with much love and care. Get back to the Resthouse just before a tropical rainstorm starts.

16.10.2007 Georgetown Today I will do sightseeing and the weather is contributing with a blue sky! Georgetown is a nice, clean, quiet colonial city, with low houses, many businesses, less people and less stress than Thailand's megalopolises. It is situated on Penang Island, which is connected to the mainland via a ferry and a bridge. I visit: the (Chinese) Hainan-Temple, Cheong Fatt Tze Mansion, Masjid Kapitan Keling, Mahamariamman Temple, Little India (the Indian quarters), Fort Cornwallis (the English Citadel, with its ammunition chamber and the similar looking chapel), City Hall, Town Hall, Court Buildings, Convent Light Street, Cathedral of the Assumption, St. Xavier's Institution, Leong Fees Mansion, Residence of Ku Din Ku Meh, Christian Cemetary, St. Francis Xavier Church. Chicken Curry for lunch, then King Street Temples, Cheah Kongsu Temple (nearby I see a Swiss flag, obviously the coffee house belongs to a Swiss), Dr. Sun Yat Sen's Penang Base (closed), Islamic Museum (closed), Malay Mosque and the Khoo Kongsu Temple, which is not worth the high entrance fee. Strolled around Komtar Centre. Chat with two German cyclists until midnight. The mosquitoes have a go at me.

17.10.2007 Georgetown-Kuala Lumpur Today I continue to Kuala Lumpur. For breakfast some Roti in an Indian

Restaurant, a bit reading the newspaper, a bit of Internet, then I am off to Komtar bus station, fortunately my bus leaves from there, near to the hotel where I stay. I have to be there at 09:00, I am picked up at 09:20, we arrive at Butterworth (the mainland) at 10:00 and then it turns out: Not enough passengers, the other 10:00 bus is full, we are put on the 11:00 bus which leaves at 11:30. Now there is a heavy traffic build-up as everyone returns from their Hari Raya (End of Eid-ul-Fitr) holiday. The bus rides mainly through jungle, while the journey from Thailand to Georgetown was through rice paddies. It rains on and off. We get to Kuala Lumpur only at 18:00, but luckily, it is not dark yet. I put up at the homely Village Guesthouse in Chinatown.

18.10.2007 Kuala Lumpur Early in the morning I get up and ride per underground to the Petronas tower, where I wait for an hour in huge queue for one of the sought-for entrance tickets for the Skybridge on the 41st floor. Behind me are an Indian with his brother-in-law from London (originally Kenya), we have a merry chat. By 9am, we can eventually proceed and in no time we stand on the Skybridge and have a good view of the city. By underground to the Masjid Jamek (Friday Mosque), unfortunately it is not open to the public, then to Merdeka (Independence) Square and the National History Museum, where I learn a bit about the history of Malaysia and its struggle against Communist insurgents after independence. Lunch at the Central Market. From here to the old railway station, which looks like an Indian palace and the Masjid Negara, the State Mosque, which is as well not open to the public. By bus to the Batu Caves, in front of them is a huge golden statue and inside there is a Tamil-Hinduist shrine. Called Alf's brother Silvio in Perth.

19.10.2007 Kuala Lumpur-Melaka At breakfast, a wasp stings me, luckily only in my finger, as I want to swipe it off my temple. To the park, walked around it. Visited the Railway Museum of the State Railways KMT. Visited the Chan See Chin Yuen Temple (Chinese). To the monorail, travelled from Maharajalela Station to Tun Sambanthan. A rough and bumpy ride. Walked back via Dayabuni centre. Past the Mahamariamman Temple to a Chinese Temple. Tea at the Resthouse. Lunch at central market. To the bus station, by bus to Melaka. The bus arrives at 15:20, by local bus to town. Put up at the Sama-Sama Resthouse, I am quite surprised that the owner speaks Swiss German and his wife is from Zurich-Wiedikon. To town, visited the Stadthuys from outside, St. Paul's Church (originally Portuguese) with many, mostly Dutch, tombstones inside, then Porta de Santiago and the Independence Museum. To the night market, ate hot sour fish soup.

20.10.2007 Melaka Overslept. To the Stadthuys, where there is a huge, dusty exhibition of Malay customs and history, as usual with book-long explanations in 10-point typeface, which I cannot even read with glasses. Part of it is the Cheng Ho gallery (a Chinese seafarer), the Governors Museum (governor's mansion) with a 1973 Daimler in front of it and the Democratic Government Museum in the modern, but disused assembly hall. To the Sam Teow Bew Temple, Sri Poyatha Venyagar Moorthy Temple, Kampung Kling Mosque (a square house with a gabled roof), Chen Hoong Teng Temple. Duck for lunch and Cendol, a local ice speciality, for dessert. Visited the two adjacent Wall Teck Kiong and Chin San Kong Temples, the Taoist Temple and the strange Kampung Hulu Mosque. Rested a bit, then to the little interesting Navy- and Marine Museum, the Buddhist Temple and back. Waited for hours for the only public Internet computer.

Malaysia is a modern country with a large middle class. It seems to manufacture a wide variety of goods locally, also its motorcars, which are sold as Proton (mainly Mitsubishi-clones), Perodua (mainly Daihatsu-clones) and Naza (Kia-clones). As they are fully licensed, they may be exported. The price level in Malaysia is slightly above Thailand. Malaysia is much quieter than Thailand, there are hardly any touts, life seems to be much slower but also more enjoyable. The climate in Malaysia is hot and humid, which favours the growth of tropical rain forests all over the country.

Singapore

21.10.2007 Melaka-Singapore By local bus to the bus terminal, but there are no seats on the buses to Singapore anymore, they are all fully booked. I take the next bus to Johor Bahru, which still has seats open, arrive there at 13h and buy a ticket for the bus to Singapore. It is just leaving. I had to wait almost an hour in a queue at the Singapore immigration. The bus which should take me into tow, is very late. Eventually it arrives, but leaves me behind, because it is full. Upon driving off, it suddenly stops and gets three of us in, I am the last one. From Queens Street Bus Station it is just a couple of meters to Little India, where I put up at the Inns Crowd Resthouse. The sun is shining. I go to change money. Stroll through Little India, take a Metro to Clarke Quay. Walk on Hill Street north, visit the Armenian Church, to Fort Canning Park, past the Methodist Church and the National Museum to Bencoolen Street with its many shopping malls. Back to Little India. Take part in the Resthouse's Night Walk, I get some Indian snacks, a garland and some incense. We visit the markets and the Sri Veeramakaliamman Temple.

22.10.2007 Singapore I walk to the Raffles Hotel, which I visit so early in the morning that nobody takes notice of me. Thus I walk the empty corridors. Come past two churches, one of them was converted to a restaurant complex, Chijmes. Walk to Chinatown, visit the Chulia Mosque, the Sri Mariamman Hindu Temple and the Buddha Tooth Relict Temple. There I am rapped because I light all the incense sticks I got yesterday - they only want me to light a few. Typically

Singapore! Walk past residential areas with huge, identical blocks of flats to the harbour front, where I get some information about the ferries to Indonesia. By Metro back to Chinatown, where I eat an excellent rice soup. To Orchard Street, the main business street of Singapore, which is lined with shopping complexes. Incredible, considering the high price level! I treat myself to an ice cream. Walk back to Little India, where I visit the Sim Lim Electronics Shopping Mall. Exchange my Singapore Dollars into Indonesia Rupees. Supper at the nearby food mall. Meet an Indian, Alex, who tailors suits for Swiss companies. Go in time to bed, but sleep is impossible. Two Asian ladies unpack their suitcase noisily (in the dormitory at 23:00h) and have nothing better to do than discussing in a loud voice and repacking the crackling plastic bags for a full hour. Then the other inhabitants of the dormitory start coming in, each and everyone without any consideration for the others.

Indonesia

23.10.2007 Singapore-Dumai I wake up at 05:30, pack (I should have made as much noise as the others have, but I abstain from that), take the Metro to the harbour front and the first ferry (Asian Raider II) to Batam. There I get the most incompetent immigration officer thinkable, he keeps trying to read my passport with his scanner, but to no avail. It takes 20 minutes until he has keyed in all my data with the one-finger-system. I run with all my ultra-heavy luggage to the Domestic Terminal, but of course the ferry to Pekanbaru has just left. As the ferry to Dumai is just about to leave and there is a bus from Dumai to Pekanbaru, I have 2 seconds time to think about it and make - as usual - the wrong decision: I get on. That was stupid, because the trip to Dumai is not only very expensive, 20 USD, but also very long. We cruise along the Straits of Malacca in-between Sumatra on the left and Indonesian islands on the right. We arrive in Dumai at 15:00h and I am instantly taken up by a tout who offers to take me to a minibus to Bukittinggi. I agree and he takes me first to an ATM machine, so I can draw the money for the bus, because my Singaporean funds have been used up for the ferry. I get onto a battered old, locally built Mitsubishi E300. The windows are covered with sunshade foil which is so scratched that one cannot see a thing. There are only 9 seats and they are very spacious with lots of leg space. As I am the only passengers on the rear row, I can lie down and sleep. For the first two or three hours, the two hyperactive little sons of the Indonesian woman in the front row, Hafiz and Chodry, make a racket, but it dies down with dusk. Around 20h we stop at a roadhouse and I want a small meal. But Nasi Goreng is out, and I get, as a substitute, rice, gravy and a small piece of liver. When it comes to paying, they charge me the same as for a full meal, more than double than agreed. Once again, I am told that I was so wealthy, that a Dollar more should not be a problem for me. This really makes me angry and I insist until they accept the initially agreed upon amount, whereas I have to extort the change bill for bill from him.

24.10.2007 Bukittinggi We only arrive at 3am in Bukittinggi, but it takes another half an hour to find the Hotel Asean. I don't put up there though (since they were mentioned in the Lonely Planet, they have doubled their prices) and I go to the nearby Orchid Hotel. There they are very friendly and let me sleep the remaining two hours in the hotel lobby (free of charge), even give me a free breakfast. Then I leave my luggage there and start exploring. First I go to town and to the Clock Tower, then to the Fort de Kock (only a water reservoir) and the attached zoo: Sad orang-utans in terrible cages, two obese bears, many empty cages, even one with a expired mouse in it and an exhibition of moth-eaten stuffed animals. Interesting is the Traditional House situated in the middle of the zoo, the exhibition inside is a collection of curiosities, with models of houses and traditional dresses, money bills from all over the world, stuffed calves with two heads and six legs etc, where even the cockroaches have bored themselves to death and lie now upside down in the showcase. Wonderful view over the cloudy Bukittinggi. Walk through the market, try Sate. To the Japanese caverns of the Second World War and the Panorama Park, which offers a beautiful view over the eroded river valley. Watched the monkeys playing. Back to the hotel, moved into the room. Excellent and cheap lunch. Minibus to the bus station. It takes an hour until the bus to Danau Maninjau is eventually loaded up and leaves. I have to pay the tourist price of 10'000 Rupees, the other passengers 6'000. The difference goes into the pocket of the conductor. It would not have happened, would I have had the right change in my pocket, but he refuses to hand me my change. In the bus the bass boom-booms are audibly beyond the pain barrier, but fortunately I sit next to the door and can put my fingers in my ears. Whoever sits in front will certainly get a serious hearing disability after a two hour's ride. Now I understand why so many Indonesians speak so loud. The drive to Lake Maninjau is spectacular and beautiful, but arriving at the bottom, it looks like any other lake. After a short while I want to return to Bukittinggi. A local informs me that the bus ticket back would be 15'000 to 20'000 rupees. A tourist racket indeed. For this kind of money I can afford a minibus, although everyone tells me that it does not exist around here. I don't have to wait long at the road when a red Toyota (Toyota are called Timor actually...) stops and takes me along. The driver has a comfortable and fast way of driving. I enjoy again the panorama and am back in Bukittinggi within the hour, half as long as the drive out. Buy two rechargeable batteries for the camera, as the ones bought in Bangkok turned out to be dysfunctional fakes.

25.10.2007 Bukittinggi I get up late, meet Chuan from Korea (now Singapore) at breakfast. Had Lon Tong afterwards. Minibus to the bus station, wait for the bus to Batu Sangkar. In the meantime, I go to the nearby market and chat with a fishmonger. As the bus leaves, I get on. We arrive at Batu Sangkar, after a 40km journey, around 12am. As I just want to go to a restaurant, a motorbike driver asks me whether he could take me to Pagaruyung. This is ideal, I skip lunch, fix a

price and off we go. After a short drive we arrive in Pagaruyung. But from the Royal Palace, which caught fire in February, there is only a video left. The palace was burnt to ashes, nothing remained. We visit other buildings belonging to the Royal family and other wealthy people and of similar beauty. Back to Batu Sangkar, where I quickly find a bus back to Bukittinggi. But it takes almost two hours until I arrive there. I have late lunch now. Stroll around town, find a vintage De Soto Diplomat and may even look at its engine. Chat with a bun salesman. Beautiful sunset. Want to see the traditional dances, but the performance is cancelled due to lack of audience. All the better: I watch them rehearsing and may even play the Talempong (like a gong-xylophone).

26.10.2007 Bukittinggi-Padang Early in the morning I get up, take a minibus to the bus station and look for the bus to Padang. Everyone says "ANS" but nobody tells me, where. So I have some hearty breakfast and then ask the sentry. He gesticulates to a place outside the bus station. I walk there and indeed, there is a minibus to Padang. I jump on. The ride goes along a disused rack and pinion railway line. We arrive in Padang at 9am, but the driver gesticulates to stay, so I don't get off and he drops me at a motorbike-taxi. That's why I was not to drop! Now I have no choice and have to hire it and it takes me to the Hotel Sriwajaya. I check in and go to town for sightseeing: The park, the "Matahari" Market with its thousands of clothes sales stalls, the Pantai Padang Beach, the Tourist Office, the Taman Budaya Cultural Centre, which is closed because of the lack of audience, the Adityawarman Museum, but the guards are at the Mosque, I am to try again at 14h. To the Sitti Nurbaya bridge, watched the domestic port underneath. Back to the market, after a long search I found toothpaste at a pharmacy and ate Gado-Gado (potatoes, noodles, chillies in sweet peanut sauce), back to the Sitti Nurbaya Bridge, then to the Museum (built in the Minangkabau style) which is now open and visited the interesting but dusty exhibition of Minangkabau folklore. By minibus to the commercial port of Teluk Bayur, chat with the pretty English language student Rini. Was allowed to enter the port, watched how tyres and coals were loaded. Back to town. The minibus driver counts his money, while he is steering blindly through the chaotic rush-hour traffic.

27.10.2007 Padang-Jakarta Early in the morning I get up, eat quickly a Lon Tong and start looking for an airport bus. A local bus takes me halfway, then I change to the Damri bus, but I get quite a fright when I discover that the short distance costs 15'000 Rp, more than a taxi. The flight is delayed, we wait for 30 minutes in queue at the departure gate. In Jakarta I have to again get onto an expensive Damri bus and a motorbike to the hotel. Visit the Monas (national monument) and buy a train ticket to Yogyakarta. Try to buy an airticket to Australia, but without success: The first travel agency only does international flights in the morning, the second one does not find an available seat, the third one is closed for the weekend and fourth one can make a booking but cannot ticket it! They send me to a fifth travel agency, which can issue tickets, but are so incompetent, that I lose the firm booking of the fourth travel agency in the process, because they cannot take it over. Now I have no flight. At night the mosquitoes, which enter the room through the cut-up mosquito screens, sting me all over.

28.10.2007 Jakarta-Yogyakarta It must be difficult to like Jakarta, it is one of the most terrible cities I ever visited. A Moloch, ugly, full of uncompleted constructions, rubbish and stinking canals filled with putrid junk. The traffic is brutal, car- and bike-avalanches rolling through the roads. I try to get to Kota (historic Batavia), buy a train ticket. I am told Platform 2. After an hour's waiting, I return to the ticket counter and ask what is happening. Today there is no train. Why did they sell me a ticket then? Run to the bus, ride up to Harmoni. Upon changing buses, I follow the sign "Kota". Wrong again, there are two kotas in Jakarta. The bus does not stop at the next stop and I have to walk back a far way to another stop and pay again. All in all I lose two hours. There is little left of former Batavia, a few houses, in-between terrible new buildings which are empty already and whose windows are broken. The canal is dirty and stinks. The Cafe Batavia is closed. To the harbour of Sunda Kelapa, there is Dhau after Dhau, probably taking cargo to the islands and back. Walk to Glodok, but it is just as barren, dirty and built up. On my way back I get exactly to my destination, because I know now how the system works. I go back to the travel agency who tries to push a price increase to USD 395.00 for a ticket for the 7.11. (The problem with flights from Indonesia is, that they are not on the Internet, except for Air Asia). I stay firm. They start getting cross. I insist they try to find a sooner and cheaper flight. They propose a flight on the 4th for USD 350.00. I accept. They start issuing the bill. Then they convert the whole amount in Rupiah and ask me to sign this off with my credit card. I quickly work it out and find out, that they loaded the exchange rate by 8%, e.g. 30 USD more. I then propose to pay USD cash. The lady at the cash till refuses my money point blank. She claims it is soiled and has become void. I produce some brand new USD bills, without the slightest stain. Now she gets really cross and tells me to leave the travel agency and the lady who was serving me to cancel my booking. I was either to go to a bank and exchange sufficient Indonesian Rupiah and pay in Rupiah cash or the deal would be off. Then she says something about ticketing at the airport. I quickly pick that up. I convinced the lady who was serving me not to cancel my booking and to give me the booking number (why did the lady of the 4th travel agency yesterday not suggest the airport?). I take a motorbike taxi to the Damri Bus Station and take the Airport Bus. At the airport I bust into Quantas' office just before they were about to close for the day. I was to go downstairs to some office. I search and search but cannot find the office. I return to Quantas, they are still around and take me to an office labelled "Airport Services". I get the ticket without any hassles - for USD 323 instead of 385. I get on the bus back to town, my train is leaving in two hours and I have found out that I left my shoes at the guesthouse. Jump off the Damri bus near the guesthouse, walk there and pick up my shoes. Walk to the train station (which is actually very close, knowing the shortcuts), have a hearty supper, and board the train to Yogyakarta. The air-conditioning cools it down to 14°C, I am freezing. The thin woollen

blanket doesn't help. The train leaves late and has no sleepers, just reclining seats.

29.10.2007 Yogyakarta I wake up at 04:30, but the train is still far from Yogyakarta. I am freezing with cold. We arrive at 06:30 in Yogyakarta. I walk to the backpacker alley, where I immediately find cheap and good accommodation at the Anda Losmen. First I buy the tickets for the onward journey and the sights of Yogyakarta which I want to visit tomorrow. Now off to town. The Kraton is not yet open (aftermath of the Ramadan...), so I first visit the former Dutch Citadel, the Benteng Vredeburg. As the museum is closed, I am allowed to visit the place for free. Then to the nearby Pasar Beringharjo (market). Now it is 9am, I go back to the Kraton (Rulers Palace), but I am disappointed: There are only two beamed halls to see, utterly uninteresting. I walk around the area and there is indeed another entry. This time, the entrance fee is absurdly high, but as I am inside, there are a few more uninteresting beamed halls and an exhibition of personal items of the Sultan, such as clothes, crockery, uniforms, diplomas. On my way to the Water Palace (Taman Sari) I have, of course, to attend the making of buffalo leather string puppets, as they hope that I purchase some. First I climb to the ruins of the palace on the koppie and walk through an impressive tunnel to the entrance of the Water Palace. The Water Palace consists mainly of three swimming pools, which are now empty, and the surrounding buildings. But the huge portals are overwhelming, although they have been secured with steel racks since the last earth quake. To the Bird Market, where there are, apart from pigeons, also bats (for traditional medicine), hedgehogs, monkeys, iguanas, geckos, guinea pigs, rabbits and snakes for sale. Excellent lunch in a small restaurant. From here to the Carriages Museum of the Sultan, what a surprise, the lowest entrance fee gives me the most joy. Wonderful carriages in excellent condition, although all dusty. Upon walking back, a thunderstorm starts. I don't manage back to the hotel before it starts raining, but I have an umbrella. In the evening I want to eat from a food stall. As I ask for the price and get the answer 7'000 Rupiahs, a lady must have picked up my accent and answers in Swiss German "Its only one Franc". I eat and want to pay, but now I am to pay 17'000 Rupiahs, considerably more than in a restaurant. The Swiss lady cannot understand my consternation and says "then I will pay the difference", whereas I am put in a corner, cannot discuss the price and have to pay the full amount. I am fuming.

30.10.2007 Yogyakarta At 5am the tour bus calls and we ride to Borobudur, where we arrive at sunrise. Borobudur is a 9th Century Buddhist Temple in the shape of a pyramid with 9 levels. The bas-reliefs of the second level are the best, from 6. to 9. Level, there are pierced stupas with a Buddha statue inside each. After two hours we return to Yogyakarta, then we ride to Prabanan. The Hindu Prabanan-Temples (the largest are the Brahma-, Shiva- and Vishnu Temples, also 9th Century) are very well preserved, but not accessible, there is a fence. The Temples of Condi Lumbung are ruined, with four remaining small temples. Only the base is left of Condi Bubrah. Condi Sewu, also a Buddhist Temple with three domes, had to be reinforced with steel scaffolding. In a square around it are 28 small temples, and around them 44 small temples. The remainder is almost entirely ruined and only a few small temples remain. In the afternoon tropical rain storm, I get soaking wet, despite my umbrella. Eat Nasi Goreng and afterwards the local dish Gudag. Try to book my flights via Internet, but the connection is far too slow.

31.10.2007 Yogyakarta-Bromo Got up at 4am, walked to the Internet café. Now the connection is sufficiently fast to book my flights from Brisbane to Christchurch and from Auckland to Buenos Aires. I can either drop off in Santiago or stay on until Buenos Aires. Ate two helpings of Boerjo for breakfast. Watch a man with a monkey on a small motorbike. He jerks the monkey brutally with a chain around the monkey's neck, so the monkey can sit onto the motorbike and ride it, because the motorbike has no engine. At 9am the minibus to Bromo arrives. The other passengers are two Dutch girls and a Flemish couple. The ride takes us almost entirely through densely populated areas. Expensive and lousy lunch. Get into a huge traffic congestion because of a metal workers' demonstration in Surabaya. Stop in Probolinggo, continue to the Yoschi Hotel in Ngadisari, where I get a nice room with bath.

1.11.2007 Bromo-Denpasar Today I will climb the Bromo volcano. I am woken up at 03:10 and start walking towards Mount Bromo. I am the only one who does it on foot, the others have hired a jeep. It is dark and cold. At the travel office they said one hour to the top, but after an hour forced marching I am still in the village. After another hour I get to a gate, where I am supposed to pay 25'000 Rupiahs entrance fee. I manage to bargain it down to 10'000. I continue walking fast, because I want to be on top when the sun is rising. There is dense fog. As the white posts end at a vulcano, I suppose that it is Mount Bromo and start, to climb the steep and slippery volcano-ash slope in direct line to the top. I have to hold onto grasses and bushes in order not to tumble backwards. As the sun rises, I am still on the slope. Then I smell a strong sulphuric odour. At 05:30 sharp I am on top. The rim is broad, everywhere lavastone, charred trees and volcanic ash. My clothes are black with it. After half an hour I have to return. I find a better path and am back after 20 minutes. Now the fog has lifted and I see that the Bromo is left of it. I climbed the Batok! Although I am completely exhausted, I climb Mount Bromo, which is not difficult, there is even a flight of stairs onto the rim. There I get a good view into the still smoking crater. Then I have to walk back. I walk as fast as I can, because I am expected at 08am at the hotel. For a short stretch, a Landcruiser gives me a lift. At 8 sharp I am back at the hotel and get a lousy breakfast of coffee and two slices of toast. Then I can eventually shower off the volcanic ash, which is everywhere on my body. The minibus to Probolinggo only leaves at 10am, but there is no ongoing bus there. We are told, it might leave at 12. I explore the area and eat Makasi with tea and cookies in a small restaurant. The bus appears at 13h, but has to return to the depot after a short while. We thus lose a lot of time. Eventually, we get on our way to Denpasar. Along the railway

line, there are well-kept gardens, obviously of private people and societies who can in turn erect a sign with their name. Good idea! We ride along a picturesque coast, past a coal power station and through a huge forest in mono-culture and whose trees are without leaves. The ferry to Gilimanuk takes only half an hour. The narrow and winding road to Denpasar leads through jungle and villages and is packed with heavily loaded lorries, which just about make walking speed. At 11h local time (Bali is an hour ahead of Java) we arrive at the Ubung Bus Terminal, from where I have to charter a Bemo to the Hotel Adi Yasa, where they fortunately have a room available.

2.11.2007 Denpasar Boerjo for breakfast. Walk to the Tourist Office, where lack of English and complete incompetence make any further inquiries fruitless. Then I visit Jayanatha Temple, whose centre consists of a stele. Like all temples in Bali, it is built from bricks and volcanic stone. To the Pasar Bandung, where there is a humdrum on five storeys. On top they sell penises carved from wood... To the Pura Des Lan Puseh Temple, where I am not admitted, because I first had to buy my own sash - in Bali it is required to wear a sash in the temples, but usually this is provided by the temple. To the Measpahit temple, which is an island of peace in the noisy city centre. By Bemo to the Ubung Bus terminal, want to get to Tanah Lot. But cannot strike a deal with the Bemo or the Moto, so I board the bus to Kediri. The beaten-up bus is terribly hot inside. After half an hour they announce another half an hour's delay, so I decide to opt for the more expensive Moto. The motorbike taxi takes me to Tanah Lot, but the most impressive about this temple is the entrance fee. The temple is located on a volcanic rock in the sea. I waded to the rock, have to wash face and hands with holy water and drink thrice from it, then I was getting blessed and had to pay. But the temple is not open to the public. The view from the terrace of the restaurant revealed, though, that there was nothing exciting inside. Try Klipon, green sweet stuff, before getting back. To the Internet café, but they are offline. They let me type my diary though. To town to search for a Internet café that is online, find a cheap, fast and well-equipped one. To burn my DVD, I have to get my own blank DVD. Buy one at a photo shop, return to the Internet café, but the DVD is faulty. Supper at the night market.

Nowhere in South East Asia is the gap between poor and rich so obvious as in Indonesia. There is a middle class and boisterous shopping centres with prices like in Europe and expensive brand makes. With money, one can buy almost everything here. The informal economy resembles Africa's, small and mobile sales stalls, a completely different price level. The two systems have hardly any interfaces. Buying fruit in the supermarket, one pays European prices. Buying them at the market, one pays Asian prices. Eating at a food stall, one pays usually a quarter or less of what it would cost in a formal restaurant. It appears, however, that a uncontrolled population growth has increased the informal sector to such an extent, that it often just represents hidden unemployment. Another aggravating factor for the Indonesian economy is the absence of efficient transport. Trains are inefficient, slow and expensive, usually just one track. Lorries waste much time and fuel, because outside Jakarta there are hardly any freeways and the entire journey is through built-up areas. Questionable from the environmental point of view is the formation of a multitude of domestic airlines, because of the poor overland transportation.

3.11.2007 Denpasar I exchange the faulty blank DVD against a good one. Back to the Internet café, burn the chip on DVD. To the post office, where I get a fright learning that the letter will cost 104'200 Rupiah, all my remaining money. To the Palace of Pemekutan, where there are animal cages all over - cockatoos, toucans, monkeys, even a Doberman dog. I am invited to tea by its inhabitants. It is raining hard now. Explore the area and am invited into a palatial home, where I am again offered tea. Chat with the 73-year-old patron, a former taxi driver who is now suffering from diabetes. To the Palace of Satria, where I am invited by a friendly gentleman to sit down and chat with him. A second gentleman joins him, and it turns out that the first gentleman is the King of Denpasar, the second gentleman is Mr. Fanggiday, a film producer. I then walk to the bird market, where there are many different pets for sale, but the monkeys on their far too short chains are very sad to watch. Behind there is the Royal Temple, a wonderful temple, by far the most elaborate in Denpasar. All made of bricks without mortar, with dishes and teacups fitted neatly in as ornaments. Meet the Polish guy who lives in the room next door to mine. My money is almost finished, but the owner of the Resthouse has pity on me and exchanges three USD against Rupiahs. Part of this wealth I immediately exchange against cake and water. To the Internet café, then I eat a excellent Soto at a food stall in the street and walk to the Bemo station. It is 20h in the meantime, there are no more Bemos running. I have to charter one, but at a very attractive rate of 15'000 Rupiah. Get to the airport. Feel diarrhoea starting. Upon checking in, I discover, that the departure tax has been raised from 100'000 to 150'000 Rupiahs, so I have to exchange another 4 USD, this time at a dismal rate. I manage to get a small bottle of mineral water for the remaining 4'000 Rupiahs, instead of the tag price of 5'000 Rupiahs.

Australia

4.11.2007 Denpasar-Perth Departure 0:20h. They serve a supper. The diarrhoea makes me suffer. Next to me is a Breton farmer, with whom I chat a bit before falling asleep. As I wake up, the plane is landing in Perth. It is 5am. At customs I am questioned and searched for half an hour. But I should urgently see a loo! Try to get hold of Silvio, but no avail. Lose my small agenda, search all over the terminal and find it on a bench. Try again to reach Silvio to no avail. Take the bus into town, to Globe Backpackers. To the Red Bull Air Show, but the pylon race is dead boring. Stroll through town, then City Walk: Trinity Church Shopping Arcade, London Court Shopping Arcade (1930), Perth Town Hall (1880), St. George's Cathedral (1888), The Deanery (1859), Perth Fire Station, St. Mary's Cathedral, Perth Mint

(1899), Perth Concert Hall (modern), Government House (1864), Old Court House (1829), Supreme Court Gardens (1897), The Weld Club (1891), Allan Green Conservatory (modern), Old Perth Boys School (1854), The Cloisters (1859), His Majesty's Theatre (1904), Barracks Arch (1860). Meet Mark, who has just cycled down from Katherine. Get hold of Silvio.

5.11.2007 Perth (Fremantle) By train to Fremantle. Visited the Fremantle Motor Museum of WA. Fine collection of rare cars and motorbikes, such as the first Benz (replica), Goggomobil, small Subaru and many Harley Davidsons. To the Round House (1831), originally a prison, on Arthur Head. Walked through the tunnel underneath. To the WA Maritime Museum Shipwreck Galleries, meet a Swiss lady who works there. To the fishing boat harbour. The Fremantle Markets are unfortunately closed. To the Fremantle Prison, but did not do a tour. To the Fremantle Arts Centre and History Museum, which are located in a historic building, originally a lunatic asylum. By train back to Perth. To the Internet. Silvio fetches me at the railway station. I may stay with them. Lasagne for supper.

6.11.2007 Perth Silvio's wife takes me by car to the Caversham Wildlife Park. There they have almost all endemic animals. The kangaroos, koalas and wombats may be touched, the kangaroos may actually be hand fed. By bus to the city centre. Booked the entire onwards journey up to Brisbane at the "Travellers Club". By bus back to Helena Valley. Take family picture with Silvio, Chris and the kids (see above).

7.11.2007 Perth-Alice Springs Visit of Chris' parents, Owen and Barbara. Chris takes me to the airport. Tedious self-check-in. Flight to Alice Springs. See Ayers Rock from above. Put up at Haven Backpackers. Buy two huge steaks for supper. Long chat with Irene from Bueren/LU.

8.11.2007 Alice Springs-Uluru Got up 04:30, packed my things. At 06:00 all the other tours are gone, only I am left. The reception calls. They were looking for me at the YHA, instead at the Haven. I get the seat next to the driver. As I fall asleep, he threatens to seat me in the back row. We drive to Kings Canyon. Hike about three hours through Kings Canyon, seeing Garden of Eden, waterhole, waterfall. Camp at Curtin Springs, light a fire. Sleep in "swags", bivouac bags.

9.11.2007 Uluru We drive to Kata Tjuta, where we hike around the Olgas. Lunch at Yulara Camp. In the afternoon to Ayers Rock, which has, viewed close-up, many cavities and consists of soft, layered sandstone. To the Aboriginal Cultural Centre. Want to see the sunset, but the sky clouds up and it starts raining, so that we cannot see anything. But there is a pink window around the Olgas. Sleep at Yulara camp.

10.11.2007 Uluru-Alice Springs Got up at 5am, watched the sun rising behind Ayers Rock. The weather has improved a lot. Breakfast with sunrise in the background. Hike around Ayers Rock. To the airport, then in direction Alice Springs. The sun is shining. Visited a camel farm, but I don't want to ride a camel. Arrive around 17h back in Alice Springs. Check in at Haven Backpackers. Watch the sunset from a hill in town.

11.11.2007 Alice Springs-Adelaide Hike through the dry Finke River, then to the Old Timers Village. The museum is closed, but I can nevertheless take pictures of the steam engine and the steam winch. Walk to the desert park, Solly gives me a lift with his Landcruiser for the last couple of kilometres. The desert park is very interesting, one learns a lot about the fauna and flora in the desert. Upon leaving I meet Solly again, who gives me a lift halfway into town. At the hostel they offer a lift to the railway station. As we open the trailer at the station, my water canister drops and bursts. Check in my luggage and get on the Ghan train. Have a long chat with my neighbour. The coaches are spacious and comfortable.

12.11.2007 Adelaide To my left is a boy, whose aunt has a toddler, which she keeps carrying through the entire train, although it could walk on its own. Consequently, the child starts crying. At 12:40h we arrive in Adelaide. I take a bus to Central Bus Station where I put my luggage in a locker. Then I stroll through town. 19h I meet my host, Matt, in front of the Exeter Hotel. He is a medical doctor by profession and has a beautiful, spacious flat.

13.11. 2007 Adelaide Today I shall fast in order to gain control over my gastro-enteritis. By bus to Hahndorf, a German settlement founded in 1839. There are still many captions in German, some houses are still built in "Fachwerk" style. It is very touristic though. It is beautifully situated in the green hills. Do the historic city walk and hike to the "cottage" (quite big for a cottage) of Hans Heysen, who was an excellent, very renowned artist, in Australia. The entrance fee is too high for me and I have seen his paintings in the museum in town, so I just view his cottage from outside. Then by bus to Mount Lofty Outlook, where there is a wonderful view on Adelaide. Hike around the summit, take the bus back to Adelaide and board the tram to Glenelg, the exclusive beach suburb of the rich and beautiful. Visit the Bay Discovery Centre. Back to Adelaide.

14.11.2007 Adelaide Visit the National Car Museum in Birdwood. Officially they say that there is no public transport there. I take a O-Bahn Bus to Tea Tree Plaza. O-Bahn is a German system which allows buses to run on a concrete track and be controlled by a simple mechanical steering device. From there I find the Bus 801 after an hour's wait, but it doesn't go all the way to Birdwood. After a short consultation with his superiors, the driver tells me that he will take me to Birdwood. It turns out that he was previously an automobile designer for Leyland Australia. Unfortunately, he lost his

job when Leyland went out of business. The interior design of the Leyland 76 was partially done by him. The Car Museum is fantastic. There is a steam car, a multitude of Australian-made cars such as Holden, Ford and Leyland, and wonderful motorbikes (see above the first car to cross Australia South to North). I get the 15:25 bus back, shop some groceries at Tea Tree Plaza and return to town. There I prepare a big supper for my host.

15.11.2007 Adelaide To the Tandanya Centre for Aboriginal art. To the Internet, updated the VSD homepage. Back to the Tandanya centre, attended a didgeridoo concert. Actually it is a Yuniki. The didgeridoo is explained, the meaning of the play and how a didgeridoo is made, is explained in a humorous way. In the afternoon by bus in direction Semaphore. As the bus gets stuck at a broken red robot for half an hour, I drop off and walk to Port Adelaide, where I visit the Heritage section and the Aviation Museum. Interesting display with an Avro without body panels and cut-off models. But hardly worth the high entrance fee. Back to Matt, said goodbye. To the bus terminal. The bus to Melbourne leaves at 20h. I will drop off in Stawell.

16.11.2007 Stawell-Halls Gap The bus arrives at 3am in Stawell. I drop off and pitch the tent behind a disused petrol station. At 06:30 I roll up my tent and walk to the Halls Gap turnoff to try hitchhiking a lift. One police car after the next races past me with siren and flashing lights. I suppose that an accident happened on that road. Eventually a bakkie stops and gives me a lift. The driver is a local and knows a detour around the accident site, which has been closed for traffic in the meantime. I arrive shortly after 8.00 in Halls Gap, where I put up at Tims Place. After a refreshing shower and shave, I walk into town to buy water and bread for the day. I get quite a fright when the 600cl bottles are 3 to 4 Dollars. Start a big hike: Venus Baths, Wonderland Car Park, Pinnacle. Then Chatauqua Peak and Clematis Falls, where I spot a Wallaby. On my way back, a large Wallaby is so engrossed in eating, that it does not spot me. Only when I start talking, it skips off. The cicadas are so loud, that it almost hurts in my ears. Everywhere there are empty cicada shells, they have recently shed their old skins. Watched the kangaroos feeding at the cricket field. I can approach them up to 5 meters. Long chat with the two couples who run the Resthouse while Tim is away.

17.11.2007 Halls Gap-Stawell Lift to Lake Bellfield (which is almost empty), then to Brambuk centre. The exhibition of Aboriginal Art is closed. Walk back to the Resthouse, where I chat with Darryl and John. Darryl is offering a lift to Stawell - the Ridges and Ballaghs spoil me with food and kindness, they even wash my clothes! Walk to Clematis Falls and Chatauqua Peak, via Bullaces Glen back to Halls Gap, see two blue-tongue lizards. With Darryl to Stawell at 16h. He takes me to a cricket match where I am introduced to his brother-in-law Robert. Robert, who owns the BP petrol station in Stawell, was once in the Australian National Team, he is an excellent cricket player and explains some of the rules to me. I may sleep at his place until the bus picks me up at 3am, he insists - in the guest room - not in the tent. In the meantime, he shows me around Stawell and takes me along to a braai of his cricket club, where I get ample to eat and drink. At 22h I go to sleep.

18.11.2007 Stawell-Melbourne My alarm wakes me at 2am and I pack my belongings. Then I walk to the BP station. The bus arrives 10 minutes late. I jump on and we arrive at 6am in Melbourne. Only at the third youth hostel, the Flinders Station Hotel, I find a dorm bed. In the morning there is heavy rain (a blessing for the parched region), so I have a hearty breakfast and then visit the Immigration Museum. In the afternoon, the rain subsides and makes place for ample sunshine. I first ride around the CBD with the historic tramway, then I do the Historic City Walk of East Melbourne. Wonderful English-style houses of the 1850s in mint condition. In a garage I see a vintage Rolls-Royce and chat with the owner.

19.11.2007 Melbourne Did City Walk No 2 (Secret Gardens) in the morning: Queen Victoria Gardens, King George V Memorial, Shrine of Remembrance (monument for the Australians who died in the various wars, offers fine views over the CBD), Botanical Garden (a jewel with free entrance!), met the elderly Austrian couple from Halls Gap, Henny and Peter, Pioneer Women's' Memorial Garden, Sidney Myer Music Bowl, Alexandre Gardens. Did Walk No 4 (Arcades and Lanes) in the afternoon: Degaves Street, Centre Place, Block Arcade, Royal Arcade (the oldest shopping-arcade of Melbourne), Bourke Street Mall, Little Bourke Street, Niagara Lane, Hardware Lane, Howey Place, Manchester Lane, Scott Alley. Then Walk No. 3 (Waterfront): Banana Alley, Enterprize Park, Aquarium, Batman (sic!) Park (but there is no runway for the Batmobile, only a heliport), Spencer Bridge, South Wharf, gazed at the Polly Woodside, a 19th Century Clipper, walked around Melbourne Exhibition Centre, Yarra Promenade, back across Rainbow Bridge.

20.11.2007 Melbourne To the State Library, checked my emails, bought a second-hand travel guide of New Zealand in a bookshop. Walk to Olympic area and the Botanic Garden. Prepared my further travels at the State Library. Cooked nice rice for supper. Chatted with a South Korean girl. Walked to the bus terminal, got on the bus at 21h.

21.11.2007 Canberra The seats in the bus were very uncomfortable, I wake up with headache. The bus arrives at 7am in Canberra. There are no luggage lockers, I have to leave the luggage at the YHA, which I fail to find in the first attempt. To the Old Parliament, attend a guided tour. Use their Internet for free. To the overwhelming New Parliament, again a free tour of the building. I am so tired, I doze away a couple of times during the tour. To the National Archive, where there is again free Internet. Back to town, where I meet Roseanne, my couch-surfing host for the night. By bus to their suburb, where I am shown into a very posh and clean room and even get supper. Try to rid her computer from Adware. Roseanne's employer calls and orders her to Melbourne for tomorrow, so I will have to find another place to stay.

22.11.2007 Canberra Early in the morning by bus to town. Have to find a new place to stay. The YHA is extremely expensive, so I first try the Civic Pub, which is closed. The City Walk Hotel has in the meantime gone out of business. There is no alternative to the expensive YHA. For 28 Dollars they don't even offer breakfast or Internet. I check in reluctantly and walk in the drizzle to the Australian War Memorial. A breathtaking war museum. I take part in a guided tour and spend the afternoon exploring the museum with its many historical planes such as ME 109, ME 262, Avro Lancaster, De Havilland Mosquito, Supermarine Spitfire, Kittyhawk, Mustang and many more. When I am in the Boer War section, I am asked to leave because they close at five. I would not have gone on my own accord! Take part in the closing ceremony (with a bagpiper) and walk in the pouring rain back to the hostel. I am drenched by the time I arrive, despite the umbrella. Went shopping at Aldi, but get a fright at the ridiculous high prices. Quickly have quickly supper and go to bed, where I keep waking up because of the TV in the room.

23.11.2007 Canberra-Sydney Get up early, but as I want to return to my dorm, only in my briefs, the battery of the electronic card reader in the door is flat and I cannot re-enter. I have to stand outside shivering and knocking at the door until a rather upset occupant opens for me. Buy some cookies for breakfast, get on the bus to Sydney which leaves 09h. Arrive in Sydney at 12:30. Try to find a cheap dorm room, but only the 4th backpacker place has some. So I put up at the Chinese-run Oasis Backpackers. Ride by train to the Circular Quay (ferry harbour). View the famous Opera House and stroll through "the Rock" (historical harbour city). Walk across the massive bridge and back. Walk in the Royal Botanic Gardens. Shop for groceries and cook green curry for supper.

24.11.2007 Sydney Walked with Linjie, a Chinese girl from Hangzhou, in pouring rain to Darling Harbour. There are many interesting museum vessels here: A submarine, a frigate, a clipper and a lightship, but in the pouring rain they lose their contours a bit. By ferry to the Circular Quay, actually more a harbour cruise! To the Opera House. The guided tour is frightfully expensive, so we explore the Opera House by ourselves. It is interesting to note that the roof is made of white and beige ceramic tiles, yet it appears white from far. Take part in a guided tour of the Government House (built 1845 in the neo-gothic style). As it rains very hard, we decide not to visit the Botanic Garden. As Linjie has to go to the railway station, we separate. I stroll through the shopping arcades of the city centre. Buy some pasta at Woolworths, but hell, they were obviously contaminated and I get diarrhoea. Walk across Darling Harbour Bridge, where the monorail passes overhead. Walk to the Museum of Sydney, where they have an exhibition of the historic prints of a Swiss collector, Beat Knoblauch. Back to Oasis Backpackers, where I prepare rice for my damaged stomach.

25.11.2007 Sydney-Katoomba/Blue Mountains Already at 7am, I walk to the station and buy a railway ticket to Katoomba. The train arrives shortly before 10am. I put up in a nice and clean room (in contrast to the one in Sydney) at "No 14 Budget Accommodation". Go walking: Through Katoomba to Echo Point, saw the "3 Sisters", then walked to the "3 Sisters", descended the steep Giant Stairway to Dardanelles Pass and Federal Pass, to the Scenic Park and the remainders of the former coal mining village. Climbed the Furber Steps in heavy rain and as the only visitor far and wide. Visited Juliet's Balcony, Victoria Lookout, Vanimans Lookout. Went shopping, back to the Resthouse. Walked in the drizzle to Cliff Drive, then on Henry Cliff Walk in direction Leura, visiting Bridal Veil Falls and Leura Cascades. Returned to the Resthouse via the road.

26.11.2007 Katoomba Started at 8am to walk the Prince Henry Cliff Walk in direction Wentworth. Difficult climbing in the Valley of Waters, but magnificent view on the waterfalls. Walked along a pretty decrepit, overgrown and partially sliding-off path to Wentworth Pass and then to the overwhelming Wentworth Fall. Ascent to the cliff and then the village via steep steel stairs. By train back to Katoomba.

27.11.2007 Katoomba-Newcastle Travelled by 08:25 train in direction Sydney. Have to change trains in Strathfield, but the train arrives 5 minutes late, so I have to wait for an hour for the next train. In the train from Strathfield to Newcastle I meet Ken, an ex-policeman and software entrepreneur. We have a great time. In Newcastle I put up at the YHA. Explored town, walked to Beaufort Street in Hamilton. Had to hurry to be back in time for the free pub supper at 18h. Afterwards a trivia game, with PowerPoint Q&As.

28.11.2007 Newcastle Explored Nobby's Peninsula, then hiked along the coast appr. 10 km to Whitebridge. I see the coal in the coastal cliffs, remainders of the former steam train and walk along the picturesque Glenrock Lagoon. Via the Fernleigh track to the Westfield shopping mall, where I get a bus back to town. Did the Historical City Walk - many buildings from 1870 to 1936 - and visited Christchurch Cathedral. Then walked again up to the library and back along the quay. There is pizza buffet at 18:30. I can only eat 11 pieces, then they run out of pizza. The battery charger, an important piece of equipment, kicks up with a spark.

29.11.2007 Newcastle-Port Macquarie Strolled through Newcastle until the bus leaves. The bus to Port Macquarie leaves at 09:35. As we arrive there, a minibus of Ozzie Pozzie Backpackers is already waiting. I check in and walk to the Koala Hospital. Joined the 15:00 guided tour. Then visited Roto House, but they are just about to close. Back to the Resthouse, a flu is coming on.

30.11.2007 Port Macquarie I did the Historic and Wetlands Walk: Historic Courthouse, St. Thomas Anglican Church, St. Agnes Catholic Church, Wesleyan Chapel, Historic Cemetery Gardens, Kooloonbung Nature Park along

Kooloonbung Creek, see a couple of water dragons (big aquatic lizards). Back to Town Green, walk to the Tasman Sea coast, along Charlie Uptin Walk on Town Beach, Flagstaff Hill, Oxley Beach, Doctors Walk to Windmill Hill, back along Pacific Drive. Bought lunch at a supermarket and ate it at the seashore. Walked back to the Resthouse. Still feel very sick. My shoes are about to break up, have to buy new ones.

1.12.2007 Port Macquarie-Coffs Harbour Bought new boots. To the library for Internet. Read magazines. The Greyhound arrives at 13:30. It stops for half an hour in Macksville and we arrive at 16:45 in Coffs Harbour. I put up at Hoey Moey Backpackers, where they are busy installing bands and laser shows. Bad prospects for a quiet night. I walk to the island where I watch the sun setting. Upon walking back I almost step on a huge snake on the pavement. It does not move, so I can take a picture. The noise at the Resthouse is not as bad as feared.

2.12.2007 Coffs Harbour-Byron Bay Woke up early in the morning because of the noise of the last partygoers. Walked to Coffs Creek. Did the Habitat Walk and visited the Botanical Garden. The palm rain forest was impressive. Walked back, made lunch from food scraps. Walked to the Big Banana. The skywalk is open but the entire place seems abandoned and dilapidated. Back to the Resthouse. As nobody is in at 16h, I enquire at the bar and somebody pitches up and gives me a lift to the bus station. Late at night I arrive in Byron Bay, where I put up at the Belongil Beachhouse.

3.12.2007 Byron Bay Try without success to change the departure time of the bus. Walk to town, do my shopping. Make lunch, then walk to the lighthouse and the most easterly point of Australia. See a marine tortoise. Watch TV, chat for a long time with a French-Algerian.

4.12.2007 Byron Bay-Brisbane I go shopping and change the departure time of the bus by phone to 13h. Spend the morning reading. My lunch doesn't get ready on time so I have to pack my things at 12:15h in a rush and pour the lunch in a jam jar to take it along. The minibus is broken and we are taken by a private car to the bus station, where we arrive shortly before 13h. All this rush was - of course - completely unnecessary, because the bus is 40 minutes late! We arrive 16:30 in Brisbane, but there it is only 15:30, because there is a time difference of an hour to NSW. It is very convenient that I can book Airport Bus and hostel directly at the bus terminal. The minibus takes me to Brisbane Backpackers. After a long walk to the groceries shop I prepare supper and go early to bed. The room is extremely dirty.

5.12.2007 Brisbane Do the Brisbane Walking Tour: Brisbane Arcade, King George Square (under construction), City Hall, Albert St Uniting Church (closed), Wickham Terrace and Leichhardt Street (early settlements), Birley Street, Wickham Park, the Windmill (without propeller), Jacob's Ladder (stairs), People's Palace, Shrine of Remembrance (war memorial), Anzac Square (another war memorial), Post Office Square and Brisbane GPO, St. Stephen Cathedral and Chapel (where I get a personal guided tour), Queens Gardens (where I eat the lunch I just bought), Harris Terrace, The Mansions, The Queensland Club, The Parliament House (where I am again the only participant in a guided tour), Botanical Garden (where I take part in another guided tour), Queensland University of Technology, Old Government House (under renovation), across the Goodwill Bridge, Maritime Museum (which I visit, including the steam Man-of-War "Diamantina"), Queensland Performing Arts Centre, Old Victoria Bridge Pier. Then to the State Library for free Internet access.

6.12.2007 Brisbane By bus to Mount Coot-Tha. The weather is overcast, but I have nevertheless a good view over Brisbane. Hiked to the Aboriginal Art in the forest and to the Botanical Garden, return by bus. Tried in vain to find a replacement for the defective battery charger. To the Queensland Museum which offers an interesting display of vehicles, animals, Queensland products and Aborigines. See the largest cockroaches on earth, about 5cm long, in a live display. To the library for Internet.

New Zealand

7.12.2007 Brisbane-Christchurch (New Zealand) Get up at 3am, breakfast, the bus arrives at 4am. I am far too early at the airport. Check in my luggage. Sleep and read, then into the plane. Flight to New Zealand, as it is Jetstar, without food or drinks. The weather is good, but I only see the sea below. After landing in Christchurch, I am singled out as a high risk and have to wait in a special queue. I am questioned and my luggage is painstakingly searched. They find some pollen on my tent's groundsheet, which are removed (!!). The drug test shows, to my horror, strong traces of cocaine on my South African passport. Some hotel receptionist to whom I handed my passport, must have used or traded the stuff. Nevertheless I am in the end allowed to pass. By bus to town and put up at Cokers Backpackers (what irony!).

8.12.2007 Christchurch Stroll at 8am through town, everything is still closed. Buy a new battery charger, but it is expensive. Start the Historical Town Walk: Bridge of Remembrance (WWI monument, 1921), St. Michael's and All Angels Church (1872), Antigua Street Boatsheds (1882), Arts Centre (1876-79), Canterbury Museum (1870-77) with partially focussed exhibits like Christchurch 1900, Antarctica, Maori, animals and some wildly combined exhibits, Christ's College (1928), Cranmer Centre (1881), Cranmer Courts (1870), Victoria Clock Tower (1897), Durham Street Methodist Church (1864), Provincial Council Buildings (1858-65) which I also saw from inside, City O-Tautahi (1887), Canterbury Club (1872-73), Library Chambers (1875-1923), Shand's Emporium, the oldest wooden building in town

(1860), Fisher's Building (1881). Around Cathedral Square: Regent's Building (1905), Former Chief Post Office (1879), Christ Church Cathedral (1860-1904), former Government Building (1911), Press Building (1909). Then Trinity Church, which is now a night-club (1874), Christchurch Club (1862), New Regent Street (1932), Theatre Royal (1907-8), Former AJ White's Department Store (1878-1910) and the magnificent Cathedral of the Blessed Sacrament (1905). Back to the Hotel, then visit the Botanical Garden.

9.12.2007 Christchurch-Oamaru To the Botanical Garden. Then to the travel agency to buy a bus ticket. I am treated so sloppily, that I go to the next Internet café and buy the ticket online. Back to the Resthouse, where I made an appointment to meet Lilly, with whom I was travelling in Thailand and Laos. We drive to her daughter and her son, both already on their own, then to Oamaru. Her husband, Simon takes me to watch the Hoiho-penguins. I see two at the beach, and see how they greet each other, chattering away. We walk to an artificial nest, where two penguins are inside. But we are "caught" by a (probably unofficial) guardian who takes down Simon's name, probably without any further consequences. Later on, we drive to the harbour, where we watch the small blue penguins close-up. They are everywhere near the old grain store and we can go so close, that it would be no problem to lift them up. Which I don't do, of course. Try in vain, to find Lilly's photos, which were deleted by a virus. Go to sleep late.

10.12.2007 Oamaru-Queenstown I explore Oamaru. First to the Botanical Garden, where I chat for a long time with Adrian, the gardener. Then explored the town. Quickly to the Museum, then back to Simon and Lilly's house in Eden Street. Lilly takes me to the bus. After 4.5h drive through beautiful, rainy mountains, we arrive in Queenstown where I put up at the Black Sheep Backpackers. My boots have a big hole, which cannot be fixed.

Given the modern technical infrastructure of New Zealand, it is quite surprising that on Lake Wakatipu such a fantastically beautiful steamer as the "Earnslaw" has been preserved. This could easily have been different as once in the 60s, there were plans to scrap the ship. Private initiative has saved it from this fate. Today, the ship which was named after Mount Earnslaw at the head of Lake Wakatipu, is a magnificent piece of ship and travelling with it is undoubtedly the highlight of any visit to New Zealand. The "TSS (Twin Screw Steamer) Earnslaw" was designed by Hugh McRae from Dunedin and built by J. McGregor & Co. in Dunedin (for New Zealand Railways) and transported in sections by rail to Kingston, where she was re-assembled. The 346.8-ton vessel consists of a steel body with a Kauri wood deck. The cost amounted to 20,850 pounds. On 24. December 1912 the vessel was launched, the maiden voyage took place on 18. December 1912. It was primarily used as a supply ship for the lakeside farms. As streets were built around the lake, its significance dropped and by 1969 the ship was bought by Fjord Country Travel Ltd.

The "Earnslaw" is powered by two 250PS triple-expansion, double-acting steam engines. She has two injection condensators. The two locomotive (!) boilers are of the fire tube type, with two fire doors and a working pressure of 11.2 bar and a Worthington feed-water pump. The coal consumption is one tonne per hour at full steam, 14.2t can be taken on board. The length of the vessel is 50.6m, the width 7.3m and the draft 2.1m. The maximum speed is an astonishing 20.4 km/h. Originally built for 1'035 passengers, it was made a little more comfortable, so that today only 500 passengers can be taken. The cargo capacity is 100t/1500 Sheep/200 bales of wool/70 cows. The crew consists of a captain, two sailors, one engineer and two heaters.

The engine room is accessible for passengers via two grid bridges. It may also be viewed from the salon, as it is open at the top. The journey from Queenstown takes us past bald, partly wooded slopes with clouds hanging low like glued-on balls of cotton wool. It is drizzling, like most of the time in New Zealand. Destination is Walter Peak, where some passengers will spend a few hours at the farm. When they disembarked, we returned to Queenstown. Despite the drizzle, the landscape is breathtaking. The steam engine stomps almost noiseless and reliably. This is romantic steam!

11.12.2007 Queenstown-Te Anau Hiked to the beautifully restored One Mile Power Station (1912, 60Kw), walked the One Mile Track to the former dam. Roundtrip with the TSS Earnslaw. A great steamship in mint condition, still with its original coal-heated boilers. May visit the engine room and the bridge. The landscape on the shore consists of naked mountains and occasionally some forest in-between. Clouds are hanging deep on the mountainsides. It is raining a bit. Back to the hotel, to the bus terminal. The bus takes me to Te Anau, where I want to put up at Rosies Backpackers, but they are full. Thus I put up at Lakeside Backpackers. After supper to the jetty, where I buy a tour to the Glow Worm Caves. By boat between picturesque islands, in the pouring rain, to the Glow Worm Caves. Through the entrance via Tomo (hunched) to Cathedral, Waterfall, Whirlpool and Corridor to the boat jetty. From there in complete darkness by boat through the Glow Worm Caves. the glow worms (they are really worms) shine like small blue LEDs from the walls of the cave. The hungrier they are, the more they shine.

12.12.2007 Te Anau Started 08:30, to hike on the Kepler Trail to Luxmore Hut. Officially the hike there takes 7h from Te Anau, but I will try to return today. It is raining cats and dogs. I walk through an enchanted forest: Moss, ferns and fallen trees everywhere, lichen, further up they are even hanging from the branches of the trees. To my greatest surprise, I arrive at Luxmore Hut already at 1pm and can eat my lunch in the dry of the hut. Chat with the caretaker. Walk to the Luxmore Caves. With my torch I climb into the cave, creep through the only 50cm high narrows and get into another cave. After about 200m it gets too low. I return, my fingers stiff from the cold. Start the descent. After another four hours and a total of 38km, I return pretty exhausted to Te Anau.

13.12.2007 Te Anau-Milford Sound The bus to Milford Sound leaves at 10h. We stop in diverse picturesque places, the Mirror Lakes, the Tunnel Entrance and the Chasm, where the water has dug big holes from the sandstone rocks. In Milford I have to wait until 4pm, until my boat, the Milford Wanderer, leaves. I walk to the view platform. The sun is shining. Eventually I can board my boat and stow my backpack in the cabin. The Milford Sound is extremely impressive. There are waterfalls everywhere because of the recent rains. The mountainsides are barren, steep rocks. Below there is sometimes a bit of rain forest. We see seals and small penguins. At the entrance to the Fjord, kayaks are floated and we may use them for about two hours. I have never done it before, but it is fun. But the sand-flies are a nuisance, they keep stinging me, sometimes I kill 10 in one stroke. Then we see dolphins, how they jump out of the water and sometimes, just to puzzle us, land on their backs. As dawn approaches, we ride into the Milford Sound and anchor near the Underwater Laboratory. We get a huge supper, I get three helpings. Chat a long time with Alex from Dnjepetrovsk.

14.12.2007 Milford Sound-Queenstown After a hearty breakfast we watch some more penguins, seals and dolphins. It is raining cats and dogs. The Milford Sound looks all different, there are even more waterfalls and the fog is hanging low on the mountainsides. Despite the rain, it is beautiful. The boat gets so close to the waterfalls, that the fore-deck is in the spray. I get soaking wet, but staying inside is not an option. We arrive back in Milford at 09:30h. I have to wait for more than 5 hours until I get a bus (the damned Flexipass...). Arrive in Queenstown 19h, where I put up again at the Black Sheep.

15.12.2007 Queenstown-Franz Josef The bus leaves at 8am. It is not raining today. We stop at various picturesque sites and arrive at 16h in Franz Josef (yes, named after the Austrian Emperor!). I put up at Chateau Franz Backpackers and book a glacier trip for tomorrow. Walk to the Franz Josef-Glacier, climb Sentinel Rock and walk to the scenic view point.

16.12.2007 Franz Josef There is a deluge of rain. I am getting glacier equipment including crampons. By bus to the scenic view point. In pouring rain we walk 2.7km in the riverbed to the glacier. The water comes up to our ankles. At the foot of the glacier we put on the crampons. Then we start the ascent. The guide, Sally, keeps cutting new steps into the ice. We climb up to the "waterfall", then a bit criss-cross through the glacier. The ice is deep blue. I am not particularly cold, but wet. We start the descent at 15h. The rain increases. The glacier stream has increased in the meantime so much, that we manage to cross it once with difficulty, but then have to climb with the help of ropes through steep rainforest in order to avoid the river. The next passage also has to be bypassed, this time we climb a rock with the help of ladders, pass through two waterfalls, which does not make us drier, and steep down again. In the meantime, the river has changed its bed, we see the scenic view point, but cannot get there anymore. The guides radio in for helicopters to evacuate us. We are 34 people, so the helicopters keep landing and taking passengers, as they can only take 5 passengers a time. I get on the fourth flight. The flight is short, we land at the parking area. Back to Franz Josef, where I have to tumble-dry all my clothes. My camera didn't make it, though, it caught water and started to malfunction.

17.12.2007 Franz Josef-Greymouth It is still raining hard, as I walk to the bus. Rode in direction Greymouth. We stop at the Possum Burger Restaurant. In Greymouth, I put up at "Noah's Ark". Heavy rainstorms.

18.12.2007 Greymouth-Nelson Do the King Domain Walk on soggy paths, unused for years. Beautiful view over Greymouth, Cobden and Grey Valley. Walk to Blaketown. Suddenly diarrhoea, but I find a loo just in time. To the South Breakwater Pier, which leads far into the sea and had railway tracks once upon a time. The sun appears. To Anzac Park, did the Kowhai Bush Walk. The bus to Nelson leaves at 13:30. In Nelson, I put up at the Club Nelson Backpackers.

19.12.2007 Nelson The hostel bus takes me to the bus terminal, where I get on the bus to Marahau. In Marahau I have to discover, that Kiwi Water-taxis do not exist anymore and I have to book the far more expensive Abel Tasman Water-taxi to Bark Bay. From there, I stroll to Torrent Bay, exploring every branch of the trail. It drizzles at times, but no heavy rain. Take hours around Torrent Bay, keep seeing Ballon Rock at the bay entrance from all different angles. Walk the long path to Anchorage. When I return to the main path, I suddenly discover that it is already 4pm. The bus leaves at 5pm and I am still 10km from Marahau! I start running, and indeed, I get back in 50 minutes. I am totally exhausted. But the bus is late! I could have walked slowly...

20.12.2007 Nelson-Picton The bus leaves at 08:15 to Nelson. There is a bit of sunshine. We arrive in Picton 10:30h. I put up at Picton Lodge. Hike to Queen Charlotte View. Book for a day tour tomorrow on Queen Charlotte Track.

21.12.2007 Picton At 9am a small boat takes me to Torea Bay. It is cold and there is a drizzle. I have diarrhoea and stomach pains. But the hike is beautiful. Between Torea and Lochmara Bay I climb a lookout and eat my sandwiches. To Mistletoe Bay, shortly afterwards I meet an English couple and their guide Adriana. We chat and arrive after a short while in Anakiwa, where I have to wait a long time for my delayed boat. In the meantime we have bright sunshine.

22.12.2007 Picton-Wellington I get up at 4am. Walk to the harbour. The ferry is much delayed, we only leave at 7am. Chat with Craig and Vanessa from White River in South Africa. The weather is good, even the sun is shining, but it is freezing cold. In Wellington I walk to Beethoven Backpackers. There is a ting of dagga in the air as several people are smoking it, and a terrible disorder. Do half of the City to Sea Trail: Botanical Garden, Cable Car Museum, Victoria

University, parks. In the evening braai at the home of the brother of Sam, the hostel's manager. I leave early, I am very tired.

23.12.2007 Wellington Today I will do the Old Shoreline Heritage Trail: From the Oriental Parade over Courtenay Place, Cuba Street, Civic Square, Willis Street to Lambton Quay. At 11am I am just in time for the tour of the Parliament House. The Beehive, a incredibly ugly building, houses mainly offices and infrastructure for the Parliamentarians. The Old Parliament Building which is built from masonry was recently made earthquake proof with considerable effort.. The Senate was done away with in the 1950s and there is only one chamber since then, but they use the German system in order to give small parties some participation. Walked back, bought some cake at the supermarket for lunch. To the Te Papa museum, a huge, modern building, where I learn a lot about Maori culture, but also about the introduced harmful animals (possums, deer, feral cats etc.). The sun is shining so that I walk along the pier to the railway station and back. Bought food supply to last over the Xmas holidays.

24.12.2007 Wellington-Turangi The bus to Turangi leaves at 8am. The bus driver does his administrative work while driving, in the meantime the bus is swerving over both lanes... After a while he is stopped and gets a fine for riding at 102 instead of 100kph. They are extremely petty here. We arrive in Turangi at 13:30, where I put up at the Club Habitat YHA.

25.12.2007 Turangi It is raining cats and dogs. I am at the office of Extreme Backpackers at 7am, but the Tongariro Crossing is cancelled because of the bad weather. Chat a long time with Mr. Cullen, the owner, about vintage cars - he owns a beautiful Triumph TR2. Sleep for the rest of the morning. Meet a Swiss couple from Romanshorn. We chat all afternoon. As the rain subsides a bit, I take a long walk. I get soaking wet.

26.12.2007 Turangi-Taupo Once more I am at the office of Extreme Backpackers at 7am, but the crossing is again cancelled, the weather has got from bad to worse, although the sun is shining down here. Thus no Tongariro Crossing for me. I will try to hitchhike to Taupo. After a short while I get a lift by a family, who drop me at the I-Site in Taupo. Put up at Burkes Backpackers. Sunshine and rainstorms in short succession. Cold.

27.12.2007 Taupo-Rotorua Beautiful sunshine. Hiked the Great Lake Walkway: Waipahiki, Rainbow Point up to Wharewaka. A little bit further, then back. To the hairdresser. Chatted with Rudi from Croatia. Wanted to catch the 14:10 bus, but it leaves only towards 3pm. Arrive around 4pm in Rotorua, where I put up at Central Backpackers: friendly and cheap. Walk to Kuirau Park, where there are many hot- and mud-springs. Then to the Maori township Ohinemutu and along the lakeshore to Sulphur Point and Rocky Point, where there are many picturesque hot water- and mud springs. Prepared a big supper, got a free beer at the "Pig and Whistle" pub.

28.12.2007 Rotorua To the Te Puia Maori Cultural Centre. Audio-video exhibition about Maori deities and weapons. At 9am guided tour, we learn about the gods, are led to the Pohutu- and Prince of Wales Feather Geyser and to the Kiwi Bird House. Then to a concert, where we get to know the traditional greeting, song and Haka war dance. Make a tour of my own: Kiwi House, where the birds are hardly visible in the dark, geysers, hot mud springs, Lake Waikaukau, schools of weaving and carving. Back to the hostel, then to the hot springs on the lakeshore (Rocky Point), Government Gardens and the Rotorua Museum, which is about the history of the building as therapeutic spa, Maori culture, NZ music and design and Maori regiments in WW2.

29.12.2007 Rotorua-Auckland By 08:30 bus to Auckland. Arrive at 12:30 at the Skycenter. Walk to the Fat Camel Hostel. Check in. Prepare lunch. Walk to the Tourist Information and the supermarket. Do the Downtown Heritage Walk. As it is Saturday night, there are drunken youths everywhere and they make a helluva commotion.

30.12.2007 Auckland Do the Midtown Heritage Walk. Beautiful sunshine. Then the Uptown Heritage Walk. Many impressive buildings from the turn of the Century to the 1920s. Back to the hostel, prepare lunch. In the afternoon to the Maritime Museum, which exhibits a small steam engine, the magnificent steam crane Rapaki and the steam launch Puke (which is hopefully not a description of the passenger's activities at sea). Stay for so long, that the security guard has to fetch me at 18:20h, or I would have stayed there all night long.

31.12.2007 Auckland To the post office, fetched my poste restante (new sim card). Changed the hostel, find a much cheaper, better, friendlier hostel. Wash the sleeping bag. Got to the magnificent Auckland Museum. On the top floor there is a Zero and a Spitfire WW2 aeroplane. Do the remaining laundry. Chatted till New Year with the residents of the Resthouse.

Chile

1.1.2008 Auckland-Santiago de Chile Chatted with the owner of the Resthouse. Again to Auckland Museum. To the Kathmandu Outdoor Shop, bought very expensive shoes, as the ones bought in Taupo make my foot pains even worse. To the hostel, picked up my backpack, by bus to the airport. In the bus I meet Rudi again, whom I met already in Taupo. No problem checking in on a one-way ticket. The flight takes off at 17:25 and is uneventful. At 12:30, 5 hours before we left, we arrive in Santiago de Chile. I take a minibus into town (it gets terribly lost, but fixed fare), where I put up at

the Hotel Tabita, which is right in the CBD. The city is like dead. Nothing is open. I do the Lonely Planet City Walk: National library, Centro Santa Lucia, Palacio de Bellas Artes, Plaza de Armes, Ex-Congreso Nacional, Tribunales de Justicia, Placa de la Constitucion and Palacio de Moneda (which is open to the public but you are only allowed to walk one way, not even a step backwards) and Stock Exchange. I find a Burger King that is open (!) and have supper, then back to the hostel and to sleep.

2.1.2008 Santiago Lousy breakfast, then to town, did some shopping: Soap, washing powder, water, cookies, a plug for the charger. Explored the Central Market. To the Parque Metropolitano and by cable-car to the Cerro San Cristobal. Up there is a lovely view of town and a statue of the Holy Virgin of the Immaculate Conception. To the Museum of Pre-Columbian Art and its special exhibition “Morir para Gobernar: Sex y poder en la sociedad moche”.

3.1.2008 Santiago-Valparaiso Got up late, to the bus terminal, bus to Valparaiso. The “Turbus” is modern and comfortable. I arrive towards noon and follow a tout to the Hospedaje Brasil. I put up there and then start sightseeing: Avenida Pedro Montt, Plaza Victoria, Plaza Anibal Pinto, Reloj Turri (Clock Tower), Plaza Sobremayor with the Ex-Intendencia and the Sailors’ Memorial. On Ave. Castillo I am stopped by a local and advised not to venture any further, as it was too dangerous. Did a tour of the port. Saw a FBW (Franz Brozincevic Wetzikon) trolley bus from Wetzikon, where I grew up. Walked eastwards to the market, shopping centre (with Jumbo and Easy shops) and to Cierro Baron. To Muelle Baron, the cruiser jetty. Strolled through town to Plaza O’Higgins, Parque Italia.

4.1.2008 Valparaiso Bought Empanada, then walked through Los Placeres and Cerro Baron. Lunch at the market. Bought bus ticket to Puerto Montt. Through the impoverished barrios Cerro Los Lecheros, Cerro Larrain, Cerro Recreo Rodriguez and Cerro Polanco to Calle Argentina and past the Congreso Nacional. In a garage I see two Ford Model A cars. As I go closer, the owner asks me whether I wanted a ride around the block. I gladly accept and we ride in a 1930 Ford Model A to a tyre shop and back. Then to Cerro las Canas, Cerro del Litre, Cerro La Cruz, Cerro Mariposa and Cerro Florida. Get lost, then suddenly find myself at the Museo San Sebastian. Via Cerro Bellavista to the Plaza Victoria. Back to the hostel, where Alex has in the meantime arrived from Santiago. We have supper together.

5.1.2008 Valparaiso-Puerto Montt By bus to Vina del Mar. Dropped at the Plaza Sucre. Plaza Vergara, Ave. Valparaiso (main shopping district). The city is modern and mundane, in complete contrast to Valparaiso. No destitute townships are visible. Walked to the Castillo Wulff (a successful German immigrant who built a castle on the beach) and the Cape Ducal hotel (in the shape of a ocean steamer). To the Casino, then had lunch in a Chinese restaurant. Back to Ave Valparaiso, listened to street musicians. By bus back to Valparaiso. Walked to Cerro Artilleria, the viewing platform, then to Iglesia Matriz (Church of the Holy Mother). Back to the hostel. The weather is freezing cold in the morning, thereafter hot, but as soon as the breeze blows, it turns to freezing cold temperatures again. Got aboard the bus to Puerto Montt. We stop in San Bernardino. Then over excellent freeways through the Chilean dusk, seeing the Andes in the twilight.

6.1.2008 Puerto Montt Early in the morning we arrive in Puerto Montt. The owner of a hostel, Germano, offers his rooms and we accept. Back to the bus station, where we book our sightseeing. Quickly bought some breakfast and marvelled at two steam engines which are on the main town square. To the tour bus to Petrohue, first stop is Puerto Varas, on Lago Llanquihue, the third biggest lake in South America. We skip the overpriced lunch in Ensenada and have a walk at the lakeshore. But we are pestered by huge flies and have to seek refuge in the restaurant. From there to the Parque Nacional Viñeta Perez Rosales, where we visit the Laguna Verde, a volcano crater filled with water. To the Lago Todos los Santos, where we have a boat ride. The summits of the volcanoes Osorno and Calbuco are covered in snow. To the Saltos del Rio Petrohue, waterfalls on a background of volcanoes. Back to Puerto Montt, quickly had some Cazuela and returned to the hostel.

7.1.2008 Puerto Montt By bus to Paragua, where we get on a ferry to Chiloe island. The people of Chiloe are said to be particularly pious, industrious and keen to learn, but also particularly superstitious. We stop in Ancud, visit the Fuerte San Antonio, where the Spaniards fought their last battle against the Chileans, and the Local Museum. Had a long chat with an old man who is building model ships. It is freezing cold and it rains. On to Castro, where we have a big meal and I marvel at three steam engines nearby the hotel. Visited the Iglesia San Francisco, built in 1912 entirely from wood and inside a bit skew. Walk to Palafitas Mirador Gamboa from where we not only see the raised houses (Palafitas) but also a wharf for wooden vessels. On to Dalcahue, a village opposite Achao Island. We can see buses and lorries riding around on the island. Back to Ancud, crossed over to the mainland. At supper, I make a huge mistake: Because the menu (and price) is advertised outside, I don’t ask for the price and of course we are asked for triple the amount. It may only be four Dollars, but I simply cannot afford such a screw-up again.

8.1.2008 Puerto Montt-Punta Arenas We are taken to town by car. Internet. The bus leaves at 11h. We stop in Osorno. The bus takes us through the green and forested Andes on the Chilean side. It is raining hard. The Argentinean immigration formalities are surprisingly unbureaucratic. Our luggage gets locked and secured with a seal. The bus, a not-so-new Brazilian “Marco Polo”, is extraordinarily comfortable, the seats as well as the suspension. The sun comes out. We are given sandwiches for lunch, for supper we stop at an Argentinian roadhouse. Now I am glad that I exchanged some Argentinian Pesos in Puerto Montt. We continue, they show three current American movies, while

outside the Andes in the sunset makes a breathtaking panorama. There is no more forest, only green hills and steep, snow-covered mountains. I soon fall asleep.

9.1.2008 Puerto Montt-Punta Arenas The landscape is only pampa now, actually a desert with some grass. Sometimes we see sheep, llamas or Nandus. Shortly after Chilean border post we stop at a restaurant, where we get a late lunch, mountains of meat. We arrive in Punta Arenas, thanks to our comfortable vehicle in quite good condition, despite the long journey. We are taken to the Hostal Maria Isabel I, where we get a dorm bed. We then go to town, do some shopping and get a bearing of town.

10.1.2008 Punta Arenas To the tourist information at the Plaza Munoz Gamero, then strolled down Calle Bories with its many shops. There is nothing, that would not be available here, and even not more expensive than in Santiago! In a shop for work clothing, I buy a rain poncho for the hike the day after tomorrow in the Torres del Payne National Park. We visit the historical cemetery, with many English and Croatian graves. Bought a bus ticket for tomorrow to Puerto Natales. Had lunch at a small eatery. By shared taxi to the Museo del Recuerdo. I would never have thought to find one of the world's finest collection of steam engines at the end of the world! There are many fantastic steam engines, steam tractors, steam lorries. On top of that horse-carts, three cars - a Martini (yebo, the Swiss car!), Ford Model T and a Peugeot - as well as four historic houses, two of them formerly owned by Swiss, a Mr. Neracher and a Mr. Baeriswyl from Fribourg. The houses have been furnished like they were during the pioneer times around 1875. Thereafter we go to the hypermarkets across the road (it is hard to believe that everything is readily and cheaply available here!) and buy food for a pretty luxurious supper and the hike. By colectivo back to town.

11.1.2008 Punta Arenas-Puerto Natales The bus to Puerto Natales leaves at 9am. It is almost full. We ride through increasingly greener pastures and see in the distance the snow-covered peaks of Torres del Payne. Now there are bushes, trees, farms with cows along the road. We arrive at 12am in Puerto Natales, where we put up at Hostel Lili. Explore town. There is a small harbour and surprisingly many shops, many of them for mountaineering gear. Order the bus for tomorrow, buy food, rent a tent and groundmat for Alex.

12.1.2008 Puerto Natales-Torres del Payne The bus to Torres del Payne arrives late and the hostel owner doesn't have the tickets ready, so buy them on the bus. In the National Park we pay the 30 USD entrance fee and change to a small bus to Hosteria las Torres. At a bridge we have to leave the bus and walk across, while the driver takes both rear-view mirrors off and carefully drives the bus with 1cm clearance on each side over the dismal wooden bridge. We pitch the tent at the Hosteria des Torres and start the ascent to the Mirador Torres. Near the summit I suddenly lose Alex. I wait there, enjoying the view on the snow-covered Torre Sur, Torre Central, Torre Norte and Cerro Nido de Corridor. After 20 minutes I get uneasy and start looking for him, but cannot find him. Has something happened to him? I descend as quickly as possible. Half an hour later, he appears at the camp - because of the many tourists, we missed each other at the summit. (12 km)

13.1.2008 Torres del Payne Walk in direction Campamento los Cuernos. Arrived there, we eat our bread and canned sardines and continue to the Campamento Italiano. We arrive at 15h, pitch the tent and start the ascent. Around 18h, shortly before the Campamento Britannico, we see the famous view on Los Gemelos, Cerro Trono Blanco, Cerro Aleta de Tiburon, Punta Catalina and Cerro Cabeza del Indio. As it is getting darker and the path back is particularly difficult and dangerous, we turn around and return to the camp at 21h. (26.5km)

14.1.2008 Torres del Payne The Campo Italiano was less windswept and thus warmer than the others. We walk in direction Refugio Paine Grande. There we pitch our tent and walk with little luggage in direction Grey Glacier. The weather is rainy, but improves towards evening. We see the fantastic, huge Glaciar Grey in the golden light of sunset, wedged between the snow-covered summits in the background and the green island and the milky blue Lago Grey in the foreground. Around us there are trees like bonsais, lichen, moss and brushes with red berries or white flowers. We walk back in a rush, in order to get back to camp during daylight. At 10pm, we arrive. What a disappointment: They already closed the kitchen, and toilet and shower are filthy. We prepare our supper near the office entrance, in order to find some shelter from the storm wind. Meet a Swiss couple again. Stormy night with knee pains and little sleep (37.6km).

15.1.2008 Torres del Payne-Puerto Natales We get up very early, roll up the tent and make mashed potato for breakfast. Then we leave in direction Administration. As we are late and have only little food left, we only have a short break at the Campamento las Carretas. The weather is super, the view great. We arrive at 12h at the Visitors Centre, quickly prepare the last mashed potato for lunch and make reservations for seats on tomorrow's bus to Punta Arenas. The bus leaves at 13h, through beautiful scenery to Pudeto and the gate and from there to Puerto Natales. We put up again at the Hostal Lili. Confirm tickets, repack backpacks, shower, laundry, Internet. I make pasta and minced meat for supper. I am busy till 1am with little tasks. (17.5km)

16.1.2008 Puerto Natales-Punta Arenas We eat the last of the fabulous breakfasts of the Lili Hostel and get to Bus Sur, where the bus is already waiting. The bus ride is short; we arrive in Punta Arenas before 11am. Put up once again at the Hostal Maria Isabel I. Buy a bus ticket to Ushuaia, buy ingredients for a luxurious lunch and supper at the supermarket.

The sun is shining, but there is a cold and stiff breeze. I explore the harbour region, discover a Hinduistic Temple and at the Navy Base two historic sailing ship hulls used for storage which are about 100 years old.

Argentina

17.1.2008 Punta Arenas-Ushuaia Got up at 05:30h to get the bus to Ushuaia. It is only a Mercedes, classes less comfortable than the Chilean buses. We cross by ferry to Tierra del Fuego; the wind on the Magellan Straits is so strong that it is barely possible to stand on deck. We spot a shoal of little tuna swimming alongside the ferryboat. In Tierra del Fuego, the landscape changes gradually. Near the border it is grasslands with the occasional farm. In Rio Grande, a unexpectedly large town, we have to change buses and wait a long time for our connection. Further on, we see oil- and gas harvesting installations. Then there are trees, mountains, lakes and villages, the landscape looks very European. We arrive an hour late in Ushuaia. We put up at the Torre del Sur Youth Hostel. Poor value, for a dorm bed without breakfast we have to pay 12 USD! Buy food at the supermarket, eat supper, watch the colourful sunset.

18.1.2008 Ushuaia Try to find cheaper accommodation, but only find a similar one, which is further from town. I don't like it, so we stay. Shopping at the "La Anonima". I take pictures at the harbour, while waiting for Alex. We book a boat trip. The boat takes us to stormy Bridges Island, where there are Antarctic geese and otherwise only moss and lichen. Then to the sea lion colony, whose smell announces it from far. Around the lighthouse "Faro les Eclaireurs". The small boat is rocked heavily by the rough seas. It is freezing cold. We get tea and cookies in the cabin. We enter the harbour alongside a huge cruiser.

19.1.2008 Ushuaia The bus to the Tierra del Fuego National picks us up at 8:50h. We drop at Lago Roca and start the ascent to the Cerro Guanaco which is known as very difficult. There are rabbits everywhere. First we cross temperate rain forest, then crippled trees. We cross a huge swamp, where our boots sink deep into the bogged ground. Finally there is the ascent to the mountain which consists of slate debris. I lose my way and have to climb to the ridge of the nearby mountain, in order to get in the end to Cerro Guanaco. This is extremely dangerous, as there is nothing to hold on to (the slate breaks at once) and everything is sliding rubble; I tear my pants on a sharp slate. Eventually we arrive (Alex took the right path) on the summit of the Cerro Guanaco, from where we have a misty view on the southernmost islands of Tierra del Fuego. The descent is much faster than the ascent. Thereafter we hike the beautiful Costera Trail to Ensenada Bay, from where we still have to walk to the main road. The bus eventually arrives. We arrive in Ushuaia completely exhausted.

20.1.2008 Ushuaia As we get to town, we find out that we should have bought the bus tickets the day before, as today everything is closed and there is no way buying bus tickets. When the staff at YHA once more scolds us for eating in the kitchen I withdraw my veto from changing hostels and we move to the End House Hostel, which offers, for 5 pesos less, much more space, faster Internet and free breakfast. We spend the rest of the day looking unsuccessfully for a travel agency selling bus tickets on a Sunday.

21.1.2008 Ushuaia At 0930am we are at the office of Tecni Austral (bus service), but the queue is huge. We walk to the office of Marga Bus, but they open late, declare the bus tomorrow fully booked and tell us to go to their competitor, Tecni Austral. We don't have to be told twice, so we return to Tecni Austral and after a long wait we get indeed two of the ultra-scarce tickets for tomorrow's bus to El Calafate. To the supermarket, then back to the hostel, where I have to make many telephone calls until I manage to get a booking for a hostel in El Calafate. Call Brigitte Leutenegger, Jarek Pyra and the Badats. I was devastated when I heard, that Zeb had died unexpectedly from an appendicitis. He was always so proud of his excellent health. A huge loss. By taxi to the Glaciar Martial and we walk the last few kilometres to the Glacier, which consists of a few ice crystals on the slope of the mountain. Hiked back to the hostel. I don't feel well, buy vitamin C.

22.1.2008 Ushuaia-El Calafate We board the bus to Rio Grande at 0530am. I sleep until we get there. Change to the bus to Rio Gallegos. There we have a break of three hours. By local bus to town, buy food at the supermarket, eat it at a park. Walked back to the bus station, by bus to El Calafate.

23.1.2008 El Calafate We arrive at 1am in El Calafate, where we check in at the Hostal Glaciar Pioneros. In the morning, we have to change to the Hostal Glaciar Libertador, as there is no more space for us. Buy a bus ticket to Perito Moreno. Took a bus to the Glaciar Perito Moreno. On our arrival, a big piece breaks off the face of the glacier, but until my camera is ready, only the splash may be seen. The glacier is huge and very high, apparently it reaches 200m under the surface of the lake. It looks very majestic in its white and blue colour in the sunlight. Just when we are about the leave, another big piece breaks off, but once again my camera is not ready.

24.1.2008 El Calafate-El Chalten Got up very early. At 0715 we are at the bus terminal and get into the bus to El Chalten. In the bus I immediately fall asleep. The bus stops at a restaurant, where we all get pictures taken with a young pet llama. We arrive at 11h at the office of the National Park, where we attend a short lecture. The bus stops at a lousy cabin, which is the office of the Bus Company. We get out and have to find a place to stay. The Youth Hostel is fully booked, but we find dorm beds at a campsite. Walk 3h in plain sunshine to Laguna del Torre, where we have a fine view

on Cerro Solo, the Glaciar Grande and Cerro Torre. My feet are in terrible pain. Alex walks and I limp back to the village.

25.1.2008 El Chaltmen Hiked via the lookout over Laguna Capri, Poincenot and Rio Blanco Camp to the Laguna de los Tres. The ascent is very steep. First beautiful view on the whole valley, particularly the Laguna Madre e Hija. The weather is fantastic. On top fabulous view over the blue lake onto Cerro Fitzroy. Back to the village. French campers donate us the remains of a barbecued lamb, which we nibble off with delight.

26.1.2008 El Chalten-Perito Moreno The bus to Perito Moreno leaves at 0130h. The pains in my feet stop me from sleeping. Eventually I do fall asleep though. When I wake up, there is only desert around us, with the occasional glimpse of the snow-covered Andes peaks in the distance and sometimes some green meadows with cattle, and Estancias. The road is unpaved, but well kept. We arrive in Perito Moreno with 3h delay. We put up at the Hotel Santa Cruz, next to the noisy power station. Visit the Church, chat with the caretaker. Buy a onward bus ticket to Bariloche, but it is 20 Pesos more than what it would have cost in El Calafate.

27.1.2008 Perito Moreno-San Carlos de Bariloche The village is all sleepy on this Sunday morning. We climb a koppie from where we get a lookout over the village. The weather is not so pleasant anymore, rather cool. In a cafe we buy some bread and sausage for lunch and eat it in the park. Long before the bus leaves we are at the bus station and wait for the bus, which arrives with some delay. We ride through barren pampas. We see a Nandu, sometimes a bit of green grass and some cattle, few Estancias.

28.1.2008 Perito Moreno-San Carlos de Bariloche We arrive around 7am in Bariloche. By public bus to the city centre. Long and difficult search for a hostel room, only the 6th hostel, the Marcopolo YHA, has two beds available, and this also only for one night. Bought a bus ticket for the 31st to Buenos Aires. Checked another lot of hostels, until I got a reasonably priced bed at the youth hostel next door - for two nights I am classified as a girl, because they only have space in the girl's dorm.

29.1.2008 Bariloche By public bus to Puerto Panuelo. Hiked partly on hiking tracks, partly on the road in direction Colonia Suiza, the last 3 km by bus. Explored the village, meet Carolina Goye, the great-granddaughter of the founder. She shows us the first house, built in 1935 in the Chilean style, but inside typical Valais (Canton of Switzerland). She introduces us to her father, with whom we have a long chat. As the bus just does not materialise, we start walking back and find it in town. Back to Bariloche. I have a phone call with Christian and update the VSD homepage. Around 22h we walk to town, where Alex proceeds to a table tennis match. In a cafe I meet a strange lady, by the name of Muschi, who talks in 3 different languages to me and urgently recommends, that I call a certain Christine Wiecko, a Polish-born physicist, who lives here. I did not find out why.

30.1.2008 Bariloche Rode by minibus two hours to Pampa Linda. Hiked on a dirt road to the Glaciar del Manso, e.g. the Ventisquero Negro (black glacier, see pic above). Impressive sight on the glacier, which brims the shores of the glacial lake and is partially white inside. To the picnic site, where we eat the cheapest available - cookies. To the Garganta del Diablo, where we have some views of the Cerro Tronador, a huge waterfall and the Glaciar Castano Overo. Hiked on the now extremely busy dirt road almost back to the village, then via a flooded track and then narrow path through bamboo reeds to the Saltillo de las Nalcas. This is a waterfall over an overhanging cliff. Chatted with Israeli people, some of them know St. Gallen. Have to hurry to get back to the village on time. Return by bus to Bariloche. Bought food and prepared the last supper with Alex. Tomorrow he will leave early to Santiago, while I leave in the afternoon to Buenos Aires.

31.1.2008 Bariloche-Buenos Aires Back to the tourist information, fetched another map. Walk in direction Cerro Otto. Meet a group of hikers from Wales, we start the ascent together, chatting away merrily. Arrived at the top end of the cable-car, we are asked for Ar\$ 15 entrance fee. As the English want to continue hiking, we separate. I take a path right of the entrance, walk around the mountain, climb over a fence and thus get to the lookout for free (see pic above). View over the Lago Nahuel Huapi, Bariloche, the two Lago Moreno with Puerto Panuelo and Colonia Suiza. There are many parachuters, but the wind seems to be insufficient, nobody takes off. Walk back, fetch my backpack. At the chocolate factory "del Turista" I buy chocolate for Ar\$ 3, so I don't leave Bariloche without having tasted the chocolate. I find it somehow dry. As they don't have change, they give me two little chocolates instead, almost worth as much as my purchase. Wait a long time for the bus to the terminal, I am already getting anxious as it does eventually arrive. The bus to Bariloche leaves with great delay. I have the right front seat on the upper deck. The view on the river valley of Rio Limay is impressive (see pic above), a green belt of trees and meadows along a deep blue river which crosses the barren Pampa in serpentine. Short stop in Neuquen. Suddenly the bus leaves, as I am standing on the platform. I get a fright. Other passengers calm me down: It is only refuelling. Indeed, it eventually returns.

1.2.2008 Buenos Aires As I wake up, the landscape has changed completely: Rain, green pastures, villages everywhere, houses. Around 12h we arrive in Buenos Aires, but get stuck in traffic for two hours in the gleaming sun on a distance of a kilometre. By underground to Constitucion, where I find the End of the World Hostel without problems. A dump. Check-in, take my washing to the laundry and go to sleep. In the evening I fetch my laundry back and watch some TV.

A helluva noise long past midnight, as every resident has his own stereo set running on full blast.

2.2.2008 Buenos Aires Walked to the Plaza de Mayo. Saw the Museo del Cabildo only from outside (they are filming there). Visited the Catedral Metropolitana. Walked around Plaza de Mayo (see pic above). Casa Rosada is not open to the public. Visited the Basilica de San Francisco and Manzana de las Luces. Visited the Museo de la Inmigracion Gallego (Museum of the Spanish-Galician Immigration). Walked to the Plaza de la Republica with the obelisk. To Monumento de los dos Congresos and the Palacio del Congreso. Then to Toscanini, the Teatro Colon, which is being renovated. To Avenida Florida, a pedestrian zone with many shops. Then to the Torre Monumental (previous to the Falkland war Torre Ingles), then to the Puerto Madero. Along the former piers are now street cafes and expensive flats. The Corbeta Uruguay, a historical steam-sailboat, is moored here, unfortunately not open to the public today. A little bit further is the Fragata Presidente Sarmiento, an equally well-preserved steam-sailing ship. I check out the fantastic fourfold-compound steam engine. Back to the Plaza de Mayo, then along Bolivar to San Telmo. Visit the Museo del Cabildo (exhibition on roof tiles). Visit the Mercado with its many antiques stalls. To Plaza Dorrego, probably the heart of San Telmo, then along Defensa to the Parque Lezama, where some artists get ready for drum performances. I watch tango classes rehearse at the Centro Cultural Torquato Tasso.

3.2.2008 Buenos Aires By bus to Recoleta, visited the Iglesia de Nuestra Senora de Pilar which was built in the Spanish Colonial style. To the "Cementerio de Recoleta" graveyard. After visiting the tomb of Evita Peron I take part in a (Spanish) guided tour. It is much more detailed than the bus tourist treadmills and takes almost two hours, in which we learn a lot about the famous personalities who are buried here. The tombs are small houses, some of them very comfortably outfitted, usually with two-storey basements, the largest of them hold more than 100 coffins, which are just stored in there. Then along the monumental neo-Gothic Facultad de Ingenieria to the Plaza de Francia and then the Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes. The collection of this museum is superb. There are paintings by almost all famous artists - from Van Gogh, Monet, Manet, Corot, Picasso, Modigliani up to Rothko - there is just about everything here, and only the best works of them. The upper floor is dedicated to the Argentinian painters. While the older ones can easily compete with the European painters, there seems to have been a vacuum during the military rule. The newer works are extremely wild, maybe breaking free after so many years of repression? There is also a small but impressive section on Pre-Colombian art. On to the gigantic metal flower "floralis generica" which is apparently closing at dawn. Past the huge, neo-classical law faculty to the curio market near the Centro Cultural Recoleta.

4.2.2008 Buenos Aires Today the weather is steaming hot. I walk to the terminal of the Buquebus ferry and wait a full two hours in diverse queues, until I have the ticket for tomorrow's boat trip to Colonia (Uruguay) in my hands. Upon strolling back, I find a small restaurant which offers a marvellous buffet for only Ar\$ 13. I stuff myself with meat, seafood and desserts until I can eat no more. It ends up costing a little bit more, as usual around here, but it was well worth it! Strolled a bit around town, called Etihad (no result) and Sheryl, but had eventually to return to the hostel to have a afternoon nap. Bought some thread and a needle for my sewing kit, had a long chat with the shop owner. Stitched up my backpack once more.

Argentina is a modern and very European-looking country. The economy has recovered more or less from the shock of 2001, the prices are rising so fast that I am afraid that hyperinflation is once again just around the corner. The broken-up boardwalks are cluttered with chewing gum and dog shit, if you don't watch out, you are literally in real shit! There are many obviously decommissioned cars (some of them newer models) on the road, probably belonging to the victims of the economic crisis of 2001. Prices in the South are sky-high, from packet soup to meat, everything is very expensive. Buenos Aires, though, is fairly cheap. Crime is not a big problem in Argentina, although one can regularly watch people emptying dustbins for recyclables, so there must be great poverty. The country is very modern, it has a excellent Internet infrastructure and many current car models are presently built here, particularly by Fiat, VW (which bought out Chrysler Argentina, there are Sunbeams with VW sign), Renault and Peugeot.

Uruguay

5.2.2008 Buenos Aires-Colonia del Sacramento (Uruguay) Looked for a skype computer, but found none. Wait for a long time at the wrong bus stop for the 126 bus. As I eventually get to the right place, it rides past me and stops further on, so I have to hardloop (run) to catch it. It is not very crowded in the bus, but an elderly gentleman complains that my backpack was inconveniencing an old lady next to me. I was to put it on the floor. This was all not at all true and I was certainly not going to put my backpack on the floor, as there was no place for it there. The gentleman has in the meantime started to voice out loud that somebody with so much luggage was supposed to take a taxi. The other passengers almost applauded him, the young lady next to me changes to a more remote seat. But he cannot throw me out and I stubbornly stay till the harbour. There the check-in is as expected dead slow. On board, I have to recoup after all this stress and do this in a first-class seat. Then I go on deck, but there is little to see. In the meantime it was broadcasted that a tango show was going to take place. Indeed, a singer sings with mucho corazon Argentinian tunes, now and then a false note is being made up by his dedication and the audiences' enthusiasm. To my greatest surprise, there is no passport control in Colonia. I walk directly to the El Viajero Hostel, where I had booked a bed. Then I visit the old

town of the pretty and very clean city. I climb the lighthouse, from where I have a good view of town, see the foundations of the Governors House, walk to the Plaza Mayor, Porton de Campo, Bastion de San Miguel, Calle de los Suspiros up to the Bastion de San Pedro. Then to Muelle (jetty) 1866, where I watch the boats for a long time. There are many vintage cars parked on the road, some with "for sale" signs, so many Fords, a Vauxhall (from the 1920s to 1940s), a Rambler Convertible and many more. Buy food in the supermarket. The butcher tells me that the name for the meal I was going to cook is "Tucito".

6.2.2008 Colonia del Sacramento I will only be able to travel to Montevideo tomorrow, for today the YHA is fully booked. Walked through town, saw a vintage Ford and a Citroen Traction Avant, from which a tree grew. Tried once again without any success to skype to Etihad. Nobody there who could help, the offices are always closed. I can probably write off my money. Walked to the Plaza de los Toros, a dilapidated bullfight arena about 5km from town. Saw more vintage cars, such as a Commer and a Fargo. The weather is hot and humid. Read a bit. My feet are all blistered, the new insoles are probably too elastic. In the evening, I take part in a braai. It is very expensive and there is far too little food for us all. I nevertheless enjoy it and chat with a Brazilian couple all night long.

7.2.2008 Colonia-Montevideo At 1am I eventually go to sleep, at 5:30 I already have to get up again, because I have to catch the 06:45 bus to Montevideo. It turns out to be very late. I sleep up to Montevideo, there I take a bus to the city centre and put up at the El Viajero Ciudad Vieja. I even get breakfast. Visit the Catedral Metropolitano (Matriz). To the Museo del Carnaval. I am being flooded with information and then taken to the Tourist Office, where I am hit by another flood of information. Do the city walk: Mercado del Puerto, Museo de Arte Precolombino e Indigena, Museo Historico Nacional Casa de Garibaldi, Plaza Zabalo, Museo Historico Nacional Casa de Rivera (strangely with more Pre-Colombian art than the respective Museum), a quick look into Museo Gurvich, Plaza Matriz, Museo y Archivo Municipal Cabildo located near the remains of the former citadel, Museo Torres Garcia with paintings and toys developed by Torres Garcia, who was far ahead of his time, Plaza Independencia with Puerta de la Ciudadela (former gate of the citadel) and subterranean shrine for General Artigas. See the Teatro Solis, the Palacio Salvo, a skyscraper from the 1920s, the Casa del Gobierno Edificio Independencia. By bus to the Teatro de Verano, to a carnival show. I only see the Murga Japilong and the Revistas D'Javu. Then it gets too late, too cold and too loud. Wait a long time for the bus back. Montevideo is supposed to mean "MONTE VI De Este al Oeste".

8.2.2008 Montevideo The weather is cold and rainy. Organise my further travels, tomorrow I will travel to Punta del Este and then to Rocha. My watch strap breaks and I find an original spare part by pure chance. The two museums, which I have not yet visited, the Museo Romantico and the Museo Casa de Lavalleja, stay closed. Write postcards to Ruetli, Saxer, Brigitte and Heinz and Irene. Send a Che Guevara fridge magnet to Raoul. In the evening to the Llamadas (street carnival). There were no more seats available and I am approximately in the fifth row. It is drizzling. Suddenly, the rain becomes a tropical downpour. The people leave. I carry my umbrella and can now even get past the rows of chairs. After a short while, the corteges move again and I am now in their midst and can take a few good pictures. I start going back, but find more corteges which have started private performances in the side alleys. Thus it gets pretty early in the morning till I return to the hostel.

9.2.2008 Montevideo-Punta del Este At 8am, I am the first at breakfast. By bus to Tres Cruces Bus Termina, bus to Punta del Este. Keep falling asleep, sometimes I see beautiful vintage cars. Around lunchtime I arrive in Punta del Este, where I put up at the 1949 Hostel. Cycled with the hostel's trashed bicycle around town. Then I check in at the hostel. I walk to the supermarket and main square, but heavy rain starts. When it clears up again, I cycle in direction Manatiales. See a herd of apparently wild guinea pigs near the road. About 10km from Punta del Este, the totally brittle tyre disintegrates. I have to push (and sometimes ride) the damaged bike all the way back and arrive completely exhausted. Punta del Este is a mundane beach resort with high-rises, tourist infrastructure, many banks (even a UBS) and roughly double as expensive as Montevideo. Cook supper, far too much. Meet a Swiss. Make photos of Punta at night. I am very tired and go to bed, much too early for Punta.

10.2.2008 Punta del Este-La Pedrera Although I get up late, I am the first one at breakfast. Walk to Maldonado to the shopping centre, where there is a garage with old classic cars across the road, amongst others an open Cadillac-Limo from the 1940s. I am walking to the tip of the peninsula, when I notice a grey rainfront coming towards me. Quickly send a completely lost American couple onto the right track and return to the hostel. To the bus terminal, where I board the bus to Rocha. In Rocha, I have to search a bit until I find the bus to La Pedrera. I get there by 20h and quickly buy some food at the supermarket. Hike the 2km to the Youth Hostel. Disappointment: For 14 USD (2 USD more than published in the Internet) I only get a bunk bed in a windswept shed.

11.2.2008 La Pedrera-Cabo Polonio Walked to the village, found out about the departure times of the bus. Walked back along the beach, had difficulty in finding the hostel. Fetched the backpack, waited at the roadside for the bus to come, then flagged it down. Have great difficulty to get in with my huge backpack, the conductor pushes from behind and I pull. At Cabo Polonio I take a very expensive 4x4 ride through the dunes to town. There I check in at the Plan B Hostel. This is a very alternative hostel, most of the guests are hippies, many from Buenos Aires and everyone is smoking pot. The village is extremely spread out, there are no roads, everyone builds his cottage somewhere in the sand. Near the

lighthouse there is a colony of sea lions, which can be approached pretty closely. Chat with Django (who looks as wild as one would picture someone named Django), the Manager of the Hostel. I am invited to a supper of rice. Until midnight there is guitar playing and singing, while a savage rainstorm is ravaging outside.

12.2.2008 Cabo Polonia-Chuy The first 4x4 doesn't take me along, because I have a ticket of another company. But the right 4x4 quickly shows up. While I am waiting at the roadside, a bus that says "Montevideo" arrives. I don't get in, because I want to get to Chuy, in the opposite direction. It leaves again. A woman explains to me that I was to have taken this bus, as it stops in Castillos and the bus to Chuy I will only get from there. I thus wait for an hour, then the bus to Castillos turns up. In Castillos, the connection is already waiting. Unfortunately, I cannot drop off at the Fortaleza de Santa Teresa because the next bus to Chuy is only in 7h. Hitchhiking is not possible here. I thus stay on until Chuy, where I first buy the bus ticket. I am short by 200 Pesos, but this is not a problem, I am given credit until 23h. Buy food at the supermarket and eat, as I am very hungry. As Chuy is a tax-free zone, everything is dirt cheap! Spent the afternoon surfing the Internet and burning my chip on DVD. Walked to the Immigration Office and got my passport stamped. Clean forgot to get Brazilian currency and had to organise it in a hurry after 18h. Luckily a bank is open until 19h. The bus leaves 23h and stops briefly at the Brazilian Immigration Office, where we foreigners have our passports stamped.

Brazil

13.2.2008 Porto Alegre The bus journey is quite comfortable, I get little of it as I keep sleeping. When I awake, we are at the bus terminal of Porto Alegre. Walk to the Marechal Hotel, check in, walk back to the bus terminal to buy a onward ticket and to peep left and right into the shops along the street. Explore town. Porto Alegre is a pretty city with reasonable prices. I notice the unfinished remains of a monorail. Have a lunch buffet for only R\$5. Visit the Military Museum. Walk in a circle around town. Visit the Cathedral. Back to the hotel and do my laundry. Upon leaving, I am told to leave the key at the reception. I go out again, but when I get back, they cannot find the key anymore. They end up breaking open the door to my room. I have to change rooms thereafter...

14.2.2008 Porto Alegre-Florianopolis (Canasvieiras) At 12h I am in the huge bus terminal, where I board the bus to Florianopolis. The ride takes seven hours and takes me almost exclusively through densely populated areas, intensive green and often through picturesque bays. Upon arriving in Florianopolis, I walk to the Youth Hostel, but they never received my reservation and are fully booked. Have to walk back to the bus terminal and take a bus to Canasvieiras, then another bus to the Hostel. Prepare a lousy but cheap supper, but get two slices of Pizza from the Argentinians next to me, so all in all I had more than enough to eat.

15.2.2008 Ilha Santa Catarina By bus to the centre of Florianopolis, then to the south of the island. The area is less developed, but obviously has little to offer. The villages are not much to speak of, so that I remain on the bus back to Florianopolis. Explore the city, in particular the Igreja Sao Francisco and the Cathedral, where there is a service. To the bridge and the lookout over the city. Back to Canasvieiras, where I have a swim in the sea and walk the beach down to the rocks and back. Two Germans have moved into my dorm, they are looking for party life and start already with a couple of caipirinhas. They let me read the latest Spiegel magazine. I read until 1am.

16.2.2008 Canasvieiras-Blumenau The Germans are just returning, when I am leaving. Once again I am the first at breakfast. By bus to Florianopolis, there I bought another ticket, took the bus to Blumenau. We arrive around 12h. Put up at the hotel directly next to the bus terminal. Walk into town. Across the steel railway bridge (now for cars and pedestrians), where I have a good view of town. See the Municipal Administration (in Bavarian style) with the steam engine in front of it, and the courthouse opposite (with fake timber-work), the fantastic steamboat "Blumenau" (unfortunately the engine was removed), Castelinho Moelmann, Praca Hercilio Luz with the memorial for Dr. Blumenau, the Beer Museum, over the road the mausoleum of Dr. Blumenau and the Centro Cultural. To the Lutheran Church. At the huge Neumarkt Shopping Centre I visit the exhibition of model airplanes of the Aeromodelismo Blumenau. Because it is getting dark, I cannot walk up to Vila Germanica. I turn back into town and have a huge buffet dinner with meat and desserts for R\$7 (USD 4). By bus back to the terminal, buy tickets for tomorrow's journey to Pomerode and Curitiba.

17.2.2008 Blumenau-Pomerode-Curitiba At 05:45h I am at the bus terminal, but no bus. This is obvious, because I am an hour early, during the night they changed to winter time and set the clocks one hour back. It is only 04:45. I doze until the bus arrives and ride to Pomerode. I arrive there at 06:45, a bit early. Doze off in a park, but spot an elderly man in a nearby garden. I say hello and it turns out that he speaks German, and is Joao Teichmann, a wood sculptor and son of the late sculptor of the same name. We have a very pleasant chat until 9, then I am allowed to leave my luggage at his place and start exploring town. Pomerode stretches out for more than 5km along the road. There are not many houses in the German style, but there are German names everywhere and there is a lot of textile industry, just like Blumenau. Walk to the eastern City Gate, then to the museum - closed - and the Casa Colonial Karl Weege, a colonial brick house with original furniture. Back to the village, fetch my backpack, chat a bit. Mr. Teichmann insists on taking me by car to the Terminal Rodovario. Until the bus arrives, I am questioned for an opinion poll. Then I board the bus to Curitiba,

where I doze off straight away. In Curitiba I want to check in at the youth hostel, but it is fully booked so I put up at a cheap hotel (Hotel Laron, cheap, clean, excellent value).

18.2.2008 Curitiba Try to find a cheap laundromat, but they are all extremely expensive. Buy a bus ticket to Sao Paulo for the 20th. Do my washing by myself, the clothes dry quickly in the hot sunshine. See the city. Start with the Praca Tiradentes and the Catedral Basilica Menor de Nostra Senhora de Luz bom Jesus dos Pinhais. Called Jeannette Frisch. Visit the Casa Romerio Martins, the Igreja da Ordem, the Casa do Artesanato, the Memorial de Curitiba (closed), the Igreja Presbyteriana Independente, the Palacete Wolff, the Igreja do Rosario, the Fonte de Memoria, the Ruines de Sao Francisco (a never completed Church), the Belvedere (art nouveau lookout), the (closed) Museu Paranaense, the Mosque, the Memorial Arabe and the closed Passeo Publico. To the Palacio Avenida with the historical red street car in front of it. To the old railway station, now Shopping Estacao, a huge shopping centre.

19.2.2008 Curitiba Took the first Tourist bus from Praca Tiradentes. Dropped at Jardim Botânico. Visited the pretty glass pavilion and the museum on poles in the lake. Continue to the Museu Oscar Niemeyer, which is probably a landmark of Curitiba with its huge Eye. Visited exhibitions of Oscar Niemeyer, Maria Bonomi, Emanuel Arango, Kurt Schwitters (Merz) with his fantastic Merzbau-room, Aurelia Toledo, Rodolfo Morales, Jose Borges with woodprints, Pablo Atchugarry with his excellent marble statues. There is another exhibition in the Eye, with works of local artists. Visited the Bosque Papa and the Memorial Polones, a lifesize model of a Polish village. Continued to the Opera de Arame, an Opera house all made of wire-mesh and steel grids! Looks great and is a wonderful feeling to stand in the air. Walk to the Parque Tangua, with a beautiful lookout, an artificial waterfall as well as a tunnel and a restaurant on poles in the lake. Continue to the Parque Tingui, hike along a little river to the Memorial Ucraniano, the replica of a Ukranian wooden Church with its round turret. By bus through the Portal Italiano, Santa Felicidade, Parque Barigui, Torre Panorama and back into town. Wait at the bus terminal. The bus leaves at 23:45h.

20.2.2008 Sao Paulo The bus arrives at 06:30h in Sao Paulo. By Metro to Praca de Arvore. Walked 1.5km to the YHA. Deposited my backpack, by underground back to town. Because of the lack of instruction, I embark on a wild city stroll: Catedral de Se, Igreja do Sao Francisco de Assis, Praca do Patriarca, Viaduto do Cha, Teatro Municipal, Praca Republica, Igreja de N.S. de Consolacao on the Praca Franklin Roosevelt, Igreja de N.S. do Rosario on the Praca Paisandu, main post office, banking area, Colegio Sao Bento, Praca Manuel da Nobrega, viewed the city from the top floor of Banespa Tower. In the meantime, I had the instructions for the "official" Downtown Walk: Praca da Republica, Caetano de Campos Building, Edificio Italia (narrow highrise), Copan Building (by Oscar Niemeyer, wave-shaped ribs), Library, Ladeira de Memoria, Teatro Municipal, Shopping Light, Viaduto do Cha, Anhangabau Palast, Santo Antonio Church (former main Church), Largo Sao Francisco, Praca da Se, Caixa Economica Federal Building, Solar Marquesa dos Santos, Swiss-Chalet, Pateo do Collegio, Kloster Sao Bento, Martinelli Towers, Correios (main post office), Santa Ifigenia, Praca Paissandu, Intersection Sao Joao and Ipiranga. Back to the YHA, checked in, got to bed early.

21.2.2008 Sao Paulo To the Estacao de Luz (former main station, today obsolete), Parque de Luz, Estacao Pinacoteca (today a museum), through the electronics shops back to Se, where I get free Internet. Continue in direction Consolacao. A beggar boy lives behind a narrow grid. For a second I stand still and wonder how he got there, when he squeezes through the grid and runs after me with a wooden crossbeam. I quickly change to the other side of the street. Walk down Brigadier Luis Antonio Street, quickly to the Internet, then visited the Casa das Rosas, former house of the daughter of a famous architect, today a museum of art, then to the exhibition Lasar Segall at the pyramid-shaped FIESP, an excellent artist who made figurative and abstract works, then to the MASP, the arts museum, where there is a small but valuable collection of famous masters, with many internationally well-known paintings from Hieronymus Bosch, Vincent van Gogh, Picasso etc. The landmark building was designed by Lina Bo Bardi. To the Parque Trianon, where they are filming for a Telenovela. Visited the Villa "Casarao", built 1905, only from outside. Back to the hostel, prepared supper.

22.2.2008 Sao Paulo-Rio de Janeiro Early in the morning by Metro to Tiete. Bought bus ticket to Rio. Wrote my diary, then I have to board the bus. Shortly before Rio we get into an enormous traffic jam because a lorry has lost its load. When we pass it eventually, we can still see the people stealing the milk tetrapaks with the help of wheelbarrows. In Rio I have to take an obscenely expensive taxi to Botafogo, as the buses are said to be notoriously unsafe. Put up at the Ace Backpackers. Walk - for safety reasons without money or valuables - through Botafogo. Internet and shop for food at the supermarket.

23.2.2008 Rio de Janeiro By underground to Cinelandia. The city is pretty deserted. It is foggy and hot. Praca Floriano, Teatro Municipal, Carioca, Rua da Carioca, Catedral Metropolitana (modern Pyramid, dark inside), back to the Convento Santo Antonio. As I am looking for the entrance, a black man blocks my way. As he says "Mafia do Brasil" I think he is a lunatic and want to walk past him. He grabs me and demands money. I roar at him with all my might. He gets a terrible fright and makes off. It could easily have gone wrong, I was holding my camera (and this is what he probably wanted) and it could easily have been damaged, apart from the many pictures already on the chip. Again Rua Carioca to Praca Tiradente. Real Gabinete Portugues de Literatura, Campo de Santana, Mercado Municipal, Street market in Urugayana. Via Rua 7 Setembro to the Praca 15 Novembro. Visited Paco Imperial (formerly Imperial

Palace, today Provincial Parliament). Arco de Teles (last remainder of the aqueduct), Mosteiro de São Bento (under renovation, dark), Praça Mauá. By bus to the Cidade do Samba. But it has been closed. Buy from "Dr. Carlos de Souza" a bottle of mineral water. The Cidade do Samba is in a seedy area, no bus dares to stop. One can see the Favela Morro de Providência. Walk along a very ghastly freeway to a petrol station. But even here no one stops. Continue walking to an Intersection, where after a long wait I manage to grab a bus, which has to stop at the red robot. Thank God he opens the door, I can get in. He takes me - even for free - to Praça Mauá. Visit the Navy Museum, where they have a submarine, a former Imperial barge and a steamboat (unfortunately now diesel powered) on display. Walk to Carioca. Rode on a completely empty underground to Siqueira Campus on the Copacabana. Walk to the beach and watch the netball players (they play with their feet!), then I walk through the Túnel Novo to a huge shopping centre, through it and to Urca to the cable car to the Sugar Loaf (Pan de Azúcar). First to the Morro da Urca, then with a second cable-car to the Pan de Azúcar. It is foggy. I descend as far as is possible and get back to the top again. Watch the sun setting in the fog. Back by cable-car. Walked through the already pretty dark town back to Botafogo. Despite the darkness I had to walk to the supermarket, buy food, back to the hostel.

24.2.2008 Rio de Janeiro It is foggy and rainy. No chance to get onto the Corcovado today. By Metro to Cinelândia. Completely deserted today. The art museum doesn't even open today. To the Aqueduto do Carioca. Visited the Museu Histórico Nacional. Exhibitions on Red Indians, colonisation, coaches, religious art. With the historic tram to Santa Teresa. It is raining and smoke comes from the control unit, but the tramway climbs the steep streets faster than necessary. Good views, also on Favelas. By underground to Catete, visited the Palace Gardens, a photo exhibition and the Palácio de Catete, the former Presidential Palace, now obsolete because the capital was moved to Brasília. Walked through the Flamengo Gardens back to Botafogo.

25.2.2008 Rio de Janeiro I feel flu coming up. On the bus from São Paulo to Rio, a woman with flu sat right behind me, it was only a matter of time till I would get it. By bus to Ipanema (humming the tune "the girl from Ipanema..."). Hiked along Lagoa Rodrigo dos Freitas, then to the beach. Walked to Leblon and to the Botanical Garden. Was sent to the wrong end, had to walk all the way back to the entrance. The garden is a bit dilapidated, particularly the rose garden. By bus back to Botafogo. Wait for the tour bus of the Favela tour. First we visit the Favela Rocinha, where we are dragged for ages through the "Artists Market". The time is lacking when we get to the centre of the Favela, which I would gladly have explored further. Rocinha is built on a very steep slope, but today the infrastructure has been built that was previously lacking: Sewerage, electricity, telephone, buses, shops and supermarkets. Still, the political power is in the hand of the drug dealers, who, with their weapons, can pass verdicts and immediately enforce them. I notice the narrow gaps between buildings, the catastrophic spiderwebs of cabling and the partially very tiny flats. We continue to the Favela Vila Canoas, where we visit a school project, once more wasted time. Thereafter we explore the Favela on foot, so that in the end, we did get a glimpse of Favela life. Back to Botafogo.

26.2.2008 Rio de Janeiro-Belo Horizonte Still I fight against the flu, taking lots of Vitamin C. The weather is terrible, deep clouds and rain. No chance of getting to Corcovado. I take a taxi to the Rodoviário and board the next (cheap) bus to Belo Horizonte. The driver seems to be a half-brother of Ayrton Senna, because he races the bus like a road hog. The ride takes us through beautiful green hills. In Belo Horizonte, I have to take a taxi to the hostel, as the place is unsafe at night. The driver has no clue where my hostel is and so I end up paying far too much. I put up at the Pousadinho Mineiro, a clean but basic place. I feel very ill.

27.2.2008 Belo Horizonte The flu has got the better of me: Cough, running nose, sore throat and head. But I really don't have time for this right now. Walk from Praça 7 along Afonso Pena to the Igreja São José, to the Internet, then to the Parque Municipal. Back to Praça 7, by bus to Pampulhas. Visit the Igreja São Francisco de Assis (by Oscar Niemeyer), the ugly Mineirão soccer stadium, the dilapidated Mineirinho Olympic stadium. Along the shores of the Lagoa de Pampulha to the Iate Clube, the doorman lets me in, so that I can admire the 1943 completed building (by Oscar Niemeyer) in- and outside. To the Casa do Baile (also by Oscar Niemeyer). Back by bus, Praça da Estação, Museu de Artes e Ofícios with many old tools, Praça Raoul Soares, Mercado Central, Praça da Liberdade, Palácio da Liberdade, Niemeyer high-rise. Back to the city centre.

28.2.2008 Belo Horizonte (Ouro Preto) Upon getting up - much too late - I feel much better, the medication seems to have worked. Pack my things, hardloop to the Rodoviário. Buy a ticket for the bus to Ouro Preto from Passaro Verde and one to Brasília from Itapemirim. Stupid me, I could have gotten a direct ride from Ouro Preto, I just believed the information from the Tourist Office and Lonely Planet. After 2h drive we arrive in Ouro Preto (by the way, there is also an Ouro Branco). The town is really very pretty. Most houses were built into the steep hills in the 18th Century. I walk past the Escola de Minas to the Praça Tiradentes, have a look at the Museu da Inconfidência but do not get in. Visit the Igreja de São Francisco de Assis, with an interior by Aleijadinho. Then to the Museu Aleijadinho, which is integrated into the Church Igreja de Nossa Senhora da Conceição de Antônio Dias. Aleijadinho was a coloured (white father, black mother), of tiny build and a gifted sculptor. Unfortunately, a degenerative sickness made him lose control over both his hands at the age of about 38 years. He had hammer and chisel bound to his wrists and continued working. His art was "Mainstream" of his time. The nickname Aleijadinho means "little cripple". I continue to the Mina do Chico Rei, where I crawl for a long time in the low mineshafts. Chico Rei was an enslaved African king, who bought himself free, bought

the mine and with its proceeds bought gradually his entire tribe's freedom. To the Igreja de Santa Efigenia dos Pretos, the "Slave Church", inside richly ornamented with wood carvings, but hardly any gold. To the Capela do Padre Faria. On the way back to Praça Tiradentes I ate well and cheap in the small restaurant "da Vovo". To the Igreja Nostro Senhora do Carmo, with an interesting Sacristy. I watched a woodpecker trying to knock a hole into the beeding of the interior Church ceiling. To the Matriz de Nossa Senhora do Pilar. I am caught trying to take a picture (mostly forbidden, but tolerated without flash), have to turn the camera in. They want to sell postcards. The Church is said to be ornamented with more than 400kg of gold. Inside it is very dark. There is an exhibition in the crypt. Past a dilapidated, nameless Church to the Igreja de São Francisco de Paula. Friendly blue and white interior. Then I have to return to the bus terminal, where the bus to Belo Horizonte leaves at 15h. At a stop I quickly run to the water tap, and my pants tear up completely. They have gone all crumbly. In Belo Horizonte I quickly bought some food which made a disgusting supper. My bus to Brasília leaves at 19h. It is a very comfortable bus, so I quickly fall asleep.

29.2.2008 Brasília We are around 100km from Brasília, when I wake up. For some time we ride through islands of buildings. Eventually we arrive at the Rodoviário. By bus 131 to the Rodoviário PP in the centre of town, then with Bus 143 to the YHA. Checked in, ate breakfast. A car gives me - for the same fare as the bus, R\$2 - a lift to town. I visit the 75m high, ugly Torre TV (Lucio Costa) and fetch a map of Brasília at the Tourist Office. Then Parkshopping, Rodoviário PP (Lucio Costa), Teatro Nacional Claudio Santoro (Oscar Niemeyer, being renovated), National Library (Oscar Niemeyer), Museu Honestino Guimarães (Oscar Niemeyer) only from outside, Catedral Metropolitana (Oscar Niemeyer) with subterranean access and bright interior, but many burst stained-glass windows, then Palácio Itamaraty (Oscar Niemeyer), Congresso Nacional (Oscar Niemeyer), Palácio da Justiça (Oscar Niemeyer) with artificial waterfalls in the facade, Federal Supreme Court (Oscar Niemeyer), Praça dos Três Poderes (Lucio Costa and Oscar Niemeyer), with monument "The Warriors" (Bruno Giorgi), historical museum with bronze head of Juscelino Kubitschek on its facade (Oscar Niemeyer), Panteão da Pátria Tancredo Neves (Oscar Niemeyer) in the shape of a pigeon, with a shrine for the heroes of Brazil in the interior, Espaço Lucio Costa (Oscar Niemeyer) with model of town in the interior, because Lucio Costa was the town planner of Brasília, Espaço Oscar Niemeyer (Oscar Niemeyer), closed because of water damage, but I am nevertheless let in. Everywhere water keeps coming through the roof. Back to the Congresso Nacional, guided tour through both chambers, even here obviously construction faults. To the Conjunto Nacional Shopping centre (irrelevant architecture). Seek everywhere for a supermarket, but in Brasília there are only a few in the residential areas. Bought new pants. After waiting a long time, back by bus.

Brasília was planned by Lucio Costa and laid out in the shape of an aeroplane. Most buildings were by Oscar Niemeyer, the gardens (today mostly sandy areas) by Burle Marx. The two wings (north and south wing) are the residential areas, the fuselage the main axis (Eixo Monumental) with all the important buildings and sights and there is even a tailwing and a propeller (the Praça dos três Poderes). There is a strong segregation of activities, e.g. a hotel area, a printing business area, etc. The residential areas are built in blocks and every block has its own Church. After almost 50 years, the gaps between the areas have still not yet been filled, while the Favelas around town are growing at a fast pace. Unfortunately, the pedestrians were completely left out. Most places are only accessible by car, there are hardly any pavements, crossings or pedestrian bridges. And pedestrians might find it difficult to have to take a train to the nearest supermarket.

1.3.2008 Brasília Walked to the Quartel General do Exército. A shell- and a tentlike structure (Oscar Niemeyer). Heavy rain starts. Despite umbrella I get soaking wet. Walked to the (Army-) Catedral Rainha do Paz (Oscar Niemeyer). Outside tentshape, inside beautiful, bright architecture. Walked via Praça do Cruzeiro to the Memorial JK (Juscelino Kubitschek). Visited the museum. Kubitschek was originally a doctor (Urologist), became (because of the contacts he made during his army service) Mayor of Belo Horizonte, Governor of Minas Gerais and eventually Head of State. He must have been a very charismatic person, who advanced Brazil a lot in many fields. Whether Brasília was one of his achievements or one of his failures, history will have to judge. I would have liked to visit the nearby car museum, but the property is being renovated and the museum seems not to exist anymore. To the Praça do Buriti, the Palácio de Buriti (Nauro Esteves). Had a look at the Ginásio de Esportes Nilson Nelson, the (rather new) Centro de Convenções Ulysses Guimarães (by Sérgio Bernardes), which was pretty much inundated by the rain, the completely dilapidated and closed Planetarium (the watchman says: Maybe they will rebuild it), the Sala Funarte Cassia Ellen and the Teatro Funarte Plínio Marcos. Took the elevator to the Torre TV. Beautiful look all over the city, despite the rain. Lunch at the Rodoviário, good and cheap. To the Museu Honestino Guimarães, of modern Brazilian art (Oscar Niemeyer). To the Palácio Itamaraty (Oscar Niemeyer), where I can take part in a guided tour. The interior of the palace is very beautiful, the view over the water basins fantastic. The furnishing with old and modern pieces of art seems odd. The Supremo Tribunal Federal is closed today, because of an extraordinary court session. Visited the Museu da Cidade (Oscar Niemeyer), there are only marble slabs with citations inside. Walked far to the Ponte JK. The bridge, with its three arches, is really outstandingly beautiful. Back by bus. Explored the southern wing a bit on foot, but then I walked enough for the day. By bus back, walked the last bit on foot, because I have to walk it back tomorrow morning. Prepared supper, chatted with the other guests, which also gives me some practise in Portuguese.

2.3.2008 Brasília-Foz de Iguaçu Got up at 4am, packed my backpack. Just in time, the rain had stopped. Walked 2.5km

to the bus stop. Waited a long time for the 131 bus. Got on board the Nacional Expresso to Foz de Iguacu. The ride takes us through green hills. We stop in Goiania, a friendly, big city. Lunch in Itumbiara. The economy in this city seems to be ailing, many shops at the bus terminal and around it are vacant. The landscape is flatter, left and right of the six-lane freeway there are sugar cane plantations. There are many cities, some of them pretty large ones.

3.3.2008 Foz de Iguacu At 8am we arrive in Foz de Iguacu. I take the bus to town and walk to the Pousada El Shaddai, where I have reserved a bed. Solve a computer problem and am thus invited for breakfast. The owner of the hostel even helps me to a lift to the Falls, so that I am already at the entrance by 10am. The portal is about 10km from the Falls. An open double-decker bus takes me to the Falls, where I hike the hiking trail along the falls and shoot a lot of pictures. A nose bear visits us tourists, but only for a short while. The falls have - taken into account the hefty recent rainfalls - not all that much water. At Devil's Throat there is a jetty a long way into the falls, so that one can even feel the spray of the water. Just nearby there is a lift with glass walls to the upper lookout. Interesting that from the restaurant just above the falls you hardly notice them! I start walking back, get a lift by the bus to the Poco Preto Trail, but with a fee of R\$135 this is a bit above my means. So I walk all the way back to the entrance, where I catch the bus back to Foz de Iguacu. Have a hearty lunch at a restaurant in town.

Argentina (Iguazu Falls)

4.3.2008 Foz de Iguacu (Brasil)-Puerto Iguazu (Argentina) Early in the morning to the bus stop. There is confusion about where my bus stops, everyone tells me something else. Nothing posted. There is just no bus. Eventually I get onto a bus which advertises the correct destination, but it goes the wrong way round, until it turns around and rides in direction Itaipu power station. At the Itaipu Binacional Power Station I go the Centro de Recepc o de Visitantes and buy a ticket for the "Circuito Especial" tour. I am fortunate: The 0830 tour is late and I can still join it. We first visit the lookout, from where we have a panoramic view of the dam wall. Then we ride on top of the dam wall and to the base of the dam wall, where each one of the pipes transports half of the water of the entire Iguazu Falls. Then the generator hall from the top, the analogue and digital control centre, the generator hall, the generators (Kaplan turbines with vertical axles!). The power station is half in Paraguay and half in Brazil. It can generate up to 700 Mwh, at the time it was 125 Mwh. The entire energy goes to Sao Paulo, only 8% to Paraguay. The energy bought from Paraguay is at 50Hz, so that it has to be converted to DC, transported to Sao Paulo and there converted to AC 60Hz again. By bus back to Foz de Iguacu, again had lunch at the fabulous R\$5 buffet. Then I want to take the bus to Argentina. I wait 1/2h for the bus, eventually it arrives, but only takes me to the Brazilian border post. It only takes 2 minutes to get the Brazilian exit stamp, but by that time the bus has already left. I wait, wait, wait. After 40 minutes, a bus passes, I want to jump on, but the driver tells me that my ticket was from another company and refuses to take me. I continue waiting. After another 20 minutes I eventually get a bus which takes me to the Argentinian side. Walking was no option, the customs officer told me that there were a lot of robberies between the two border posts. Eventually I get to Puerto Iguazu, walk quickly to the Las Palmeras Hostal, but surprise: Instead of the 18 Pesos advertised on the Internet they suddenly want 25 Pesos per night. I pay reluctantly. Walk to the bus station, but get no ticket to the Falls, in the meantime they are already closed, because they close early, at 16h, and Argentina is an hour later than Brazil. Walk to the Tourist Office, the three countries monument, along the Rio Iguazu back to the hostel. Post the DVDs to Sevi.

5.3.2008 Puerto Iguazu Upon getting up I cannot leave the room, because the door mechanism is completely broken. Somehow I still manage to get out. To the bus terminal, by bus to the Falls. Hiked the Sendero Macuco. Meet a South African couple. Walk to the Salto Arrechia and to the Rio Iguazu. On the way back I see a Cuies (like a rat) and a school of Coaties (nose bears). A Coatie catches a frog on a tree and savours it. By Tren Ecologico de la Selva to the Estacion Garganta del Diablo. There is a lot of water today, much more than two days ago! Fantastic view on the Falls! By train back to the Estacion Cataratas. From there I walk the Circuito Inferior down to the jetty. By boat to Isla San Martin. See many Lagarto Overo (large lizards, about 50cm). Then a marvellous view onto the Falls, which look like a Japanese garden from here: Alto Escondido, Salto San Martin, Salto Mbigua, Salto Bossetti. Back to the mainland, walked to Salto Bossetti and Salto dos Hermanas. To the Circuito Superior, watched the Falls from above. There are many rainbows. Back to the Estacion Cataratas and hiked on the Sendero Verde to the Estacion Central, whereby I see some more Coaties. In the end I see a pretty tame Cuies. By bus back to Puerto Iguazu.

Paraguay

6.3.2008 Puerto Iguazu (Argentina)-Cidade del Este (Paraguay) Early in the morning a fright: Want to quickly check my mail, but there is a message "Site coming soon" (sic!). Thus my mail server has evaporated, I have no more email. Walk about 3km to the jetty, but now I get the second bad news: The ferry was beyond repair and the service has been discontinued. It is very hot. Walk as quick as possible back to the bus terminal - on the way there I drink 1.5l water - and just manage to get on the Foz de Iguazu bus. Pleasant: Today it waits at the Argentinian border and I need no stamp at the Brazilian border, so that I can stay on up to the border of Paraguay. Walk across the apparently so dangerous bridge (I believe this is not true) to Cidade del Este. Change money, walk up to a certain street crossing and take a bus

to the bus terminal. There I put up at the cheap and pleasant Hotel Tia Nancy. Walk back to town. Cidade del Este is a commotion of street peddlers, Chinese import shops and consumer electronics dealers. One can hardly walk, drive or get anyhow else ahead. I get caught in the shopping mania and buy in a Chinese import shop a T-shirt, new socks and some travelling accessories. In an Internet café I quickly check the mail server, but it is dead for good. Back to the bus terminal, change my departure time tomorrow from 13:30 to 08:20h.

7.3.2008 Cidade del Este-Asuncion When I get up and want to go to the bus terminal, it is so strangely quiet. I ask somebody for the time and indeed! Paraguay is an hour behind Argentina, I am way too early. Buy bread in a bakery and walk to the bus terminal. My ticket is being exchanged - only when I am on the bus I realise what happened, I paid for the express, but now I am in the slow bus. It is very hot, the air conditioning gives up after a short while and the bus is being jammed with passengers like in Africa. I only have the Argentinian biscuits with me, whose sweetness tastes revolting in this weather. I abstain from drinking water: The bus has no toilet. The windows are coated with sun protection foil, preventing me from seeing through it. After 6 hours tiring bus journey we arrive in Asuncion. I take a local bus to the city centre. As we get close to the hostel, in which I plan to put up, I get out and walk the rest. I put up in the Pension da Silva, in a old colonial house. Then I walk to the Plaza Uruguay, have a look at the railway museum at the old railway station, but only from outside. Walk to the Plaza Constitucion and the Palacio del Gobierno, where I start the Lonely Planet Walking Tour: Palacio del Gobierno, Centro Cultural Manzana de la Rivera (with small museum of town), Congreso Nacional, Cabildo/Casa de la Cultura (former senate, with many exhibitions), Catedral Metropolitana (closed), Teatro Municipal (only the entrance is from 1889), Casa de la Independencia with museum, Panteon de los Heroes. Asuncion is characterised by opera-like small palaces, which were apparently built by the various dictators. I notice that the slums start across the road from the Parliament in a former park, on the best ground in town. To the Internet, great pleasure: My mail server is running again! But the pleasure quickly turns into disappointment, when I cannot run my favourite client and the speed is very slow. And I have ten times more spam than usual.

8.3.2008 Asuncion In the morning to the Internet café, but it is closed. Watched music- and dance-show on the Plaza de las Heroes. Visited the Panteon, where they just changed guards and the Catedral Metropolitana. A shoelace broke, I searched for a long time in many shops until I found a poor and expensive replacement. Lunch at the supermarket. Lazy afternoon at the Resthouse, chatted with Uwe and Vera, the two Mennonites from Neuland in the Chaco.

9.3.2008 Asuncion Met Louise from Melbourne at the Resthouse, we decide to go together to the Museo del Barro. Catch Bus 30 there, but the museum is closed. Get on the Aregua bus, spend the afternoon in this little colonial town with all its ceramic garden gnomes. Meet, what a coincidence, Uwe and Vera at the Olzi Cafe. Chat with them for a long time. By bus to the bus terminal. Had good supper. By 22:30 bus in direction Filadelfia.

10.3.2008 Filadelfia We arrive at 5am in Filadelfia. I only notice it, when the bus has left again, that I forgot my little pouch which I used to clog the broken A/C jet. The bus is still circulating in Filadelfia, I find it again in the Hindenburgstrasse, flag it down and fetch my little pouch. Put up at the Hotel Golondrina. What a nice, clean place. Sleep a bit. Check out town. To the Jakob-Unger-Museum with Mennonite- and Indian exhibits and stuffed animals. I loved the ingenious two steam engines. Lunch is lousy and expensive. In the afternoon I strolled through town. Met an elderly couple, Hans and Kaethe Penner, was invited to ice-water and cake (the weather is too hot for tea!). We have a long and very pleasant chat. In the end I am even given chocolate and cookies to take along! They are such nice people, that's how I would wish grandparents should be! There is thunder all day long, but not much rain. Long chat with young Mennonites at the Internet café. Such decent young folk! For supper to the Comedor across the road from the hotel. Meet a lorry driver, with whom I chat a long time, he knows a lot about the local cars! The thunderstorm which was threatening all day long breaks loose, it is raining hard.

Filadelfia is not like the Lonely Planet says a collection of houses from a Munich suburb. There are typically Paraguayan houses, with brick walls and tin roofs, huge properties and a couple of cars in the yard. As most inhabitants of the Fernheim colony live on farms, there is a considerable amount of infrastructure such as garages, workshops and supermarkets. The streets point E-W and N-S and are all unpaved.

11.3.2008 Filadelfia-Asuncion The rain has turned the roads into mud-pits. I continue to explore town, walk to the co-operative supermarket - well stocked - and to the not yet commissioned peanut factory. The bus leaves at 12. It stops everywhere, to let people get on or off. We ride through the Chaco, a landscape of green pastures and trees in-between. Formerly known as the Green Hell. I only arrive 19h in Asuncion, where I put up at the hotel Yasy close to the bus terminal.

Argentina (Northern regions)

12.3.2008 Asuncion-Resistencia Get up early, walk to the bus terminal, but blicksem! the office of Brujula, the only morning bus to Resistencia, is closed. I ask the lady at the information desk and she tells me to wait until 05:30. They eventually open at 05:50 and I buy their first ticket to Resistencia. Rush to the exchange and change my last Paraguayan

money into Argentinian Pesos and then rush to the bus, where I just can get in. The bus leaves at 06:00. The customs formalities are unnecessarily long and tedious. We arrive at 12:00h at Resistencia. But stop, here it is already 14h, because of the time difference. Quickly buy a ticket for the 18:30 bus to Salta and take an urbano to town. Resistencia is like an open-air arts museum, there are statues by local artists everywhere, of various quality, and it is exciting to seek and find them. As everything else is closed for siesta, I bought lunch at the supermarket and ate it in the park. To the Museu Provincial de Bellas Artes Rene Bruseau. Got quite nervous when I had to wait a long time for the bus back to the terminal, but got onto my bus to Salta in time. I've got one of the premium seats in front of the double-decker.

13.3.2008 Salta The bus arrives at 6am in Salta. I walk to the Hostel Quara, where I put up and have breakfast. To the Plaza 9 de Julio. Visited the cathedral with its beautiful interior. The Museo de Arqueologia de Alta Montana shows a 500-year-old mummy of a child (los Ninos de Ilullaillaco) who was sacrificed to the gods, completely conserved, even the fat tissue and the eyes are still around, because the mummy was in 5'000 m altitude, far from microbes and in -18 deg C. To the breathtaking sugar-tart-Church Iglesia San Francisco, but the interior is disappointing. Viewed the Convento de San Bernardo only from outside, it is closed to the public. By the cable-car, built in Arth-Goldau, to the Cerro San Bernardo, enjoyed the today hazy view, hiked back. Explored the two pedestrian zones Florida and Alberdi. Walked to the tourist market about 3km west of it. Back to the Mercado Municipal, shopping at the supermarket. To the Museo Provincial de Bellas Artes Arias Rengel, showing wild oil paintings by Nestor Favre-Mossier and photos by Isidoro Zang, both thematise the time of the Junta Government. The country has difficulty to get over this, the art scene is suffering very much, because these works will probably not be persevered, they are too much fixed on this period of time and appear already a bit retrovert. I liked the statues of various artists in the yard, one of them puts them all on old car windscreens, which looks really funny. I have terrible sunburn on my legs since wearing shorts, long trekking pants were not available in Brazil.

14.3.2008 Salta At 02:30h there is a knock on the door of my dorm and three Israeli enter noisily. They switch the light on, have a loud chat and make so much noise until 04:30, that I stay awake. My alarm clock rings at 06:30 and I have to get up, but I feel awful. The car shows up at 07:30, we start in direction Cachi. I travel with two German students and their mother. Dense fog. The landscape is very green, soon there are no more trees. Colourful sandstone formations. We ride through Quebrada de Escoipe, Cuesta del Obispo, Piedra del Molino (there is indeed a millstone at the roadside), via Payogasta to Cachi. On the way there we see wild donkeys, a huge tarantula and many, many protected "Cardones" cactii, which only grow 1cm per year. Once the car gets stuck in a stream across the road and we have to push it backwards out of it. In Cachi we eat something, have a look at the cactus wood ceiling of the Church. On the way back there is more fog. We see wild Guanacos (black head, brown fur). We arrive in Salta a bit exhausted from the long drive.

15.3.2008 Salta-Cafayate I have an enormous lack of sleep and have to sleep late. Buy a bus ticket for the bus to Cafayate. Backup data via Internet. 13h I am at the bus terminal, get onto the bus. A gentleman is already sitting on my seat. I try to explain that it is my seat, but says that he doesn't care at all, he would not give up the seat. Then another gentleman with a ticket for the seat next to it appears. Now we are three people for two seats. When they check the tickets, it turns out that the stubborn gentleman was on the wrong bus! We all laugh heartily, while he steals away like a beaten dog. The first part of the journey is boring and I keep falling asleep. But the Quebrada de Cafayate is very impressive with its gigantic sandstone formations looking like layered cake. Arrived in Cafayate, I check into the El Balcon Hostel. Then I explore the pretty viniculture town, visit the Museu de Vid y el Vino, where there is also a - unfortunately incomplete - steam engine. There is a Mass at Church, in which I take part. Prepare my supper and read a bit.

16.3.2008 Cafayate Walk to the Mirador Cerro Santa Teresita. Meet a woman who is doing the same walk, she has an enormous knowledge about the area. She knows all the plants and their healing effects. She leads me to the back of the hill, where we see a stone hollowed out like a throne and caves which were used by the Indios as tombs. Suddenly I stop, I almost stepped onto a more than 2m long viper, which flees quickly and causes a few stones to drop as it creeps under a large rock. We find cactus fruit and eat them, but they leave little thorns in our fingers. The dog enjoys itself greatly and races up and down the water channels. Then I meet a gentleman who invites me to his house, should I pass there again. Buy food for supper and a bus ticket to Salta for tomorrow. Walk to the winery La Banda/el Vasijo Segreto where I may see everything for free and am even invited to taste their wine. I can recommend their semi-dry white wine! Walk past Bodega Esteco and Taller Cristofani to a historical mansion, then back to town. Chat while cooking with Richard from Sydney.

17.3.2008 Cafayate-San Salvador de Jujuy Left Cafayate with the 9h-bus. The weather is overcast, the rocks don't look too impressive in the cold light. In Salta I quickly eat a choripan and hop on the bus to Jujuy. I only arrive 17h in Jujuy, where I put up at the Yok Wahi Youth Hostel. Buy food, check out the Iglesia San Francisco, the Catedral Basilica and the Cabildo.

18.3.2008 San Salvador de Jujuy-La Quiaca The promised breakfast buffet is only a meagre breakfast. Walk to the Museo Historico Provincial, which, although small, has quite a few interesting exhibits, for instance Indio-made leather hats in the shape of the helmets of the Conquistadors. To the former railway station (the rails have been removed and

the area turned into a park, the turntable into a pool), along the rails to the Parque San Martin, across a bridge to the other side of the Rio Grande, walked back, again across the Rio Grande, visited the Museo Arqueologico which shows some Indio mummies and a Indio fertility goddess. To the Plaza Belgrano (more or less seized by the hobos) and the artists market. Had a rich lunch at the market. Back to the Resthouse. The bus leaves at 15h. Up to Humahuaca I am glued to a small window which opens and take snaps of the Quebrada de Humahuaca. From there, the landscape becomes less spectacular. My neighbour is Lorena from Buenos Aires. We chat until we arrive in La Quiaca. I put up at the La Frontera Hotel. It is pretty cold. I am very tired. La Quiaca is a dusty town with little to speak for itself, a typical border town. Its former glory as a railroad crossing has waned since the Argentinian rail system fell apart.

Bolivia

19.3.2008 La Quiaca-Villazon (Bolivia)-Uyuni (Bolivia) Already by 8am I am at the border post, munching the buns I just bought. The border formalities don't take long. There are many travellers: Israeli, British, New Zealanders. Most I meet again at the bus terminal, but I keep walking to the railway station. I am the first to get a ticket to Uyuni. The train only leaves at 15:30, until then I have to kill time, difficult in a place with no sights except the three markets. I visit the markets, have my hair cut, read in the park, have a nice and cheap lunch at the market. The train leaves punctually at 15h. Lots of dust gets into the coach. Breathtaking scenery. We get tickets for supper. At 19h I want to get it but they tell me to return 22h. Next to me is a Bolivian who works in a lead and zinc mine in Jujuy. I eventually get supper at 21.30h. Shortly afterwards I get diarrhoea: Food poisoning. I am sitting on the loo, as the train gets into Uyuni and just about manage to get out in time. I follow an old woman to the Hotel "Sajara", where I put up.

20.3.2008 Uyuni-San Juan For breakfast to the market. Ask the various tour offices for a tour of the Salar, in the end get the best offer from Turismo Desierto. Meet the two Swiss girls again. We leave 10:30h in a late model Landcruiser. We are 7 passengers, Obedo the driver and the cook. We first visit the Cementerio des Trenes, where there are many cannibalised steam engines, amongst them rarities like Garrets. Then into the Salar (salt lake), everywhere salt. Stop at the salt carving market, where some houses are built entirely from salt. Next stop at the Hotel Del Salar, which is also entirely made from salt. The salt is about 1m deep, then 24m of a mixture of salt and volcanic rock, then again pure salt. We see how the salt is heaped up, dried, loaded onto old lorries and taken away. Next stop at the island Incahuasi, a island of coral rocks overgrown with many cardones cacti. Our cook prepares a fantastic lunch. From here through a flooded part of the salt lake with picturesque reflections in the water, to the shore. Over corrugated dirt roads, past Vicunas, Llamas and sheep to San Juan, where we put up at the Hospedaje San Juan. Beautiful sunset. Card games until late.

21.3.2008 San Juan-Huayllajara Still stomach cramps and diarrhoea. Get up early, cold shower. We see the volcano Olague, the Laguna Canapa with its Flamingos, the Laguna Etionda, which contains Sodiumchloride, the Laguna Chiarcota, also with many Flamingos, the Laguna Onda, the Arvoles de Piedra (formations of eroded sandstone) and the Laguna Colorado, whose red Algae get driven to the surface by the sunlight in the afternoons and dye the water red. The shore is white because of the Borax of the water. Pay the entrance fee of the national park. Put up in a simple hostel in Huayllajara. A generator supplies the electricity.

22.3.2008 Huayllajara-Uyuni Get up at 04:45. It is freezing cold. Visit the Geysers at full moon (picture). See the sunrise in the desert. Visit the warm springs of Polques. Visit the Laguna Verde, whose green colour only comes on when a west wind causes a chemical reaction. To the rural village of Villa Mar, where quinoa and potatoes are grown and Llamas are bred. Have lunch. To the Valle de las Rocas, impressive sandstone formations. See a Viscacha, like a rabbit with short legs and a tail. Stop in San Cristobal, a 8-year-old mining town for the nearby silver mine, which was recently commissioned. Return non-stop to Uyuni, where we arrive at 18h. I put up at the Hotel Avenida. Buy Norfloxacin.

23.3.2008 Uyuni-Potosi Had to kill some time until the bus left at 10am. The bus ride takes us through a marvellous enchanted mountain landscape. There are layered rocks like in Argentina, eroded sandstone rocks, green oases, high summits. We must have hit 5'000m or more. Sometimes we cross the railway line, which makes a disused impression. Eventually we arrive in Potosi, where Helen, a tour guide, gives me her business card and recommends the Hotel Felcar, where I get a nice room for only 25 Bs. Walk to the market, but little is happening today (Sunday). The altitude combined with the effort of heaving my ultra-heavy backpack to the hotel and the fact that I have not eaten anything in 24hs makes me dizzy.

24.3.2008 Potosi To the market, eat two breakfasts. Then to the Agencia de Viaje "Cerro de Plata", buy a ticket for the silver mines tour. At 9am we start. First stop is the Mercado Minero. We buy gifts for the Mineros: Coca leaves, beverages, cigarettes, alcohol for the "Tio" and dynamite. Then we go to the change-room, where we get rubber boots, overalls, helmets and lamps. To get to the mine, we still have to ride quite a distance uphill. We then enter the mine. The entrance section is probably still the same as it was in 1550. Our lady guide explains how hard the miners' life was under the Spaniards: From age 16, the miners worked every day up to 20 hours, having to buy all supplies at inflated prices from the Spaniards, to usually die at the age of 45. We get to the mine deity "Tio", a devil with an erect penis and

decorated with paper flags. His name derives from “Dios”, God. Everyone of us has to make an offer of alcohol, or we may suffer an accident in the mine. We traverse through partially only 1m high shafts further into the mountain. At times someone calls “Carro” which means that a trolley loaded with 1.5t of ore, pulled by two Mineros and pushed by two Mineros is whizzing by and we have to lean closely to the wall. Our guide explains that the miners were self-employed but made no investments whatsoever in equipment. They lived for today and if they made good money, they spent it for cars and cellphones. Many were from poor and huge families and had to support their siblings. We walk deep into the mountain. Once I hit with my head on a tube which traverses the shaft and is so covered with dust that it melts into the background, but thanks to the helmet I take no damage whatsoever. We help the Mineros shovel the ore into buckets made of old car tires. Time and again trolleys whizz past and we have to quickly find a wider spot in the narrow shaft and press against the walls. We see mainly zinc reefs. In one spot we climb pretty adventurous - the first 1.5m we have to climb vertically down in the rock as the 2m ladder is far too short - and watch a Minero how he manually chisels a hole for a dynamite blast. The Ore here is a compound of tin and copper, thus bronze. At 14h we leave the mine and return our equipment. I walk to the “Torre de la Compania de Jesus” where I enjoy a fantastic view of the city. Then I walk to the Convent “Convento de Santa Teresa”, today a museum, and take part in a guided tour. Here I see the wealth of the city, gold and silver were used by the ton. The altar of the Church which goes up to the ceiling is made of pure gold. The liturgical dresses are made from gold- and silver threads. The Convent, founded in 1585, was a monastery of the nobility, where the daughters could be disposed of in style against a payment of 2'000 Pesos. The nuns entered the convent at the age of 15 and never left it. They were not allowed any contact with their environment, even at Church they were only allowed to listen behind a black curtain in a side room, while the choir sang behind another black curtain on the gallery. For the liturgical wine and the sale of produce, they had a kind of revolving shelf, where they could put the items in. The flagellations, highlighted by the Lonely Planet, were only seen in one exhibit. Our guide explained that South Americans pictured Christ with much more blood than Europeans. Many exhibits combine Indio- and European styles. Interesting is, that the fountain in the courtyard is purposely in the shape of a Mogen David (Star of David). Then to the market, where I pay a tailor 50 Bs. to make a bag for me, which contains a steel chain and can thus not be cut off. Then to the night market, where I get pretty lost. Sew a few stitches on the bag with unbreakable thread. To the Internet café.

25.3.2008 Potosi-Sucre In the morning to the market and have breakfast. Explored the Indio quarters, as the Casa de Moneda only opens at 9am. At 9h I am back there and take part in the Spanish guided tour, as it starts earlier than the English tour. Impressive the huge wooden machinery to flatten the silver ingots, imported at the beginning of the 18th Century from Spain. Exciting the two steam engines, which would probably still run. With steam pipe boiler! There is a lot of miscellaneous stuff around, like some child mummies, apparently they all died of natural causes. Strolled a bit through town, asked in the clinic for Mefloquine, but no avail. Back to the Hotel Felcar, checked out, walked to the bus terminal. The 12:30 bus is ready to leave, I put my backpack in, quickly eat three empanadas and drink some water. The ride is once again outstandingly beautiful. Next to me is a Bolivian with whom I chat all the time. Suddenly I urgently have to pee. This is stupid, because this bus is not going to stop. I try to ask the driver to stop, but he would not hear of it, but tells me that he will stop anyway soon. It takes another 15 minutes until he does stop. I rush out and must have left some 5 litres of water behind, more than what I have drunk in the last 3 days. Fortunately, the bus has indeed waited for me. The ride is now much more enjoyable. We are not far from Sucre anymore and arrive there 16h. As there is no urban bus for a long time and those who ride past are chockablock full, I take a taxi into the city centre. I put up at the Alojamento Turist, a dreadful shit hole, I should have checked out a few more places. Explore town: Mercado Central, Iglesia de San Francisco (only outside), Plaza 25 de Mayo, where there were some political rallies just now taking place, Catedral, Convento de San Felipe Neri (closed), Iglesia de la Merced (closed), Casa de la Cultura, Iglesia de Santo Domingo. To the market, eat spicy minced meat with potatoes for supper. As I ask the vendor what I had just eaten, she answers with “Scheisse” (German for shit). I have to laugh aloud, she follows suit. Her colleague tells me the spelling is “Saice”.

26.3.2008 Sucre For breakfast to the market. Change to the Alojamento San Jose, miles cleaner than the previous one. Chat a long time with an English motorbike traveller. Then to the Plaza 25 de Mayo, but at 09:30 an employee of Cal Orcko tells me that the bus was cancelled and I was to return at 10:30. I quickly visit the III Encuentro de Arte Contemporanea with an exhibition of sculptor Juan Bustillos and the Casa de la Libertad, where I take part in a French guided tour. At 10:30 I am back at the Plaza and get on the bus to Cal Orcko. There are 4 more passengers. Arrived there, we are given a guided tour. First we are introduced to what the fibreglass dinos were and when they lived. Then we are introduced to the plaster casts of the dino footprints at the museum. Then we may go to the panorama terrace, where we have a full view of the sandstone wall, where hundreds of dino tracks may be seen. Unfortunately at a distance of more than 100 metres, it is difficult to see. This may have its reason, because the quarry is still in use. At 13h I am back at the plaza. A doctor, who was part of our group, recommends visiting the Recoleta. I quickly have lunch at the market and grab the bus to Recoleta. I am a bit early, enjoy the view over town and walk a bit further up the mountain to have a better view. A couple passing by recommends climbing the hill, but at least in a group of 3 persons, because of the many muggers. So I rather stay where I am. At 14:30 the Museo de la Recoleta opens. We are guided through the monastery with its four courtyards, see a 1'500-year-old cedar tree, many paintings, a weird transport coffin

and may even get on the gallery of the Church. The tour is strange, our guide hardly says anything, just keeps waiting quietly. At least this allows me to sneak a few forbidden snaps. Walk to the Iglesia La Merced. Doing so, I happen to meet the doctor again who recommends to visit La Glorieta. La Merced is now open, I visit the Church which is in poor condition. There are three gilded altars, but even they are damaged. I climb the gallery where there is a dilapidated organ, inside one can see jack-knifed organ pipes. Then to the tower. Fantastic view over the sunlit city of Sucre. I climb to the roof (this is meant to be done) and may even climb the domes (there are stairs), but they have become quite rickety on top, because the mortar has crumbled off. Shoot panoramic pictures. Walk to the minibus stop to La Glorieta. The bus rides for a couple of kms until it stops at an army barracks. Behind is indeed La Glorieta, the Palace has already taken my fancy upon entering Sucre. The castle was built in the late 19th Century by Francisco Argandoña and his wife Clotilde. The state wants to make it a museum, but up to now, little has been done. It may only be viewed from outside. Its trademark is the minaret, which the spiteful nobleman had built in order to supervise his over 100 employees. Back to Sucre, where I write postcards and post them and go to the Internet café, in order to have my full camera chip burnt to DVD. Chat almost until midnight with Juan and Johnny at the Internet café.

27.3.2008 Sucre To the bus terminal, bought ticket for the 19h bus to La Paz. To the Internet café, fixed Dubi's website. To the Capilla Santa Barbara (today a hospital), the Theatre and the Parque Bolivar, where I climbed the very rickety and everywhere corroded "Eiffel Tower". To the Rotunda Chapel and the old railway station, where I find an old steam locomotive and chat for a long time with the doorman. Read at the hostel until 15h, then to the Military Museum, where they have some old cannons, an Embraer (sports plane) and some more war scrap. To the bus terminal, where I meet the Austrians from the bus to Potosi again. On the bus I sit next to a lawyer from La Paz, with whom I chat. The seats are very comfortable, I quickly fall asleep.

28.3.2008 La Paz The bus arrives despite traffic jam to my surprise at 07:30 in La Paz. I first inform myself at the Tourist Office about the dangers and annoyances, then take a taxi to the Wild Rover Backpackers Hostel. Leave my backpack there and start exploring town: Plaza Murillo with Legislative Palace and Government Palace. Iglesia San Francisco, Calle Sagarnaga (the tourist road with many souvenir shops), Coca-Museum, Plaza San Francisco, lunch there at the market, back to the hostel, checked in. Avenida Mariscal Santa Cruz, Plaza del Estudiante, Parque Raul Salmon de la Barra, but there is so much construction going on that I cannot access the Mirador. Nevertheless a good view over town. To the modern Church Maria Auxiliaria, inside it is not beautiful. To the Church La Merced, where there is currently a service being held, back to the hostel, then to the Mercado Negro and had supper at the Plaza San Francisco.

29.3.2008 La Paz To the bus terminal, bought ticket for tomorrow to Tihuanaco. To the Museo de Etnografia e Folklore, a fantastic collection of tissues, masks, ceramics and money. A very modern exhibition, with excellent descriptions (in Spanish). Interesting also the video about the mask makers. I am asked to leave at 12:30 when they close. To the Iglesia Santo Domingo, where there is a wedding. To the Internet café, skyped with Aunt Ruetli and Christian Gerig. For the installation of Skype I get 1/4h free. To the market, where I eat excellent Rebuelta. No wonder my neighbour keeps asking for more. To the Plaza Wenceslav Monroy with the beautifully restored Teatro Municipal. To the Calle Jaen, but the museums are closed. Never mind, because a kind of carnival is just about to start, with prizes for the best groups. Many groups parade past me, with fancy costumes and terribly off-sounding bands, but their enthusiasm makes up for it! There are traditional costumes, Moors with glitzy wings, ballerinas, Gauchos, Indios with bowler hats, woollen caps or Conquistadors helmets made of leather, Kusillo (Jesters), pretty much everything there is in South America. In the evening back to the Plaza San Francisco, where I have chicken soup. The gentleman across the table tells me to ask for "Aumento". He does it and it works, so I do it too, get an angry look, but it works, too.

30.3.2008 La Paz The breakfast comes far too late, I can just gobble something down as my tour bus to Tihuanaco pitches up at 08:30h. But we wait for an hour in front of a hotel for somebody who just can't get ready, eventually we leave without him. We only arrive in Tihuanaco at 11h. We first visit the museum with the monolithic statue of Pachamama, 7.5m tall and weighing 25t, and the Star Gate. Then to the second museum with some Tihuanaco artefacts and deformed skulls. Then to the pyramid. It is not very interesting, though, little has been excavated. We see a few monolithic stone figures. Visit the semi-subterranean temple. In the third complex we see the Puerta del Sol. The site is not really impressive, too little has been excavated, too little is known about it. As I am asked to pay 25 Bs. for lunch, I walk to the village market, where I eat the local fish "Pejerey" for 7 Bs. and chat with the locals. Back to the tour bus, ride back to La Paz. At the Mirador we stop for photos. We arrive in town at 16:50h, far too late for my 17h bus to Copacabana. I predicted this and left message with the hostel, so I can keep my bed for another night. All night long disco noise, I hardly sleep.

31.3.2008 La Paz-Copacabana At 7h I walk to the bus terminal, buy a ticket to Copacabana. Until the bus leaves, I have ample time to eat my breakfast at one of the food stalls in front of the bus terminal. The bus leaves, next to me is Marisol from Cuzco, travel agent, who gives me good advice about my travels in Peru. We ride along the lower Lake Titicaca. We cross the Estrecha de Tiquina, between San Pablo de Tiquina and San Pedro de Tiquina, by ferry and arrive at 12h in Copacabana. The village is situated picturesquely between two hills at the shores of Lake Titicaca. I put up at the YHA Las Brisas II. Buy a ferry ticket for tomorrow. Ate trout at the market for lunch. To the huge cathedral, climb

the Cerro Calvario on the lakeside. At the top I meet an Argentinian with whom I chat. Back the other side. Afternoon nap. Back to the cathedral which is now open, so that I can visit the upper floor, where there is another huge chapel, and the lateral Capilla de las Velas, dark and encrusted in wax. The Tourist Office recommends to climb the other Cerro, too. So I climb the "Horca del Inca", which has a savage rock landscape on top, regarded as an Inca sanctuary and offers good views. To the Inkintala, but it is already closed. To the grossly expensive Internet. Milanese for supper. Thunderstorm and heavy rains.

1.4.2008 Copacabana (Isla del Sol) Change to the cheaper and better Residencial Aroma. Eat breakfast at the market, am far too early at the jetty. It is freezing cold and dark clouds are threatening. We leave at 08:30h with "Andes Amazonia". The boat is made of wood, with the looks of a modern yacht, but has neither electrical nor mechanical components and is driven by two completely unequal outboard engines. I climb onto the roof, where it is draughty, but I have a good view. In one place we have to navigate through a narrow passage between two rocks. At 11h we arrive in Challapampa in the north of the Isla del Sol. We are rounded up by a guide, no way getting out. First we have to purchase entrance tickets for 10 Bs. Then to the Museo del Oro, despite its name it has not a single item of gold, just a few broken vases and some human skulls and bones. After a short hike, where we get little interesting information about the maize, quinoa and sugar beans planted here, we arrive at the "Mesa del Sacrificio", without commentary easily mistaken for an illegal copy of a stone table at a freeway rest site. Across is the "Roca Sagrada", a rock with a hardly visible triangular face carved into it. From far, the rock may - with some difficulty - also be recognised as a puma face. To the "Laberinto Chinkana", a complex made of dilapidated dry stone walls. The guide still gets money for his useless explanations. Eventually I am free and walk fast to the south end of the island. Good views. In the south, I have to pay another 5 Bs. entrance fee. Walk to the "Escalera del Inca" and "Fuente del Inca", a stone stairway with a kind of a well with three water fountains on top, a little stream next to the stairway and a similar fountain at the bottom. Wait for the boat to leave. Behind a rock I glimpse a reed raft like Thor Heyerdal's, walk there and take snaps. The boat leaves at 15:40. The "Casa del Inca" we only see from the boat. Chat with Koni from Biel, Switzerland. Arrived in Copacabana, I run to the post office in order to post the letter to the Penner family, but the post office is closed because of a "journey to La Paz". Walk to the Intinkala, but they want 5 Bs. entrance fee for the few rocks, so I decline. Climb the hill next to the Calvario, walk around it. For supper a big piece of meat for 5 Bs. at the market.

Peru

2.4.2008 Copacabana-Puno I use up the last coins for a cup of coffee and get aboard the 9h bus to Puno. The border formalities are quick and easy. No luggage check. On the road customs- and police checkpoints, I see a South African "Buffel" armoured car in the service of the Peruvian police, even the Transvaal number plate is still visible. We arrive at 12h in Puno, but because of the time difference it is only 11h. I check in at the Hostal Illampu, where I book a tour to Sillustani for today and to Uros for tomorrow. Quickly change money, eat lunch at the market. To the Internet, back to the hotel. The tour bus arrives 1/2h too late and has two passengers too many, which are put aboard a taxi which is to follow us. The Torres de Sillustani are picturesquely situated on a peninsula in the Laguna Umayu. The towers get wider toward the top, like a vase, are seamlessly built from hewn stones, in the pre-Inca-period, the Coya period. A woman with a tame baby vicuna is sitting in the ruins and knitting. On the way back we stop at a reed boat and later at a traditional house, where I can get a few snaps of the Alpacas. Chat with a Franco-Canadian couple from Montreal on the bus.

3.4.2008 Puno Breakfast at the market, then wait for the tour bus. We are picked up at 9h and taken to the harbour, where we board a modern passenger ship. Cruise through the reeds to the swimming islands of the Uros. First stop at Hisk'a Challwa, with the symbol of the fish. The swimming islands consist of a layer of Totoras reeds, about 1m thick. The core of the reeds is a foamlike, eatable mass. The islands are tied with strings to the other islands, to prevent them floating off in a storm. Every month, about 30cm of reeds have to be put on top in order to replace the rotting parts underneath. Walking on the island is soft, the feet sink a bit into the reeds. The houses are also made of reeds and slightly elevated, so that the layer of reeds underneath only has to be increased once a year. Many houses feature solar cells and batteries for light and TV, a gift of the then President Fujimori. Partially, they still use traditional reed boats, some modernised as catamarans, but also wooden dinghies with outboard engines. The Uros originally fled from the other tribes to the islands, where they were left in peace. They fish, grow some potatoes on the islands(!!!), used to also eat the roots of the reeds, today they are mainly in the tourist industry, selling curios and offering boat rides. Interesting is that they keep tame ibises and herons as pets. With a reed boat we cross over to Jacmatata, where I get a good view over the reed islands from the tower. I am given some Totoras to eat. Back to Puno, where I fail to find out which bus takes me to the Yavari, so that I end up walking there. The steam ship "Yavari" was built in 1862 in England and shipped in 2'766 parts to the then Peruvian port of Arica, from where they were brought by railway to Tacna. From there they were transported by mules to Puno. Consequently, the maiden voyage only took place in 1870. The steamer was fired with dried Llama dung. In 1916, a Swedish Bolinder diesel engine was fitted and the hull extended. The vessel is still in running condition. Under the jetty there are some wild guinea pigs. Further on to the nearby Coya, which is stranded in shallow water since 1986. The steamer was brought here the same way as the Yavari and

commissioned in 1886. Unfortunately, the ship is used as a restaurant today and the steam engine is partially dismantled. What a pity. Just next to it, the huge “Olianta” is in the dry dock. Restoration is under way and the ship is supposed to be recommissioned with real steam. Amazing the two steam powered rail cranes nearby, obviously still in running condition. To the Museo Naval, but it is closed today. To the Museo Carlos Dreyer, I almost ran away when they asked 15 S., but we end up agreeing to 5 S., as I am the only visitor. There are some interesting exhibits from the pre-Inca-times, adzes, knopkeries, stone missiles, pottery, textiles, stonemasonry. Gold and silver of the treasure of Sillustani. Some paintings and sacral art. Carlos Dreyer was a German painter, who settled here as a professor and arts collector. Visited the huge cathedral. To the Deustua Arch, a arch across the street. Took a picture of the lit-up cathedral.

4.4.2008 Puno-Arequipa At 08:45h I am in front of the Museo Nautico - still closed. It would not open today I am told. Back to the hostel, fetched the backpack, to the bus terminal. A tout of a bus company offers me a ticket for 15 Soles, as I hesitate, he even offers it for 13 Soles, I cannot refuse this offer. We leave punctually. In Juliaca I have to rush to the loo and just about make it in time. For every litre of water I drink I have to pee three, so I have to stop drinking water altogether. We have not sufficient passengers, so we spend an hour soliciting passengers. The ride takes us through a breathtaking mountain landscape with blue lakes, smoking volcanoes and further down many cacti. We arrive in Arequipa an hour late. I take a minibus to the city centre, where a gentleman takes me to a private Resthouse, the El Rosario Hospedaje, which is close to the Plaza de Armas and goes exactly with my budget. Visit the beautiful Church San Augustin, where they are just celebrating mass, the Catedral and the Iglesia La Compañia. To the Tourist Office and several tour operators. The tour to the Colca Canyon will be exceedingly expensive. In the meantime it has become dark, the Plaza is beautifully lit up. Have supper at a small restaurant. To the Internet.

5.4.2008 Arequipa Today I have to fast, because of my perpetual stomach problems. Early in the morning by minibus to the bus terminal, to find out the departure times to Cabanaconde. Back to town. To the Convento San Francisco, where I am the only visitor and they do a guided tour just for me. The Convent is tremendously richly endowed, they wanted to lock away the spare daughters in dignity. To the Museo de Arte Virreynal Santa Teresa, one more Convent. This is not less endowed than the former one. To the Monasterio de Santa Catalina, the most famous monastery of Arequipa. The Convent Santa Catalina de Siena was founded in 1579, 40 years after the city of Arequipa. It was damaged in the earthquakes of 1958 and 1960 and opened for the public in 1970. It is built from the typical sillar stone, a kind of white volcanic rock. A monastic city, wildly grown. The rooms are far bigger and more comfortable (lounge and bedroom) than in any other convent and usually include a private kitchen. Everything appears like in the olden days. There are stories of wild excesses and the nuns are said to have had several servants. Walk to Yanahuara, but don't find anything particular. To the Convent of Recoleta, which offers some excellent Indio art, stuffed animals and Indian items from the Amazonas basin, a fantastic library which only opens for 15 min per day as well as sacral art and paintings. In the first cloister there is Peru's oldest “Chomba” wine jar (500 lt.). The convent was founded in 1648 by Padre Pedro de Mendoza and built according to plans by Padre Pedro de Peñaloza. It is like all the other monasteries, built of sillar stone and has four courtyards (cloisters). It was opened to the public in 1978. Back to the Plaza de Armas, visited the Iglesia de la Merced and the Santuario para la Adoracion Permanente (modern). Visited the cloisters of the former Jesuit Monastery La Compañia. Today's Church was built in 1650, the cloisters in 1660. Took pictures of the Plaza de Armas and the University by night.

6.4.2008 Arequipa-Cabanaconde Today I may eat again, I get Arroz Cubano for breakfast. To the military parade on the Plaza de Armas. First the flags of Peru and Arequipa are set, in presence of the provincial- and municipal government. The schools, associations and hospitals parade past. Then the army, whereby a surprisingly high percentage of women is seen in the fighting troops. Thereafter to the Museo Santuarios Andinos. Very expensive entrance fee, then movie and guided tour. The mummy, like the one in Salta found by Johan Reinhart, is in a much poorer condition than the one in Salta. Back to the hostel, said goodbye, by minibus to the bus terminal. Unfortunately all the buses to Cabanaconde are sold out, but I get the last seat on the “Trebol” bus. It is just about to leave, I discover with pleasure that I have the seat next to the driver. Driver and conductor are very nice and offer me food and drink. On the way, two young cows are loaded into the luggage compartment. The door next to me is opened and closed time and again, the bus is more than full. A girl has a young llama on her lap. The tar road ends in Chivay. The canyon of Colca looks quite impressive, but it is too dark for photos. In Cabanaconde I put up at the “Villa Pastor” and have a quick supper.

7.4.2008 Cabanaconde (Valle de Colca) For breakfast hot cereal broth. To the Mirador Achichague, but it is closed and I have to walk a long way until I can see the valley from above. Then I walk in direction Sangalle, the oasis at the bottom of the valley. Get lost and have to ask quite a few people for the right path. Meet a couple from Bordeaux/France, with whom I hike up to Sangalle (2180maSl). We see a few Condors. Sangalle has little in common with the Swiss St. Gallen, a few houses, a few fields and two swimming pools, all this at the bottom of the valley. Eat some cactus fruit, but the little spikes get into my fingers. Continue to Malata (2660maSl), then Cosñirhua (2660maSl), where I eat an expensive but decent lunch. There are guinea pigs under the kitchen table, at times also in the cooking pot. Walk down to the bottom of the valley, across a bridge to San Juan de Cuccho (2300maSl). Everywhere there are houses, fields, electricity. Wherever possible, the slope is terraced. Surprisingly many goods arrive here, although it is only accessible on foot or by mule: Fridges, windows, doors, corrugated iron, TVs, stereo sets, cooldrinks etc. Before

getting to the second bridge, a gentleman wants to see my “Boleto Turistico”. I tell him, that I had none and wanted none and walk away in the other direction. This was wrong, and I have to pass the bridge, at the other end of which the said gentleman is waiting. This time I just pass him. The very expensive Boleto Turistico is a dubious affair, as it is not issued by a government authority. I start the steep ascent (1'000 meter's climb). After 3/4 of the way I meet a donkey driver, with whom I chat a long time. I am amazed at the high level of education of the people here, I don't have to explain to anyone where Switzerland is or what we produce. At 17:30, 1.5hs before plan, I am back in Cabanaconde (3287maSl). Near the cemetery I meet the Spaniards again, whom I last met in Puno. Buy a bus ticket for tomorrow.

8.4.2008 *Cabanaconde-Cusco* At 06:30h I quickly drink hot cereal broth, then off into the “Andalucia” bus to Arequipa. I have a good seat. The Valle de Colca looks, despite back light, marvellous. At the Cruz del Condor the bus stops for 10 minutes. Everywhere there are control posts for the “Boleto Turistico”. I somehow manage past them to the Mirador where I quickly do a few snaps, but see no condors. Then we continue to Chivay. At the police check point of Pampas Cañahuasi I get off. A policeman immediately takes care of me and promises me that he will ask every vehicle for a lift for me. After a short while he waves to me, a empty tourist bus offers to take me for 15 S. to Juliaca. Initially I wanted to travel to Cusco, but at this time of the day there is little transport, so I accept gladly. The ride is comfortable and quick. The driver, a tourist guide, knows a lot about every place we pass. I drop in Juliaca, eat a ridiculously cheap lunch at a restaurant and the good woman owning the place, even puts me on the right three-wheeler taxi to the Terminal Terrestre. Upon arriving there, the bus to Cusco is just about to leave which gives me even some leverage to negotiate the fare. I get in and off we go in a new and comfortable bus. The landscape is fantastic, looks like green fleece-coated Styrofoam mountains of a model railway behind the white peaks, almost unreal. Then red clouds - blue sky - green mountains, before the sun sets. A salesman of educational books (very good ones, nota bene) and one of health products hold their lectures in the bus. This is very entertaining. We arrive in Cusco at 20:30h, I have spent 13.5h on buses. At the terminal I am approached by Juana, the owner of the “Hospedaje Samani”, who offers a room. We take a taxi there, it is very centrally located. Thus even this problem is solved.

9.4.2008 *Cusco* To the Plaza de Armas. Visit the Catedral for free, because there are no checks that early. To the Tourist Information Office. Buy an absurdly expensive “Boleto Turistico” - 30 USD. Visit the “Museo de Santa Catalina”, the Convent was moved from Arequipa to Cusco, but continued to exist in Arequipa. Interesting the many paintings in the prayer room of the nuns, and the frescoes. A painting, the Killing of the Children by Herod, is identical to one in Arequipa. To the “Museo de Arte Popular”, where there are many funny dioramas of everyday life, mostly in ceramics. Back to the hostel, where Juana explains alternatives to the absurdly expensive train to Machu Picchu (110 km 100 USD return). to the “Museo de Sitio de Qorikancha”, a dark underground museum, not worth mentioning. It offers no information on Qorikancha. Visited the Church Santo Domingo, which is built on the foundations of Qorikancha. Lunch in a small restaurant. Chatted with the people. No tourist ever finds his way in here. To the “Museo Municipal de Arte Contemporanea”, which shows a few steel statues and paintings. To the “Museo Historico Regional” at the Casa del Inca Garciloso de la Vega. It shows Mastodon bones, some pre-Colombian art (Venus of Chanapata, Wari-ceramics), Inca art, whereby here the Inca period lasted the longest (1200-1538), Spanish dominated art, whereby mainly the Pachamama-Madonnas in the shape of mountains are noticed. Visited the Churches San Francisco and Santa Clara just on outside. Strolled through the market. Visited the Templo San Pedro, just the outside. To the railway station, but it is closed and I am told that I am not allowed on the cheap train, I was to buy one of the madly expensive tourist tickets. Walked to the Monumento Pachacutec, climbed the tower. Back by minibus. to the Centro Qosqo de Arte Nativo and saw a tourist show with local dances. Meet Eduardo, an architect and chat with him for a long time. Supper and Internet.

10.4.2008 *Cusco (Sacred Valley)* By minibus to the Mercado Rosaspata, where the bus to Písaq is already waiting. Upon arrival, the taxi drivers ask 10-15 S. for the short ride to the ruins, so I prefer to walk. It turns out a beautiful hike, through the ingenious Inca-terraces in the steep mountain slopes. After only 25 min I am at the top and marvel at the fantastic site: Everywhere terraces, temples made from seamlessly hewn stones, residential houses, fortifications. The path between the different parts of town is partially built up with stones, it even features a tunnel and in several places huge rocks were carved through. Meet a couple of Swiss and a Peruvian-French couple from Annecy. Walk back to Písaq, where I get a good lunch. As I walk to the bus stop, the bus is already there and I just hop on. In Tambomachay I drop off: A water sanctuary with several holy wells. It also known as “Baño de la Ñusta” or “Balneario Inca”. Where the well is, is not known. Across the road is Pucapucara, which is poorly preserved. It is not known whether it was a rest-house or a fortress. By minibus to Quengo, a sanctuary with a subterranean part hewn into the rock (body of Pachamama) and mysterious “seats” everywhere on top of the rock. Further down again a similar site. Walk in direction Saqsayhuaman. Meet people who are just about to film a video. Two women in traditional dresses are dancing. I am asked to dance with them, which I gladly do. The video is to be displayed on YouTube within the next two weeks¹. At Christo Redemptor I meet Maximiliano, a happy musician, who sings jolly songs to the tune of his guitar-like Charango, and plays also the pan-flute or the recorder at times. Eventually to Saqsayhuaman, a huge fortress, but really

1 The video was never published on YouTube

a sanctuary. In the one part there are supposed to be tunnels. Everything made of huge, many tons heavy and perfectly hewn, rocks. Within the walls there are stones arranged in the shapes of animals. When the Spaniards came, parts of the fortress were supposed to have been hidden under a 4m thick layer of earth. Walk back to town with two guides. To the Inca Museum, which has interesting models of the most important Inca sites on display. Back to the hostel.

11.4.2008 Cusco-Aguas Calientes To the railway station, bought ticket for the train from Ollantaytambo to Aguas Calientes. Only when returning, I pick up that I was short changed 4 soles. Fits exactly the picture of this miserable exploitative train company. Fetched the backpack, to the bus terminal to Urubamba. There I get onto the bus to Chinchero. Arrived there, I leave the backpack at the entrance gate. The site of Chinchero is little impressive. Terraces, only partially excavated stairs, a rock carved into a sacred bath and a picturesque part of the Inca trail. Continued with the completely overcrowded bus to Urubamba, from there with an equally crowded minibus to Ollantaytambo. Lunch, leave the backpack at the restaurant. View first the main site high above the village, with many terraces in the steep slope and some houses built into the overhanging cliffs. Meet Mättu, a Bernese, and an Englishman. We walk together to the houses in the facing mountain. A steep path leads us there. Incredible, how houses and even terraces were built into the steep slopes. Back to the village, bought cheese and bread, fetched my backpack. Ate my supper on the main square. Walk to the railway station. I am not allowed into the waiting room, have to wait in front of the station. Eat a soup from a food stall. At 19:30h we are allowed to board the train. Chat with a Mexican and Maria from Uruguay. The train only leaves at 21h. We lose even more time, in the end the most expensive train on earth manages 1h delay on 28kms distance. In Aguas Calientes, the ticket office for Machu Picchu is now closed. Put up at the “Posada del Inca” directly at the Plaza des Armas.

12.4.2008 Aguas Calientes The alarm clock wakes me at 04:30h. I rush to the ticket office. It opens at five, but because of computer problems they don't sell tickets today. Maybe on top at the entrance. I rush in the darkness to the top of the mountain, lose the path a couple of times. After an hour I am at the entrance gate of Machu Picchu. Indeed, I can buy there one of the exceedingly expensive tickets (120 Soles!). I get in, to the “House of the Caretaker” and from there the several kms long Inca Trail up the mountain to the “Puerta del Sol”. There is dense fog up there and hordes of tourists, so that I quickly turn back. To the Temple of the Sun, the Royal Enclosure and the Royal Tomb and the Ceremonial Baths. To the prison section with the “Temple of the Condor”, then to the “Three Doorways”. To the Gate of Wayna Picchu (only 400 tourists per day allowed up there). Try to get to the Great Caves, but have to give up a few kms after the “Temple of the Moon” because I run out of time. Back to the path to Wayna Picchu. Meet the Uruguayan woman again, we walk together the ultra steep trail to the summit. Often, one has to grab a steel rope. In one spot there is a very narrow tunnel, which one has to creep through. We make it to the summit. I take a few pictures, then I leave, because I have to return slowly. Nevertheless, my knees cause problems. Down again, I eat illegally (one is supposed to eat very expensively at the official restaurant), then continue with sightseeing: Ceremonial rock, main square, Observatory “Intiwatana”. A guide kicks me rudely out of there because I was walking against the direction of the arrows. I have to climb it from the other side again (he smiles victoriously) and return now on purpose the same way. Then to the temple section: Main Temple, Temple of the Three Windows, Holy Square, House of the High Priest, Sacristy. Down to the prison group, the mortars, industrial section, residential section, back to the Three Doorways. Back to the Ceremonial Rock. Walked through the “Qolqas” to the gate, hiked very slowly back to Aguas Calientes. I am dripping wet, have a shower, clean clothes, eat a good and cheap supper.

13.4.2008 Aguas Calientes-Cusco Got up at five in the morning. Started hiking in direction Hydroelectrica Santa Teresa. I am a bit dizzy, maybe because of the extremely heavy backpack. Walk through the rainforest on the decayed railway sleepers. Crossing the streams on the slippery sleepers is a bit tricky. Fortunately at the bypass a train drives by. At the Hydroelectrica I get into a shared taxi which takes me to Santa Teresa. From there with a crowded minibus - there are even passengers on the roof - to Santa Maria. On the way I see a huge black snake with yellow pattern creep away. In Santa Maria I meet a Fribourgois and a French. We buy tickets for the bus and eat lunch. The bus ticket was a stupid idea, because exactly the bus of the other company arrives on time at 12:30. Our bus is nowhere to be seen. We wait and wait, eventually it arrives at 15h. The ride is long. We drive through the clouds onto high, snowed-in mountain passes. We only arrive at 21h in Cusco, to make it worse, not at the Terminal Terrestre. By minibus I get there, where I am told that the last bus to Nazca had left. Put up at a hostel close to the bus terminal.

14.4.2008 Cusco-Nazca I get up early, board the bus to Juliaca. Drop in Tipon, walk in direction of the ruins. On the way there I meet Sadith Kamof Alava, who invites me to her house, which is about to be built. I can watch them building a house from bamboo and covering it with plaster of Paris. We have tea, chat. She invites me for lunch, but I have to continue sightseeing. Visit the ruins of Tipon. Remarkable the much bigger terraces, the still working wells, one of them with four overflows, and a 25km long water channel, which is now unfortunately dry. In the ruins I meet Javier and Fabiana from Buenos Aires. We visit the Inca ruins together and they offer me a lift with their rented car to the ruins of Pikillacta. There we see the ruins of the Wari culture (400 - 800 DC), which were partially built with remarkable precision from adobe blocks and dry stone walls of up to 5m tall. On the way back, Javier and Fabiana even treat me to a roasted guinea-pig, it tastes excellent! We get early to Cusco, so that I even catch the 14h bus to Nazca. I can negotiate the price a bit, as it is just about to leave. But the “Molino” company is lousy, the bus is crowded with passengers. By

my feet sits a woman with loads of luggage, so that I cannot move my legs. Next to me sits Hector, a musician, with whom I chat to late at night. He gives me one of his CDs, and I invite him for supper.

15.4.2008 Nazca The bus arrives at 05:30h in Nazca. But although some passengers tell the driver to stop, it doesn't. I try to get to the front, but stumble over the passengers sleeping in the aisle. Try to tell the conductor to stop, but he is asleep. The bus continues. Only in the midst of nowhere it comes to a stop. I refuse to get dropped here. I get off at the tollbooth and coerce the conductor to give me 5 Soles for the taxi back. The policemen tell the driver off and promise to get me a lift back. With me is a Peruvian, who was less pushy and didn't even get the money for the taxi. Suddenly there is a minibus to Nazca. We both get in. But this bus again doesn't stop in Nazca, but in a suburb. I have to get a taxi at my own expense, which drops me after a unsuccessful attempt at the "Hospedaje Aqueducto", where I put up. Find the office of "Condor" which was recommended by a fellow traveller, book a flight, whereby after some negotiations, I get the 50 minutes flight for 50 USD. To the Internet, at 10:30h I am back at the travel agency. We get to the airport, get into a Cessna 172. The flight is rough and bumpy. The lines and figures are, to my surprise, very difficult to see. They were stepped into the desert ground. Inexplicable the many lines and geometric shapes. The pictures are hardly useable. After almost an hour, we land again. To the Internet. At 15h, I am back at the travel agency, for a tour of the aqueduct. We first visit some of the Nazca lines close-up in the desert. The lines were made just by removing the black stones which usually line the desert. Then we get to the aqueduct of Cantalloc, which is misnamed because it is in reality an underground irrigation system. The walls are from stones, which allow the water from the river as well as excess water from irrigation to return to the channel. The channels are set in a zigzag pattern with circular breathing windows. From there we get to the Inca ruins of "Los Paredones", which are built of adobe blocks. Most of the ruins have been destroyed in the 1970s. I spend hours at the Internet café trying to fix my broken site manager, but to no avail.

16.4.2008 Nazca-Lima I get up much earlier than planned, walk to the office of Sojuz Bus. Eat breakfast at a food stall, when I see a "Viva" bus stopping to let passengers off. I grab my backpack, run to the bus and get on. The price is a bargain, the ride very comfortable. The landscape is desert, getting more and more urban towards Lima. We arrive there at 14h, one of the passengers takes me along to Miraflores in the taxi. From there I walk to the "Casa del Mochilero", easily the cheapest sleep in Miraflores. Find out about prices of air tickets to Pucallpa, buy some food, stroll through the many beautiful parks along the seafront, watch the sunset.

17.4.2008 Lima By Colectivo to the Plaza des Armas. Visit the museum of the Catedral with the tomb of Francisco Pizarro. Then I watch a dance show on the plaza. Once again I am asked to dance with them, which I subsequently do. I will probably be seen on some American home videos, I hope not on "America's funniest videos" though. To the Museo de la Inquisicion. In the former house of the inquisition, they tell about the Peruvian inquisition and show the methods of torture very explicitly. Walk the Jiron de la Union to the Plaza San Martin, where I visit the monument of General San Martin with the statue of Madre Patria, which should have had a flame on its head but ended up with a Llama (in Spanish "flame" and "llama" are the same word). Chat a long time with a policeman. Visit the Iglesia de Santo Domingo, the Basilica de la Veracruz with its yellow/orange interior and the arcades of the post office. Then walk to the Parque de la Muralla, where parts of the former city walls are on display. Visit the small museum and the statue of Francisco Pizarro, which in the meantime has landed here. Then to the Monasterio de San Francisco, where I visit the monastery and also the catacombs filled with bones and skulls. To the Museo del Banco Central de Reserva del Peru. The fantastic museum shows present-day Indio art, the probably best display of pre-Columbian ceramics and gold (collection Hugo Cohen) artefacts as well as an art gallery. I only leave when they close. Quick look at Iglesia San Pedro. On the way to the bus stop, I come across a brass band and wait there and listen. They play very well, which is rather the exception here. By minibus back to Miraflores. Buy some vegetables, chat a long time with the people of the Rest-House next door. Prepare a huge supper.

18.4.2008 Lima In the morning to one of the huge supermarkets. The food is very expensive, more than in Europe. Buy toiletries for the journey on the River Amazon. Then to the Huaca Pucallana, a step pyramid of the Lima culture, between the years 200 to 700 AD. Back to the hostel, burn DVDs of my photos. A few Orthodox Jews visit the hostel and invite me to Seder. Have lunch at a fish restaurant, where they serve Ceviche. Post the letter with my diary and the DVDs. Walk to the LarcoMar shopping centre, watch the sunset.

19.4.2008 Lima Upon getting up in the morning, I fall as my right leg becomes lame. I cannot stand on it and feel dizzy. Drag myself to the breakfast table, have two cups of coffee and then it is OK again. What could it have been? By minibus to Puente Primavera and from there by another minibus (S. Bartolo) to the ruins of Pachacamac. I am very disappointed as I am not allowed to leave the road, only the Sun Temple may be entered. The other ruins have to be viewed from a great distance. Wherever one does a step off the road, someone whistles and one has to get back to the road. The museum is not worth mentioning. The complex was used for 1'000 years, from 500 to 1500 AD and features several temples with a ramp. Return to the hostel, but feel too sick to go to the Seder tonight.

20.4.2008 Lima-Pucallpa I am feeling somewhat better, as the alarm clock wakes me at 5am. I get up, quickly pack my backpack and have a coffee. The taxi arrives 6am. The Spaniards are also ready - we are going to share the taxi. They

have a lot of luggage, but we easily fit it all in. At the airport I check my luggage in, but my flight just doesn't get called. Only at 09:10, way past our departure time, we can proceed to check-in. We arrive 40 minutes late in Pucallpa. By three-wheeler taxi to the Hotel "Richard". There they first don't want to give me a room for 10 S., but as I threaten to look somewhere else, they suddenly have one. The driver tells me about a Swiss mission nearby. I explore town, have lunch at the market and take a minibus to the Parque Natural. This is a zoo, not exactly according to the latest standards, but quite amusing as many animals may be petted or fed. They have many panthers, jaguars, ocelots and other big cats as well as funny monkeys. The museum is not worth mentioning. Have supper at a street stall.

21.4.2008 Pucallpa Early in the morning by colectivo to Yarinacocha. There I get into a boat to San Francisco, but have to wait more than an hour until it leaves. The ride on the Laguna de Yarinacocha is picturesque. It is very hot. In San Francisco, I chat with a Chilean, Antares, who considers himself a Shaman and works in an aid project and with the villagers. By boat back to Yarinacocha, I get soaking wet as a sudden breeze comes up and blows all the spray into the boat. Back to the Pista, by Colectivo up to Km 15 and on foot to the Mision Suiza. The mission which has just celebrated its 50th birthday, was founded by Swiss Protestants and Lutherans as a seminar for indigenous priests. Today, the students are arriving from all over the country (by air, for lack of other transport). I meet Lynette from Aesch, who is teaching the German-speaking children of the missionaries. As it gets dark, I return to the Pista and by Colectivo back to Pucallpa. Walk to the harbour, eat something.

22.4.2008 Pucallpa Early in the morning I started looking for a boat. The "Men del Norte" is supposed to leave at 15h. I buy water, carry it to the harbour, have an early lunch, check out of the hostel and drag my luggage to the ship. Bargain the price down to 90 Soles. Meet Neiser from Nauta near Iquitos. We wait and wait. At 15h they are still loading. The payload consists of cooldrinks, Honda-CG-125-three-wheelers, a few lorries, a car, a generator engine and an industrial radiator. At 19h they say that the boat would not leave today. It is sizzling hot. In the afternoon, Neiser bought me a pouch of Gelatine. On top of that I bought food and put it away in the hot boat for supper. Now I have digestion problems.

23.4.2008 Pucallpa-Iquitos At three in the morning I have to go to the toilet for the first time. Heavy dysentery at four, completely out of control. There is neither water nor light. Until seven permanently on the loo. The toilets are too small to close the door while sitting on the toilet pan. Take Loperamid and Norfloxacin. In the course of the morning it is stabilising. Buy some bananas. The ship is being loaded to the brink. Hundreds of additional passengers arrive, the hammocks are set in a 50cm roster. At 16h we are still loading. The weather is very hot. At 1630h they are about to leave. The ship sails to another dock, where an engine is loaded. The crate almost bursts and a tank on top of it falls down to the deck. Eventually we leave. I watch a beautiful sunset. I sleep on the bench, because the hammock puts too much pressure on my intestines. Around midnight rain starts, splashing the bench so I have to change to the hammock. It is getting cold.

24.4.2008 Pucallpa-Iquitos The rain develops into a tropical thunderstorm. The not-professionally-built ship leaks water everywhere; it lacks sills and the windows are leaking. Both passenger decks are inundated by 2cm of water. They keep ladling the water out. Fortunately, my stuff is in the middle, where it stays dry. Upon manoeuvring, a window is knocked out by a branch. By 4h we are past the worst. But the morning turns out foggy and rainy. It is cold. We keep seeing villages, Peki-Pekis and freighters. We stop in Contamana. I buy some sardines baked in a banana leaf from the vendors. Neiser buys Camaron (freshwater shrimp). Contamana is a real city with cars, roads, a Church and a nice park along the shore. But without land access! From here we continue to Inahuaya, a village, where we stop only briefly. We have a longer stop in Orellana. I buy oranges. After supper we still have enough time for a stroll through town. It is very cold, I put on all clothes I have.

25.4.2008 Pucallpa-Iquitos I even have to put on the rain poncho, because an icy wind blows through the boat. Upon waking up, we are stationed at the shore. I see monkeys and parrots in the trees. The fog has become so dense, that the ship was moored since midnight. The fog is lifting around seven and we can continue. Stop in Fansito, many other small villages, amongst others also in Saman. It has become hot. I shower, get a change of clothes and wash the dirty ones. Two girls help me enthusiastically. My clothes dry quickly in the hot sun. I notice that the ship only has rudder and accelerator, no electronics whatsoever. The depth is measured with a rope. The bridge has no windscreen. We stop in Juancito, where many street vendors get on. Some miss the departure signal and have to be evacuated by Peki-Peki. In the night there is again an icy wind blowing through the ship.

26.4.2008 Pucallpa-Iquitos At five in the morning – I have changed in the meantime from the bench to the hammock (which causes me backache) – music is blasting through the boat. But breakfast is only at seven – the kitchen team had organised a stereo set and wanted loud music while preparing the food. A passenger with two monkeys and three parrots has come on board during the night. It is foggy and cold. We stop in Requena. As one passenger told me earlier on that his stuff was stolen during the night, I stay with the luggage. Eat a mango-like fruit that he gives me. The peels I give to the monkeys which gladly eat them. When Neiser gets in, we quickly get into town and buy Tetracyclin for the monkey, which has a nasty wound on its arm. Suddenly the ship hoots and we have to run back. I disinfect and dress the wound of the monkey. This is the first time that I can make use of my travel first-aid kit. We see where the Ucayali and

Maranon river join. I chat with Francisco, the owner of the ship. He says that the engine is a Caterpillar, uses 120 litre of Diesel per hour and cost him 168'000 USD. For supper delicious bush meat. I feed the monkey and the parrots with bananas. We arrive at 21h in Iquitos. Neiser organises a Motokar taxi and we ride into town. All hostels are fully booked. Only the fifth or sixth has room. I negotiate a decent price for the room. While Neiser is taking a bag with goodies to his relatives, I eat rice at Wilson's food stall for 1 S. He gives me a soup for free.

27.4.2008 *Iquitos* Today I have to change to a smaller and cheaper room. I help Neiser to carry his heavy things to the bus stop. From there I walk to the market, the shantytown of Belen and the Plaza de Armas where they have a military parade, as well as back to the hostel. They explain that they have no room for 10S. The Hostel nearby has, but it is not vacated yet. I walk to a tailor, have my pants repaired. A hostel nearby would have a room, but doesn't want to rent it just for a couple of days. Walk back, indeed has the hostel next door now a room available and I can change. Good lunch. Visit the shantytown of Belen again. Back to the Museum of Amazonia, but it is still closed. A tour guide wants to sell me an expensive tour to the jungle. To the Internet, typed my diary. Back to the hostel, read. Supper at Wilson's, the others are too expensive.

28.4.2008 *Iquitos* To the market, then to the Plaza de Armas, where I meet Ana again from Barcelona, whom I already met on the ferry. We decide to visit the Butterfly Park together. To the Tourist Office. From there by motokar to the harbour. There we are told that the Butterfly Park was closed today. Nevertheless we get by Peki-Peki to Padre Cocha, whereby we pass two beautiful steamers. From Padre Cocha we walk - together with two boys - to San Andrea, an Indio village. The houses are elevated on poles, because sometimes the place gets inundated. We return and also visit the "Quebrada de Amor". By Peki-Peki (the path is inundated) to the Snake Park. They have Choro-monkeys, tame sloths, Anacondas whom we may put around our necks, Boa Constrictors. The monkeys keep playing with us. Further we see a Capybara, an amphibious tortoise, young alligators and in the end we may play with the monkeys. A nocturnal monkey sits on my shoulder and licks my ear. The Choros play very wild and bite a bit hefty sometimes. And even the parrot pinches me because he also wants to play. There is even a young Coati. By Peki-Peki back to Nanay and by Motokar back to the Plaza de Armas, where we say goodbye. I have a hearty meal at the market. Then I do a canoe tour through the Belens Water City. Buy alligator meat for supper.

Iquitos is a dark, chaotic and noisy town, but at the same time charming. The Plaza de Armas and the Churches have lost their status, the real centre is poor Belen. Ceaselessly noisy Honda CG125 "Motokars" roam the streets. At the market one can buy just about everything from alligator meat to live monkeys. The shantytown in the flooded plains of the river Itaya below the market is said to be dangerous. But its flooded water streets, in particular the "Venice", are picturesque. Also here there are many markets. The houses are built on stilts, as this part of Belen is flooded every year in the high water season; further out the houses are built on rafts. Many of the houses may be reached on foot via jetties. The two harbours of Nanay and Masusa are about 2km out of town. There are many more harbours nearby. It is not quite easy to find out which harbour services goes to which destination. It is quite surprising that in this remote town - Iquitos is the world's biggest city which cannot be accessed by road - everything is readily available, there is Internet access and even a Honda motorbike factory. The most important attractions of Iquitos are Padre Cocha with the Butterfly- and Snake Park and the Indio village of San Andres, but also Quistococha with the Allpahuayo Mishana Park and the Centro Turistico, a small zoo. The Museo Amazonico is not worth the entrance fee, it shows only slightly worn fibreglass statues of Indios.

29.4.2008 *Iquitos (Reserva Allpahuayo Mishana)* Walked early in the morning to the minibuses to Quistococha, but they only go as far as the village, not to the National Park. But they take me to the market of Belen, where I quickly find the right minibus. Upon arrival in Allpahuayo Mishana I get off, but the buildings seem to be deserted. Walk to the entrance, there are a few people gardening and send me in the wrong direction. Eventually I return to the Administration Centre, where the staff has arrived in the meantime. The Manageress comes in, sells me an entrance ticket and assigns a guide, which has to entertain me, until a group of students comes in which I can join. We walk to the museum, the Centro de Interpretacion, see the minuscule red-black frogs for the poisoned arrows, many orchids attached to trees, some of them tiny. Back to the entrance, the students have not shown up. So we go on a tour of the forest. We see the "djungle roads" and "monkey stairs" (lianas); huge trees; butterfly host plants with colourful flowers; medicinal plants such as the stinking "Noni", anaesthetising flowers, perfume bark; trees with lots of rubber sap; "Varillales", forest on white sand which offers little support and contains hardly any nourishment, recuperated forest; trees with huge roots; monkeys in the trees. The jungle is partially so dense that the sky cannot be seen. There are 589 types of trees on the size of a soccer field. I eat a star fruit which is quite sour. By minibus back to Quistococha, where I visit the zoo. Almost all animals of the region are found here. There are Amazon dolphins and paiche, which are hard to spot in the murky water. I play with tame parrots. There is also a medicinal garden. Back to Iquitos, fish for lunch. Bought Tetracyclin and cocoa butter for my lips. Fetched my luggage and rode by bus to the Masusa harbour. But here are no ships in direction Pevass. Walk to the Henry Harbour, but also here nothing. Through a hole in the fence I climb to the fishing harbour. Lose my tent, but somebody picks it up and hands it back to me! The first ship that I ask is much too expensive. The second, the "Camila", makes a fair price so that I get aboard. We leave at 20h in direction Santa Rosa.

30.4.2008 *Iquitos-Santa Rosa* We stop first in a small inundated village. Then in Huanca, in the province capital of

Pevas I buy fruit, then in San Jose de Cochiquinos and in San Antonio. Everywhere fuel and cooldrinks are unloaded. The “Camila” is in poor condition, has rust holes everywhere over and probably also below the waterline and takes in a lot of water. The food is excellent, but there are a lot of stones in the rice.

1.5.2008 Iquitos-Santa Rosa It is raining cats and dogs when I wake up. May eat breakfast twice. We are at an army camp, soldiers search the boat. Next stop, still in the pouring rain, in Caballococha. Chat with Jose and a policeman who has to take up an assignment 7 days travel from Islandia. Passport control upon arriving in Santa Rosa. Until I get the passport back, I organise a room at the Hospedaje Las Brisas. Unfortunately the place is very loud, everywhere is loud disco music pounding. Meet someone who was in the same bus as I in Nazca. Stroll through the very poor village. Upon having supper, they refuse to accept Peruvian currency, only if I have the right change. The other guests change my 50 S. so that I can pay exactly 4 S. No clue when the ferry to Manaus leaves, everyone tells me something else. Loud disco music until midnight.

2.5.2008 Santa Rosa-Tabatinga-Leticia The disco music starts again at half past one in the morning and keeps me awake. In the morning to immigration, but they are still closed. The woman opens the office at eight, but still wants to take a shower, so that I have to wait for 20 minutes until I get an exit stamp. By ferry to Tabatinga. A lively village with a big market. Ask at the “Voyager III” about price and departure: Tomorrow at 15h, 170 Reais. Walk pretty far to the Policia Federal, where I get my entry stamp. To the Internet. Walk to Leticia (Colombia). The produce at the market is very expensive. A tour guide wants to sell me an expensive tour package. Buy bread. Back to Tabatinga. Lunch. Return to Santa Rosa. Read. Meet Jose again. Wait for his goods, which are still in the “Camila”. The boat moors at the petrol station, which we reach via a shifty and mended jetty. Jose gets his goods. Disco music until midnight.

Brasil (Amazon)

3.5.2008 Santa Rosa-Tabatinga-Manaus Breakfast in Santa Rosa. High waves upon crossing over, the Peki-Peki almost capsizes, I am all wet. Buy boat ticket for 150 Reais. Wait at the Hotel “Sarah” for Jose. He comes and we ride with his hired motorbike through Tabatinga, to the airport and the Laguna. Want to change the remaining money, but impossible in Tabatinga. I have to walk to the harbour of Leticia, where I change it in Reais. Quickly to the Internet, back to Jose’s Hotel, where I fetch my luggage. Quickly eat a ball of rice, buy another one and some bananas for supper. To the ship, where I meet an American and a Dutch lady, as well as Lilly from Chur. The boat leaves at 15:45 almost on time. It is chockerblock full, there is every 50cm a hammock. Long stop in Benjamin Constant. Customs razzia at 23h, every piece of luggage is being searched. I sleep on the floor, but my neighbours keep walking across my sleeping place.

4.5.2008 Tabatinga-Manaus I am woken up at 04:30. My troublesome neighbours step on my sleeping mat, almost onto the camera. I pack my things and get up. The boat stops, fortunately my neighbours get off. Lunch at ten, we may eat as much as we please. Supper also very early, at four in the afternoon.

5.5.2008 Tabatinga-Manaus No events. Again mountains of chicken meat. Little to see at the riverside. I am reading.

6.5.2008 Tabatinga-Manaus Exactly at the spot where yesterday a ferry sank, our ship suffers damage to a pump and is drifting towards the shore. Just in time the damage can be repaired and the engine started again. We ride through narrow channels with picturesque farms on both sides. We arrive at 14:30h in Manaus, where I put up at the Amazonas Backpacker Hostel. Explore town. A tout takes me to Amazonas Jungle Tours, where after long negotiations, I book a two-day-tour for tomorrow. To the Teatro Amazonas, which is already closed. I am invited for supper at the hostel.

Manaus, a not very aesthetic, modern town with a few high-rises, is a typical tax free zone, with many import shops, selling cheap Chinese articles, entertainment electronics, computer parts and clothes. Everywhere wholesalers, it is at times difficult to buy single pieces. Colourful lorries are loaded with supplies for the hinterland. The famous opera house has been excellently renovated, but the building is little impressive, only its history, that almost all building materials were imported. Near the market there is a historical steamship moored, today unfortunately with diesel engine.

7.5.2008 Manaus At 08:45 I am indeed picked up by a employee of Armstrong, the tour operator. The other passenger on the tour is Fatima, a writer from Morocco. We first get to the market, where food is bought. then we get aboard a speedboat. We ride to where the Solimoes/Amazonas and the Rio Negro merge. Despite the overcast weather we can clearly see the difference in colour of the beige Amazon water and the brown Rio Negro water. Suddenly many dolphins appear and jump, up to three parallel. They are pink and grey Amazon dolphins. We continue to the Janahuari Park, where there are huge Victoria Regia water lilies and some alligators, which bask in the sun on the large leaves, which can carry up to 17kg. On the way back we see the dolphins again. Near the swimming village we see a quite large Papava snake which swims across the river. Fatima insists that we visit a house of the swimming village and so we stop at one of these houses, which are built on just about still floating tree trunks. Inside they are quite modest, hardly any furniture. We ride more than an hour upriver to the Green Lodge. There we ride in a rowing boat into a flooded forest for piranha fishing, which we attempt to catch with baits of meat. The guide catches one piranha after the next, but I don’t even catch one, but sometimes they eat my bait. For supper we may eat the caught Piranhas. They are not particularly tasty, have lots of bones and hardly any meat. The best part is the jaw muscle. In the evening we go by

Peki-Peki to a flooded forest where we look for alligators, which are night-active. We see some very young ones. The guide gets out and catches one, which we may hold. The engine of the Peki-Peki is almost broken off its support, but it still makes it back. I sleep on a hammock in a anchored boat.

8.5.2008 *Manaus* In the night there is a thunderstorm and it gets very cold. Water leaks everywhere into the boat. I am glad that I put all my stuff into a watertight bag. The rain stops in the morning. I see a large Caiman swimming away from the lodge. By Peki-Peki we ride quite a distance, then through some flooded forest to a part of the jungle which can be explored on foot. Shortly before our destination, the engine of the Peki-Peki breaks off completely from its bracket. We will not be able to return with it. As it was raining hard during the night, the ground is muddy and there are many deep waterholes in the path. We see rubber trees, poisonous Tukanbeda ants, Brazil nut trees, how animal sounds are imitated by a Inaga leaf and a machete, the Chimbo root which together with the skin of a poisonous frog makes up Curare, the Breigira tree, the white resin of which is hallucinogenic and its black resin cures headaches. In a hole in the ground we find a huge tarantula, which only reluctantly shows itself to tourists and gets a cricket in the end, but is so angry that it refuses to eat it. We find a tiny chameleon and a cinnamon tree. I stumble over a liana, which hooks my foot, and fall into the mud, but don't get hurt. Because of the damaged engine we have to stop early, we row to a fisherman's cottage, where they lend us a boat with diesel engine. With great difficulty the engine is started. But the tank is empty. We stop at another fisherman's cottage, where they sell us expensive "Diesel". It is poured into the tank. With utmost difficulty, the engine is started again, huffs and puffs a couple of times, issues white smoke and stops. We are drifting in the lagoon. All efforts are void, the engine refuses to start. The fuel bought was probably not diesel. Fortunately another Peki-Peki of the same tour operator comes past, takes us in tow and gives us a ride back to the Green Lodge. For the way back into Manaus there is no speedboat today. We are taken by Peki-Peki to a beach, where a taxi is waiting for us which takes us - with a stop at the Piscicultura 3 Irmaos - to Cacao Pirera, where we cross by ferry back into Manaus. Take the Dane to his hotel, check in at Amazon Backpackers, then I stroll through the tax free zone and go to the Internet café. Unfortunately my server is dead today.

9.5.2008 *Manaus* Breakfast at a food stall. To the steamship "Justo Chermont" and the Cathedral, then to the Tourist Office. To the Teatro Amazonas. The Opera was completed in 1896 under Governor Eduardo Ribeiro and has space for 700 persons. The good acoustics is said to be thanks to the hollow cast iron columns made in Scotland - all building materials were imported. The stage may be changed vertically, like an elevator, its curtains are still original. The dome depicts the downside of the Eiffel Tower, in-between allegories (paintings of the goddess of arts, goddess of hunting, etc. in the neo-classical style). To the Palacio de Justicia, where I visit first an art exhibition, then the diverse judges chambers and courtrooms. To the Palacio del Rio Negro, where I take part in a short guided tour, see amongst others the office of Eduardo Ribeiro. My glasses get serviced for free. By bus to the Bosque da Ciencia. In this piece of jungle with University buildings in-between I see Ariranha, a kind of a large otter, very playful and may be petted, Peixe-Boa, a kind of Amazonian sea cow, tropical rainforest with many Agutis. Near a lake I play with the monkeys. Back to the hostel, fetched the backpack, but walk to the wrong bus stop. Have to walk to the Tourist Office and ask for the right bus station. I am sweating like hell. At the Rodovario they still send me to the wrong box office. Eventually I get my ticket to Santa Elena de Uaiquen. In the bus I sit next to a pretty Venezuelan lady.

Venezuela

10.5.2008 *Santa Elena de Uaiquen* The bus arrives at 06:30h in Boa Vista. Use up my last coins, have a shower. The bus to Santa Elena is late. At the border I can change money. In Santa Elena I put up, together with Martin from Germany, at the Hotel Michelle. Look for a restaurant, but the food is expensive here, the cheapest meal is 15 Bs. (USD 7). A group of travellers is forming for a hike upon the Roraima. We start buying foodstuffs for the 7-day-trip. Food is obscenely expensive, much more than in Switzerland or Japan, and only a weird selection is available.

11.5.2008 *Santa Elena de Uaiquen* More people join our group. We continue buying foodstuff, which is not easy, as food is in short supply. Have beers in the evening.

12.5.2008 *Santa Elena de Uaiquen-Roraima* More shopping. A packet of Soya was lost. I buy a new one out of my own pocket. Endless discussions. Find a guide. Shortly before the planned departure we organise transport. Some have organised funds in the last minute. We work out the costs, everyone has to pay 215 Bs. Everyone has to put his share on the table, but then everyone just leaves and runs away. I stash the money in my pocket so it doesn't get stolen. We leave at 16h. Ismael suddenly demands the money, hands it to Dan and gives orders to blow the remaining 8 Bs. immediately on cooldrinks. We arrive in complete darkness in Paraitopy. Prepare supper and pitch our tents. The group consists of the guide Jose, as well as Baptiste, Tobias, Vincent, Daniel, Ismael, Matias, German and myself.

13.5.2008 *Roraima* It is raining during the night. We are woken up at 04:30 and start walking towards the base camp at 5h. The rivers have risen because of the continuous rain. The Rio Tek has to be crossed on slippery stones. The Rio Kukenan has much more water. I keep my socks on and pull my pants up. In the middle there are about 4m in strong current to cross. Because of the heavy backpack and the slippery underground I lose my balance and fall into the water. I am drenched, stupidly also my money and passports. My camera bag was watertight. It continues raining. I am

soaking wet and in the wet and cold climate, nothing dries. Around 17h we arrive in the muddy base camp. It is cold. For supper mountains of spaghetti.

14.5.2008 Roraima Rain at night. Rolled up the soaking wet tent. Nothing dries, it is too humid and too cold. The rain increases. We wait for an improvement. At 10h we start nevertheless. The guide makes a cross - not a good sign. He instructs us on the dangers of the mountain. We climb through a clay wall, then temperate rain forest, up to a cliff, back down and a steep, difficult and dangerous stretch through a stream (Lagrima) up to the top. I am all soaked. At the top it stops raining, even the sun is visible through the clouds for some minutes. We enjoy the view and make some photos. Then we continue. I sink into black mud up to the knees. All wet we arrive at the "Hotel", a cave where the water drips from the ceiling and with a waterfall in front. I hit my head at a low part of the ceiling so hard, that it bleeds a lot. Pitch the wet tent. Jose distributes bags with chalk, because all faeces have to be collected and taken back down. The rain increases, the waterfalls sprays into the cave.

15.5.2008 Roraima Upon waking up, the rainfall has become less severe than during the night. But during the night it has covered my tent, shoes and backpack with a sandy spray. Mealie Meal (maize) for breakfast. We only start at 8h for the long hike to the Punto Triple - it should take 8h. It is raining hard. The landscape is weird, everywhere erosion grooves in the sandstone rocks. We see an animal, far away, maybe a puma. We walk very fast. Once we have to jump over a stream. Some rocks are so slippery that I skid. We can't afford accidents, there would be no way out. There isn't even a cell phone or a radio telephone. When we reach Punto Triple, the sun appears for a short while. On the way back we lose Ismael, but he finds us finally again. We get back to the cave at 16h. My shoes are so soaked that I have to walk barefooted. It is freezing cold, so that I go to sleep after supper.

16.5.2008 Roraima Although it has been raining in the night, even into my tent, it stops in the morning. Far too late we start first to the Valle de Rosas de Cristales, then to the Valle de Cristales. From there to the edge of the mountain, where there would be a view of Guyana, if there would not be dense fog. Then to the "Ventana", which is all fogged up. After a while the fog clears and we see the rainforest 1'400m below. We continue to the "Jacuzzi", where we get some sun just in time so that we can take a dip in it. Back to the "Hotel", where the time is killed with cooking. I walk with Jose, the guide, to the Corazon, a heart-shaped hole in a rock. In the evening it is cold and raining hard.

17.5.2008 Roraima The planned summit hike is off, everyone is still sleeping at half past five and we wanted to leave five. Afterwards the sky gets overcast again. We start hiking down at half past eight. The Lagrimas are particularly dangerous today, because they are very slippery in the heavy rain. In one place we get lost, because the guide is too far ahead of us. It is raining very hard, the Lagrimas are becoming savage rivers. The last leg through steps in the clay earth is particularly slippery. When we get to the base camp, we get a glimpse of sunshine. I walk on my own in direction Rio Kukenan, where I arrive at 16h, a bit earlier than the rest. The group decides to camp here for the night. There is a young Toucan, with which I play.

18.5.2008 Roraima-Santa Elena de Uairen What a relief upon getting up: The Rio Kukenan has a bit less water than yesterday. I feed the young Toucan. Jose takes my backpack, I follow with a stick through the ford. The river crossing is this time quick and easy, despite the still strong current. We continue to Rio Tek, which I cross with my backpack. Then I continue on my own in direction Paraitepuy. The weather is overcast, but the rain has stopped, my clothes are drying. Halfway there, I meet Tobias. we chat. Then it starts raining very hard. The ground is clay and sticks to the shoes. At every incline I skid, have in the meantime about 4cm of clay on the soles of my shoes. The path has become a river, I am ankle-deep in water. Some small streams which have to be crossed have become flooded and one has to wade up to the knees in them. Eventually we arrive in Paraitepuy. The rain has turned it into a sticky clay hill. To camp here - no thanks. It is only 12h, so we speak to the driver of a Landcruiser who promises us transport by 18h. We prepare lunch. By 18h, the village chief takes the message to us that there were no drivers available and we had to pay 40 instead of 37.50 Bs. per person if we insisted nevertheless. Ismael finds this too much and declines the offer in the name of the group. Jose, our guide, negotiates with the village chief and eventually they conclude that we are to be taken to St. Elena with the Landcruiser of the village co-operative. It is still raining very hard. Our luggage is loaded onto the roof and we drive off. About two kilometres before San Francisco, the engine starts to knock. The driver tells us that the camshaft belt was broken, which is absolutely impossible, but definitely something is seriously wrong. At walking speed we eventually reach San Francisco. Now there is a discussion, how much is to be paid for the partial trip. The driver demands 150 Bs. Ismael, our self-declared leader, offers 50 Bs. Eventually he hands over 80 Bs. and blames the guide, who pays the difference of 70 Bs. out of his own pocket. Tobias, Dan and I are not at all in agreement, but the majority wants to eat with the profit made (we have already paid 300 Bs., the effective cost is now 160 Bs.). Tobias and I demand our "food part" and get at least that much, that we can pay for a taxi to St. Elena and give 20 Bs. to the guide. We get back to St. Elena by 22h, where the group is now waiting in front of the closed Hotel Michelle. I ask a nearby innkeeper how to get hold of the owner. I had to call out for Wilson, who would alert the landlord. It works perfectly. I share a room with Tobias, the rest sleep in a 6-bed-room. What a pleasure, showered freshly, in dry clothes, sleeping on a real mattress.

This strange dynamic in the group taught me a lot. I found a perfect example of how a charismatic leader gets the

people to follow him uncritically. All he has to do is to promise them something they want (in this case a feast of food and drink) and they will follow him, even if they are better educated and actually know better. I think, in politics it works exactly the same way.

19.5.2008 Santa Elena de Uairen Being used getting up early, I wake up at five. Air my stuff, dry my tent, do the laundry. Ride with a "Porpuesto" (shared taxi) to the Brazilian border, but the ATM is defective. Back, pack my things, put my backpack in the storeroom. Eat a skewer, then have a last time lunch with the group. Update my blog for hours. Say goodbye to the group. Walk the 3km to the bus terminal. The bus to Puerto Ordaz leaves at 18:30h. It is ice cold in the bus because of the air-conditioning, worse than ever imagined. The windows ice up on the outside. My glasses freeze over when I get outside into the humid air. I almost freeze to death. Why do they do that? When I want to buy some sweets during a stop, the vendor tells me in unintelligible English, that they were 5000 Bs. I give him 500, which is still more than enough.

20.5.2008 Ciudad Guayana (Puerto Ordaz) I arrive at four in the morning in Puerto Ordaz, without having slept much, it was far too cold for that. Wait at the bus terminal about two hours, then take a taxi to the Casa del Lobo. I get a fright when I am told that the room is now 70'000 Bs., 3.5x more than the travel guide says. But there is no cheaper accommodation here. By bus I get into town, eat much (rationed and poorly baked) bread for breakfast. Then to the Parque Cachamay, where I see the picturesque rapids of the Rio Cachamay. To the Parque Loeffing, where there is a small zoo with endemic animals. Back to the Hotel Intercontinental and the Parque Punta Vista, where the Rio Cachamay and the Orinoco join. By shared taxi back to town. Eat cheap and well at a Chinese restaurant. Visit the big (but certainly not as advertised "the largest of South America") Orinokia shopping mall. The goods seem to have been in the shops for a long time, little is bought, the choice is weird. Even worse in the supermarkets, where entire shelves are filled with the same product, because the choice of foodstuffs has narrowed down so much. The foodstuffs still available are extremely expensive, from Swiss price up to four times or ten times the Swiss price. Everything is imported, apart from rice and salt crackers nothing more is made locally. Cars and electronics still seem to be freely available though. The gasoline is about 5c per litre, but rationed. For this reason, this is the last South American country, where the huge American 4x4 are still being used. Buy a pair of trousers as replacement for my only pair which was torn on the trip to the Roraima. Get lost on the way back and have to call, because there are neither street signs nor consequent numbering. Spend many hours updating the VSD homepage.

21.5.2008 Ciudad Guayana (Puerto Ordaz)-Ciudad Bolivar By bus to town, then by bus to San Felix. Halfway there it stops and the driver tells me he is turning around for lack of passengers. I am at the most inconvenient place possible, near Parque Cachamay. Walk through the parks in direction Parque La Llovizna, because I don't dare to cross the dangerous bridge. Unfortunately it is much further than I thought and I end up walking for 2.5h. The Parque La Llovizna is beautiful, with many islands, streams and waterfalls. Seek desperately for a bus or Porpuesto back to Puerto Ordaz, but to no avail. In the end I have to take an expensive taxi. Fetch the backpack, find a bus very quickly to the terminal (I think he went there just for me) and get on board of the completely curtained bus to Ciudad Bolivar. In Ciudad Bolivar I ask to drop at the airport. There is the plane of Jimmy Angel (All Metal Aircraft Corporation "Flamingo" G-2-W, c/n 11, reg. NC-94873, Pratt & Whitney Wasp engine of 450hp), who discovered the Angel falls, but had to leave the plane above the falls, because it hit marshy ground and the wheels got buried. As I am looking for a bus into town, a car stops and the driver asks me to get in. The car is driven by Maggie, also a lawyer. She invites me to her stately house, then invites me for ice cream and even helps me find a decent place to stay. I put up at the Posada Don Carlos, after finding out that the "secret tip" Hotel Ritz was a despicable heap. At 20h Maggie pitches up again, this time with a Toyota 4x4, and takes me to the other side of the river to see Ciudad Bolivar. Then she invites me for a hamburger. How did I deserve all this?

22.5.2008 Ciudad Bolivar Did the historical town walk: Plaza Bolivar (where they hold a military parade), Paseo Orinoco, Antigua Carcel Publica, Casa del Correo del Orinoco with its odd and dusty arts collection, Casa del Congreso de Angostura, former office of the Royal Treasurer (picture above), Casa Lauro, Casa de los Gobernadores, Casa Parroquial (where they park obsolete Church statues), Catedral, Casa Paschen, Mayors office (former hospital), Centro de los Artes, Plaza Miranda, Casa Granados, Casa Maradey (Casa de la Poesia), Carcel de Piar, Casa Arzobispal (partially ruined), Carlos Raul Villanueva Cultural Centro. Have lunch in a typical restaurant, they serve mountains of meat. To the Fortin El Zamuro, high above town, then to the Casa San Isidro, where Simon Bolivar resided during the congress. Eat many mangoes which dropped from a tree in the garden. Maggie calls and invites me to eat arepas. I do not only get a rich cheese arepa, but also some juice and cake.

23.5.2008 Ciudad Bolivar Made a 1.5h phone call with Switzerland, the job in Africa seems to come through. Also called Alex Shafir, Aunt Christeli and Eugene Buckley. By ferryboat to Soledad, walk to the other end of the settlement, eat a not-so-tasty soup, take a ferry back to Ciudad Bolivar. By Porpuesto to the Museum Jesus Soto, where his supernatural, optically deceiving pieces of art are exhibited. Chatted for a long time with Dexter, who works there. Police check on the way back.

24.5.2008 Ciudad Bolivar Went to the hairdresser, expensive haircut. Burned DVD. Fish for lunch. To the bus terminal,

unfortunately there are no buses after 10pm. Maggie will pick me up at 19h. She pitches up a bit earlier, while I am still under the shower. It is a very nice birthday party, her (grown up) sons and daughters are there, all very learned, two of them lawyers. We chat. I get a huge steak for supper. At 21:50h I am taken to the bus terminal, where I get onto the bus to Maracay. Next to me is a German, physiotherapist for the Lucerne soccer club. It is not so cold as usual and I have my sleeping bag with me.

25.5.2008 Maracay We arrive at eight in the morning in Maracay. I ride by bus into town, but the Hotel Sao Vicente has in the meantime become far too expensive for me. Seek for some time until I end up at the Hotel Guyana. Walk to the Museo Aeronautica, but there is a sign at the gate "Cerrado pro reparaciones". Disappointed I walk to the shopping center, buy water, walk back - and the gate is now nevertheless open. I marvel at the worldwide probably unique collection of historical aeroplanes and helicopters, amongst others an excellently preserved Sikorsky Dragonfly. Back to the Hotel, checked in. The cheap restaurants are closed, I have to buy food at the supermarket. Eat it at the Plaza Girardo. Didn't find an open Internet café.

26.5.2008 Maracay (Caracas) Early in the morning with the (once more completely darkened) bus to Caracas. Huge traffic jam, the ride takes three hours. Accident on the oncoming lane. By Metro from La Bandera via Plaza Venezuela to Capitolio. To the Plaza Bolivar, visited the Catedral. Casa Municipal, Capitolio (unfortunately the Salon Eliptico is closed), Supreme Court, Casa Natal del Libertador, Museo Bolivariano, Panteon (closed), Plaza de la Candelaria, Parque Carabobo, Torre Oeste, where I get to the 49th floor by elevator and walk to the 53rd floor to enjoy a fantastic view of town. To the Museo de Arte Contemporaneo, with good works by Jesus Soto, Pablo Picasso, Cy Twombly, Piet Mondrian and many more. To the incomplete Center of Plaza Ibarra. By Metro back to La Bandera, from there by bus back to Maracay. This time huge traffic jam in Maracay. No open Internet café found.

27.5.2008 Maracay (El Playon) Early in the morning by bus to El Playon. It is raining. The ride through the tall green trees of the Henri Pittier National Park would be impressive, if it were not for the loud music in the bus which almost renders me deaf. There is little to see in El Playon, I walk through town, chat with the fishermen and watch them feeding the pelicans with the innards of the fish. The flooding plains are littered with rubbish, in-between thousands of blue crabs and lizards. Back to Maracay. To the Internet café, Skype doesn't work here. Then I walk slowly to the bus terminal. Wait for the bus to Merida. The bus arrives an hour late. I pad myself with sleeping bag and jacket.

28.5.2008 Merida The children in the seat behind me wake me at 5am. With some more delay than yesterday we arrive in Merida. I take the bus into town and put up at the Posada Suiza. Walk to the cable car, but there is thick fog and it rains. I prefer to eat a decent lunch, after a long search find an Internet café with at least ear- and microphones and use my USB-Stick-Skype to call Rahel und Christian Gerig. To the bus terminal. By bus to Jaji, a mountain village, about 45km from Merida. It is very foggy. I explore the village, which is quickly done. With one of the last buses back to Merida, where it is already getting dark. The buses are US-made with huge, powerless, uneconomical gasoline engines.

29.5.2008 Merida Got up at 5h, to the cable car, waited a long time until it opened eventually. Up by the first cable car. The world's longest and highest cable car takes four stages to the 4'765m high and 12.5km distant Pico Espejo: Barinitas (1'640m asl), La Montaña (2'436m asl), La Aguada (3'452m asl), Loma Redonda (4'045m asl), Pico Espejo (4'765m asl). The fourth stage was completely fogged up. On top it is 5° C cold and a icy breeze blows snow over the unheated buildings. We only have a 30 minutes stop, enough to quickly view the marble Madonna and get back into the shelter. Going back is almost entirely in dense fog. Good and cheap lunch. To Plaza Milla. Lazy afternoon, I am too tired for more sightseeing. Instead, I make arepas. I am witnessing a wild fight between the landlady and a gentleman, which seems to be a former boyfriend of someone here. He kicks the door in and enters the place. The ladies scream. One lady hugs him, the other one screams at him. Eventually the police are called and come in. Even they take hours to pacify the upset lover. Latin lovers!

Colombia

30.5.2008 Merida-Cucuta (Colombia) Once again I got up at 5am, by minibus to the bus terminal, then waited quite a long time until the bus to San Cristobal leaves. Once more the windows are coated with dark foil and there are thick blue drawn curtains. I try to get a glimpse of the landscape through a crevice between the curtains. It is pretty attractive around here, first huge forests, then less trees and eventually denser populated areas. Eventually we reach San Cristobal and I quickly jump into the first bus in direction San Antonio. By the time I paid the fare, there is no seat left and I have to sit on a small pedestal in the brand new bus. The ride is much quicker than estimated and I am dropped right in front of Immigration, so that I just have to pay the exit tax (46 BsF) and get the exit stamp. Then I walk into town, eat a really nice lunch, visit the Catedral and walk in direction Customs. Suddenly I notice that I still have a letter for Sevi and I walk back to the post office, but it is closed. Walk to the Colombian side, have the entry stamp made, change the last money and wait for the bus. A car heads for me and then steps on the brakes, so that it screeches to a stop shortly before me. A stupid joke. Then the bus arrives and I get in. In Cucuta I stay up to the terminal, but I have not enough money for the ride to Bucaramanga and I am told that the bus arrives late at night. But I want to avoid to be at a bus terminal at that hour. Thus I walk into town and put up at the Hotel La Bastilla, post the letter to Sevi and explore town. As I want

to make a photo in one of the shopping streets, somebody stops me and tells me that it was illegal to take photos here. I ask him why and he tells me there were "important people" that would not want to be in pictures. I can just imagine, that the goods exhibited are not the only ones traded here. I calm the guy down and tell him that I did not take the picture because it was too dark. He accepts this without hassle. The hotel turns out to be quite noisy.

The differences between the Venezuelan and the Colombian economy couldn't be bigger: On the San Antonio side of the border, business is slow, there is still a lot available but it seems that the economy is stalling. Although Venezuela has a much better infrastructure than most South American countries, like huge shopping centres, they appear a bit dead. Food is very expensive and mostly imported. On the Colombian side, the streets are bustling with shops and street vendors. Prices are moderate, people are buying. Everywhere I hear "A la orden" (at your service). There is a lot of competition which keeps prices low.

31.5.2008 Cucuta-Pamplona Got up very early, by minibus to the terminal. Wait in the minibus to Pamplona, but there are not enough passengers. In the end we are sent by taxi. The driver seems to be related to Clay Regazzoni: He races, ignores double lines, overtakes before bends. My knee causes me excruciating pain. Eventually the race is over, we arrive in Pamplona, which is picturesquely situated between green mountains. I find a cheap hostel, the Hospedaje El Retiro near the bus terminal. To the market, at last I can buy fruit at reasonable prices. By minibus to the Mirador Christo Rey, high above town. Walked back to town. Had a good lunch. Read a bit, unfortunately the arts museum does not open today. They have Fiesta, tomorrow there is a bullfight. I walk towards the parade. What a pleasure, there is a corso/parade of historical vehicles. I take a lot of pictures. The horses, which also take part in the parade, are nervous and keep moving. Most of the historic cars and some of the bands are from nearby Venezuela. Supper at the hostel.

1.6.2008 Pamplona-Bucaramanga At two in the morning I am woken up by noise outside my door. Some youths have returned with a bottle of hard spirits and are drinking and discussing. I ask them to stop. At 06:30 I am at the bus terminal, but there is no bus to Bucaramanga. As there is still no sight of one at 07:30h, I grind my teeth and take a shared taxi. But to my surprise, the driver drives decently. We ride through the deep-green, foggy Andes. Everywhere along the road, modern settlements, restaurants, workshops and shops. We arrive at 11h in Bucaramanga. The driver drops me at a street corner and gives me accurate directions - and after a few steps I am directly in front of the Residencial ABC. They are fully booked, so that I end up at the Residencial "Mi Recuerdo" across the street, where I get a nice room. Walk first to the Parque de los Niños, then to the Carrera 33, to find a bus to Girón. Meet a young Colombian who wants to take the same bus. When none shows up, we walk down the street and chat. Suddenly the bus passes us. I run after the bus and stop it, until the Colombian also has got in. I drop at the Puente del Malecón, walk across the rickety and dilapidated bridge and get into the historic city of Girón, which still looks the same as in colonial times. All houses are low and covered with tiles. At the main square there is a Basilica Menor. There are pretty stone bridges over the second stream. The town is very touristic with many sales stalls. By bus back to Bucaramanga. Dropped at the corner Carrera 15 and Calle 35. It is Sunday afternoon and the town is a bit dead. Everywhere there is rubbish in the otherwise well maintained streets. To the Parque Santander, where there are many sales stalls for second-hand books. The (closed) Catedral de la Sagrada Familia is adjacent. To the Parque Bolivar, where children climb onto the lap of the Simon Bolivar Monument and tell me to take a snap. I do that but they get very disappointed when I don't dish out money. Walked to the Parque Roviva with the adjacent (but also closed) Iglesia de San Laureano and Capilla de los Dolores. As I want to buy an ice cream, a beggar demands money very threateningly. This will escalate. I thus forfeit the ice cream and walk away quickly. Instead, I buy a deep-fried potato at Carrera 15. Along Calle 31 to the Parque Centenario, back to the hostel and to the Parque de los Niños, where I watch the clown, how he doesn't succeed to divide the children in groups for some game.

2.6.2008 Bucaramanga-San Gil Today is a public holiday. I walk all over town to find an Internet café with webcams. All of them were closed. In the end, right next to my hotel, I notice that an Internet café is just opening. I start a Skype session and - not easily - tell the people in Zurich that I withdraw my application for the job in Africa. I then have another fine lunch and take a minibus to the bus terminal. There I get on the bus to San Gil. There is absolutely no leg space, I have to sit sideways. The ride is once again through mountain roads. I arrive around 15h in San Gil, where I put up at the Hotel San Carlos. San Gil is a lovely, still quite colonial town perched on a steep hill. Walk to the Cerro La Gruta and the Cerro de la Cruz, both of them offer fine views over town.

3.6.2008 San Gil By early bus to Barichara and explored the almost completely intact colonial town. Hiked via the Camino Real, built in 1864 by the German Geo von Lenguerke, to Guane. The last remainders of the Guane Indio tribe were settled here, today it is another colonial-touristic village. Visited the Museo Arqueologico, get an ultra-fast guided tour because the caretaker has to catch the bus. We end up in the same bus to Barichara. There I don't find a inexpensive place to eat, the price level is a bit higher as in San Gil, so that I get back on the same bus up to San Gil. Eat at the market, then to the Parque Gallineral, where I don't find the entrance, further on to the Parque Ragonessi, which has a short but picturesque path along the Curiti stream to a deserted amphitheatre. Chat with a local who tells me that the amphitheatre is now a meeting place of the drug addicts, pretty dangerous, most visitors are being mugged after 16h.

4.6.2008 San Gil-Villa de Leyva I oversleep and thus only get to the bus terminal at 8am. Nevertheless, I get a promise

of a minibus to Tunja at 8:15, which only shows up 8:45. The ride is this time comfortable, I have plenty leg-space. There is no time for lunch, so I just have some Arepas in-between. In Tunja I change to a minibus to Villa Leyva and chat with a passenger all the way. At 15:30h I arrive in Villa Leyva. Villa Leyva is still predominantly colonial, very well kept as it is a favourite weekend destination for the Bogotans. I put up at the Hospedaje Villa and explore town. A film crew is shooting an historical film, so large parts of town are cordoned off. The sky is overcast and there is thunder.

5.6.2008 Villa de Leyva By early bus in direction Santa Sofia, up to the Dominican Monastery Santo Ecce Homo. Hiked a few kilometres to the entrance. The Monastery is unfortunately now only a Museum. I forget my umbrella in the toilet and the door is not open anymore - but now I know where the back entrance is and I sneak back in and fetch my umbrella. Walk 10km to the “El Infiernito” (little hell), to the Parque Arqueologico. There are umpteen stone-hewn phalluses erected by the Muisca Indios, apparently an astronomic device, but not explained any further. On to the nearby Museum “El Fossil” where there is a huge petrified skeleton of a pliosaurus and some more petrifications on display. A bit tired back to Villa de Leyva where I eat a decent lunch, rest a bit and visit the Carmelite Monastery and the Casa del Primer Congreso. Then I hike to the Mirador, from where I see the town in the evening light. I have to hurry back in order not to get caught in darkness.

6.6.2008 Villa de Leyva-Tunja By early bus to Tunja. Put up in the miserable, but cheap Hotel “Dynastia Real la Septima” near the bus terminal. Explored town. Big surprise: Beautiful, historical houses, Churches, pedestrian zones. The city is a jewel! To the Don Juan de Vargas, with beautiful courtyard, then to the Casa del Fundador Suarez Rendon, where I first attend a parade with military music to the Monument of Simon Bolivar, then I chat for some time with the policeman stationed there. Plaza Bolivar, Iglesia de San Ignacio, pedestrian zone, cannot go past the bakery without buying some bread, to a Church in the north, then Iglesia San Agustin, Iglesia San Francisco (open), Iglesia Santo Domingo, Catedral (now open). Lunch, Internet. To the Parque La Esperanza and the nearby shopping centre which looks like the Swiss Federal buildings. Rain is threatening, but it stays dry.

7.6.2008 Tunja-Bogota At 06:30h I get onto a comfortable “Libertador” bus to Bogota. The weather is very foggy, I see little of the landscape. About 21km before Bogota, we are hit by a truck which was doing an illegal U-turn. The police arrives, it takes time. Fortunately, another bus of the same company passes by and takes us all, but we have to stand in the aisle until Bogota. The bus makes quite a detour and so I only arrive at the terminal at 10h. There I get a map and find out the departure times of buses. The reason for this is because I would like to change my initial plan and spontaneously travel south. By urban bus to the centre, where I check in at the Hostal Platypus, but this takes ages. Lousy lunch at the market. Explored town: Iglesia de la Candelaria, where they are just having a service; Catedral Primada, where they also have a Church service with beautiful chants and even with the Bishop, whilst the service is broadcast to numerous screens in the Church; Plaza de Bolivar, whose Palacio de Justicia was newly built after the 1985 guerrilla assault, the Edificio Lievano (Alcaldia = city hall), the Capitolio Nacional (Congress Building) built in the neo-classical style and the Capilla del Saguario. Visit the Iglesia de Santa Clara, its walls plastered with paintings and whose ceiling is adorned with stars. To the Iglesia de la Concepcion, whose ceiling is richly decorated in the Mudejar style. The Iglesia de San Ignacio is currently being renovated and unfortunately closed. See a children's parade to the red-white cake-style Iglesia del Carmen. Further to the Museo Militar, which has some beautiful aircraft and helicopters, and an excellent collection of automatic weapons on display, in particular sub-machine guns. Continue to the free and stunningly good Museo del Banco de la Republica. One of South America's best numismatics museums, a fascinating Museo del Oro (gold museum), an art museum with outstanding works by Renoir, Picasso, Miro and many other famous painters, a special exhibition of the wild, excellent and less good works of the German Rose Marie Trockel, a whole section of the museum dedicated to the Colombian Fernando Botero, whose style to portray people very fat is very special, as well as works of other Colombian artists such as the miniatures by Roberto Paramo, the pictures of Fidolo Alfonso Gonzalez Camongo, impressionistic pictures by Andres de Santa Maria, ultra-realistic womens' portraits by Jose Acevedo Rodriguez, large body allegories by Luis Caballero, sculptures made of scrap metal by Feliza Bursztyn and many other works.

8.6.2008 Bogota Got up quite early. It is raining and cold. By Transmilenio bus and one more bus change to the Portal del Norte. From there by minibus to Zipaquirá. Walked to the Catedral del Sal. Joined a guided tour. The Catedral del Sal is a huge Church, rock-hewn in 1995 from no longer used shafts of a salt mine. There are pilgrimage stations on the way to the cathedral, which is 75m long and 25m high and consists of three naves. The left nave is for baptisms, the middle one, with a gigantic, indirectly illuminated cross carved into the wall, for worship and the right nave for funerals. Walked back to Zipaquirá, had lunch, then by minibus back to the Portal del Norte and by Transmilenio to town. The bus doesn't stop at Calle 26 so I have to backtrack 10 roads until I arrive at the Mirador Torre Colpatria. The viewing platform is on the 49th floor of the skyscraper, despite rain a spectacular view over Bogota. Next to the Museo Nacional, where I first visit the fine collection of Indio art (where it is even allowed to take pictures). On the second and third floor, the history of Colombia is brought alive by paintings of the protagonists. In addition, there is some modern art, amongst others some good Boteros. I stay until 17h, when the museum closes. Back via the Plaza de Bolivar.

9.6.2008 Bogota The loud disco music at the hostel only stops at two in the morning. Prepared breakfast, checked out. To the Museo Historica Policia, which is closed, but they do a tour just for me! One can see how Paulo Escobar was

hunted down in Medellin and killed along with many other members of the drug cartel. Did the Lonely Planet City Walk from Plaza de Bolivar through La Candelaria via the Emerald Market to Parque Santander and Carrera 7. Looked a long time for a bookshop selling Lonely Planets. No success. Wandered all over Candelaria. West of the Plaza de Bolivar there are many wholesalers, mainly for textiles. Lunch at a small restaurant. It is raining. Try to go to the Internet, wait for an hour without any success. Try another, more expensive place. Bake Arepas. Share an expensive taxi to the bus terminal. Find a "Velotax" bus to Cali, which is just about to leave. The bus is brand new.

10.6.2008 Cali Arrive at six in the morning in Cali. Walked to the Iguana Hostel. Then I walk into the city: Park, Plaza de Caycedo, Palacio Nacional, Catedral San Pedro, Iglesia de San Francisco with Capilla de la Inmaculada and Torre Mudejar (brick buildings). Have to wait at the Museo de Oro until their (slow) clock shows 9am. The museum, despite its name, exhibits mainly clay vessels of the Indio cultures. To the Iglesia de la Merced (Cali's oldest Church, 1536) and the incredibly expensive museum in the former monastery, fairly useless guided tour. There are some good clay figures, but otherwise not much worth seeing, and there is little information about the building. Strolled through the city and its wild commercial quarter. Cheap and good lunch. By bus to the zoo. A modern, beautiful zoo, with expensive entrance fee, but not a must-see, as the guide books say. Waited a long time for the bus back. Found a 1994 Travel Guide for Central America, better than nothing. Walked back.

11.6.2008 Cali-Popayan I get up early and walk to the terminal, probably not by the most direct route. Find a cheap bus to Popayan, which is just about to leave. But alas! The bus is not full and rides for more than an hour around Cali to solicit passengers. It is raining. Finally, we do arrive in Popayan. I take a bus to the city and when I see a road with many budget hostels I drop off. I put up at the Residencial Florida. Search for a 5l pouch of water, but here in Popayan they are not available. Eat well and incredibly cheap at the market. To the city, Parque Caidas, Catedral, Tourist Information, Iglesia de Santo Domingo, Iglesia San Jose, Iglesia de San Francisco. Everything is closed. Back to the hostel, wait a bit. Back to the Puente del Humilladero with the Puente Chico (Puente de la Custodia). To the Museo Guillermo Valencia, where they are pleased to have a guest from Switzerland, the museum is housed in a generous house in the middle of town, with beautiful views of the two bridges. Guillermo Valencia was poet and conservative politician, his son State President. On to the Museo Mosquera, also in a beautiful town house. Mosquera was a General. Continue to Morro de Tulcan, where I have a beautiful view over town. Finally, the Churches open and I visit them in the following order: Catedral, Iglesia de San Jose, Iglesia de San Francisco, Iglesia de Santo Domingo, Iglesia del Carmen (closed), Iglesia la Ermita.

12.6.2008 Popayan-San Agustin Rise early, breakfast at the market, to the bus terminal. I could have saved the rush, the 7:30 bus to San Agustin leaves one hour late. We ride on dirt roads. We pass a lorry which has sunk up to the axles in the mud. From San Jose de Isnos the road is paved. Shortly before San Agustin I am dropped off. I insist that they at least reimburse the fare to San Agustin, which I have already paid. By Porpuesto I get to San Agustin. In the Porpuesto is also Anna, who offers me cheap accommodation. I go along with her and the room is quite nice, so I'll stay. On to the Parque Arqueologico, where I visit the small museum, the "Bosque de los Estatuas" and the sites Mesita 1-3, Fuente de Lavapatas and Alto de Lavapatas. Supper at the "Brahama". I feel a flu and a gastritis coming on.

13.6.2008 San Agustin Around 9:30h, the Bakkie to the more distant sights picks me up. In the Bakkie is also Manuela from Lucerne, so we can converse in Swiss German. We visit "El Estrecho del Rio Magdalena", where the river has to pass between rocks and then turns 90 degrees. Then to the excavation sites Obando, with some tombs and statues and Alto de los Idoles with more tombs. Lunch in San Jose de Isnos. Then Alto de los Piedras with more tombs. On to the waterfall "Salto de Bordonos", where there is also an abandoned hotel. Then to the Salto del Mortino, another waterfall, this time of the day not a must-see. On our return, I notice that I have fever, diarrhoea and feel generally sick.

14.6.2008 San Agustin-Pasto Get up late, I am feeling a bit better. Walk to the main square and find out where the buses leave. Retrieve the backpack, get onto a Porpuesto to Pitalito. From there, I quickly find a bus to Mocoa. Mocoa is obviously into drug cultivation and a FARC stronghold. Here I find a bus to Pasto. A tyre is completely worn off. Dirt roads. My neighbour gives me some peanut sweets. He tells me that one should not speak about FARC on the bus, as it was too dangerous. Outside Mocoa there are two army controls in quick succession. The trip goes through a spectacular landscape. We see waterfalls, pass river fords. The narrow road is carved into the steep slopes; they often fall vertically off. The evening light lets the colours appear even stronger. At the Mirador I take a few photos and chat with a soldier. The road is too narrow for crossing, whenever there is an oncoming vehicle, the bus has to reverse to a wider part of the road. We travel over two mountain passes to San Antonio. It is getting dark. San Antonio is in complete darkness because of a power failure. We drive across another pass. At 22h, after a seven hours ride, we arrive in Pasto, where I put up at the Hotel "Paola".

Ecuador

15.6.2008 Pasto-Quito (Ecuador) A motorbike takes me to the city centre. Visit Plaza Mayor, Iglesia San Juan Bautista with strange side nave. Internet and phone call to Aunt Ruetli. Visit the different Churches, which are all open, as it is Sunday morning: Iglesia San Andres, Iglesia San Felipe, Iglesia Santiago Apostol, Templo de Christo Rey. To the

modern Plaza de Carnaval with strange towers. To the Iglesia la Panaderia. I am suffering from terrible gas, the worst ever. Walk back to the hotel. Fetch my backpack and walk across the road to the bus terminal, where I catch a bus to Ipiiales. In Ipiiales, I do the sightseeing of the town built onto a steep hill with all my luggage: Plaza de la Independencia, Catedral, Plaza la Pola, Iglesia San Felipe (closed). Walk along Carrera 6 to Calle 4 where I catch a Porpuesto to Las Lajas. The sanctuary of Las Lajas is a magnificent Basilica which was only completed in 1944, spanning across a stunningly beautiful river gorge. It is said that in 1750, an apparition of the Virgin Mary appeared on the cliffs. The site maybe kitsch, but it is nevertheless sensationally beautiful. This part now forms the main altar. As I want to continue from here to Ecuador, I visit the Sanctuary with all my luggage! I meet others who are in the same predicament. From here I take the Porpuesto back to Ipiiales, another Porpuesto to the border of Rumichanga. The formalities are quick. On the other side, I get a Buseta right to the bus terminal of Tulcan, where I get onto a bus to Quito which is just about to leave. The bus stops everywhere to load or drop passengers and is terribly crowded. It races like mad around the bends, so that I am thrown from one side to the other. Around 22h I arrive in Quito, where I take a taxi (for security reasons) to the nearby Hotel Huasi Colonial, which has a true Grand Hotel atmosphere of past days. I only have 20 USD, but it was ample to get here and pay for the hotel.

16.6.2008 Quito Get Photostats and money. To the Plaza Grande, at the Palacio del Gobierno I walk up to the uniformed guards (and take the obligatory picture with the guards). Visited the Catedral, where they are having a Church service. The sarcophagus of Mariscal Sucre is located here. On to the Monasterio de la Concepcion and the Iglesia del Sagrario. To the Centro Cultural Metropolitano, where I use the dirt cheap Internet. To the - closed - La Merced, Plazoleta Belalcazar. Visited the grandiose Basilica del Voto Nacional, whose construction from concrete blocks started in 1895. Close-up there are serious damages to the structure and it was also never really finished. Inside, it is quite dismal. I climb the one twin tower. The last platform consists of far too weak wire mesh, which is already broken everywhere. I overcome my fear of altitudes and climb to a sill outside on the roof, from where I have a magnificent view, hundreds of metres above Quito. Next via a footbridge inside the Church roof and a steel ladder to the rear tower. Then to the Teatro Sucre and the Mercado Central. Took part in a guided tour of the fantastically beautiful, with 52kg of gold adorned Baroque-Rococo Church Iglesia de la Compana. The Church was gutted by fire a few years ago and severely damaged by the smoke. Since then it has been repaired. Back to the Monasterio de San Francisco, where I visit the museum (impressive: paintings on alabaster) and the Church. To the Arco de la Reyna, across the road is the Monasterio de Carmen Alto. Have my hat, torn by age, repaired and eat - maybe it's stupid - at least a soup. To La Merced, which is now open. Back to the hotel where I have some rest.

17.6.2008 Quito Breakfast at the Mercado Central. To the Plaza Santo Domingo, visited the Iglesia Santo Domingo. The Museo de la Ciudad is still closed, so I walk to Parque Itchimbia, where I get a good view of the city. Then to the South American Explorers Club (Mariscal Sucre), but they don't have the Lonely Planets of Central America. Went to a bookshop, it has a few guide books but nothing about Central America. Strolled through Mariscal Sucre, the backpacker district of Quito. Walk in direction Teleferiqo, the last leg by taxi. By Teleferiqo to the flanks of the volcano Pinchincha, at least until Cruz Loma. Back by bus to the Old Town and returned to the Mercado Central, where I eat very well - for \$ 1.25! To the fantastic Museo del Banco Central (Mariscal), which has many pre-Columbian ceramics and gold ornaments on display, but also colonial and postcolonial art.

18.6.2008 Quito-Tulcan I have a peculiar Quiteño breakfast: bread with cheese, hot chocolate, star fruit juice, two hard-boiled eggs. To the Casa de Sucre, a beautiful mansion and a fun way to depict the life of Sucre in a comic strip. To the Iglesia San Agustin, which is now open, but insignificant. Then to the Internet café and skyped with Brigitte and Halina. Back to the Museo Alberto Mena Caamano (at the Centro Cultural) with the exhibition de Quito a Ecuador, which is now finally open. It depicts the historical role of Quito in simple displays and with very little text. To the market, ate papas con Cuero, the typical meal of Quito. A drunkard puts his hand in my pocket, tries to rob me, I threaten him. Back to the Museo de la Ciudad, where I visit the mostly unexplained and little informative exhibition on the development of Quito and a much more interesting exhibition of Russian icons and Ethiopian crosses (those which I then sent to Europe were better!). To an Internet café, to burn a DVD of my photos. We agree on 3 USD for the DVD and the burning of the two chip cards. When the owner sees that the burner predicts 30 minutes for burning, she first asks for 5 USD, then even double. I refuse, she wants me to stop burning. I don't, as I have to catch a bus. I complete the burning process, but she doesn't want me to get away with 3 USD. We have a long, fruitless discussion, she uses the old market women's trick the quoted price applied to each chip card. Finally, I pay \$4, get my DVD, leave angrily. Outside it is raining. I quickly buy water and bread for the journey. Then I walk to the bus terminal, where I just missed the 18h bus to Tulcan. The 18:30 bus only leaves at 19h and spends 1.5h looking for passengers all over Quito. I arrive - to my greatest surprise almost on time - at midnight in Tulcan, where a shop near the bus terminal organises an excellent room at the Hotel Alejandra for seven Dollars including the taxi there.

Colombia (North)

19.6.2008 Tulcan-Bogota Quite early in the morning, I get up and eat a big breakfast with meat and rice in the market. Then I look for a Porpuesto to the border. A bus takes me for free to the Plaza Mayor, where I get the same Porpuesto

that brought me here a few days ago. I have to wait a long time until it is full. At the border, the Ecuadorian passport control is quick. But on the Colombian side I wait 1¼ h until I am served, because other people keep squeezing in in front. Changing money does not work out, the money changers try to cheat me, so I stop there and then and take a Porpuesto instead to the city centre, where I change at a miserable rate. Now it's already 9:45 a.m. and I have to take a taxi to the bus terminal, since the buses tend to leave on the full hour. Today, I have no luck, the next bus to Bogota leaves only 11h. But it is one of the renowned "Fronteras" Line, a subsidiary of "Bolivariano". I negotiate the pretty steep fare, which turns out to be a good investment. The trip is hugely enjoyable. On the one hand, the bus has air suspension, on the other hand it rides according to a schedule and does not solicit passengers. In addition, they show the latest James Bond movie, while we ride through a spectacular landscape so I have to keep an eye out the window and one on the screen. Around 17h we stop in El Bordo for "lunch". I run across the road, where it is much cheaper, but very good. At night I read until it gets too dark, then I sleep.

20.6.2008 Bogota The bus gets caught in the morning traffic jam and only arrives after 8h in Bogota. I take a minibus to the centre, where I put up at the "Fatima". Send SMS and Email to Max, have breakfast, shower and shave. Have a nice lunch at the market. Try to skype to Max, but to no avail. Skype with Janos. Update the VSD website. Do some laundry. Lunch at the market. Keep checking the Internet. Call Max's Hotel and leave a message. Read. It is raining and cold. Max calls and we agree to meet tomorrow at 12am.

21.6.2008 Bogota It has rained heavily during the night. Great breakfast - cheese sandwiches and coffee - from the hostel. With the help of the Internet and the old guidebook, I research my route through Central America. It turns out that I absolutely must visit Yucatan, probably via Belize. May tumble dry my laundry, which has become rather more humid than dry because of the rain. By Transmilenio to Heroes, then I walk up to Max's Hotel "Hamilton". It's great to see my sports friend after two years again. With Max is Patrick, also a former globetrotter, now also works for SEFAR. We eat very well, then we stroll through the exclusive shopping centres of this posh district of Bogota. At 17h I have to leave again, because I must catch a bus to Medellin. Fetch my things at the hostel, run to Ave 19, where I get onto a bus to the terminal. Unfortunately the bus doesn't enter the terminal, but stops about 1km away from the terminal, so that I have to walk in the dark to the terminal, which is dangerous. In the terminal I look for the best deal and end up with "Santa Magdalena". The ride is quite pleasant, but the seats are, although wide and with lots of leg space, uncomfortable.

22.6.2008 Marinillas Around 1am, I notice that the bus stops for hours in a traffic jam. I fall asleep again, when I wake up, we drive through a landscape of green hills. We should have arrived around six. But we are still 200km from Medellin. I ask the driver whether the bus would pass through Marinillas. The driver says yes, so I drop off in Marinillas. Find a room at the "Hotel Turista", an expensive but wretched dump, which apparently serves as a brothel, because as soon as I paid, two obviously professional women entered my room and I had difficulty to get rid of them. In front of the cathedral a brass band plays, then they hold mass. Explore the town, far less attractive than what the "Lonely Planet" says. Hiked to Rio Negro, but upon getting there, I have severe pain in the left foot joint. So I return by Buseta. Expensive and not-so-good dinner at the restaurant "Carvajal". Noise from the nearby bars until the early morning hours.

23.6.2008 Marinillas-Medellin I get up early and am at 06:30am at the Autopista, where I climb into a bus to Medellin. As I want to sit down, the driver brakes hard. I am catapulted the entire length of the bus and thrown against the driver's cabin, where I land hard. For a moment, I lie still, then the other passengers help me up. My kneecap hurts a lot. I collect my luggage and chat with the nun in the seat next to me, when I suddenly notice that I left my camera belt in the hotel in Marinillas. Thank God, because would I have worn it, the contents would certainly have been destroyed and I would have injured myself on the debris. I drop off the bus and get on the next bus back to Marinillas. There I run, despite knee, neck, back and head pains to the hotel where my camera belt is still lying on the bed. There is no one up so early, otherwise it would have been gone. Back to the Autopista, where I only find a totally crowded bus. With my heavy backpack on my back, I have to stand one hour to Medellin. In Medellin I take the Metro to Poblado, where I put up at the "Black Sheep Backpackers". By Metro back into town until Parque Berrio. Visit the Parque Berrio, the Basilica de Candelaria, the frescoes in the Parque Berrio, the Parque de Bolivar with the Bolivar Monument and the cool fountains, and the - closed - Catedral Metropolitana. To the Internet café, cannot reach Otto Egloff, but skyped to Aunt Christeli. Back to the Centro Commercial Villanueva. To the Plazoleta de las Esculturas, where there are many bronze sculptures by Fernando Botero. On to the Museo de Antioquia, which has an excellent Botero-section (Botero is famous for his chubby portraits but here are also many of his bullfighting paintings on display) and some good modern art. The section of colonial art cannot hold up to it. In the annex they show avant-garde videos, not my wave length. Back to the Catedral Metropolitana, which is now open. A huge brick building, even inside the bricks are visible, which give it a warm and inviting appearance. Eat for very little money in the park. Walked along Carrera 49 to the south. Visited the huge supermarket "Exito". Continue to turn then - too late - to the west and ask for the Parque de los Pies Descalzados. Have to backtrack a bit and get to the impressive Plaza Mayor and the Alcaldia. The Parque de los Pies Descalzados is being renovated, it is a place with different "experience worlds" for bare feet. Via the pedestrian bridge across the road, where there is another brick Church, the Iglesia del Sagrado Corazon de Jesus, unfortunately closed. It

seems a poor, dangerous area. I quickly walk east, where the impressive and modern Biblioteca Tematico EEPPM and the Plaza de Cisneros, with its hundreds of concrete flagpoles, are found. Then back to the Carrera 49, where I continue walking south. Visit the impressive brick Church "Iglesia del perpetuo Socorro", in the style of the Notre Dame de Paris. Inside, everything is white plaster. Walked to Poblado where I buy chicken for supper at "Exito".

24.6.2008 Medellin By Metro into town. Visited the Iglesia Ermita de la Veracruz. Explored Avenida Maracaibo, Centro Commercial Palacio Nacional (historical palace, today shopping centre), Parque San Antonio (with two Botero statues), Carrera 46, the beautiful pedestrian shopping zone Carrera 52, Plaza de Alpajara with two remarkable monuments, surrounded by civic administration buildings, chatted with the policeman for some time. To the Parque de los Pies Descalzados and the new building of the civic services EEPPM. Climbed Cerro Nutibara, where there is a model of an Antioquian town and a good view over town. Returned via the Sendero de las Esculturas, to the city centre, by Metro back to the hostel, because I have blisters on my feet. Prepared lunch. In the afternoon I chatted with the other guests and with Guenther from Stuttgart, who is married here. Found a Lonely Planet Central America.

Medellin is an ultra-modern town, with an abundance of new buildings. The architecture of the majority of the town is appealing. Even Motortown is not as ugly as it is usually in South America. It has plenty of tree-lined pedestrian zones and plazas with shady bamboo trees and good works of art. The arts seem to have a high priority and there is an abundance of works of art all over town, as well as art museums. The province of Antioquia is very industrialised because of its hydroelectric power plants.

25.6.2008 Medellin-Santa Fe de Antioquia Early in the morning by Metro to the bus station and got on the bus to Santa Fe de Antioquia. Arrive at nine and buy a ticket to Turbo, at the bus office I find a ultra-modern Internet, I use it with pleasure. Can leave my backpack here. Santa Fe de Antioquia was earlier the provincial capital, until Medellin took over. Today it is a colonial village with cobbled streets, many historic houses and Churches. I visited the Basilica Menor (closed), the Iglesia Santa Barbara (closed), the Iglesia de Jesus, the Iglesia de Nuestra Senora del Carmen (by the cemetery), the Museo de Arte Religiosa with its unique exhibits, it displays amongst others the Last Supper in life size. The artist took revenge on his client, who locked him into his workshop because he was doodling with the work, by moulding Judas' face after his client. The paintings were once stolen, but all but two were recovered. To the Iglesia de Nuestra Senora de Chiquinquirá and the Parque de la Chuca, to the Parque Samara at the end of the village. It starts to rain. The Churches don't open by 6pm as promised. I eat Arepas at the Plaza Mayor. Waiting for the bus which is supposed to leave at eight. Santa Fe de Antioquia is a colonial-Spanish town, with cobbled streets, low houses covered with tiles, stone doorways and wooden grids on the windows. I do some Internet while waiting for the bus. At eight the bus comes in and I get on. There is loud music playing all night long (the conductor says that the passengers demand it, very unlikely though), so that it is impossible to sleep.

Panama

26.6.2008 Turbo-Puerto Obaldia The bus arrives at 4am in Turbo. I wait at the office of the bus company Cootransuroccidente until 6am, as Turbo is considered a very dangerous in the dark. At 6am I walk to the harbour and purchase a ticket for the ferry to Capurgana which leaves at 8:45h. I return to the bus office, leave the backpack there and explore town. Turbo is an extremely poor and African town, very unlike the other Colombian cities. The houses, even the newer ones, are run down. The businesses are obviously suffering. There is rubbish everywhere and the hard surface of many roads is gone. There is no real city centre. The market is almost empty, some dismal fruit is sold outside. I have a long chat with a local who is obviously in the focus of police, as they warn him not to take advantage of me. He wants to travel to Europe to make a fortune there, I advise him against it, in order to prevent a great disappointment. I then rush back to the bus office, pick up my backpack and run to the harbour. They don't want to let me to the boat, when I eventually get through all seats are taken except a crowded seat right at the back, in the spray, with all my leg space taken by luggage. Next to me is Diana, a biologist teaching at the Theodor-Hertzl-College in Medellin. We only get as far as the military checkpoint, where we are returned because of two missing life vests. The skipper borrows them from an oncoming launch and this time we may pass. The life vests are sent with the next oncoming launch back to the harbour. We are then pushed by 2x200hp outboard engines towards Capurgana. The spray is soaking me. Once we hit a log, but otherwise, the ride is eventless. In Capurgana I get off and immediately find a direct launch to Puerto Obaldia, Panama. But the immigration office is closed and I have to wait for an hour to get my exit-stamp. Capurgana is a little village, with many hostels and restaurants and little else. It has no roads, no cars or motorbikes, is only accessible by sea. Eventually I get my stamp done and I and three pleasant Hare-Krishna-Disciples board the launch to Puerto Obaldia. The ride takes a bit less than an hour, this time less savage as the engine only has 40hp. Arrived in Puerto Obaldia, the immigration formalities are quick and easy. I get a booking for tomorrow's 10am flight to Panama city and put up at the Pension Cande, which is as dismal as all the other houses in town, but at least one toilet and shower is still working. Puerto Obaldia is a pathetic little town. The majority of the houses are broken down, parts of the roofs are missing, the wood eaten by termites. The short 300m runway of the "airport" cuts right through town, with many obstacles right and left. There is rubbish everywhere, I watched them throwing packets of rubbish right onto the beach. Broken sewerage pipes lead right onto the beach. They build fibreglass boats on one of the

beaches, dropping the remains into the sea. A large warehouse has no roof, nor has the police station. From 8 to 10 there is electricity. The Internet café has its own generator which is thumping all day long. Two boys on a scooter with a noisy sports exhaust ride up and down the runway. I have supper at the "Las tres L" restaurant and go to bed early.

27.6.2008 Puerto Obaldia-Panama City At 8:30am I am at the airline office, a private house in town. I had thrown out the broken pair of pants and the water canister to make my luggage lighter, now exactly 15kg. No problem checking it in. I wait and wait for the plane. 10am goes, 11am, they keep promising the plane for the next full hour. At 13h I eat lunch. Eventually, at 15:40h, the plane, a De Havilland Twin Otter 300, comes in. We passengers get on, get buckled up, but the captain tells us to get off again. There is a serious technical problem, the plane is grounded. The airline official says, there might be another plane coming in with a mechanic to solve the problem, and pick us up. But this is not confirmed. At 17:30h indeed another plane is landing, brushing past the parked plane without touching it. It is amazing how such a big plane can touch down on such a short and narrow runway. We get on and this time it takes off, quite frightening on a runway that drops right into the sea after 300m. At 18:30 we arrive in Panama City, where we first take a long time to pay our - amazingly cheap - airfare, then get into customs, where our luggage is first sniffed by dogs, then searched in detail by the customs officers and in the end each of us is questioned for 20 minutes. They must be very afraid of drug trafficking from Colombia. At 20:30h we are through, Together with a Japanese I take a taxi to "Mamallena" Backpackers. But the road is in darkness, a power failure and the place obviously doesn't exist anymore. We put up one street further at "Zulys Backpackers". Then we go to the nearby supermarket to buy something to eat.

28.6.2008 Panama City Write the Internet diary. When I have written about three pages A4, the computer crashes and won't start again. I lose everything, have to change to another computer and write everything again and fix the webpage. The other guests (what a waste of Internet) want to watch YouTube videos and complain but I ignore this. Then by bus to Parque Santa Ana. Visit the Iglesia Santa Ana. The old part of Panama, the Casco Antiguo, turns out to be dilapidated, impoverished and dangerous. Everywhere, unemployed youngsters are loafing around. I walk to the Iglesia de la Merced, Plaza de la Independencia, visit the big and empty-looking Catedral. Back to the Teatro Nacional, where I start the Lonely Planet Town Walk. Iglesia de San Francisco (closed), Ministerio de Gobierno y Justicia, the Club de Clases y Tropas, bombed in 1989 by the Americans and the only the walls remain. Along the Paseo de las Bovedas to the Plaza de Francia, where I enjoy the view from the Mirador and then visit the dungeons underneath as well as the badly weathered stone tablets about the construction of the canal. To the ruins of the Iglesia y Convento Santo Domingo, where I see the Arco Chato, a large stone arch. Back to the Parque Bolivar. Despite heavy security, I may proceed to the Presidential Palace "Palacio de las Garzas". Indeed, there are herons in the palace, they are quite aggressive and pick me. To the dismal Muelle Fiscal and the dilapidated, closed market. Through a narrow street, where many beggars sleep in the entrances of the ruined houses, to the Plaza de la Independencia. The former Hotel Central has caved in, only the facade remains. To the ruins of the former Jesuit monastery Iglesia y Convento de la Compañía de Jesus. From here, I have to cross the road several times to avoid dark figures. To the Iglesia San Jose, with the famous Altar de Oro, which was rescued from Panama la Vieja because the priest had it painted black. The Parque Herrera I cross quickly, because more dark figures are waiting here. Back to the Avenida Central. Past the Parque Santa Ana, through the awfully dilapidated shopping street. Lunch at a Chinese restaurant. To Plaza 5 de Mayo. By minibus towards Panama la Vieja. A terrible thunderstorm starts. At the Museum Panama la Vieja I drop off. As I appear dripping wet at the Museum, they allow me in for free so I can dry. In fact the air-conditioning dries me in a jiffy. The Museum is excellent and shows the history of Panama la Vieja; it also has a large model of the city. Then I visit Panama la Vieja: Puente del Matadoro (with steel frame, so that it doesn't cave in), Fuerte de la Natividad, Convento de la Merced, Convento de San Francisco, Hospital San Juan de Dios, Convento de la Concepcion, Convento de la Compañía de Jesus, Convento de Santo Domingo, Casa Allarcon, Catedral, where I climb the tower, Los Genoveses, Casas Reales (earlier on an island, mainland today), then further down the road to the Convento de San Jose and the Puente del Rey. There I meet again exactly the same minibus, with which I came. I get on. At the Parque 5 de Mayo I change to the next bus to Via España. I drop off at Calle 50, walk up to Avenida España. Quickly view the Iglesia de Nuestra Senora del Carmen, then back to the Hostel. Register Zuly's in Wikitravel, which makes the owner very happy.

29.6.2008 Panama City By bus to Plaza 5 de Mayo and with the Paraiso bus to Escluso Miraflores (Miraflores Locks). Waited until 9am for it to open. Watched two container ships, the Hyundai Garnet and Libra Santa Catarina, traversing the lock. Watched useless video, visited the museum with a good model of the channel and attended an interesting simulation of a ride through a lock. Watched the tanker New Constellation crossing the lock. Walked to the Parque Nacional los Camino de Cruces, and get another good view of the Miraflores Lake and the waiting ships. At the National Park I am strongly advised not to walk alone as there were too many robberies. In addition, heavy rain begins. I turn around, wait for the bus. There I meet a motorcyclist, a 79-year-old American, with whom I chat a long time. Finally, the bus arrives and I get back to Plaza 5 de Mayo. Lunch. Walked to the "Mi Pueblito", a Spanish, an Afro-Caribbean and an Indio village-replica. The crumbling site has no visitors at all (on a Sunday!). To the summit of Cerro Ancon, enjoy the view over Panama City and the locks. Back to Plaza 5 de Mayo and by bus back to the hostel.

30.6.2008 Panama City Looked for a laundry shop, the one next to the hotel is still closed. The other laundry wants 3 USD, but I can bring in 5kg. Back to the hostel, brought more clothes. To the bus terminal. Had to wait for almost an

hour at Ticabus to get the ticket to San Jose. The purchase is ultra-complicated and the ticket is expensive. Back to Plaza 5 de Mayo. Bought socks, had lunch. Waited a long time for the minibus to the Amador Causeway. The Causeway, a dam several miles long, connects three islands, with marinas and restaurants, to the mainland. Stayed on the bus until it returned to the Plaza 5 de Mayo. Back to the hostel. Booked cheap flight from Boston to Munich (25.12.08), Munich is not much further from Thal than Zurich, but much cheaper. Buy supper, fetch laundry. Help Zuly to take all the postings off the wall as she is moving the hostel one block down the road.

Panama is a strange combination of slum and first-world life. While people are living in places like the Casco Antiguo in extreme poverty, there are European-style dwellings in the new town. Life is very cheap, partially due to the fact that it is a USD economy. So packaged foods, imports, luxury goods, electronics, cars and motorbikes are cheap. In countries with exchange restrictions, usually only agricultural produce and accommodation are cheap. Everything is available, there are no import restrictions. But nevertheless, the economy does not seem to prosper too much, with run-down businesses in the city centre. Many retired people seem to choose Panama with its hot and humid climate as their domicile.

Costa Rica

1.7.2008 Panama City-San Jose At 8am I take a bus to the bus terminal. Because I am early I buy - a very complicated and time consuming affair indeed - two more tickets, one San Jose to Managua and one Managua to Tegucigalpa. At the same time, I check in for the bus to San Jose. When we are about to board the bus, we have to pay another 5c, but I have no more coins. A French woman gives me the 5c coin. The bus is like in Venezuela, far too cold and thick blue curtains. Whenever somebody opens one, the staff closes it immediately again. We get lunch. The customs formalities at the border are tedious. Both customs check all our baggage thoroughly. Back in the bus, they keep showing movies, while disco sound is thundering away in the driver's cabin. Nevertheless, I fall asleep.

2.7.2008 San Jose At 2am, we arrive in San Jose, much too early. A taxi driver says he would take me for me 2'000 C. (4 USD) to the 300m distant JC Friends Hostel. The night watchman says there was no place (a scam, as I learned later that it had lots of space). So I end up in a private boarding-house, where I have to pay 14 USD for a dirty bed in a cockroach-infested room, and the taxi driver also skims 6 USD off me. In the morning I leave this dump and walk to the Coca-Cola bus station. But there are no local buses. There are no road signs in San Jose, as in most Central American cities, and the map of the Lonely Planet useless. So I have to once again take a taxi, first to the pension Gallo Pinto, but they are not ready to rent the rooms at the advertised price, then back to the JC Friends Hostel (at La Toyota), which is now virtually empty. To the city: Parque la Merced, Iglesia la Merced (closed), down Avenida 4, Parque Central, Catedral, Garantias Sociales, Plaza de las Artes, Iglesia la Soledad, until the beginning of the "Caminada", the Historical City Tour, near the Museo Nacional. Parque Nacional, the old train station (former Museo Ferrocarril with a beautiful steam engine), Iglesia Santa Teresita with a simple, impressive interior, the new building of the Biblioteca Nacional, Parque España, Casa Amarilla, Instituto Nacional de Seguros, along the Edificio Metalico to the Parque Morazan with the "Templo de la Musica". Walk down to the pedestrian zone Avenida Central, Plaza de la Cultura, Correo Central, Parque Central, Catedral Metropolitana. Have a cheap (for Costa Rica, where the food is expensive) and lousy lunch at a Chinese restaurant. Back to the Museo Nacional. Visited the exhibition pre-Columbian art with impressive stools made of lava rocks and gold jewellery. There is a colonial house with interior decoration and a somewhat leftist exhibition of colonial history. It is raining hard now, so I see nothing in the Butterfly House. I wait for the rain to cease and chat with a gentleman, who then even takes me with his umbrella to the bus stop. With the "Sabana" bus back to the hostel. Look for a supermarket, but there is only a ultra-expensive Schickimicki shop. So I eat at "Taco Bell", where I can at least drink as much Root Beer as I want.

3.7.2008 San Jose I am far too early at the bus station in the Parque la Merced, the bus to the Volcano Poas doesn't leave until 08:30h. The trip to the volcano is very beautiful. We arrive 11h. I quickly run to the crater and see it in the sunshine, with the deep green lake and the cloud of steam emerging from the lava exit. Then it fogs up. I walk to Laguna Botos, an older crater lake, clean of fog. Then through temperate rain forest on the "Canto de las Aves" back to the crater, which is now completely covered by fog. The museum is pitch-dark and with little information, most lamps are blown. Watched the video. There are still 2 hours until the bus leaves. Walked the entire circuit again. A severe thunderstorm with strong rains starts. Despite my umbrella, I am getting soaked and seek refuge in the video room where I can at least sit in the dry. Wait until the bus leaves. In Alajuela I change to the bus to Heredia. There I visit the new city and the market. Buy sausages for 400 C. and get a huge lot! Then I visit the Iglesia de la Immaculate Concepcion, the historic Post Office and the Escuela Argentina. By bus back to San Jose, chat with the teacher next to me. Drop off at La Toyota. A flu is coming up, the sick man next to me in the Ticabus has passed it on to me.

Nicaragua

4.7.2008 San Jose-Granada Got up at 4am, by taxi the 300m to the Tica bus terminal, just to be on the safe side.

Checked in - Tica bus is very disorganised, for the 6am bus, you have to check in at 5am. I am still very sleepy and get little of the countryside. At the border to Nicaragua there is a traffic jam, many lorries blocking the way. We passengers walk to the border post and get the exit stamps. I cannot get over the poor exchange rate for Costa Rican currency: 36. It will take a long time until I figure out, that they mean with this 36 Cordobas for 1000 Colones, which is quite alright. Luggage check on the Nicaraguan side. I have to pay 8 USD entry fee, pay with Colones. When I get my change I am very disappointed to only get 180 Colones, but the change was correct, there is an extra 2 USD charge for payment in the hated Colones (!!!), but better get rid of this worthless currency now, banks are unlikely to exchange it. To my greatest surprise, we arrive at 14:30h in Granada on Lake Nicaragua. I instantly decide to get off the bus and stay here for a night, there is still enough time tomorrow to see ugly Managua. I visit the Iglesia Xalteba with its withered face and the beautifully dilapidated park. Then Iglesia La Merced, where I climb the tower to have good view of town. Then to the Plaza Colon, where I visit the huge but plain cathedral. From there to the Iglesia Guadalupe, a former fort. To the Muelle, the huge jetty, where I have to pay 15 C. entrance fee. Boys are diving from it, although the jetty is only about 4m above the surface of the lake. Walk back, to the Iglesia Maria Auxiliadora and the Gymnasio Salesiano and to the Fortaleza Polvora, which was formerly used by the Somozistas as a place to torture. Picked up my backpack at the Ticabus office and put up at the Hospedaje Central.

5.7.2008 Granada-Managua Take one of the first buses to Managua. At UCA I have to change to the bus 102, which takes me to the vicinity of the Ticabus terminal. There, in the obviously dangerous neighbourhood, I have to look for a long time until I find the terminal. There are no street signs in Managua and only two, three major streets do have a name. I find cheap quarters at the Casa de Huespedes "Tica Nica". Start with the City Tour, in the absence of useful public transport I walk. To the monumental area, along wretched slums (tents made from plastic bags) in a park across the road from the Parliament. To the completely ruined Parque Luis Velasquez. In the buildings left standing by the earthquake, in the north-east corner of the park, a dismal slum has sprung up. To the Plaza de la Revolucion (recently renamed thus). Everywhere huge posters of President Daniel Ortega. Visited the ruins of the old cathedral, the Palacio Nacional and the Casa del Pueblo (the new Presidential Palace) all only from the outside. To the Monumento a Ruben Dario, the Teatro Ruben Dario, the already badly neglected Plaza de la Fe Juan Pablo II, with its shell-shaped speakers' console. Along the Malecon to Puerto Salvador Allende, where I book a boat trip on the Lago de Managua. The capital still looks wretched from the boat, slums and smoking heaps of garbage everywhere, all the shores covered with rubbish. Eat cheap and good lunch at the Malecon, but have to put up with loud disco music and views of the never completed marina. To the Museo Nacional in the Palacio Nacional, a dark, little appealing exhibition pre-Colombian artefacts (especially Metate, three-legged stools for maize milling). To the Parque de la Paz, a lighthouse in a water pool, built in 1990 and now completely ruined, then to the partly overgrown socialist-realistic monument to the Nicaraguan woman and the Soldado Estatua, done in the Communist style. To the Inter Shopping Center. What a surprise, a modern shopping centre with movie theatres in this environment. Climbed the hill Loma de Tiscapa, visible from afar with its Sandeman profile (it is actually supposed to be General Sandino). Enjoyed beautiful views over Managua. Some tourists do the Tiscapa Canopy Tour, gliding on a steel cable over the Laguna de Tiscapa, a former volcanic crater. One can see the new cathedral quite well. Visited the exhibition about General Sandino. It is incredibly hot, so I'm glad when I find a Pali supermarket, where I buy a gallon of water and ice cream. To the Nueva Catedral which I view in- and outside. It is strangely built, like water containers on the roof. Inside, it is surprisingly cool. Then to the Metrocentro, another shopping centre. The contrast to the environment could not be bigger, in 1972 Managua was destroyed by an earthquake and only the government- and army buildings were rebuilt. The empty plots and the damaged houses were squatted in a jiffy by paupers. The government doesn't seem interested in urban planning. No wonder that Managua is regarded as one of the most dangerous cities of Central America.

Honduras

6.7.2008 Managua-Tegucigalpa Shortly before 4am I am at the Ticabus office - but the offices are closed. I am rudely told that the offices would open at 4am sharp. I get very angry - this is one of the most dangerous neighbourhoods in Managua and they let us wait in the street, but expect us to be 4am sharp at the office for a completely unnecessary check-in! I tell them to open the offices in future half an hour in advance. The bus leaves 1/2h late and arrives around 13h in Tegucigalpa. I check into a lousy but cheap hotel close to Rey Expressbus. Lunch at the market. Walk into town. Explore town: 6a Avenida with their poor markets, Plaza Morozan with the (scaffolded) Catedral, Parque Valle with the (closed) Iglesia San Francisco, Parque la Merced with Iglesia la Merced (closed), National Art Gallery and Palacio Legislativo. To the Iglesia las Dolores, with its beautiful facade, the Parque Herrero with the Teatro Nacional Manuel Borilla, the Museo de Heredia Nacional I don't feel like visiting. To the Parque la Concordia with its kitschy replicas of the ruins of Copan, the Museo Nacional Villa Roy is unfortunately closed. I climb high up Parque Leona, from which I have a beautiful view over the city. The flu has me in its claws thus I go to bed.

7.7.2008 Tegucigalpa-Copan Ruinas By 06:30 bus to San Pedro Sula. There is - what a surprise - a new bus terminal, now for all bus companies. Find immediately a chicken bus to La Entrada. It would have been a surprisingly pleasant trip to La Entrada if it were not for my bad flu. My nose is running, I am coughing, my bones hurt. For lunch I buy

some food through the window - tasty and cheap. In La Entrada I change to the bus to Copan Ruinas. I arrive shortly before 16h in Copan Ruinas, where I follow a tout, but then get a good single room at the Hotel San Jose without his help - with my bad flu I cannot sleep in a dormitory. Have a good supper at the market. I am feeling terrible, go to bed at 18h. The flu gets worse in the night until I cannot breathe anymore. So I take my last Contac, which gives me some minimal relief.

8.7.2008 Copan Ruinas I wake up feeling like tortured and my nose immediately starts to drip again. Corn soup for breakfast. Buy water and bananas. Coughing and sneezing I drag myself to the ruins. The entrance fee has been increased to 15 USD. The huge structures, completely surrounded by jungle, are impressive. I felt like a discoverer, there were so few tourists that early in the morning. First I visit the stele field (most steles of King 18-rabbit), surrounded by a kind of a courtyard. The building 223 shines with its utterly precise construction. The hieroglyphic stairway is unfortunately closed. The two main pyramids are impressive by their size, height and execution. There are many beautiful ornaments, leopard heads and hieroglyphics on the walls. All in the middle of the jungle, where parrots screech. Around midday I am feeling too sick and leave. But I still decide to follow the "Natures Trail" and find a small Ball Court. Good lunch at the market. Back to the hostel.

Guatemala

9.7.2008 Copan Ruinas-Antigua Guatemala In the morning to the Museo de la Escultura. It not only has all the original statues, but also a replica of the Rosalila Temple and several reconstructed house facades. Then I buy a ticket for today's 12h bus to Antigua, fetch the backpack, eat another good lunch quickly. I am feeling much better. The journey to Antigua is fast. The landscape the same as everywhere in Central America: green hills. We arrive 19h in Antigua, where I unsuccessfully check out two hostels, until I find a bed at the Umma Gumma Hostel. As I am very hungry, I go to a nearby restaurant which advertises "Curry" for 22 Quetzales. I am utterly disappointed when I get a handful rice and a spoonful of curry (for double the price of a complete meal at a normal restaurant).

10.7.2008 Antigua Guatemala I seem to be the first in the hostel who is getting up - not even early, around 6:30am. Prepare my breakfast. Start to explore Antigua Guatemala. Antigua Guatemala was repeatedly shaken by violent earthquakes until the capital was finally moved to Guatemala City. Many historic buildings are therefore in ruins. In the south the Volcano Agua towers above the city. It stopped raining, there is even some sun. To the ruins of the Compañía de Jesus, I am admitted in, although it is now a school. To the Parque Central. Viewed the Catedral, which is plain inside. To the Tourist Information, got map. To a bookshop, priced the Lonely Planet Mexico. To the Monumento Landivar. To a supermarket, only to study the goods and prices. Take my silken purse to a tailor to replace the broken zippers. Back to the Parque Central. Palacio del Ayuntamiento. Palacio de Capitanes, chatted with a few locals. Beautiful view from the terrace of the Palace on the park. To the Tanque de la Union, possibly a former laundry. To the Ruina Santa Clara. To the Iglesia, Ruinas y Museo de San Francisco, where the mortal remains of Hermano Pedro de Betancourt lie, who was sanctified only a few years ago. To the Escuela de Cristo, still a school. To the Ruinas Los Remedios. To Iglesia Guadalupe and the Iglesia Belen. The Casa Popenoe, a historic house, is closed. Find by chance a very cheap used "Lonely Planet Mexico". Have a good and cheap lunch at the market. To the Ruinas San Jeronimo and the Ruinas La Recoleccion, then to the fantastically beautiful sugar cake Church La Merced, inside disappointing. To the Ruinas Santa Catarina, the archway El Arco, the Ruinas Santa Teresa, the Ruinas El Carmen, Ruinas Capuchina, Ruinas Santa Rosa, the Candelaria Ruinas a bit outside and the Ruinas La Concepcion. Visit Hotel Museo Casa Santo Domingo, but not the museum itself. Since Antigua is very touristy, the entrance fees for tourists are absurdly high (around 4 USD per ruin), thus there are few foreign visitors.

11.7.2008 Antigua Guatemala I have the Internet computer to myself early in the morning, while the others still sleep, and can finally upload the photos and backup the camera. Then to the Museo de Armas de Santiago on Parque Central. But it has only a few pictures, a few weapons, some debris of Church figures and a historic courtyard. Visited the monastery of La Merced, with a huge fountain. Lunch at the market. At 14h by tour bus to the Volcano Pacaya. We get into a huge traffic jam because a big funeral blocks the main road. On arrival at the Volcano, we hike mostly through agricultural lands to a huge black lava deposit. We climb through the sharp solidified lava, get to two lateral lava exits on the flank of the volcano. See the smouldering hot lava. We cannot stay long nearby, it is too hot. On returning, the clouds disappear and we see the Volcanoes in full size. Then it is getting dark and we stumble in the pitch-dark night back to the starting point. The worries of the guide books about robbery seem to be unfounded, as today the tours are highly professionally organised, among other things with constant radio contact. Back to the hostel, chatted with Marlene and Yanti until midnight.

12.7.2008 Antigua Guatemala-Guatemala City At 7am I am at the bus terminal and get on the bus for "Guate". I ask whether they would get to the Terminal Terrestre and they say yes. But when we arrive, I end up as the last passenger and no Terminal Terrestre emerges. I ask the driver, he tells me that I am to walk a few blocks and take a city bus. So I exactly end up at "Fuente del Norte", a Bus company to Flores. So the rumour that there was a new Terminal Terrestre was wrong. I book for the 8pm bus and ask whether it is a non-Aircon. With my terrible flu, which is now on the

decline, I could not bear air-conditioning. Then I deposit my luggage and walk to the city centre, which is not far away. A castle arouses my curiosity, it is the former Police Headquarters, today Ministerio de Gobernacion (National Government). At the Plaza Mayor / Parque Concordia, is a giant fountain. I visit the inside meaningless Catedral and the Palacio Nacional only from outside. Walk 2kms to Parque Minerva, where I intend to visit the "Mapa Relive". The tourist ticket price is absurd so I threaten to leave without entering it. They end up admitting me at the local price. The Mapa Relive was created in 1904 on the scale of 1:10'000 (Altitudes at 1:2'000) and quite impressive. But Belize was simply assigned to Guatemala!. Back to the Plaza Mayor. Strolled through the souvenir market of the Mercado Central. At a "comedor" (eatery) in the basement of the Mercado, I ate dirt cheap and well. To the Iglesia Guadalupe. Walked the traders street Avenida Sexta. Unfortunately, motor vehicles are still allowed, so that between the cars and the stalls there is not enough space for pedestrians. A pity. Back to the Palacio Nacional, where I participate in a guided tour. The interior of the building was completed in 1942 with finest materials and very pompous. Then the Centro Cultural Metropolitano, in a former monastery¹, where modern art (exhibition La Paiz) is shown, amongst others a pile of crumpled paper, where I can then watch how children are allowed to destroy the work of art. In the building across the road there is more wild modern art. Next to the Iglesia San Francisco, with an impressive decoration with white and gold cloth (Semana Santa) and a striking wooden altar. Then to the Iglesia Santa Clara across the road. Again past the nearby Ministerio de la Gobernacion. The building is relatively new, but very pompously made to look like a castle. Through the shopping streets to Iglesia del Calvario. Adjacent is the beautiful Tipografia Nacional, unfortunately completely obscured by the many market stalls. Back to the Plaza Mayor, to the Internet. Back to the bus terminal. The conductor wants to shoo me from my seat because my ticket says seat 5 and this bus has no seat 5. I stay. The bus is being crowded with standing passengers until the windows almost burst.

13.7.2008 Flores At 6am, the bus arrives in Santa Elena. I feel like I'm tortured after sleeping badly during the night in the overcrowded bus. By taxi to Flores, the island is connected by a dam with the mainland. Put up at the "Los Amigos" Hostel. Bought ticket for the minibus to Tikal, but wait a long time until it turns up. After a 2hs journey we arrive at 9am in the 60km distant Tikal. I start with exploring: Grand Plaza - impressive the two huge, steep Pyramid Temple. North Acropolis, West Square, Central Acropolis, Temple 38, Group G (U-shaped palace), Temple VI (of the inscriptions), not closely enough accessible, the completely scaffolded Temple V (can be climbed via a wooden staircase), the Seven Temples Plaza, El Mundo Perdido with the central pyramid and a pyramid-shaped temple. The Temple III is not excavated, just a steep hill in the jungle. N is overgrown and unexcavated. Temple IV is impressive with a steep main staircase and accessible via a wooden ladder. Beautiful views over the jungle from which the temple tops emerge. Along the Mandslay Causeway to the complexes M, P and H, with further climbable pyramid temples. Back to the Grand Plaza where I take photos because of the changed light. Via Complex R (unexcavated) and Q (small pyramid temple) back to the parking lot, where the 15h shuttle is just about to leave. Excruciating pain in the left ankle, this happens now every afternoon. Arrived in Flores, I have some food at the only open budget restaurant "El Peregrino".

14.7.2008 Flores Do my laundry. Today, I want to relax, the stress of the last few days has strained my ankle too much. Explore Flores, Santa Elena. The market is a wild bustle of Market stalls and buses. Lunch at the market, eat much fruit. To the bus station, but they know nothing about the bus to Bethel. Read, watch a video at the hostel. Eran wants to join me tomorrow.

Mexico

15.7.2008 Flores-Palenque Around 04:30am I am shaved and showered and wake the taxi driver in the house next door. I can't get Eran awake. He comes running only when we are about to leave. At the bus terminal, the bus is ready, we can get in and stow our luggage inside, a huge advantage. The fare has recently more than doubled. I am snoozing a part of the ride through the green hills of Guatemala, then we hit gravel road. The bus stops in front of the immigration in Bethel, where I get the exit stamp. Then on to La Tecnica where the ferry is waiting and we must hurry. It also has recently doubled the fare. Guatemala suffers apparently under hyperinflation. In Frontera Corozal, on the Mexican side, I quickly get the entry-stamp. Then I take a long time to find someone who can exchange my Guatemalan Quetzals at a lousy rate into Mexican pesos. At least now I have 180 pesos, far too little. Dollars cannot be changed. Fortunately I can pay the Lancha to Yaxchilan in Dollars and get the change out in pesos, so I can still buy the entry ticket. By wooden outboard Boat to Yaxchilan, about 20km upriver. I am with the tour group of Leonel Fernandez Morales, all lively Mexicans. One can hear the howler monkeys and sometimes see them. To enter the temple complex through the bat-infested catacombs, we have to hold a handkerchief to our nose. Fortunately I have a flashlight with me. Then I visit Edificio 17 and the ball playgrounds. Suddenly I feel sick, get diarrhoea. Probably the immense heat. I run back to the entrance and hit the toilet just in time. Then I walk back and proceed to Edificios 12, 11, Stele 1, Edificios 8, 15, Stele 3 and the lying, excellently detailed Stele 11, Edificios 20, 25 and 26. Up the flight of stairs to the fantastically preserved Edificio 33, with the entire roof structures intact. From here to the fairly distant, very well-preserved Edificios 39-41 ("south acropolis"). Here I meet a hysterical mother whose daughter ran away. Since she obviously is not here, I send her back towards the entrance. To the small Acropolis, less well preserved. Back to the entrance. I have enough time to

return to the building 30 and back to 33 to take a few photos in the changed light. Then we return with the “Lancha”. On the way we see a large crocodile motionless in the water. In Frontera Corozal I fetch my backpack at the Lancha office and see just Leonel’s minibus departing. I speak to Leonel and he offers to take me for my 180 pesos to the Temple of Bonampak and on to Palenque, all admissions included. Of course I agree immediately, I am so lucky, I never expected to see Bonampak! In Bonampak I get to know that the admission is 39 and the shuttle 60, so I made an incredibly good deal! We take the shuttle to the vicinity of the temple, cross to the temple over a bush landing airstrip (with a Piper Super Cub, abandoned 8 years ago on it). We get to the Plaza of the small site. The world-famous frescoes are located in the inconspicuous “Templo de las Pinturas”. The colours are still quite unexpectedly good. But it is quite difficult to see exactly what is represented due to lack of light and time (only three people may go in at a time). When walking back to the car we see an aircraft landing, it is another Piper Super Cub. At the car Leonel takes me aside and says that the group had decided to have dinner on the way back. He would return me 60 pesos, which should be more than enough for the minibus to Palenque. He still takes me to the main road and drops me at the police station. I chat a bit with one of the policemen, when a minibus comes along and I get on. Around 20h, after about two hours drive, we arrive in Palenque. I only have 10 pesos left. I walk towards ADO bus station, where after a few meters I find an ATM. Then I walk towards El Panchan. Unfortunately at this time there are no more mini-buses, but I hitchhike and after a few minutes a Bakkie takes me along. He takes another couple of backpackers and takes us all to El Panchan. We have a long chat with him (how incredibly friendly people here are), then I check in for only 30 pesos at the “El Mono Blanco”. I had not eaten all day long and eat now for 50 pesos a skimpy, overpriced dinner.

16.7.2008 Palenque Get up early. The weather is humid and hot. I want to be at the temple at 8am when it opens. Walk to the museum, but everything is closed. So I walk into the site without a ticket. In Group 2, a guard encounters me and sentences me to walk around the entire facility to the main entrance, a 1.5km detour. Here I first have a big breakfast - expensive but still much cheaper than in El Panchan - soup and tortillas. Then I buy the ticket (it is meanwhile 9am and the box offices have opened) and enter the site, the majority of which was built around the year 700 AD. Impressive the giant stairs to the temples in the bright morning light. There are a lot of tourists. To the Templo de la Calavera, Templo XIII, the domineering Templo de las Incripciones, unfortunately not accessible to the public. Visit the huge palace, first the Courtyard of the Prisoners, with bas-reliefs of conquered rulers, then I visit the top structures, some with original colors. The tower, probably incorrectly reconstructed, is unfortunately closed. There are toilets and saunas. The base has huge caverns, some of the guides say that they served as dormitories, others deny it. To the Grupo de las Cruces, above the palace. The Templo del Sol is slightly, Templo 14 completely, ruined. Climbed to the well-preserved Templo de la Cruz, it still even has its roof adornments. On to the Templo de la Cruz Foliada, whose facade is missing. The Acropolis Sur is unfortunately cordoned off, only the Templo XVII, with a beautiful bas-relief inside, is accessible. Passing the completely overgrown Templo XI to the Ball Court, then Templo X, Templo del Conde, Grupo del Norte. Back to the parking lot, where I eat tamales. Look for water to fill my jerry-can. The chef of the restaurant fills it with drinking water free of charge. I chat for a long time with him. Across the bridge to the “enchanted” ruined Group C of residential buildings. Continue to the Grupo de los Murcielagos (Bat Group), which I explore with the flashlight and I find an opened tomb in the ground in a room. Across an unsteady suspended bridge (Puente de los Murcielagos) to groups 1 and 2 (residential buildings), fairly well preserved and there are hardly any tourists. From there to the museum, where there are many impressive clay incense burners in mask shapes and the huge, richly decorated sarcophagus, found in the Templo de las Incripciones. Back to the Palace and the Templo de la Cruz to take photos in the afternoon light. To the parking lot, by minibus to El Panchan. Another absurdly expensive, bad dinner - there are no alternatives.

17.7.2008 Palenque-San Cristobal de las Casas Around 6am I am on the main road to Palenque and wait for a minibus. Soon, a Bakkie stops and takes me. At the AEXE terminal I buy a ticket to San Cristobal de las Casas. The trip is very pleasant, a comfortable bus, the landscape beautiful, more green hills. The video shows a US-trash film (Vampire/Fantasy). The boy next to me - I keep being targeted - is ill with flu and blows his nose in his fingers for lack of a handkerchief. I hope that I will not get flu again, the last one still not quite cured. At 13h we arrive in San Cristobal. I walk into the city, looking for accommodation. Can't find anything. The Tourist Information knows nothing about cheap accommodation, is even much surprised that there was any. Finally I find a good bed at the Hostal La Catrina, for just the 50 pesos of my budget. To the market, eventually I can enjoy a proper meal, and even cheap. Then to the Museo de la Medicina Maya, of which I am somewhat disappointed because it is too superficial. Visited Templo Santa Domingo and Templo de la Caridad, which are now open. Back to the hostel where I meet a German, with whom I walk to the bus terminal to find a bus to Merida. The direct bus is very expensive, it might well be worth to change in Palenque. On the way back past the Arco del Carmen and climbed the Templo del Cerrito de San Cristobal. To the Plaza Catedral, admired the Cathedral and the Facultad del Derecho admired in the evening light. Got inside the Cathedral and the adjacent Iglesia de San Nicolas. Ate a cheap and fabulous supper.

18.7.2008 San Cristobal de las Casas At 7am the streets of San Cristobal are deserted. I walk to the market, where I have some Atoll (rice gruel). Then I walk back to the hostel, where in the meantime the restaurants have opened and treat myself to a real breakfast. Visit the Arco de la Carmen (the Church is closed), the Plazuela de la Merced, the Templo de la Merced, the not very informative Museo de los Cultures Populares, the Iglesia de San Antonio. Visit the bus terminals, there is a cheap bus to Cancun, half the price of nearer Merida. Past Iglesia Santa Lucia, blue-white sugar

cake icing, Iglesia San Francisco to “Ticketbus”, where I end up getting a ticket for a better 2nd class bus to Cancun tomorrow. To the Templo del Calvario, hidden in a lovely courtyard and across an old bridge. Find no minibus to Chamula, thus walk to the Mercado. Have Tacos for lunch, tasty but not filling. Stupidly, I have no small bills left and here nobody can break even 100 Pesos. So after an unsuccessful attempt to break the 100 Pesos, I go to the supermarket and buy a bun for 1.50 Pesos. The cashier tries to cheat me: He doesn't type the purchase and charges me 3 Pesos. Now I have to enforce the principle, just wait at his till and keep asking for the change until he coughs it up. Now I have enough 10 Peso coins to take the minibus to San Juan Chamula. Arrived there, I visit the Indio village (but 60'000 inhabitants), weird graveyard around a ruined Church, littered with rubbish. For the Templo de San Juan they want an entrance fee. I just go in without a ticket and they quickly drag me out again, but too late, I have already seen that it is not worth buying the ticket. There are no benches, just hundreds of candles on tables inside and some pagan rituals are conducted. On the way back I meet a Canadian couple. Back in San Cristobal, I visit the Templo de Guadalupe, another sugar-cake-icing Church, idyllically situated on a hilltop. I then explore the Barrio de Guadalupe.

19.7.2008 San Cristobal Early in the morning to the market to buy tamales, coffee, bread and atoll for breakfast. Search long for an open Internet café - only the most expensive one is open. Upload the images. At 10h I am at the ADO bus terminal. The bus leaves an hour late at 12, just when I am outside buying a few tamales for lunch. I have to hurry in order to catch the bus. Am very surprised that the 2nd class bus is a modern Busscar, with comfortable seats. The ride is very pleasant. They show good movies, “Gladiator”, “Perfume” and “Surf's Up”. I sleep well.

20.7.2008 Cancun Around 5 am, we arrive in Playa del Carmen, by 6 clock we are in Cancun. Put up at the hostel “Las Palmas” - for 100 pesos, cheap for Cancun. Have tomorrow's breakfast today because I will leave early tomorrow. Then to the supermarket, where I buy a lot of food and eat half straight away - yesterday's tamales were not really filling. Walked to the Zona Hotelera. It looks similar to Punta del Este or in Florianopolis: Solid tourism infrastructure. By bus back, fetched my swimwear and back to Playa Chacmool. Only the weather has meanwhile changed, it storming and raining. The waves are huge, up to two meters high. There are only a few Mexicans on the beach. I put my clothes in a waterproof bag and bathe in the fantastic warm water. The waves have a tremendous violence and hurl me sometimes against huge stones hidden under the waves. This hurts my knees quite a bit. The storm strengthens up, the Mexicans leave. Now I am alone at the beach. As the storm gets stronger, I also leave. By bus back, showered the sand off. For dinner tortillas and sausages from the supermarket. Register the Hostel in Wikitravel.

21.7.2008 Cancun-Valladolid By 6am bus towards Tulum. Arrive at 08:30 h at the crossing in Tulum, but have to walk another 1.5km to the ruins. It is raining. Deposit my luggage, buy ticket. Start at the north tower, Casa del Cenote, Templo del Dios del Viento (picturesque against the backdrop of surf) with the mini-temples, Structure 25, Templo del Dios Descendiente, Palacio. See large iguana. The “El Castillo” (Templo de los Frescos) is well-preserved but for no apparent reason all fenced off. Templo de la Estela, some photos behind the Castillo. The site is beautiful, right on the beach, strategically situated. Walked in pouring rain in direction of Tulum City. Find a minibus to Coba. There I deposit my luggage and visit the site, once more in the pouring rain: Grupo Coba with the Templo de las Iglesias (big pyramid, once again fenced off) and a beautiful Ball Court. Walked in direction of Nohoch Mul. Found another well-preserved Ball Court. Climbed the Great Pyramid of Nohoch Mul. On the way back I visit another perfectly preserved small pyramid with rounded corners. To the Conjunto de las Pinturas, but unfortunately everything is fenced off. The steles are heavily weathered. To Grupo Macanxoc. Everything is very eroded. Some ruins are still completely overgrown in the jungle. Walked back in thunder and rain storm, despite the umbrella, I get completely soaked. Lunch in an expensive restaurant. Eventually, the rain lessens, I fetch my luggage and try to find a bus. But the bus leaves at 16:30, but now it is 15h. So I walk towards the junction to Valladolid. A delivery truck stops and gives me a lift to the 3km distant junction. Here I don't have to wait long until a truck holds. The tired driver is just glad to have somebody to talk to. I chat with him until we arrive in Valladolid. There, I find after a few meters, find affordable accommodation in the Hostal Kinbe. The rain also subsides. Make sightseeing tour of Valladolid: Museo San Roque with a wild mixture of pre-Columbian items and urban history, Parque Francisco Canton, Iglesia de San Servacio (Catedral), built like a castle (1545). To Cenote Zaci, a subterranean lake about 20 meters below the surface, partially open. To Iglesia and Parque Santa Ana. Bought water at a supermarket. To the Convento de San Bernardino of Siena, where I visit the former convent, the very deep Cenote, the museum with rifles from the caste war, salvaged from the Cenote. Buy cookies at a supermarket. Dinner in a small restaurant. Suddenly I notice that my so centrally important umbrella is missing. I run to the first supermarket, nothing. Nothing at the museum and the tourist information either. To the second supermarket: Bingo! The saleslady remembers, hands it back to me! What luck. It is a special umbrella from Japan, built for strong winds. The weather is incredibly hot and humid, the sweat running down and soaking my diary.

22.7.2008 Valladolid-Merida (Chichen Itza) Early in the morning by minibus to Chichen Itza. At 8am I am one of the first visitors. I walk first up to the “El Castillo”, the large, well-preserved pyramid. Unfortunately, everything is fenced off. To the “Plataforma de las Aguilas y los Jaguares”, “Plataforma de los Craneos” with excellently preserved bas-reliefs. On to the “Gran Juego de Pelota”, a huge Ball Court, with the “Templo de los Jaguares y Escudos” integrated like a turret. In front is the Templo del Barbado, with beautiful frescos, but again fenced off. To the Cenote Sagrado. Along the path the curio vendors are staking out their stalls. They may circulate freely through all these barriers, while

we paying tourists may only see the attractions from a great distance. The Cenote is completely open. To Plataforma de Venus, the largely ruined Templo de las Grandes Mesas and the unfortunately completely cordoned off Templo de los Guerreros. Walked along the Grupo de las Mil Columnas. Indeed a forest of columns, some of them decorated with bas-reliefs. The small Ball Court is no longer accessible, but still the steam bath. The Mercado has an impressive column court. Past the Temple of the Xtoloc and the almost completely overgrown Cenote Xtoloc to "El Osario", the Templo del Venado and the beautifully preserved Casa Colorada. To El Caracol, the round Observatory, once more all fenced off. To the Templo de las Tableros Esculpidos and the fantastic "Monastery" (effectively a palace) with the "La Iglesia" that has an almost complete roof structure. Meanwhile, it is raining hard. Thousands of tourists, mostly French Canadians, flood the place. It is getting crowded and I make an exit. Find a bus to Merida. We are dropped off in Calle 50. To the market, ate "Sopa de Lima" for lunch. In pouring rain I walk to the Nomadas Hostel where I put up.

23.7.2008 Merida (Uxmal) To Tame bus terminal and by bus to Uxmal. Arrived there, I first visit the "Casa del Adivino", effectively a huge, perfectly preserved pyramid with rounded corners. It is just being weeded. Next to "Cuadrangula de las Monjas" a giant well-preserved palace with a large courtyard and fantastic facades. Continue to the crumbling Ball Court, but one of the richly decorated stone rings (the ball was thrown through them) is still intact. On the Acropolis first to the "Casa de las Tortugas", a Rain Temple decorated with turtles, then to the fantastically beautiful and well-preserved "Palacio del Gobernador". Everywhere there are large but shy iguanas. In the Palacio there are lots of bats and even some swallows nests. In front of the Palacio is the Adoratorio de la Picota, a huge, lying, stone trunk. Continue to the "Gran Piramide", smaller than the "Casa del Adivino", then "El Palomar" which really looks like a dove-cote. To the "Grupo del Oeste" with the strange "Estructura Redonda", then to the "Cementerio del Grupo" with well-preserved bone and skull reliefs. Next, to the stone phalluses and the largely ruined "Casa de la Vieja". The pyramid is completely overgrown. Here I chase a huge iguana. After a long search I find a few remainders of the "Grupo del Noreste". Again to the Palacio del Gobernador, then Casa del Adivino and Cuadrangulo de las Monjas. Then I leave the site and wait for a bus to Merida. There is little traffic in this direction. Finally a minibus stops. Actually, it is only running to the next village, Muna, but since all the passengers want to go to Merida, it goes all the way and even cheaper than the outward journey. To the Bank, exchange T/Cs and have now have enough money to buy a 1st class bus ticket to Mexico City as for no apparent reason there are no second-class buses there. To the Parque San Juan, Catedral de San Ildefonso and the Iglesia de la Compañia de Jesus. Back to the hostel. Meet a few Swiss girls there. The mosquitoes bite me all over.

24.7.2008 Merida (Izamal) Around 09:30 clock to the Tourist Offices Walking Tour of the Old Town. We visit the Palacio Municipal, the Casa de Montejo, Catedral, Palacio Arzobispal (now a museum of modern art MACAY), the Pasaje de la Revolucion and the Palacio Ejecutivo (Government Palace) with many monumental paintings by Fernando Castro Pacheco. Then I check out at the Hostel and put my luggage in a locker. Have a look at the Paseo de Montejo, adorned with some modern art. Back to MACAY, where I visit the exhibitions - most artists too wild or too trivial or both. Interesting are Fernando Garcia Ponce and Pilar Camara, both have a similar style to my own painting. Back to the Puente del Arco and Arco y Curatel de Dragones, both gates of the former city wall, which was built as a protection against English pirates. To Calle 50, by "Oriente" bus to Izamal. Arrive there at 15:30. Visit the stunningly beautiful Convento de San Antonio de Padua (built in 1561), which was unfortunately founded by the controversial Fray Diego de Landa. Then to the Mayan pyramid Kinich Kak Moo and past the Capilla de los Remedios back to the monastery, where I get a sudden diarrhoea and they quickly open the toilet of the city hall for me. By minibus back to Merida, not only 2 pesos cheaper, but also twice as fast! Around 18:30 h I am back again, running back to the hostel, cooking a dinner to stop the diarrhoea. To the CAME-bus terminal. I get there all sweaty and grubby. The bus to Mexico City leaves at 21.15h. It has very uncomfortable seats without leg space.

25.7.2008 Merida-Mexico City Around 12:30 a.m. we arrive in Cordoba. 30 minutes break. I quickly run from the bus terminal and order a "Menu Corrida" in a small restaurant. I am very surprised when I get a huge plate of chicken, rice and Frijoles for my 25 pesos, as well as a lot of tortillas. At 18h we arrive in the pouring rain at the TAPO terminal. A policeman explains to me exactly how I get by Metro to Taxquena station. I arrive there at 19h and call Max Bosshard (my neighbour from Thal, Switzerland who is living and working here right now), who picks me up after a few minutes. Huge dinner with Max, Teresa, Saemi and Carmen.

26.7.2008 Mexico City Late large breakfast, with the Bosshard family to the Zocalo. Visited the Catedral. I am invited to a buffet lunch at the Hotel Majestic, high above the Zocalo. Watch the Indian dances on the Zocalo. It starts to rain.

27.7.2008 Mexico City With the Bosshard family for a posh breakfast at a restaurant, then by boat, driven by a gondolier, through the channels of Xochimilco. Back and to the Ex-Convento de Churubusco with its not particularly interesting museum. It starts to rain.

28.7.2008 Mexico City At 08:30 h I walk to the Metro, go to the terminal Norte. From there by bus to Teotihuacan. Here is the main archaeological site of pyramids in Mexico City. First to La Ciudadela, with a courtyard surrounded by stepped platforms. Inside is the Templo del Quetzalcoatl. Within the pyramid are parts of an older pyramid, with beautiful bas-reliefs. Along the Calzada de los Muertos to the north. On the left, I visit the Edificios Superimposados, i.e

buildings built on top of older buildings. Amongst them, the Basamento Pintado is accessible, an older building with frescoes. Next door, the Conjunto Plaza Oeste with the Colosales Cabezas de Serpiente y Jaguar, huge stone carvings of something between a snake and a Jaguar, also on a lower level and visible through an opening. On the right side I visit the "Plaza Este", probably residential buildings. Climbed the Piramida del Sol. Its gradient flattens gradually. Back to the Museo del Sitio, where some smaller items like figurines, obsidian knives and arrowheads and incense burners are on display. Walk along the Calzada de los Muertos. Cross the car park, visit the Palacio de Tepantitla, far east of the pyramid. There are fantastically beautiful frescos, with detailed drawings. To the Plaza de la Luna and climbed the Piramide de la Luna. From here there is a beautiful view directly to the Calzada de los Muertos. To the Palacio del Quetzalpalotl and the underlying Palacio de los Jaguares and Templo de los Caracoles Emplumados (Temple of the Plumed Shells), where there are good frescoes and bas-reliefs. Through Gate 3 to the Museo de la Pintura. To the Temples Yayahuala and Zacuada, both closed. But the Palace of Atetelco and the magnificent frescoes of the adjacent Palace of Tetitla are open. By bus back towards the "Centro", but dropped already at "Deportivo 18 de Marzo" where I catch the Metro for one stop to "Villa Basilica". Visit the inside of the completely scaffolded Basilica Antigua. It is, like many older buildings in Mexico City, completely skew as a one corner has sunk, the other is raised, while the facade leans outwards. The adjacent Capuchinas has only one transept nave, which is not visible from outside. Back to the "Carillon" glockenspiel, which also features an Aztec stellar clock. To the modern Basilica Nueva, where a Church service is just being held. Climbed the hill, visited the Iglesia del Cerrito. Beautiful views over Mexico City. Back to the adjacent cemetery portal "Panteon de Tepeyac", then on the other side down to the baroque Capilla del Pocito. In the "Jardin de la Ofrenda" there is a more than life-size representation of the appearance of the Virgen de Guadalupe. To the Capilla de Juan Diego, on the inside there is a steel frame to prevent it from collapsing. Back to Taxquena, where Teresa spoils me with a big dinner. Chatted until midnight, when Max returned.

29.7.2008 Mexico City By subway to the Zocalo. Visit the ruins of the Templo Mayor of Tenochtitlan, then the excellent museum. Noisy school classes drive me from here. Because they are filming in the ruins, I am expelled. Visit again the Catedral Metropolitano. White-clad priests were just holding a mass. Then I visit the Palacio Nacional, with monumental frescoes by Diego Rivera and several museums, among others about Benito Juarez and the Parliamentary Hall. In a courtyard it has a "Jardin Botanico". Back to the Templo Mayor, where the filming has meanwhile finished and I can visit the ruins. Do the Lonely Planet historic City Walk with some modifications: Calle Moneda, Iglesia Santissima Trinidad, shopping streets. Two huge tacos for lunch. Visit the sculpture "The establishing of Tenochtitlan" on the corner of Pino Suarez / Corregidora. Along the Zocalo, past the Gran Hotel Ciudad de Mexico and the many goldsmith shops and the "Centro Joyero". To Iglesia Profesa, the closed Palacio Iturbide, the last remainders of the Franciscan monastery, the "Iglesia de San Francisco". In the courtyard there is an exhibition "Esculturas Nomadas" by Angel Ricardo Rios, inflatable statues of the exile-Cuban artist. To the high-rise (1956) Torre Latino with fantastic panoramic views from the 37th and 42nd Floor all over the city, today without smog or clouds, as well as a small museum. Past the impressive, swanky Palacio de Bellas Artes to the Alameda Central park. Along main post office and Allende to the Plaza Santo Domingo, with Portal de Evangelistas, Iglesia Santo Domingo and many small printer shops, which still use lead typesetting. Back to the Zocalo, by Metro back to Coyoacan, where I get a big dinner. Play "Tschau Sepp" until late.

30.7.2008 Mexico City By Metro to Chapultepec. Visited the Castillo de Chapultepec, with the Museum Nacional de la Historia and the swanky rooms of Emperor Maximilian and Porfirio Diaz. Would like to visit the Bano de Moctezuma, unfortunately it is closed. By Metro to the centre. Visit the Museum de la Ciudad, today free entrance. Tacos for lunch. To the Iglesia de Nuestra Senora de la Pilar. Burn memory card to DVD. To the fascinating Museo de la Medicina Mexicana at the medical faculty at the Plaza de S. Domingo. To the Secretaria de Educacion Publica, where I enjoy the frescoes by Diego Rivera (from the 1920s). Since Rivera was a Communist, they show many red hammer-and-sickle flags and red stars. To Bellas Artes, get a quote for spectacles. Back by Metro. Tortellini gratin for dinner. We play Jatzzy games.

31.7.2008 Mexico City By minibus to the Museo Leon Trotsky, but it is still closed. To the Mercado and Parque Allende. To the Plaza Hidalgo and Jardin del Centenario, a single huge chaotic construction site. Visited the Casa de Cortes, but only the courtyard is open to the public. The Iglesia San Juan Bautista is closed. On to the Museo Nacional de Culturas Populares, mainly some modern ceramics. Interesting, how primitive the kilns are they use. To the Museo Frida Kahlo, the "Casa Azul", with some interesting memorabilia from the life of Frida Kahlo and Diego Rivera. Back to the Museo Leon Trotsky, the former House of Trotsky has many photographs on display about his time in Mexico. By bus to the Museo Diego Rivera Anahuacalli, a pyramid-shaped structure on a huge bushveld property. Diego Rivera left an impressive collection of pre-Columbian art. The museum had a construction period of 21 years because Rivera ran out of money and then died before the building was completed. Only long after his death it was completed. By bus directly to the Viveros de Coyoacan. Beautiful gardens, where they grow the flowers for all the municipal facilities. The squirrels are so tame that they eat out of one's hand. To the colonial Plaza Santa Catarina, with the Capilla Santa Catarina and the Centro Cultural Jesus Reyes Heróles. In the garden of the centro is a life-size bronze statue of the couple Frida Kahlo and Diego Rivera. Back to the Jardin del Centenario and along the Ave Mexico to the Viveres, where I buy a few flowers. Then back to Plaza Hidalgo. The Iglesia San Juan Bautista is now open. Inside it is a huge

hall without columns, like a gym. Continue to the Plaza de la Conchita with an old Church and the Jardin Frida Kahlo, unfortunately totally neglected and all water basins are dry. By trolley bus directly to the Paseo de la Luz. Teresa has prepared mash potato and gravy meat for supper. Play Tschau Sepp games until late.

1.8.2008 Mexico City By Metro to Insurgentes. Explored the Zona Rosa. To the Monumento de la Independencia, a gilded angel on a column. Along Ave Insurgentes, past the Monument Moctezuma to the Plaza de la Republica with the Monumento a la Revolucion, originally a part of a Parliament Building of the government of Porfirio Diaz. In the Ave de la Republica there is a squatter camp. As I take photographs one of the occupants wants to stop me, but I just continue. Keep running from loo to loo. To Alameda Central and the Jardin de la Solidaridad. To the Plaza de Santa Veracruz and visited two Churches. Visited another Church at the Plaza Hidalgo. To the Museo Mural Diego Rivera. Past the Hemiciclo a Benito Juarez to Bellas Artes and Plaza Garibaldi, where the Mariachis line the street and solicit their services as “day labourers”. Back to the Palacio de Bellas Artes, where I attend a guided tour through the Art Nouveau theater. Impressive the huge iron curtain, adorned with Tiffany glass. On to the Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes, where there is a huge collection of Mexican art. Back by Metro. It is 1st of August, Swiss National holiday. For this reason, there is Fondue for supper at Bosshards.

Mexico City is a huge city, but without the big cardboard slums as elsewhere. The subway system is efficient and cheap, there are also many city buses. Hardly any other city in the world has so many attractions as Mexico City: Hundreds of museums, historical buildings, parks, shopping streets. You could sightsee for months, without ever seeing anything twice. There are also fewer stray dogs than elsewhere, so the pavements stay clean. The traffic is a monster and red robots are not always respected, but in general it is very civilised. Nevertheless, the city suffers in certain weather conditions under smog from car exhausts.

2.8.2008 Mexico City-Cuernavaca After a last big breakfast I said goodbye to the Bosshards and am even taken to the Terminal Sur. It is difficult for me, after all this luxury, to put up again with the minimum possible. The Terminal Sur is crowded, as it is Saturday and everyone wants to travel. Buy a ticket to Cuernavaca. The bus leaves punctually, but is delayed at a toll station for a half an hour, so we arrive only after 11h in the 84km distant Cuernavaca. The “Lonely Planet” says that there is no cheap accommodation in Cuernavaca. So I ask first the Tourist Information, who send me to an expensive hotel. From there I am sent to a cheaper hotel and they know the budget hotel road. Thus I walk to Calle Aragon y Leon and end up at the Hospedaje Marilu for only 65 pesos. Do my sightseeing: To the Jardin Juarez and the adjacent Plaza de Armas with the Palacio de Gobierno. Then to the Palacio Hernan Cortes (see picture). To the Recinto de la Catedral, with the Churches Capilla del Carmen (left of the entrance), Templo de la Tercera Orden de San Francisco (right of the entrance), Templo de la Asuncion de Maria (Catedral), Abierta Capilla de San Jose (adjacent to the right). There is a wedding on at the moment, the Catedral is adorned with flowers. Then to the Castillito with the Museo Fotografico. Hiked along the Pasillo de la Barranca de Amanalco through the deep gorge and its shaky bridge. To the market, then along Humboldt to the Jardin Etnobotanico, about 2km from the centre. There is the “Casa de la India Bonita”, the cottage for the courtesan of Emperor Maximilian, housing the Museo de Medicina Tradicional. Visited the herb garden. Back by bus. Attended a free Mariachi concert at Plazuela del Zacate.

3.8.2008 Cuernavaca (Taxco) It is raining hard, but around 7am it stops. The Palacio de Cortes is still closed at 9, so I walk to the bus terminal and buy a ticket to Taxco. The bus only leaves at 10h, and we arrive with the usual delay at 12h. At the tourism desk they recommend that I immediately buy a return ticket. I queue up and when it is my turn, I just get the last seat for today, unfortunately for the bus at 19h. There are only three companies serving Taxco and they seem to keep the available seats intentionally short. Past Casa Humboldt I walk to Plaza Borda (Zocalo). Visited the Templo de Santa Prisca, they are just holding a Church service. To the Plazuela San Juan with its fountain and towards Hotel Victoria and past it. In a shop they recommend I visit the market for good food. I do so and eat a very tasty taco and some fruit. To the Iglesia de Guadalupe and then up the steep hill to the statue of Cristo Redentor. Towards the top there are increasingly shabby houses until it there are only shacks made from bitumen cardboard and corrugated iron, which are stuck into the steep slope. Back to the Zocalo, visited the Museum of Casa Borda - wild modern art, but untalented. To the Ex-Convento San Bernardino, the Church has two parallel naves. To the sugar cake icing Church del Señor del Ghavarrieta. From there to the Ave de los Plateros and back towards Palacio Municipal. Taxco was earlier a major silver mining town. Today, the mines are exhausted and it relies entirely on the production of silver jewellery and tourism. This is apparently not enough to employ everyone here.

4.8.2008 Cuernavaca-Queretaro By early morning by bus to Toluca. There I waited a long time until they knew that they give me no discount for my HI card. Buy bus ticket to Queretaro. A little bread for lunch. The bus to Queretaro is not only very expensive, but also dreadfully slow. I only arrive at 15h in Queretaro, where I take a minibus to the city park. There I have either a problem with my compass or the north on the map is wrong, in any case I walk in the wrong direction and eventually have to reverse. A taxi driver recommends a Hotel San Francisco downtown. But this is far too expensive. I am trying different budget sleeps on Calle Juarez, but they are either too expensive or incredibly bad so that it makes no sense. Finally I walk to the “Hostel Jirafa Roja”, expensive but much better than the others. Sightseeing: Plaza de Armas, Casa del Corregimiento, Jardin Zenea, Plaza de la Corregidora, Plaza de la Constitucion, Casa de la Marquesa, Iglesia Santa Clara, Catedral, Aquaeducto (very impressive, 1.2 km long), Plaza Mariano de las

Casas and Iglesia Santa Rosa de Viterbo with a rich interior. Queretaro is a typical tourist town, very clean, maintained, but also very expensive. I still end up walking to the supermarket on the outskirts of town. Buy chicken and tortillas. Back at the hostel there are no matches to light the gas stove so that I have to prepare all in the microwave.

5.8.2008 *Queretaro* To the Iglesia Santa Clara and Catedral, both now open. To the highly interesting Museo de la Republica de la Resistencia, then to the Museo de la Ciudad, which allows good views of the Capuchin Monastery from inside, but displays little interesting modern art. To the Iglesia de San Francisco and the neo-Greek Temple Teresitas, very beautiful inside with lots of silver. Back to the hostel, rested. Then to the Convento de la Santa Cruz, participated in a guided tour. Saw the “cross thorns” and the rainwater cisterns, the connection to the Aqueduct and the clay water pipes. Then to the Pantheon with the Mausoleum of the Corregidora. To the Mirador del Aquaeducto. Then across the city to Cerro de las Campanas. I am just a few minutes late, it is already closed. Walked around the park. To the supermarket and back to the hostel. Sardines and tortillas for supper.

6.8.2008 *Queretaro-San Miguel de Allende* At 7am I leave the Hostel. A Canadian girl also wants to take the early bus, but she can't because the reception only opens at 8am and she still needs her deposit back. I can't help. At the bus station I immediately find a bus to San Miguel de Allende. The ride through the sunlit landscape is fantastically beautiful, but towards the end of the journey I am struck with one of these suddenly appearing heat diarrhoeas. I manage very narrowly to the toilet of the bus station - fortunately they have one! By local bus to the Center. Put up at the “Pancho Villa” Hostel. Explore town, once again so beautiful that it is almost too much, is it possible that a place is so incredibly picturesque? Templo de la Concepcion; Casa del Canal de Mayorazgo (now a bank); Parroquia de San Miguel Arcangel, the main Church, with impressive (but not very old) facade, where I listen in to a guided tour; Iglesia de San Rafael nearby, with strange “Calvary” on a scale of 1:1 made from rough stones and the three crosses; Jardin de San Francisco, Capilla de la Tercera Orden (closed), Templo de San Francisco (inside modest), the Plaza Civica, Templo de la Salud with shell-shaped entrance, Colegio de Sales (now an University), equestrian statue of Allende, Oratorio de San Felipe Neri, a huge Church complex, only partially accessible. Then to the hairdresser, ate well and cheap near the market. To the Mercado San Juan de Dios, then the Iglesia San Juan de Dios, the Instituto Allende with a Diego Rivera-inspired mural of the Mexican freedom struggle and some wild frescoes of 1959. To the Escuela de Bellas Artes in a former convent. A room with pretty wild murals by David Alfaro Siqueiros. A cello player practises, a beautiful background sound. To Casa Canal, and along Capilla del Calvario, Iglesia Santo Domingo, and Iglesia Ermita to the Mirador, where I have a beautiful view on part of the city, but just not the old town. Back to El Jardin and the Hostel. Then to the Teatro Angela Peralta with a beautiful fresco by the Chilean artist Carmen Cerecedo. Visited the Fuente Francisco Madero. To the Mercado El Nigromante, where I buy fruit. Visited Iglesia de la Salud and Oratorio de San Felipe Neri again. Back along the massive, always closed Templo de Santa Ana alongside the Biblioteca Publica.

7.8.2008 *San Miguel de Allende (Dolores Hidalgo)* Pouring rain. I change my plans and thus remain one day longer in San Miguel, so I can leave my luggage in the dry. By bus to El Cortejo, walked to the Santuario de Atotonilco. The inside of the Sanctuary is covered with very beautiful, well-preserved frescoes. The village is exactly what you imagine as the stereotype of a Mexican village, with the typical Mexican houses, chains of flags across the road and sales stalls. Walked back to the main road and immediately found a bus to Dolores Hidalgo, the site of Mexican Revolutionary Miguel Hidalgo y Costilla. There is a big market, where I eat very expensive and not much. Then I walk towards the centre where I stop at an Internet café. Skype with Brigitte Leutenegger, Aunt Ruetli and Rahel Gerig. Visit the Parroquia de Nuestra Señora de Dolores, where Hidalgo preached. Then the Museo Casa Hidalgo. The huge mansion is very aristocratic, with many large rooms. The exhibits of the museum, however, don't justify the high entrance fee. Meanwhile, the weather has improved and the sun is shining. Upon getting back to San Miguel, the sky has become dark. I walk back to the hostel, but at the market the rain starts. At the hostel I wait for the rain to subside, but in the end I decide to have supper anyway. With my umbrella, I get into the rainstorm, but after a short distance, I realise I cannot leave the area anymore, the roads have become wild rivers with 20-30cm of water. I return to the hostel, wait and try after another hour. Same result. I then just buy some bread at a nearby bakery and some beans.

8.8.2008 *San Miguel de Allende-Guanajuato* While my host is still sleeping, I leave the hostel and take the bus to the bus terminal. There, I immediately find a bus to Guanajuato. The trip lasts much longer than the hour it should officially take, we arrive just before 11am. By local bus to the centre, it drops me off in the middle of the tunnel. Walk to a recommended hostel, but they do not open. Then I look for the Hostal de los Angeles, but that no longer exists. Finally I end up at “La Casa del Tio” Hostel, a bit more expensive than planned. Quickly Internet, then to town. Visited the Basilica de Nuestra Señora de Guanajuato. Ate a not-too-good lunch at the Mercado for 25 pesos. To Plazuela San Fernando and Plaza San Roque and the inside scaffolded Templo San Roque. Alhondiga de Granaditas (only from outside) a former grain store and used by the Spaniards as a fortress when Miguel Hidalgo invaded the city, until someone burnt the door down and the Spaniards were smoked out. Plaza San Javier, hiked 5km to the Templo de Valenciana. The sky is getting overcast and it is raining slightly. Visited the nearby Bocamina Valenciana, a former silver mine. Unfortunately, only a few hundred meters are accessible, and the rest is shut off. The guide complains that despite the high entrance fee he was not paid a salary so that he also has to be paid. By bus to the vicinity of the Museo de las Momias. Since this area is not drawn on the map, I get pretty lost. Finally, I still find the museum. The mummies

exhibited are quite extreme, most grimace, because the muscles tense up in the course of time. Many are known by name. The corpses were not in the ground, but in a mausoleum and because of the favourable climate, they get preserved. Whenever a grave expires because of non-payment of fees and the corpse is not collected by the relatives, it risks ending up at the Museo de las Momias. Most mummies are already a few hundred years old. There are also mummies of small children. The Mexicans love everything about death and skeletons, so they take their small children to the museum. In front of the museum people sell T-shirts with mummy comics print, or "Momias Caramellos", small puppets of mummies made from caramel. In order not to be identified as a Gringo, I also pose in front of the mummies, but as always in Latin America they cut my legs off. The main thing is that the flash went. From here to the book market in the Jardín de la Reforma, to Plaza San Roque, Plazuela San Fernando, Basilica, Templo San Diego, Teatro Juárez, Templo San Francisco. Back to the hostel, fetch the umbrella, then Plazuela Baratillo, Plaza de la Paz, Plazuela de los Angeles, Callejón del Beso (where the houses are so close, that from the balcony of the one, you can get to the window of the other house on the other side of the road), via the Calle Subterráneo to Avenida Juárez, supper at the market.

9.8.2008 Guanajuato-Zacateca In the morning at 9am, Guanajuato is like dead. Walked to the Monumento al Pipila, high above town. Then back down to the Templo de la Compañía, the University, and the Casa de Diego Rivera (only outside). By bus to the terminal and from there with "Flecha Amarilla" to Leon. Arrive there 12h, but the bus to Zacatecas doesn't leave until 13:30, so I store my luggage and explore the footwear Mecca - Leon is an industrial metropolis with many shoe factories, so there are many shoe shops, but not cheaper than elsewhere in Mexico. Shoes in Mexico are generally very cheap and of incomparably much better quality than the Chinese shoes which are sold everywhere else on earth. Eat two huge sandwiches, but I have too much spicy guacamole with them, so that my intestinal gas almost makes me explode. Back to the bus station. The journey to Zacatecas with "Omnibus de Mexico" is very pleasant. We arrive only shortly before 18h in Zacatecas. By bus to the centre. The hostel "Hostal Villa Colonial" is unfortunately full, so that I have to put up at the shabby, but equally expensive "Hostel Don David". Explore Zacatecas: Mercado Gonzalez Ortega, Catedral (where a wedding is taking place), Plazuela Francisco Goitla, Teatro Calderon, Casa de Moneda, ex-Templo San Agustin with impressive, massive arches (the facade has been walled up by the Presbyterians), Templo Sagrado Corazon, Ave Juárez, Jardín Independencia, Biblioteca Mauricio Magdaleno (a former granary), Plaza Tacuba, Plaza de Armas with Palacio del Gobierno and Palacio de la Mala Noche, Plaza Santo Domingo with the Templo Santo Domingo. The whole town is full of Harley Davidson motorbikes, they are parked everywhere. It thunders, but it is not yet raining.

10.8.2008 Zacateca Around 2am I am woken up by a huge commotion at the Hostel. In the morning I go first thing to the Hostel "Villa Colonial". Prepared breakfast. Met a Japanese, Jennifer from Germany whom I already met in Guanajuato and Chris, an American, who cycled here. Walked up to the Cerro de la Bufa. There I meet the Japanese from the hostel again. Magnificent views and fine weather. Visit the Capilla de la Virgen del Patrocinio and the Pantheon. Back to the bottom and to Fuente de los Conquistadores. To the museum Rafael Coronel and continue straight to the Instituto de Cultura Zacatecano (closed). Meet Jennifer from the hostel and we decide to visit the Museo Manuel Fequerez, but although it is Sunday, they charge a high entrance fee, so we refrain. I return to the Museo Rafael Coronel. Thousands of masks, the painter has collected African- (from the slaves), Indio- and colonial masks. There are also string puppets, pre-Colombian art, some drawings and paintings by Diego Rivera and paintings by Rafael Coronel. Then to the Acueducto El Cubo, Parque Gral. Enrique Estrada and the Templo de Fatima, fantastically beautifully built of red sandstone. Then Alameda, Jardín de la Madre, the ex-Vecindad de Jobito (now a luxury hotel) and the Jardín Juárez. To the highly interesting Museo del Universitario de Ciencias with many, over 150 years old, physics apparatus. To the ex-Templo San Agustin, which is now open. The interior is completely empty, but has beautifully carved sandstone. Then to the Palacio Legislativo, where only the entrance hall is open to the public. To the Templo Santo Domingo, which is shining beautifully in the evening light. Back to the hostel. With Chris and Jennifer to the Parque Enrique Estrada, where Chris installs a tightrope and does some tightrope walking, then we must also try. I stop after the second attempt. Sitting with Chris, Jenny, Claudio (Swiss) and Thomas (Swiss) until past midnight on the roof terrace.

11.8.2008 Zacateca-Durango Got up while all were still sleeping. By bus to the bus terminal and from there - as the only passenger! - on the bus to Durango. At the terminal, gradually more people get on. In Durango to the Complejo Deportivo Juvenil, where I can put up cheaply. Into town: Bought some food at the Soriana for lunch, quickly to the Templo del Sagrado Corazon de Jesus, and then ate my lunch at the Plaza in front of it. Plaza de Armas with the music pavilion, Catedral Basilica Menor, Palacio de los Lagrimas (because so many people died during its construction), Edificio de las Tres Rosas. Then Plaza IV Centenario with the Benito Juárez Monument, Palacio de Zambrano, with fantastic murals in the style of a Diego Rivera, but slightly more naturalistic, Teatro Ricardo Castro, Iglesia San Juan Bautista de Analco, Las Alamedas with an exhibition of paintings by local artists printed on vinyl sheets, Parque Guadiana with artificial stream and duck pond. Templo de Nuestra Señora de los Angeles, Templo San Agustin, where a bishop is preaching and the Church is crowded, to the Templo Santa Ana and Plaza Santa Ana, railway station with a fantastically preserved steam locomotive from the 1930s. Past the Museo Regional to the Soriana, where I take the bus back to the Sports Centre.

12.8.2008 Durango As I leave the hostel to the bus station, nobody is at the reception desk, so that I cannot check out

and take the key along. Buy a ticket for the bus to Chihuahua tonight and a ticket to Chupaderos. About 30 years ago, a part of Chupaderos was a “Western” film-set. The structures are still around, although now heavily damaged. Some houses were fully built, others only the facade. The Church was even built over an existing colonial house! The strange round towers should depict ceramic kilns. In reality, hardly fit for the purpose! The coffin-maker offers as a special: 2 for 1! From here I walk on to Villa del Oeste. The site is still closed, but just as I continue, the owner shows up and opens the gates. He even waives the entrance fee! The village is exactly as you imagine a Western village, with bank, hotel, bar and a blacksmith. By bus back into town, back to the hostel, where they tell me not to worry about the checkout. Back to town, Museo de Arqueología Peschard-Ganot, very well explained, then to the film museum, but it has moved, I have to walk to the outskirts of town. There it is accommodated in the Porfirian building of the Instituto de Cultura del Estado de Durango. The palace-like structure was originally planned as a hospital, but was then troop accommodation and orphanage. Today it hosts a few good museums: the Museo del Cine Temático (actually closed, but I am allowed in, with many old projectors and cameras), the Museo Arqueológico (pre-Colombian art), a photo exhibition, the Museo de la Revolución (where I chat long with staff) and the Pinacoteca with some stunning tapestry. In the visitors books I see that there are few visitors. A pity for these beautiful museums! Fetched backpack, to the bus terminal, boarded the bus and fell asleep, despite the movie.

13.8.2008 Chihuahua I arrive at 5am in Chihuahua, because there is an hour's time difference to Durango. Wait for the first bus to the city center. In the centre I walk to the Plaza Hotel, but they want 130 pesos for a single room. Searched for a long time until I found the Hotel Trias, but the old night watchman is very unfriendly, and wants to get rid of me quickly. At the Hotelito I am shocked by the dirt, although location and price are right. So I take a bus to Casa Chihuahua at the train station. But yerre! They are fully booked and anyway don't take anyone without reservation, despite the high price. I walk - I have no coins left for the bus - back to the Trias Hotel, the second best, but the owner has not yet arrived and the old man wants me just to leave as quick as possible. I end up at the Hotelito, knowing full well how dirty it is. Start sightseeing tour of Chihuahua: Catedral (they are just holding a sermon), the Plaza de Armas, Palacio del Gobierno with beautiful frescoes, Palacio Federal, still closed, Plaza de Hidalgo in front of the Palacio del Gobierno with a statue of Hidalgo on top of an obelisk, Plaza Mayor north-east of the Palacio del Gobierno, with angel statue, Templo San Francisco. At the Palacio del Gobierno I visit the Galeria de Armas and the Museo de Hidalgo. On to the Museo Casa de Juárez, the former seat of the shadow government of Benito Juárez during the French occupation. Walked the shopping street Calle Libertad. Back to the Museo Pancho Villa at the train station, a huge palace, which the former bandit and later freedom fighter had built and which was awarded after much confusion, to his main wife. Back to the train station, purchased tickets for the train to Creel the day after tomorrow. The huge Templo del Sagrado Corazón is unfortunately closed. Back to the Palacio del Gobierno, where I check out the frescoes with a detailed description. Look for other accommodation and find Casa de Huespedes Flores which is the same price, but legions better than my present accommodation.

14.8.2008 Chihuahua In the morning I have to leave the “Hostelito” unshowered, as there is no water whatsoever. I quickly check in at the “Casa de Huespedes Flores”, where I get a lovely room with my own toilet and shower, even TV! I have the so necessary shower and then catch the bus to Nombre de Dios. There I have to walk quite a distance. I obviously get lost - the signs are all from the other direction - and have to ask a local who even leads me to the entrance. I visit the “Grutas”, a huge system of caves with stalagmites and stalactites. Unfortunately, most of the tips are broken off due to the unscientific commercialisation of the caves. Walked about 4km to the Quinta Carolina, a former hacienda of Don Luis Terrazas, one of the wealthiest citizens of Chihuahua. Unfortunately, the buildings are decaying and some of the stables and the garage have already caved in. The main building is not open to the public. Back to town, drop at the Casa Redonda, a former locomotive shed, now housing the Museo de Arte Contemporáneo. More interesting is the model of the building as it was during the time of steam engines. The section of modern art is mostly being rebuilt. Back to the hostel, then to the Estatua Zorba el Griego, a monument to Anthony Quinn, (full name Anthony Quinn Oaxaca) who was born in Chihuahua. Then to the Parque Central el Palomar, where I climb the viewing platform with a good view over the northern part of town. To the monument “Guirnalda o Monumento al Trabajo”, a Communist-inspired abstract sickle, of course in red, with some Commie verses beneath it. Very well made by the famous Chihuahuan sculptor Sebastian. There I meet Hugo Holguin, who has his dental laboratory right next to the monument. He invites me in and we chat for a long time. This is Mexico! Friendly people wherever one goes. From here I go to the magnificent Quinta Gameros, built in 1907 by Ing. Manuel Gameros for his fiancée, who ended up marrying the architect. Gameros left the country and at one time the mansion was even the quarters of Pancho Villa. The Art-Nouveau-Building is now furnished with original furniture of the time, in fantastic condition, and houses some art exhibitions. From here to the mausoleum of Pancho Villa, although his bones are now in Mexico DF at the Pantheon of the Heroes. In the evening to the Musical Fountains. Looked a long time for an open Internet café.

15.8.2008 Chihuahua-Creel At 5h I get up and by bus to the station. There are many buses - the railway line was damaged, we had to take a bus for a short while, we are told. Reluctantly, I get in. The short while turns out almost the entire route to Creel, only the last few kilometres are by train. And for the last eight km we have to wait more than two hours until the train leaves. Those who bought their tickets today, paid only 180 pesos, the regular cost of the bus, but I bought one day in advance and paid 353 pesos. A scandal! In Creel I put up at the Casa Margarita, where - how pleasant

- breakfast and dinner are included in the accommodation price. At the station I find no-one to which I could complain. Book a tour (by the usual trick: I have no change, would you want to take the tour?). We leave at 14:30, visit the Cascada Cusarare, a lake, the Church of San Ignacio Aradecos (closed), the Valle de los Ranas (stones, with a little imagination looking like frogs) and the nearby Valle de las Hongos (they look like mushrooms). To the Cuevas Sebastian, the caves are still inhabited. Back to the village where I have supper.

16.8.2008 Creel With Borja, Nuria (Spanish) and Mayra (Mexican) to the station to complain, but again nobody is there to receive our complaints. Today there are no trains, because the train derailed near Los Mochis. No wonder, due to privatisation there is no track maintenance. Bought bus tickets to Divisadero. Borja is not joining us, he goes horse riding. I spend an hour standing in the crowded bus. In Divisadero, we admire the view of the Barranca del Cobre. Hike until Piedra Volada. As we return to Divisadero, the bus of 14h already left and the 16h bus turns out to be non-existent. Nuria, however, quickly finds a tour bus which takes us for the regular bus fare. We have to wait a bit until we leave - I am sitting in the booth on the cooler box. In a short time we are back in Creel and quickly visit the cemetery. There is thunder and lightning, the sky is overcast, but it is not raining. While I am sitting in the Internet café, I hear a lot of loud bangs outside and see people dashing back and forth across the railway tracks, but I give it no further attention, thinking that once again somebody is burning off firecrackers. Upon my return the others ask me whether I had not heard of the shooting in town. Actually, an assault on a private celebration had taken place, somehow connected to drug trafficking, and seven youths were killed. This all right next to the Internet café, where I was sitting all the while.

17.8.2008 Creel-Chihuahua Extensive breakfast. Bought bus ticket. We leave at 9am with "Noroeste". The bus is, as always, overcrowded. Shortly after San Juanito, there is a bang and a bump to the bus. The rear left inner twin tyre has burst. We stop. The driver tries to change the tyre, but the paltry tool bends. So we have to continue, very carefully. In La Junta we looking for a tyre service. But it is Sunday, everything is closed. Finally, we find yet a small, poorly equipped workshop. When the tyre is removed, I see that the entire wheel suspension is torn. The tyre is changed against a totally worn one. We arrive at 16h in Chihuahua, where I again put up at the Flores Hostel. Organise a Telmex-copy for tomorrow, but all copy- and Internet shops are closed. Eat soup at the market. Back to the station to reclaim my money, but it is also closed. Chat a long time with the security guard. The newspapers are full of the murders in Creel. Meet a strange old man, Wolfgang Petersen, German, but speaks only English and he seems to be quite crazy.

18.8.2008 Chihuahua In the morning at 05:30am I am at the station, the teller is now open, but they tell me to return by 8am. Back to the hostel (every time 2km to walk...). Shortly before 8 I am back at the station, but this time they tell me to return by 9am. To the photocopy shop, by the bus to the "Delegacion del Transito" where I apply for a Mexican driver's licence. Bad news: Without a residence permit, there is no driver's licence and the Swiss confirmation of examination is not recognised. Back to the station, where a supervisor finally reluctantly hears my case, raises many "buts" and finally scribbles something onto the ticket. I am very surprised when they return 180 pesos to me. On to the migration office. In the bus I get to know the pretty Maricela, a cashier in a large restaurant. The migration office is already closed. Walk back to the centre and pop in to Hugo Holguin. He is delighted with it and insists on taking me by car to the various universities and hospitals (which he as a dental technician knows well) and in the evening to their home, where I am invited to a fine dinner. At 9pm he even takes me back to the city centre.

Chihuahua is a fairly flat city, nestled between mountains of volcanic stone, with a few hills, which - of course - are spiked with mobile antennas, like pincushions. The city is quite modern, there is no historical centre as in other Mexican cities, however, there are a few historical buildings. One gets the feeling that it is safer here than elsewhere, and actually I have been strolling around at night without the slightest problem. The police in the city centre mainly use bicycles. They are said to be fairly well paid, thus working more efficiently than elsewhere. The strong police presence certainly contributes to the safe feeling. The weather is hot, but the heat can hardly be felt because of the dry air. The centre is located at the southern end of the city, which hardly has any high-rise buildings. The expensive shops and big companies are, however, in the middle. People sometimes allege that Mexicans were crazy drivers. I cannot confirm this as they drive quite cautiously and always let pedestrians have the priority. And they honk only if it is necessary.

19.8.2008 Chihuahua Today I want to travel to Tijuana. I buy water and cookies at the supermarket and some cheese and bread for breakfast. Have to wait a long time until the first Internet café opens. By bus and with all my luggage to the bus terminal. There I am told that all the information I was given yesterday was dead wrong: The ticket is much more expensive and the bus doesn't leave at noon, but at 18:30h. And storing the luggage would be obscenely expensive. So I grumblingly get the ticket and return to town, where I am allowed to store the luggage at my friendly Casa de Huespedes. Skype with Christian and Halina. Stroll around town. Meet a crazy Mexican, who has been all over the USA, travelling on goods trains, and spent quite some time in jail there. Now he is a Pentecostal Christian. It starts to rain, I take refuge in the Internet café (Tecno Centro, Ave Libertad). At 17:30h I am back at the bus terminal. I board a modern Chihuahuense bus. They show movies, but I soon fall asleep.

20.8.2008 Chihuahua-Tijuana When I wake up, there is still green vegetation, which gradually gets thinner, until it finally turns into desert, with sporadic ruined building and scrap-yards. When we get off at an army checkpoint, scorching heat. Lunch in San Luis Rio Colorado, where I quickly run to the centre and eat a soup. As I return, the bus is

just about to leave. We stop in Mexicali. Then we ride through bizarre stone mountains. We get into the evening rush-hour in Tijuana until we arrive at the bus terminal. By local bus into town. Two youngsters give me good information and a list with free accommodation. My couch surfing enquiry in San Diego was unfortunately negative. So I put up at the Hotel Morelia. As I want to pay at the supermarket with a 20 pesos bill, they reject it because of a barely visible damage. They tell me that it was worthless. This makes me quite angry.

USA

21.8.2008 Tijuana-San Diego Big breakfast from the supermarket, where I enjoy paying with exactly the same rejected bill of yesterday. I explore the Ave Revolucion, like dead in the morning, the Mercado and the Centro Cultural. Back to the hostel where I fetch my backpack and walk towards the border. On the Mexican side I have to pay the exit tax of 237 pesos, then I proceed to the American side. When my passport simply cannot be detected by the scanner, the official sticks a note on it. I have to wait in an incredibly long queue until I am called in. The ensuing procedure however is concluded very friendly and I pay a 6 USD visa fee so I can enter the country. By trolley to the city centre, where I want to put up at the HI hostel, but it is fully booked. I try three more hostels, all full. Call the St. Christopher Hostel, which still has space. So I get there, by trolley and bus, a journey of 1.5h. A Black man "leads" me there - he has no clue where it is, just wants a tip, but I cannot get rid of him. Finally I arrived at the hostel, managed by a very resolute Nigerian woman and check in, but have to content myself with the couch in the lounge. To the library, checked my email, then the long road back into town, explored town. As the trolleys start too late for the train to San Francisco the day after tomorrow, I organise for tomorrow a room at the YMCA. Bought two cans of spaghetti for supper. As I walk to the tram, I am molested by a couple of Blacks, who live there on the sidewalk, but fortunately a Police patrol just passes. By trolley back. Miss bus, have to walk the remaining 4km until 1445 Skyline Drive. Long discussion until midnight between the owner and Mariana from Ukraine on how to get to the airport, as she had missed the last train to town.

22.8.2008 San Diego Pancakes for breakfast. Chatted with the Swiss. Packed my backpack, by bus No. 4 back to town. Put up at YMCA's AAE500 Broadway. A luxury hostel at a luxury price of 44 USD per night. To the Maritime Museum, but there is so much to see, I have to make a choice between the "Midway" and the Maritime Museum. So I visit the Aircraft Carrier Midway. A fantastic exhibit. I spend much time exploring the huge ship, the many airplanes, talking to war veterans who actually served on the ship and flew the aircraft. Around 17h I eventually manage to pull myself loose, quickly run to the library to check the email. No news. In a discount shop I buy huge quantities of dirt-cheap food for tomorrow's journey. To the Seaport Village. Then by ferry to Coronado, where I walk across and explore the huge Hotel Coronado. Back by ferry. San Diego looks beautiful in the night.

23.8.2008 San Diego-San Francisco Got up at 04:30h, check in my luggage at the railway station at 05:30h. The train has modern and comfortable double-decker coaches. We ride through the foggy Californian coastal landscape until Santa Barbara. There I change to a bus. Try without success to call Sandy. We ride through, in the meantime, sunny landscape along the incredibly beautiful Route 101, past vineyards and oil-wells. The driver is a sanguine Philipino. Shortly before 19h we arrive in San Jose. As I am the last passenger on the bus, the driver does not want to ride into San Francisco anymore, as the bus is parked in the nearby Oakland. So I am given a train ticket, a quite substantial refund and I have to hurry to catch the train to San Francisco. I am a bit worried, as I cannot tell Sandy about the change of plans. On the train I meet Kiseon, originally from Thailand, who calls Sandy with her cellphone, so that I can tell her about the change of plans. We chat until San Francisco. There I don't have to wait long until Tom arrives. It takes a while until Sandy, who has to drive the car on the complicated route around the railway station, also arrives. We drive to Kentfield, where they live. It is pretty cold.

24.8.2008 San Francisco (Kentfield) With Tom and Sandy to Mount Tamalpais, from where we have a lovely view over the sun-drenched Californian coast. Picnic, then by car to the lookout. In the afternoon shopping. To a trekking store, where I buy a Pacsafe (steel-protected fannybag), a pair of trousers and new shoes. All in prime quality.

25.8.2008 San Francisco Sandy takes me by car to the ferry. By ferry from Larkspur to San Francisco. It is foggy. By bus to the Civic Center. To the library, because of the Internet, but the upload of the pictures fails. To the Contemporary Jewish Museum in Mission Street. The building is designed by Daniel Libeskind and looks as if a giant had dropped a huge knobkierie on the former power station. But it actually should depict a chet and a yod. Inside wild modern art to the topic of Genesis and an exhibition of the inventor of Shrek, William Steig. Lunch in a Chinese restaurant. Through Tenderloin and Russian Hill, past the flower beds of Lombard Street to Fishermans Wharf, where I visit the Visitors Centre of the San Francisco Maritime Park and then take part in a guided tour of the anchored historic ships. Then I at least visit the inside of the Balclutha. Get on my way back in time. But the tram can't move on, as continuously more people are getting on, so that it can't close its doors anymore and has to wait. I promptly miss the ferry so that I get to Larkspur half an hour late. Walk in direction Quisisana drive, but Tom has already gone to look for me and finds me 100 meters from the house.

26.8.2008 San Francisco By bus into town, but I drop off at the Golden Gate Bridge as it is wonderfully lit up by the

morning light. Take my pictures, then walk towards Fishermans Wharf. Visit the boats C.A. Thayer (without masts), the steam tug Eppleton Hall is unfortunately closed, the paddle ferry Eureka with it's strange one-cylinder steam engine, the steam tug Hercules. Some small crafts and the Alma are not open to the public. Walk to Pier 45, where I visit the Mechanical Museum, with lots of historic automatons. Bought a City Pass. To the North Point Shopping Plaza, where I eat not very well at a Chinese restaurant. Made a harbour cruise, under Golden Gate bridge and around Alcatraz. The wind is strong, the waves high. Cable car ride with the Powell-Mason cable car line. Check out several cellphone shops in Market street. Back to the North Point Shopping Plaza, where I buy a cellphone for USD 15 and some airtime. I will need this for couch surfing. The Tourist Office doesn't know where the buses leave back to Kentfield, in the end I meet a man who gives me a bus schedule. By bus No. 24 back to Kentfield.

27.8.2008 *San Francisco* By bus into town. To the Aquarium. It is not yet open, so I watch the seals, which are basking in the sun and barking in front of Pier 39. The aquarium opens at 9am. The glass tunnels through two huge fish tanks are impressive, the first with schools of small fish, the second one with big sharks. In the end, in specially made basins, one is allowed to pet skates and tiger sharks. By bus to market street. To a computer shop, had a look at the Asus Eee PC. Lunch at a Chinese restaurant. To the Asian Art Museum. Marvelled all afternoon at the impressive collection and the special exhibition "Ming Art". By bus in direction Lombard Street. There I have to change, wait for my bus. Suddenly, a huge 4x4 parks exactly on the bus stop. I tell the young woman to park the car somewhere else. She just tells me "this is a city!". I hardly have to explain that the bus just rode past when he could not stop. And that I had to walk for one km to the next bus stop. And that I boxed a dent into the fender of the car that set the alarm off.

28.8.2008 *San Francisco* Early in the morning I call Geico Insurance, which offers immediate insurance for any car I will buy. I consult Craig's list for hours. The small cars are either hours away from here or completely dilapidated, so that it even shows on the picture. Eventually I end up looking at a Volvo 740, whose advantage is, that it is just around the corner. I am very surprised to learn that it is a well-preserved 740 Turbo Station Wagon. Much room and not much more consumption than the "small cars" which also have two-litre engines. I buy it and immediately go registering it. This is much easier than I thought. I am now a proud owner of a car. Next week I can ride in direction Alaska. In the afternoon I took the window washer pump to pieces, which I cannot repair anymore, but at least I change the functioning rear one to the front.

29.8.2008 *San Francisco* By bus to the Golden Gate Bridge, from there by local bus to the Golden Gate Park, walked to the De Young Museum. A huge museum complex with a incredibly rich collection of art, of everything just the best. Many works of modern art from well-known artists. The masks from Papua New Guinea, also from Africa and Mexico are impressive in their quality, but a bit sobering that there are no such good exhibits in Mexico. In the glass section there are extremely decorative works of art from glass and ceramics. Strikingly beautiful the special exhibition of Dale Chihouly, who turns glass into pieces of art in incredible colours and lights them impressively. Enjoyed a good view from the tower. Walked through Golden Gate Park to Queen Beach, lunch at Burger King (what huge helpings, nobody has to starve in the US) and then by bus to the Palace of the Legion of Honour. A vast exhibition of classical European art, with many masterpieces of famous names like Van Gogh, Monet, Rodin, Renoir, Gainsborough and many more. A fantastic sight. In the basement there is a porcelain collection, and Greek and Roman ceramics. Walked in the dense fog to Golden Gate Bridge. The ships are honking. Impressed and tired back to Kentfield.

30.8.2008 *San Francisco* By car to the parking by the Golden Gate Bridge. There I park it. Walk 1/2h across the bridge and take the bus in direction Moma (Museum of Modern Art). I drop at the Japan Center, but apart from a pagoda there is little to see. By cable-car to the Moma, which just opens up. Visit the photo exhibition of Lee Miller, the exhibition of Chinese painters and the permanent collection with many famous names. Then to McDonalds and by cable-car to the computer shop. Continue to Coit Tower, where I would have to wait for hours to get up, so that I don't climb it. By cable-car to Fisherman's Wharf, where I visit the very interesting Boudin-Sourdough-Museum. It tells a lot about San Francisco, the gold rush and the art of baking. By cable-car back to the computer shop, where I get a very good laptop computer for 500 USD, which has to provide me with WiFi Internet on my further travels. By bus back to the Golden Gate Bridge. Crossed it at sunrise. By car back to Kentfield, where I quickly stop at a supermarket and buy a sandwich.

31.8.2008 *San Francisco* Skyped with Aunt Ruetli and Jarek. Burned DVDs from my photos. Hiking with Tom and Sandy.

1.9.2008 *San Francisco* To Sears Roebuck, bought tools. Then to the automotive centre, bought new window wiper and a new battery. After fitting, the car is dead. I have the battery checked, but it is fine. It turns out that a cable was loose. By car to the Golden Gate Bridge. Park it there. Walked across, by bus to the centre. By cable-car to the Cable-Car Museum. There one can watch the propulsion station, which is still working and there are some exhibits of cable-cars. Walked to Chinatown, strolled through. By cable-car and bus back, but this is complicated. Line 30, then 43, then waited a long time for the 28. When it eventually appears, it rides right past me as the stop has been moved. Walk to the other stop and have to wait for another 20 minutes. Walked back across the bridge, which is now full of tourists.

2.9.2008 *San Francisco* Very early in the morning I drive to Fairfax. First I find the wrong Bolinas Ave. The right one I cannot find, so I end up at Arts Auto Repair in Oak Manor. He charges 90 USD for a simple check-up, and this without

any enthusiasm. I am told to return at 10am. I walk into town, have a yoghurt at the supermarket, walk to the other end of Fairfax and return to the library, which is still closed. In front of the library I meet Jan from Germany who married an American and is now living here. He lets me use his laptop to check my emails. Good news from Alex, he is in on the Alaska trip. Upon my return to the workshop I am told that there was nothing wrong with the car. When I repeat that for my 90 USD I at least want all fluid levels checked, this is reluctantly accepted, but probably not done. I am just told that everything was OK. Return to Tom and Sandy's place. To Kragens Auto Parts, where I order a new air filter and brake pads. At 15h I return there to pick them up. Unfortunately, the brake pads don't fit. I have to return to Kragens to have them refunded, which they very reluctantly do. To Trader Joe's where I buy some food for the journey.

3.9.2008 San Francisco-Lava Beds Got up early, packed my things. Said goodbye to Tom and Sandy. Loaded all my stuff in my car and drove off. Spontaneously I decide in Vallejo to ride via Napa. From there by a picturesque road through the forested hills past Lake Berryessa to Winters, where I get onto 505. There are tomatoes everywhere on the freeway. I quickly learn why, when a tipper truck passes me, loaded with tomatoes and losing some when the wind hits him. Lunch at Burger King in Anderson. Around 16h I am in Weed, but still far from Lava Beds. Have to ride up to Klamath and then return south, a huge detour. Only at 18h I arrive in Lava Beds National Park. Visit the strange lava formations. Sleep at the Rest Site near Fleener Chimneys.

4.9.2008 Lava Beds-La Pine I experience sunrise in the lava fields, explore Schonchin Butte, a hill with a fire lookout and Merrill Ice Cave, today without the ice. Then the pretty long Skull Cave. On to the cave loop. The lava caves are actually underground lava streams which have solidified, leaving a cavity on top of the lava streams. Very impressive, some go on for kilometres. Good that I always carry a torch with me. I explore the Golden Dome until it gets too low, then Hopkins Chocolate. In the Catacombs Cave I get lost and I keep entering the wrong branches, until I find my way out again. It is not easy to walk on the still very rough lava stream surface and some of the ceilings are very low. See the pretty Sunshine Cave (with openings where the sun shines through) and the Natural Bridge, formed from lava. Leave out the Hercules/Juniper Cave and walk the whole length of the fabulous Sentinel Cave. Continue to La Pine. On the way there I visit the fabulous Collier Memorial Park Logging Museum, an El Dorado for steam enthusiasts, with many fantastic steam engines, amongst them a huge sawmill engine, as well as logging trucks as much as 80 years old. Shortly before Anne's Place in La Pine I miss a turnoff and want to turn the car around. I ride a bit on the shoulder of the road when the car suddenly skids off the road. The shoulder consists of a dust-like sand and there is no way of getting out. Someone gives me a lift to Anne's place, where I have to show up without the car and first ask her to tow me out. She and Wendell drive there with her big SUV, Wendell hitches my car with a chain to the front bumper, she reverses a few centimetres and my car is standing again on a bit more solid ground. With a hearty sprint I get across the dust barrier back onto the road. Anne and Wendell go out of their way to accommodate me and I have a wonderful time at their place. We share the love for historic motor cars.

5.9.2008 La Pine-Portland, OR Travelling north. At a 1\$-Store I stock up on cans. Stop at the Columbia River Gorge and at the Bonneville Dam, where I am even given a tour of the turbines. I continue to Portland, where I ride first north until I notice that I have to turn around and find the YHA easily. There is no more parking space available so that I have to park on the road. And glass on the pavement tells a story of breaking-ins. So far my Volvo 760 Turbo is doing pretty well, I manage about 30mpg. Today I took the A/C belt off to improve my mileage. Checking in at the YHA, using the WiFi to update my diary.

6.9.2008 Portland At 5am somebody's alarm clock rings. He does not awake, so the alarm clock keeps ringing for more than an hour. I am fully awake now and get up. At 8am I am already at Pioneer Courthouse Square. I urgently have to find a loo, but there are no public toilets here. I look everywhere, even a McDonald's would do, but nothing at all. Eventually I find the Pioneer Place shopping centre which is about to open, just in time before a disaster could happen. In the early hours of Saturday, the streets of Portland are full of homeless people, some of them quite threatening. I watch a black man cursing a passer-by viciously because he would not give him fire. Walked to the controversial post-modern Portland Building (1980). To South Park Blocks with the Arts- and the History Museum and then Tom McCall Waterfront Park, where they hold a dragon boat race. Past Salmon Street Springs and Morrison Bridge to Burnside Bridge. Visited the Portland Saturday Market, a quite overpriced flea market. The Skidmore Fountain I do not see. To the Chinatown Gate, then to the entrance of the Classical Chinese Garden. I do not go in, as there is a more interesting Japanese Garden which I am to visit later in the day. Walk back to the Pioneer Place shopping centre where I have to use the loo again. Back to Burnside, where I walk past the bookstores and North Park Blocks back to the hostel. Lunch at McDonald's, where I once again eat mountains of unhealthy foodstuff. Back to the hostel, where I drop my Lonely Planet off, so that I can now enter the gigantic Powell's Book Store. Look through the weird shop, where second-hand books, new books and sales items may all be side by side on the same shelf. Walk in direction Washington Park, but lose myself in the uncharted residential areas. Chat with a couple, the woman is of Swiss extraction by the name of Amstutz. Find the Rose Garden eventually. Huge, but a bit late in the year, most roses are slightly past their bloom. Visit the 45-year-old fabulous Japanese Garden. Very authentic. My ankle once again causes me excruciating pain (oh, yes, now I remember why I had to have that car...) so I return to the hostel. Broccoli for supper.

7.9.2008 Portland-Seattle Got up, because the shower is occupied I go to the shower in the passage. Only when the

door slams behind me I realise that I left the access card in the dormitory. Shower, get dressed and find in the breakfast room a roommate who opens the dorm with his card. Have a large breakfast. Check on my emails, call Saxers and Auntie Christeli. Buy a 13h-spoken book on CD for the long journey to Alaska. On the way back I walk a long way past the hostel until I find out that I missed it. Check out, ride in direction Seattle. At Mount St. Helens I fork off. At the visitors centre I listen to an introduction about the eruption of Mount St. Helens. With photographs, it is shown how the volcano had a bulge for a long time, until it erupted sideways. The forest on this side was completely destroyed. I ride the 45 miles to the mountain. At the first lookout I buy a warm winter jacket which says "Mount St. Helens", heavily reduced in price. I will need this for Alaska. At the main lookout there is too much back-light. So I quickly ride back to the lower lookout, where the volcano may be seen much better. Upon riding back I stopped quickly at the Coldwater Lake. Then back to the freeway to Seattle. Shortly before Tacoma, in Lakewood, I fuel up and ride to the Wal-Mart, where I buy a towrope and some engine oil for the car. Eat a can of chilli con carne in the car. Back to the freeway. With the directions of Google Maps I find Nick's apartment easily. Park the car. Nick welcomes me warmly, leaves me in charge of the flat for the night. He speaks some German, as he has a friend in Hamburg. And there is the skull-and-bones flag of the FC St. Pauli in his flat!

8.9.2008 Seattle By bus No 33 to the city centre. To the Pike Place Market. Then to the Tourist Office, where I get a map. With the rattling monorail of the 1960s to the Space Needle. Walked back, to Pioneer Square, where there are many old brick buildings. Visited the Gold Rush Museum. Excellent exhibition of the gold rush in Alaska, which started in Seattle. Visited the observation deck of the Columbia Center. Great view over town. To the huge library. To Alex's hotel, but he is not yet in. To the gigantic REI Outdoor Gear Store. Supper at McDonald's. Back by bus. I don't feel well, a flu is coming up. Nick introduces me to his girlfriend. Shortly before midnight I get a SMS from Alex. I call him. We agree to call tomorrow morning again.

Canada

9.9.2008 Seattle-Spence's Bridge Early in the morning I try to call Alex, but he is not in his room. I leave a message that I will pick him up. Nick is in a hurry, because he has to go to work. I pack all my things into the car. Drive to Alex's hotel. We ride out of town in the dense morning traffic, in direction border. First we stop at a Wal-Mart, where Alex buys some warm clothes. Then we stop at a Fred Meyer supermarket in Bellingham and buy some oil and fuel and chicken for lunch. At Lynden/Sumas we get lost and have to retrace a bit. The border formalities take a while, but are without any problems. In Hope we again get lost, because our route is not signposted. We have to backtrack a bit until we find highway 1 north on the other side of Hope Village. I am feeling tired and sick. We sleep for the night in Spence's Bridge, in a very expensive cottage in a caravan park.

10.9.2008 Spence's Bridge-Quesnel Today I am feeling a bit better. We continue driving. In 100-Mile-House we stop, use the free WiFi, have some lunch and buy some food. As we ride past Quesnel, we stop at the tourist information office, which strongly recommends the Stewart-Cassiar Route, which is supposed to be more picturesque than the Alaska Highway. As we continue, we see a sign "Motel \$49, with WiFi". We stop and put up for the night. Explore the city centre, go shopping at Safeway. Use the WiFi.

11.9.2008 Quesnel-Stewart At the outskirts of Quesnel we take a German backpacker along, who drops off in Prince George. At the periphery of Prince George we buy some food at a Dollar Store and some chicken at a supermarket for lunch. In Smithers we stop at the local museum, where there are Swiss flags all over. They have an exhibition on Swiss immigrants. Rain starts and stops again. When we gas up in Kitwanga, we meet a German-Canadian who ran out of gas in the back country. We take him and a large jerry-can of gas to his camper-van halfway to Meziadin Intersection. He is very grateful. We ride in the night in direction Stewart. Eventually we arrive, it is already 23h. At a hotel we get (for Canada) a surprisingly reasonable room with WiFi.

12.9.2008 Stewart (Hyder, Alaska) We make hot porridge for breakfast with borrowed hot water. Fill up the car with expensive gasoline, also the jerry-can. Then we drive across the border to the Alaskan part of the village, Hyder. Hyder appears very impoverished. Everywhere there are skeletons of lorries, SUVs, snowmobiles and mobile homes. Some houses have never been completed, others are about to collapse. Past Moose Pond to the Bear Viewing Platform, where we pay 5 USD entrance fee. They tell us that the bear viewing season has finished and we cannot expect any viewings. But as soon as we are inside, Alex points out a bear to me. Indeed, a young Grizzly is pacing to the river. On to the Riverside Mine, of which only a few bent steel parts remain, since the last building burnt down in 1987. Only a few bent steel crossbeams are also only left of the Texas Creek Bridge. At the Premier Border Crossing we get back into Canadian Territory. Past the still operative Indian Mine and Premier Mine to the toe of the impressive Salmon Glacier. Meet Swiss from Twann. The road climbs up steep and we feel the pressure on our eardrums until we are high above the glacier and have a good view of the meantime, beautifully sunlit, Salmon Glacier. The glacier flows into a T. We drive along Summit Lake and past two more glaciers to the Grandduc Mine at the foot of the Berendon Glacier, a copper mine which stopped working in 1983. From there we return to the bear viewing platform. Unfortunately, there are no more bears. Back to Hyder which we explore on foot, suspiciously watched by the locals. We only see a vintage

snowmobile. Back to the bear viewing platform, where we meet a Swiss couple from Konolfingen. Back to Stewart, where we gas up, buy sausage and butter for supper and pay another night at the hotel.

13.9.2008 Stewart-Boya Lake Alex can not tear himself off the WiFi so that we leave one hour late, around nine. Ride through a landscape of autumnal trees, lakes, rivers, hills and valleys. Hardly populated, about every 150 km a gas station, nothing else. We refuel at Bell II. Shortly afterwards, a long construction site, where we must go slowly. Suddenly the temperature gauge of the car rises and the "check engine" light comes on. We are currently in Bob Quinn, a mine settlement. I drive the car off the road and stop the engine. Open the hood. On the radiator, a plug on the right side had come off so that the whole coolant was pumped onto the street. I am perplexed and hope that the lid may still be found on the road. Walk 2km back to the construction site and search for it. At the site they ask by radio, whether someone found the lid. No luck. Back to the car. Try with all kinds of things to plug the hole until I remember a rubber stopper I kept in the centre console. The stopper fits reasonably. The radiator holds. At the mine I fill all water containers that we have with water and refill the radiator. Now it has obviously no longer antifreeze in the radiator, but at least we can go on again. So we continue. Stop at Kinaskan Lake, Iskut, pass by the Gnat lakes and over the Gnat Pass to Dease River. Past Jade to Boya Lake, where we have a long stretch of 20km/h, until we get to the campground. When we arrive, the radiator boils over, and the fan is not running. It is now clear to me that the electric radiator fan no longer works. Either the relay or the thermostat switches are broken. Fill up the coolant. We sleep in the boot of the car on the campground, which charges 15 CAD, although there is no infrastructure, not even showers. It is not easy to pack the entire contents of the boot onto the two front seats. It only works because we leave the two back seats outside the car.

14.9.2008 Boya Lake-Whitehorse We wake up late, it was not so cold in the car. We leave without breakfast. Soon we come into Yukon Territory and the Alaska Highway. We refuel at Rancheria Motel. When the filling station attendant learns that we have a radiator problem, he calls his father, who is very concerned and hooks up the radiator fan to the battery, but refuses to take money. We decide to eat there and may also use their wireless LAN. Then we continue. The hours pass by. Along the Alaska Highway, the landscape is more monotonous. Green and yellow trees alternate with fir trees. We drive along Kluane Lake. At each stop, we check the water, but with the fix we at least don't lose any water at slow speeds anymore. We note, however, that the mechanic forgot his pliers in the engine compartment of the car. It will probably be about a week until we get back there again. Shortly before Whitehorse we have a long wait at a bridge, because the traffic may only use one lane due to construction. When we arrive in Whitehorse, all cheap accommodation facilities are full - the hostels, motels, everything. Finally, we land at the Chilkoot Trail Inn, unfortunately without Internet, but like most of them, run by Sikhs, and slightly cheaper than the others which all ask around 100 CAD per night. The Wal-Mart is already closed so that we prepare dinner from our food stocks. Tomorrow we must see a radiator service.

15.9.2008 Whitehorse Early in the morning we drive to Yukon Radiator, where they say they cannot do much, but at least they have the plug which fell out, which they give me for free. I continue to Capital Towing Service which is renowned to solve electrical problems, but they are not willing to help so I just go to Wal-Mart, buy some cable and a switch and install it so that I can switch the radiator fan on and off from the driver's seat. I glue the plug with heat-resistant silicone into the radiator, hoping that this will last. Then we take a bus to the Yukon Transportation Museum. But this is, like most others, closed for the season. The Yukon Beringia Interpretative Centre would be open, but it only has a mammoth skeleton and we decide not to spend the CAD 6 entrance fee. It's a long walk back to town, first along the airport, then down to the Schwatka Lake and along the Yukon (2nd Ave) back. We get past the Visitors Centre, where Alex has a long chat with the lady in charge while I watch the video on the Yukon. We walk along the Yukon to the tram shed where we can see the tram inside, get to Smiths Cottage where we get lots of information about the most interesting vistas in the area. Then to the liquidation shop, where Alex buys some sweets and to a supermarket, where we buy plastic cups. All day long is beautiful autumn weather with warm sunshine.

16.9.2008 Whitehorse-Dawson City Early in the morning we pack up. I fill the radiator of the Volvo with water and we load the car. Take off in direction Dawson City. Stop at Lake Laberge and the Five Finger Rapids, where we walk around a kilometre to the Rapids and see them from the high cliffs. From here the road doesn't follow the Yukon River anymore. Somewhere in between we pick up a hobo, who is travelling with his belongings to Dawson City. All the way he doesn't speak a word. Hear the last CD of Zorro. The landscape is becoming more monotonous. Autumn is already past here, the trees have no leaves anymore. There are huge piles of wood at the roadside, trees cut alongside the road to keep a strip of clear ground left and right of the road. Towards Dawson City there are huge gravel heaps, with hardly any vegetation. We arrive already around 16.30h in Dawson City. By ferry across the river, check in at the Dawson City River Hostel. Back, explored the gold digger town. It almost looks like 100 years ago. Bought food at the bakery. By ferry across the river. For supper we fry sausages on the cooking fire. The accommodation is very primitive: No electricity, no running water, hot water for showers has to be boiled with a wood stove. A girl wants a lift tomorrow to Tombstone National Park. At night it is very cold. I make a fire in the communal room. The Internet doesn't work, the signal is too weak.

17.9.2008 Dawson City I get up at 6am because of diarrhoea. I then light the fire of the bathroom boiler. This is not an

easy task as there is hardly any dry wood left. At 8am the girl informs us that she took sick in the night and will not be joining us. We cross the river by ferry and park in front of the Internet café, where we receive and answer our emails. I skype to Bindersgarten and find out that Otto Egloff is fine. At the supermarket I buy some dirt-cheap black chocolate against my diarrhoea. We drive in direction Tombstone National Park. But as we leave Dawson City, the rain gets denser and so does the fog. It makes no sense to continue. We turn around and drive back to Dawson, where we stop at the Visitors Centre. They recommend that we do a guided tour of town. It just started, we join. A young man dressed in clothes of 1897 explains about the whores who were in Second Avenue, two banks (the first in a wooden building covered by pressed metal to look like stone, like the Freemasons Hall), the post office and many other buildings. We return to the Visitors Centre, where we learn that we should visit Harrington's Store, then continue to Claim 33 to wash gold. We drive to Bonanza Creek Road. At Claim 33 we are greatly surprised to find a steam El Dorado: The owner, Jerry Byden, is a steam enthusiast and has collected a multitude of historic steam engines, mostly from the 1890s, which he found on abandoned claims and has already fully restored some of them. Amazing is the excellent condition: The cold and dry weather preserves the machines perfectly. We chat for hours with him, while he shows us all his treasures. He even has a few boilers and machines with boilers. Interesting the one steam engine which broke apart when it was new and then patched together (even crudely replacing some teeth of a sprocket) and actually worked like this. We then do some gold panning. I get quite a few gold nuggets out of it. To think that the gold has been panned here for more than 100 years and still there is more! We can hardly leave this fascinating place. When we eventually do, we continue to Dredge No 4, which was one of the dredges responsible for the gravel heaps we saw while driving into Dawson City. The dredge digs its own canal, which is filled with water so it floats, filling it behind itself with a gravel heap. The sand is filtered out and panned. Those dredges have been in service since the 1900s. Dredge No 4 doesn't work on steam, but on electricity, which is generated in hydro-electric plants. We continue to Discovery Claim, the original claim, where the first gold was found. We return to town. On the way we organise a camping spot for the night, with warm showers and Internet. We then visit the Jack London Cabin and the adjoining museum, where we chat for a long time with the caretaker. She is very concerned about the present stock exchange crash. The Jack London Cabin was actually found in the 1960s, disassembled and half of it was used for the cottage here and half of it for the cottage in Oakland. So both cottages have 50% new parts. We continue to the Robert Service Cabin which is far less impressive. Nearby is the still inhabited Pierre Berton house. We then visit the pretty dilapidated Guns and Ammo Building. We return to the supermarket, where Alex buys some food and I some bananas. We then ride to the top of Midnight Dome Road, from where we have a good view of the foggy, partially sunlit town, the Yukon and the Klondike River and the Bonanza Valley. We then drive to the Bonanza Gold RV Park, where we make good use of the Internet access.

USA (Alaska)

18.9.2008 Dawson City-Fairbanks We wake up at 7am and enjoy the warm showers. At 8:30 we leave, take the ferry across the Yukon river and continue on the Top of the World Highway, a big word for a third-class dirt road, muddy and covered with potholes. There is dense fog and a drizzle of rain. I drive pretty fast in order to avoid a too bumpy ride. The border formalities as we get into Alaska are friendly and without any problems. In the next village, a few houses by the name of Boundary, we gas up - for 6 Dollars per gallon. We drive for hours on the poor dirt road, through obviously burnt and dried-up forests. The car is caked with a solid layer of dirt. In Chicken (the name derives from the Ptarmigan or bush chicken, an endemic bird) we visit the gigantic dredge (which was used for gold mining). We see also a well-preserved steam engine and a very original snowmobile which someone must obviously have made around a lawnmower engine. Via the Taylor Highway, which gets better and better the closer we get to the Alaska Highway, we drive to Tetlin Junction. The weather has greatly improved and it is a beautiful autumn afternoon. We join up with the Alaska Highway. In Tok we see a very unusual small aircraft parking right by the highway, across the road is a historic steam boiler on wheels, probably used by miners to thaw the permafrost ground. At Delta Junction we ride alongside typical Russian houses and a Russian Church. We then see a few farms, even livestock. We visit the Clearwater State Recreational Site which is a bit disappointing, just a little stream. Then back to the Alaska Highway where we see a magnificent bridge of the Trans Alaska Oil Pipeline. A little bit further down we turn off to Quartz Lake. We see another part of the pipeline, which is on the typical stilts on permafrost soil. Quartz Lake is quite pretty, with a campsite and an abundance of wild ducks. From here we continue to North Pole, where thousands of childrens' letters arrive every Xmas. We buy some food at the supermarket, eat supper and continue on the road to Fairbanks. When we see Roads End R/V Park, we stop for the night - we can sleep here in the car, have warm showers and Internet.

19.9.2008 Fairbanks-Nenana The night is freezing. Despite the thick sleeping bags, we shiver like street dogs. The temperature is about zero degrees Centigrade outside. In the morning a wonderfully hot shower. I quickly write an e-mail to Zach, who wanted to join me to Seattle. We then drive to North Pole, where we have breakfast at McDonald's. After this, the post office has opened up and I can post my postcards. To my greatest surprise, the postage is cheaper than in South America. We visit the Santa Claus House, where they keep reindeer in a pen. We then drive to Fairbanks, where we first go to Home Depot and buy a small heater fan and a extension cable. Then we park in 3rd Street to explore the city centre. There is really not much to see: A few shops on 2nd Street, a Visitors Centre on 1st Street. We drive to Pioneer Park. Although all the attractions are closed because the season is over, there is a multitude of historical

blockhouses, which were brought here. There is also a Beechcraft of 1942, a snowmobile on spiral cylinders, a sternwheel steamer (the Nenana) and an historical railway station. Lunch at Burger King. To the Museum of the North at the University of Alaska, where there are many exhibits on wildlife, native population and an arts exhibition. Another streak of bad diarrhoea. On Highway No 3 in direction Anchorage. On the way I find out that the weird sound which my car makes for quite some time, originates from a loose pulley. A rubber insert has crumbled off. Unfortunately, I cannot repair it here. Zach calls and lets me know that he cannot come with us back to Seattle. We spend the night in Nenana at the Nenana RV Park, where there are plugs, allowing us to heat the car.

20.9.2008 Nenana-Anchorage I wake up already at 6am. The night was, thanks to the heater in the car, warm. I rush through the ice-cold morning to the sanitation building, where I take a wonderfully hot shower and then enjoy a hot coffee. We load the car and drive off. Around noon we arrive at the Denali National Park. The Visitors Centre is already closed because of end of season. We ride the 15 miles which are still open off-season, into the park. There is a lot of road construction, thereafter the road is fine. We ride past snowy peaks, fog, steppe grass. In Savage River we have to turn the car around. We then continue across the snowed-in mountains in direction Anchorage. Heavy snowfall starts, but the snow melts immediately when it touches the ground. Stop at the Alaska Veterans Memorial. We ride through the Denali State Park. We can't see Mount McKinley, it is hidden in dense fog. In Wasilla we return to civilisation. We stop at the Museum of Alaska Transportation and Industry. There is a fantastic collection of mostly unrestored historical cars, lorries, airplanes, helicopters and trains. As the museum closes at 5pm, we have to hurry. We meet a group of car freaks, who, with the greatest pleasure, show us their tuned-up American cars. From there, there are only 30 miles to Anchorage, where we put up at the YHA Anchorage International Downtown Hostel.

21.9.2008 Anchorage After a cold night in the run-down YHA I decide that we have to change hostels. We change to the newer, very clean and friendly Arctic Adventure Hostel. Then we ride into town. Anchorage is a modern town. Because of the moderate climate there is no permafrost, thus allowing them to build high-rise buildings of concrete. I find out that the defective pulley is called a "harmonic balancer". We ask at Schuck Motor Spares - 135 USD - then at Napa Spares - 30 USD cheaper - but neither has it in stock. We then explore the city centre. Down 5th Ave, to Elderberry Park, Oscar Anderson House, Coastal Trail, Captain Cook Statue. Do some shopping in 4th Ave. I buy a sleeping bag liner (my sleeping bag is crap) and a rain poncho. At the Visitors Centre they explain the various sights to us. Then to the Aviation Museum, but it is far less interesting than yesterday's museum. But it is ideally situated next to the small lake where the hydroplanes keep starting and landing and there are many parked ones too. Then to Earthquake Park, where a rift shows how the two tectonic plates have shifted one on top of another. Down the slippery slope to the beach, where we see the skyline in the evening light. Then to Point Woronzof, where there is a good vista on the Cook Inlet and the Anchorage skyline. The starting planes from the airport keep passing above us. The mountain in the distance might be Mount McKinley. Then to Wal-Mart and back to the hostel, it just starts to rain hard. The car makes more and more noises, I really should get the spares. Alex tells me, that he will fly from Anchorage to Miami, because he cannot wait for the spares to arrive. We sum up our accounts.

22.9.2008 Anchorage Alex packs his things. I call Volvo, but the repairs would be more than 450 USD. Call the last spares shop I have not yet asked, but they have no stock either. Thus I order a harmonic balancer per Internet from Texas. Burn the last audiobooks on CD. Ride with Alex into town, where we visit the Police Museum with the famous Hudson patrol car and watch a long video. Then we shop for curios, now in after-season much cheaper. Have a Chinese lunch. I take Alex to the airport. In the afternoon I buy some tools at Sears and try without much success to remove the harmonic balancer. It is stuck. Beautiful autumn weather. In a small army-surplus-store I buy a drill bit and a steel rod, maybe I can hold the balancer when opening the central bolt. While eating supper - nothing particular, only cereals - a part of a tooth breaks off. That just tops it off!

23.9.2008 Anchorage In the morning I skype with Alex and find out that he arrived well in Miami. Then I walk to Continental Volvo, where I ask some information about the repairs due. It is very cold. At the Salvation Army Shop I buy a second-hand Targus notebook carrying bag for only 50c. Back to the hostel, where I meet Jose from Guadalajara. Make pancakes for lunch. Walk into town. Visit the Anchorage Museum, which has a good exhibition about the customs of the Inuit, an arts collection and a history exhibition. Back to the hostel.

24.9.2008 Anchorage Went in the morning to look for a garage. Find Alpina Motors, who agree to loosen the centre bolt with a impact wrench, at an immodest tariff. Wait all day long for the spares to arrive. Exactly 16:30, as announced on the Internet, they arrive. I drive to Alpina Motors, the centre bolt is quickly removed. But now I get into trouble: the enclosed puller doesn't fit. The two owners of Alpina Motors use the situation to their advantage: I have to pay 80 USD for them to pull the harmonic balancer off, a job of only 20 minutes. I pay the 80 USD, put back the radiator and the belts. But now my car is driveable again. Tomorrow I can visit Seward.

25.9.2008 Anchorage-Seward-Anchorage Drove by car toward Seward. Stopped time and again, took pictures, observed nature. It snowed down to about 500 meters. The weather is cloudy and foggy. I try to spot Beluga whales, but there are none. Autumn is here only at the beginning, while in Fairbanks it was already over: Here the leaves are green and yellow, in Fairbanks the trees had already shed their leaves. I walk in Seward along the beach promenade - now

deserted after the end of the season. The sun does not succeed to penetrate the fog. Strolled through the old town (built 1906). Visit the museum, a motley collection of all sorts of knickknacks, not really worth the entrance fee. An old man with a long beard sits typing at a laptop. Drove to the port. Then to the Exit Glacier, about 9 miles out of town. There, I meet a German couple. Back to Anchorage. Filled all canisters with cheap gasoline.

Canada (Vancouver)

26.9.2008 Anchorage-Haines Junction At 8am I pick up Steve and Noah and we start driving towards Tok. At Matanuska Glacier we stop and walk towards the glacier. But the distance to the glacier seems huge, miles to go. We return to the entrance, where we are told that we have to pay \$15 each to enter and then drive for a distance by car. We do not want to pay this and leave. But we did see the glacier quite well, just not close-up. We continue to Tok, where we stock up on foods. At the Canadian border there is a long, but friendly and unproblematic immigration procedure. Eventually we reach Haines Junction, where we stop at a turnout and sleep, I in the car and Steve and Noah in their tent.

27.9.2008 Haines Junction-Iskut It is way below zero when we wake up at 5:30h. Frost everywhere. The night was so cold, that I hardly have command over my fingers. With great difficulty I refuel the car from the jerry-can. We then continue. Beautiful sunrise at dawn. We see moose, a fox, a white wolf, reindeer, a wolverine. In Rancheria I return the pliers that the friendly owner forgot in my car when he was fixing my radiator fan on the way up. At Intersection 37 we fuel up again and turn off to the beautiful Stewart-Cassiar Highway. We ride for hours without seeing another car. When we refuel in Dease Lake, we are told that there is a RV park still open in Iskut. In Iskut we cannot find it, so we end up stopping at the Bear Paw Camping, run by an Austrian. I have a wonderful hot shower. Steve and Noah make a campfire and we sit around it, singing and playing music.

28.9.2008 Iskut-Quesnel We get up early again and continue driving. But there are few animals to be seen, once some animal, probably a deer, is at the roadside. In Bell II we refuel only 10lt and continue until the Intersection, where we use up the contents of the jerry-can and top up the rest. Shortly before Moriceville we see a bear mother with two cubs, close to a built-up area. It clearly is a black bear, not a grizzly. In Smithers, we look for an Internet café for a long time and eventually find Safeway Supermarket with free WiFi access. We sleep at a Rest Site after Quesnel.

29.9.2008 Quesnel-Vancouver Again we start driving at 6am. Sunny and warm weather. We stop at 100 Mile House to use the Internet. Make a booking at the Pender Lodge Youth Hostel in Vancouver. Skype with Christa Burger. We continue driving, decide to take the picturesque road via Whistler. Beautiful sights. From Whistler, a modern ski resort, the road is one single construction site. They are widening the road for the 2010 Olympics. We ride at 50km/h along beautiful fjords to Vancouver. Despite a lack of an accurate address, my two passengers find their destination quite easily. I drop them in Nanaima Road and then proceed to the not too distant Pender Lodge Youth Hostel, where I immediately find a parking space and put up for the night. A bit scary are all the homeless people in the area. I share the room with Delfine from France.

30.9.2008 Vancouver After so many days of little sleep or showers I enjoy sleeping a bit later and taking a hot shower. Into the city centre. To the Gastown Steam Clock. It is indeed powered by a small steam engine! Apparently around 100 years old. I then walk to Canada Place, an ocean cruiser jetty, exhibition hall and shopping centre. There is a good view from there of the container harbour and the waterfront. A luxurious ocean liner is moored. I go to the Tourist Information Office and ask for a Historic City Walk and some information about Grouse Mountain. I am advised to walk up the "Grouse Grind" as the cable car down is only \$5 and afterwards to visit the Capilano Regional Park. I thus get on the sea bus to Lonsdale Quay, where I change to Bus 236 to Grouse Mountain. There I start walking the Grouse Grind, a very steep hiking trail of 7km to the mountain top. I was told it takes 2.5h to get up to the top, but I arrive there after 1h 4min. I visit the bear refuge, where two large grizzly bears are kept. I then attend the lumberjack show...no must-see. I get a ticket for the cable car down. The trip is quite impressive. I then walk in direction Capilano, get into Capilano Regional Park, cross the dam and walk southwards on the other side. At the Highway 1 I walk along the highway. On Capilano Street I happen to see a Bus 236 but it does not stop, so I follow the direction it takes. I get a bit lost, ask somebody for the 236 Bus stop and find it. After a short time, another 236 is coming and takes me along. When it arrives at the sea bus, the latter is just about to leave. On the other side I am a bit lost with the bus back to the hostel. A bypasser tells me where the buses stop, but wants money for it - another homeless person. The city is peppered with them. I get off at corner Hastings and Gore Street. Everywhere homeless people. Some are openly selling drugs, others are injecting them. I quickly get back to the hostel.

1.10.2008 Vancouver In the morning I start with the self-guided walking tour. I choose to start with the Gastown Tour. Gastown was founded in 1867 by Captain John "Gassy Jack" Deighton. In 1886, the old town was destroyed by a fire. In 1884, when it was announced that the Canadian Pacific Railway would arrive here, the properties shot up in value. I visit the Europe Hotel at 43 Powell Street, the French Captain Building at 41 Alexander Street, the Dunn Building at 110 Carrall Street, the Byrnes Block at 2 Water Street, the second block of Ferguson at 6 Powell Street, the Hotel at 210 Carrall Street, The Lonsdale Block at 8 West Cordova Street, the Stanley Hotel at 36 Blood Alley Square, unfortunately hardly accessible because of construction work. The passage, besieged by homeless people, is closed. Then the

Dominion Hotel at 92 Water Street, the modern Gaslight Square at 131 Water Street as a successful example of an integrated modern building, the First Malkin warehouse at 139 Water Street (formerly on stilts), the Edward Hotel at 300 Water Street, the Hudson House at 321 Water Street, the Kelly Building at 361-65 Water Street, Holland Block at 364 Water Street, Horne Block at 311 West Cordova Street, the completely scaffolded Masonic Temple at 301 West Cordova Street, the modern Unitel Building at 175 West Cordova Street as an example of the planned reconstruction, which then fortunately was discontinued, and the Leckie Building at 170 Water Street. Many of the historic brick buildings have been lovingly restored. This cannot conceal the fact that Gastown is still far from being a Yuppie centre, because it is still dominated by the homeless, who occupy almost every house entrance. I start now with the Tour of the City Centre. The tour is focused on the artworks. It begins at the Vancouver Art Gallery, corner Robson/Hornby. The works around the gallery are currently not accessible, everything is shut off due to construction works. Across the road, around the court building is the sculpture "Spring" by Alan Chung Hung and the sculpture Primary #9 by Michael Banwell, then I walk on the terrace up to the Court House, where I visit the sculpture Themis, Goddess of Justice. As I take a picture, someone comes running and shouts that no photos are permitted. The installation 100'000 Doorknobs by Joey Morgan consists of taps and door handles embedded in resin in the ground. Unfortunately, the resin is already blind. In a stationary shop I eventually find a cable lock for the notebook computer. Some of the artworks I cannot find. In the park corner Hastings/Hornby I find the Working Landscape Sculpture, three pots of plants and seats on slowly rotating disks. At 999 West Hastings I visit the Tapestry of the Vancouver Skyline by Joanna Saniszkis. The Fountain of the Pioneers in Burrard is original, the sculptures The Builders by Joyce McDonald and The Vessel by Dominique Valade are not impressive. In the garden of 1201 West Pender is a small sculpture by Gerhard Class and in the entrance hall metal bas-reliefs by George Norris. In Bute Street, I encounter - behind glass - the glass Persian Wall sculpture by Dale Chihuly. Here I also find the installation New Currents in ancient stream by Gwen Boyle, with two boulders in a pool with a waterfall. At 1111 West Georgia stands Spirits in a Landscape by Abraham Anghik. The plywood mural Primavera at 1075 West Georgia Street is very commercial, but the wooden Ksan Murals by Chief W. Harris, Chief Joseph, A. E. Moldo, K. Mowatt, A. Sterritt and V. Stephens in the RBC on West Georgia Street are very impressive. Across the road is the Christchurch Cathedral from 1895, one of the oldest Churches in the city. Totally banal are the covers of the steam heating valves by Susan Ockwell and Jill Anholt. The wall sculpture Symbol of Cuneiform on the former library is typical 60s style. Very original is the Pendulum by Alan Storey in the HSBC at 885 West Georgia Street. The giant pendulum really swings! Here I again stand in front of the Vancouver Art Gallery, with the BC Centennial Fountain of R.H. Savery and A. Svoboda, the two granite lions by Timothy Bass and John Bruce and the King Edward VII Fountain by Charles Marega. Back to the Hostel. Skype with Christa. Extend my stay at the hostel for a night. Buy vegetables in Chinatown. Then I start the Tour of Yaletown. Yaletown was the industrial zone of Vancouver, around the locomotive sheds of the CPR. As the centre of Vancouver developed, Yaletown got somewhat forgotten and only in recent times it has revived to something like a new centre of the entrepreneurs, because the rents are much cheaper and offices in the former warehouses are spacious. Many former industrial sites were also developed into subsidised apartments. The CPR Roundhouse is unfortunately closed, the beautiful Locomotive 374 just visible through the glass. The Bill Curtis Plaza appears to have been demolished in the meantime. But I immediately find the Yaletown Building, a former warehouse. The Yaletown warehouses had on the one side a railway load bay (now Street), which serves today mainly as a balcony for the bistro tables. Visit the Percival Building at 1140-50 Hamilton Street, 1144 Homer Street (now just a garage), Yaletown Towers at 1241 Homer Street, now replaced by a new building, Canadian Linen Supply Building at 1232-38 Richards Street, which is still in the Art Deco splendour, the ugly VLC Properties Building of 1993 at 600 Drake Street as an example of condensed housing, the Yale Hotel at 1300 Granville Street, where the owner welcomes me briefly and is pleased that tourists visit his hotel, also a cook, John Edwards, who lives there. The building 1200-1202 Granville is fairly plain, across is the ostentatious Scotiabank at 1196 Granville. On the 1000 block of Granville Street is also a HI hostel. Lightheart apartments at 540 Helmcken Street were renovated in 1990 and again compacted to accommodate social housing. The little house at 1021 Richards Street has already been demolished and replaced by a skyscraper, but across the road there are a few more such houses, all of them already doomed for demolition. The same happened to Auto Sebring at 1085-95 Homer Street. Nevertheless, the building at 1090 Homer Street is still around, although only the facades are old. Via the Seawall Walk back to the hostel, where I prepare my vegetables and chicken.

2.10.2008 Vancouver The weather is overcast today, it is pretty dark. I walk through town in the direction of Stanley Park. Faster than expected I get there. Walk past the Lost Lagoon, then to Beaver Lake, where several beaver nests may actually be seen. Then to the East Bank, where I have a good view of the suspension bridge to North Vancouver. Then I walk to Prospect Point, right at the bridgehead. But now heavy rain starts, thus the view of West- and North Vancouver is not good. Back to Beaver Lake where I suddenly find myself back on the eastern shore of the park. So I walk along Pipeline Street back into the city, where I do some shopping at the Dollar Store for cookies. Back to the hostel. Two cyclists have just arrived, but the manager is not in, the telephone number wrong, I cannot help them. Along Hastings to the post office, where I post two DVDs to Sevi. Then I walk back, buy some chicken and herbal tea in Chinatown, then back to the hostel.

3.10.2008 Vancouver-Qualicum Beach (Vancouver Island) Early in the morning I get up and load my car. I then drive

through town, across Stanley Park and over the huge Lion's Gate Bridge to North Vancouver. At Horseshoe Bay I just missed the earlier ferry, so I have to wait a long time until the next one eventually leaves. The crossing is expensive and takes 1.5h. In Nanaimo it is raining hard. I am running late. I get onto the island highway and start driving north. Shortly before the Qualicum Beach off ramp there is an accident and I have to wait some time until traffic moves again. I quickly find the house of Christa and Rudi Burger, who welcome me warmly. In the afternoon we ride into Qualicum Beach where I explore the centre on foot. We then ride along the beach and see all the mansions built by wealthy people along the coast. For supper, Rudi prepares huge sirloin-steaks, outside crisp, inside pink. The former Air Force navigator is a cooking enthusiast.

4.10.2008 Qualicum Beach (West coast) At 10h I start driving in direction West Coast. Since the Internet has promised good weather, I stop nowhere, driving through Port Alberni and in direction Tofino. Shortly after Port Alberni, I see two hitchhikers with lots of luggage in the rain. I stop, return and take them along. They are two apprentices on the way to Tofino, where they will get well-paid seasonal jobs. It rains hard. The road winds through the mountains, along a river. I drive fast, probably too fast for the rain. In Tofino I drop them off, park the car and explore on foot the picturesque village located on a narrow peninsula. It rains in torrents and a strong wind blows, several times my umbrella is flipped over. Tofino is a small village with a lot of seasonal infrastructure. Facing the village are small islets, all with houses on them. I visit the Art Gallery of Roy Henry Vickers with its very impressive art prints. Each image features a second picture, which is only recognisable when looking from the side. The prices are clearly first World! From here I drive through the Pacific Rim National Park and stop at Radar Hill, where I have to purchase a day pass for 7.80, quite a cheek in off-season. There is no view whatsoever, everything is fogged up. Then I stop at Comber Beach, where people in neoprene suits are surfing. Next stop is at the Rainforest Trail, where I visit both Sections A and B. The trail is well done, one walks on wooden tracks. The rain forest is comparable with moderate rain forest in Chile, Argentina, Venezuela or New Zealand, with the difference that the fir trees here are huge. From here, I leave the park and head for Ucluelet, also on a narrow peninsula. Unfortunately, here the coast is poorly accessible, it is covered with private homes. I visit the port. It rains in torrents. The Hotel ship Canadian Princess is already closed for the season. Drive back. In Port Alberni I gas up and continue to Cathedral Grove. Here I do a tour of the giant tree forest. The fir trees here grow up to 75m tall. Again, it is moderate rainforest. The rain prevents me from making good photographs, everywhere white dots appear where the rain drops reflect the flash. Continue to drive to the Small Qualicum Falls, where I quickly - before dusk, it is already after 6pm - explore the trail to the two waterfalls. Then I return to Qualicum Beach to Rudi and Christa. They had been worried that I might have had a breakdown. Rudi has ordered Sushi for dinner - what a feast! We are very happy, certainly partially due to the sake. Get Rudi's PowerPoint to function again.

5.10.2008 Qualicum Beach (Campbell River) Long chat with Ruedi and Christa. At 11h the sun comes out and I drive off towards the north. I ride on the old coastal highway 19a, riding through Qualicum Beach, Qualicum Bay, Bowser. In Fanny Bay I pick up a hitchhiker, a lumberjack who works at Denman Island. In the centre of Courtenay I station the car and drop him off. Then I explore the modern city on foot. Across the steel bridge to Simms Millennium Park, while eating my lunch. Then I walk through the streets of Courtenay, before I continue my journey. It takes me to nearby Comox, another beautiful town with a large marina. I drive from Comox further along the coast to Campbell River. The city consists of a marina and many residential dwellings, but there is not a real city centre, only a few stores along Dogwood Avenue. On the highway towards the south. At Mount Washington I turn off and get into the mountains. I go past a big Ski resort, but there is no snow, thus lifts and hotels are still mothballed. Then I arrive at the Strathcona Regional Park, where I start to walk the trail. To Lake Helen Mackenzie, where I have a long chat with Shelley, a veterinarian I meet on the trail, then to Battleship Lake and back to the parking lot. The park is fantastically beautiful, in its autumn colours. A fairy-tale landscape, all in light green, yellow, red and brown. Now it's already 6 clock and I quickly return to Qualicum Beach, where there is as much Sushi as I can eat.

6.10.2008 Qualicum Beach Today it is exactly two years since I left Thal. Clean my car inside and out - it is covered with filth and there is so much Yukon sand in it that it is almost worth panning the sand for gold nuggets. We visit the store of Rudi's and Christa's son. Then we visit the Qualicum Heritage Forest with its huge Douglas firs. Then I also clean the inside of Christa's car. Fitted a gel saddle to Christa's bicycle. We practice cycling - Christa has not sat on a bike for years. After a few minutes, it is clear that she has not forgotten how to cycle. For dinner I am invited to chicken wings and Caesar's salad at Deez.

7.10.2008 Qualicum Beach-Victoria We chat for a long time in the morning. Then comes the sad farewell. I am being equipped with a huge food package: Chicken, fruit, tomatoes. Then I sadly have to say goodbye. We had a good time together, thus leaving is hard. Ride on the coastal in direction Nanaimo, past Parksville and Nanoose. The weather is beautiful, the sun is shining and I can even open the roof. I park in Nanaimo at a shopping centre and grab my lunch bag. Then I walk to Promenade Drive, where I eat in a small park. Then I explore Nanaimo. It is an attractive, modern town with many shops and a huge marina. The sound of musical instruments is everywhere and some bards are singing. Visit the Bastion, a watchtower, built by the Hudson's Bay Company in 1853 to protect the coal mines. Then I walk through the village and back to the car. Continue in direction Victoria. Stop in Ladysmith, the namesake of the city in Kwazulu-Natal, South Africa, where I discover an interesting steam locomotive. Next stop in Duncan, where I find in a

Dollar store some small steel angles to repair the lining of the rear hatch. The weather is getting overcast, it starts to rain a bit. I close the roof and continue to Victoria. I arrive - thanks to the Google Maps - without problems at the Turtle Hostel, where they have a bed and - more important - parking for my car. Skype with Christa and Rudi, stroll through Victoria. It's freezing cold.

8.10.2008 Victoria Went to the Visitors Centre. It is not yet open, so I walk to the ferry terminal and inquire about the ferry on Friday. It was a very unfortunate date, I am told, because it was Thanksgiving weekend and no reservations are taken. Then I visit the Parliament of British Columbia. Back to the Tourist Office, where I get some historic city walks and maps. To St. Ann's Academy and I explore Beacon Hill Park. Then I start the "Secrets of the City - Happy Haunting" Tour: St. Ann's Academy, two native American community houses (Wawadit'la or Mungo Martin House) with corresponding Totem Poles, Helmcken House, the house of the first doctor on Vancouver Island, the first school on the island, Empress Hotel, which is overgrown with ivy, Roger's Chocolates, Murchie's Tea & Coffee, Old Morris Tobacconist, Bastion Lane with Garrick's Head Pub, Bastion Square with the Maritime Museum. The second Historical City Tour is called "Secrets of the City - Forbidden City": Market Square, now a modern shopping centre, BC Produce Company, Hoy Sun Ning Yung Benevolent Association, the only about one meter wide Fan Tan Alley, where there were opium dens and illegal gambling halls, 500 Block Fisgard Street with its many Chinese shops and the former Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association building, the Dragon Alley, once upon a time gateway to the crowded immigrant quarters, Hard Block, previously horse stable at the bottom and brothel on the first floor, 1800 Government Street, the longest Chinese building in town, The building of the Yen Wo Society where Canada's oldest Chinese Temple is located on the top floor (where everyone understands only Chinese) devoted to the God Tam Kung, the colourful building of the Chinese Public School, the Lee Mong Kow Way with the modern fresco of his family and the Gate of the Harmonic Interest, a traditional Chinese gate, built in 1981. Went to the Dollar Store to buy a few cookies for lunch and some cables for the computer. Continue with the City Tour "Secrets of the City - Fools Rush In", which I do backwards: The brick buildings of Lower Johnson Street, Waddington Alley with its wood paving, 515 Yates, where Samuel Booth's Gold nugget was displayed, the former Ship Inn, the first tavern on spot, now no longer operated, with cast-iron columns in front, Bastion Square, Commercial Row in Wharf Street, former stores and warehouses with cast-iron columns in front, across the road in the large parking lot one can still see remains of the warehouse of Hudson's Bay Company, Dominion Customs House, the former Bank of Commerce in Government Street, the former Windsor Hotel on corner of Government/Courtney Street, today with mock Tudor facade, the former Inner Harbour, now the Empress Hotel. Now I am at the beginning of the next historic city tour, "Secrets of the City - Law and Disorder": 500 Block of Humboldt, former Kanaka Row (Hawaiians), Union Club, Government Street, 1001 Government Street where the "Germania Singverein" was looted by a furious mob in 1915, the former Bank of Montreal building, designed by Francis Mawson Rattenbury, the architect of the Parliament house and the Empress Hotel, Trounce Alley, the former sinful mile, Duck Building on Broad Street, the former Omineca Saloon, where the skeleton of an assassinated gold digger was found, corner Government and Pandora, where a opium factory stood, McPherson Theatre, the former Police quarters of Chinatown in Fisgard Street, and the City Hall. Because a guided tour of the Parliament is about to begin, I quickly walk there. Unfortunately we can not enter the Council Hall, because a meeting is taking place. I walk from here to Craigdarroch Castle. Unfortunately, it is already about to close as I arrive there, but I take some beautiful photos in the evening light. The castle was built 1887-1890 for the rich coal Baron Robert Dunsmuir. He died before its completion, though.

USA the second...

9.10.2008 Victoria-Detroit, OR Get up early, walk to the harbour, to the Black Ball Shipping Line, which operates the ferry Coho to Port Angeles. There I am told, that they don't do reservations, I have simply to park the car after 10:30h at the pier. They do not expect many cars today. Then I go to the Royal British Columbia Museum. I start on the second floor, there is a special exhibition "Free Spirit: Stories of you, me and BC". It is quite interesting, shows very informally the variety of the inhabitants of BC. I have to quickly move the car to the parking lot of the ferry. As I arrive some minutes before 10:30h, I have to wait in a by-road until the earlier ferry has left. Then I return to the museum. the next exhibition, "Living Land", shows the fauna of British Columbia in very well-made dioramas. On the third floor there is an exhibition on the history of British Columbia, on the left side of the first nations, with a Kekuli (underground house) and a Kwakwaka wakw longhouse and many totem poles. On the right side, there is an exhibition of the past hundred years, with a section of Old Town built in original size, with many shops and workshops, as well as a functioning waterwheel and a replica of the aft section of the "Discovery" of Captain Vancouver. Now I have to return to the car, fetch the computer and quickly check in an Internet café, whether somebody has registered as a passenger. But nobody has. I quickly eat two pieces of Pizza and drink a coke - this will keep me awake for the night - and return for another half an hour to the museum. Then it is 14:30, the check-in for the ferry starts. I explain to the customs officer, that I would like an extension until December 30. It is getting very complicated - mainly because the IT system has trouble saving the data - I have to scan my fingerprints four times and look into the camera four times - but in the end I am granted the extension. The ferry crossing is spiced up by the sighting of a few Orca whales on starboard pretty far from the ferry. Then we arrive in Port Angeles, where I gas up and hit the road. Stop at a large Dollar Store where I stock up

on food. The road to Olympia leads along a fjord and although it is almost dark, it is serenely beautiful. After Olympia I get on the Freeway. At Centralia I have supper at Burger King. I am the only guest. Nevertheless I get a receipt with a number and when my food is ready they call my number. Just to make sure, there is no mix-up? I continue driving. Ride around Portland. At the end of the detour a police car parks strangely on the on-ramp. Then it starts tailing me. I follow it up in my rear-view mirror and promptly ride for a second on the white line, which makes him stop me. As my papers are in order, I can continue after a short while. Imagine this in Switzerland! Once stopped, one never gets away without a fine or being charged with an offence, even if everything is fine. I continue, as I don't feel tired at all. My car is worrying me: The exhaust is making more and more noise. Obviously a muffler is leaking. After all, I have done 8'000 miles in the meantime. In Salem I turn off to Route 22 and ride in direction Bend. Shortly before Detroit (OR! not the other one) I find a Rest Site and sleep there in the car. It is already 2:30 in the morning.

10.10.2008 Detroit-La Pine, OR At 7am the noise of the passing lorries wakes me up. I pack up and continue driving. Slowly I get into snow: The trees are powdered with snow, the but the road is dry. Then also the road is covered by snow. But underneath, there is split gravel and tarmac. I pass a SUV on its roof, stuck on the barrier and ask myself how he did do it on the well-kept road. Call Wendell and announce my arrival. Two kilometres further up I suddenly lose control over all four wheels. I try to steer against it, but the car has lost all contact with the road. I have arrived at the pass, the road is horizontal and there is a mirror-like layer of ice on it, neither cleared nor strewn with split gravel. The car is turning wildly. Only no collision now! There is an oncoming car, but he can pass me. With a turn I land in the ditch of the oncoming lane, thank God in direction of this lane. It does not look as if I could get away on my own. As soon as I have got out of the car, the police arrived, who have in the meantime recognised the problem up here and are trying to restore order. As I take the towrope from the boot, a big SUV stops and asks me whether I wanted to be towed. I gladly accept, he takes a chain from his boot, his wheels are churning despite 4WD on the ice and after a minute my car is standing - all skew - on the slippery road. He does not want to accept money. Even on foot one has to be careful not to slip and fall. I say goodbye and turn the car very, very carefully - every moment it is threatening to skid away again. After about 200m the ice comes to an end and the road underneath the snow is better again. I drive to Bend, where I buy some oil at Wal-Mart, then I continue to La Pine to Anne's and Wendell's house. The two are not yet in, they are out canvassing. When they come in, we are all very glad to meet again. We attempt to ride to the two little lakes on the mountain, but there is too much snow and ice, despite 4WD we have to return. Wendell, although blind, cooks a fabulous supper - chicken casserole.

11.10.2008 La Pine Today, I have to fix the wheel alignment of my car, the tires are wearing too fast on the shoulder and I have to get a hole in the exhaust fixed. After breakfast, I start calling several wheel alignment places, but all are fully booked. Wendell gives me some two-component putty with which I can fix the hole in the exhaust pipe. I then decide to drive into Bend. In Bend I first end up at the Dollar Store, where I buy something to nibble. I then look up the different places which did not answer the phone but they are closed. I then remember the Goodyear Workshop on Business 97 and stop there. They are very friendly, offer the service at a decent price and are willing to do it immediately. While I am waiting, I complete the translation of the diaries of the last couple of days. Afterwards, I go across the road to the Columbia Hiking Gear Factory Store. A true El Dorado for an eternal traveller like me! Everything from Columbia greatly reduced. I buy pants, a T-shirt and a pair of waterproof hiking shoes for next to nothing. Next door is a Nike Factory Outlet with similar pricing, but I cannot ride across the USA with a boot full of clothes, so I try to restrain myself. Drive back to La Pine, where Anne, Wendell and I chat until the late hours of the night.

12.10.2008 La Pine-Boise Anne and Wendell take me to the Paulina and East Lakes. It is already deepest winter up here, everything covered with snow and ice. No more tourists. The roads all covered with ice. Then they take me back, I say goodbye and leave. The trip to Bend worries me: The engine is only running on three cylinders when idling. I can not imagine anything else than a problem with the ignition. So I stop in Bend at Wal-Mart and buy four new spark plugs and a matching socket. But when I fit them I note that a package with two spark plugs contains a different type. It also says P-64 on it, but somebody has torn the a 6 off, in reality it is a P-646. I go back to Wal-Mart, but there is a long queue at the customer service counter. After nearly an hour's wait, I am being attended to. The spark plugs are exchanged. But while assembling the fourth spark plug I notice that the connector is completely burnt out. It was probably not quite firmly attached and has steadily fired. That was probably the problem. I run to the nearby spare parts shop "Baxter Auto Parts" and also want to replace all the rotten vacuum tubes, while I already have dirty hands. I also have to wait here, because the only employee is beleaguered from all sides with requests. Finally I get my hose, but not the ignition cable plug which they had not in stock. But the hose does not fit, my sample had obviously already lost a big piece, the hose has to be much longer and slightly narrower. So back again. I easily get the other hoses. Install them, they are much thicker than the previous ones, so I have to rebuild a few things. Finally, everything is in order, only the ignition cable plug missing. I go back to spare parts store and want to pay, but the salesman tells me not to worry, it was free, "Welcome to America." That was really nice. I drive on three cylinders, because I don't want to damage the new spark plugs. Park at the Dollar Store, and search for the spare parts shop on foot, because I'm not so sure where it is. I finally find it and get a not quite matching ignition cable, however I can make it match with an adapter. Now the engine is back running on all four cylinders. Then I have to refuel, there is a long queue, I have to wait. Finally, I am not

allowed to reverse to the pump, the attendant has to stretch the hose like mad so that it reaches the other side of the car. I finally start driving toward Yellowstone. It is already 14h. The weather is beautiful, the sun is shining and I open the sunroof. I follow Route 20 until deep into the night. Shortly after Boise, I stop at a rest area and sleep in the car.

13.10.2008 Boise-West Yellowstone The night was cold, it's frozen everywhere. Sunrise is only at 8am. So I continue driving around nine, because I do not want to drive on icy roads. Everywhere there is a thick frost on the grass. In Mountain Home, I stop at the Visitors Centre and send out emails. I have a long chat with the friendly lady, who tells me about her sons, all private pilots and almost all are somehow working in aviation. I am leaving on the Route 20. Everywhere a lot of snow and everything is frozen. Once I see a huge deer herd along the street, comfortably grazing next to the cows. I cannot stop and photograph as the road is too narrow. At the Crater of the Moon Park, where it has huge lava fields, I stop. Because of the snow unfortunately only the first crater is open, because the road was not cleared. On Route 33 right up to Rexburg, where I turn toward West Yellowstone before I reach the city. In St. Anthony, I stop, but I'm too late to reach the dunes 12 miles away, so I drive on. The road to West Yellowstone is longer than expected and the road is partially covered with ice. I arrive around 18h in West Yellowstone. Try to check in at a camp site, but they want 30 USD for the site only, so I afford myself the luxury to put up at the Pine Shadows Motel. The roads are all covered with ice, there is snow everywhere. Who said that winter would only set in after October? Deepest winter we have here!

14.10.2008 West Yellowstone To the Visitors Centre. I get detailed instructions on how to structure my visit. I then enter the park. Along Madison River I stop several times. The Firehole Canyon Drive is closed. I do the Fountain Flat Drive instead and walk a couple of miles on the bicycle path. I visit the Ojo Caliente, a geyser. There is a pretty fresh track of a huge grizzly. I keep looking out for him, but do not see him. An airplane circles a long time above, maybe they had spotted him. Visit a geyser a bit off the track, which splurts boiling water. I return to the parking lot. The sun tries to break through the clouds. On the way I see a wolf on the road, unafraid of the cars. I continue to Biscuit Basin and Black Sand Basin, both with a multitude of geysers and hot springs. There are multicoloured bacteria mats on the hot water plains. I then visit Old Faithful, the best known geyser of Yellowstone. There are a lot of pretty tame Bison around. As the geyser seems to be inactive when I arrive, I embark on the Geyser Hill trail. Just as I am the furthest away from Old Faithful, it starts splurting. I can witness it from far, but the sun is against me, it would not do for photos. My left ankle once again causes me excruciating pain. So I continue very slowly, limping along. I get past Grand Geyser and Giant Geyser and return on the bicycle path, seeing the Castle Geyser on the way. I return to Old Faithful. It is almost 1.5h after the first eruption, the next is just about due. And indeed, after about 15 min waiting, Old Faithful erupts. It splurts about 6m high. In the meanwhile it is snowing. I then continue with Firehole Lake Drive. A lot of minor geysers and hot springs. A big lake under a cloud of steam, with a herd of Bison grazing on its shores. Two males fight right next to my parked car. I then start driving back to West Yellowstone, not without doing the picturesque Madison River Drive.

15.10.2008 West Yellowstone Again I extend my stay at the motel, after finding out that today is once more ice-cold weather and sleeping in the car hardly seems possible. Drive once more to Madison Intersection, then turn left. Stop at Terrace Springs, Gibbon Falls and then at Beryl Springs. The Norris Geyser Basin is peppered with very many geysers, hot mud pools and hot springs. There is a good catwalk to see all the attractions. Upon continuing, I see a wolf on the road, he almost seems to parade for the motorists and shows no shyness. Next stop is the upper terraces of Mammoth Hot Springs, similar to Pamukkale's White Cascades. Many hot springs are currently not active, the cascades dry. Then I continue to the lower terraces, where almost all springs are dry. At the roadside is the phallus-like Liberty Cap. In the village of Fort Yellowstone there is a herd of elk grazing. Although not recommended, I leave the car and approach them very close on foot because my camera has no zoom. I can easily go as close as one metre. At least they don't attack me. From here I continue to Undine Falls, impressive waterfalls in a steep rocky ravine and Wraith Falls, hardly a waterfall, more of a waterslide. Then to the Petrified Tree, a petrified redwood tree stands like a real tree in the ground! At the Tower Falls, I see a somewhat hidden small waterfall surrounded by sandstone needles. From here the road is blocked. Turn around, go to Lamar Valley. As promised, there are many animals, but only bison, which stand about everywhere, even on the road and do not mind that cars have to pass very close. Of course dead slow! The huge animals are stoic and peaceful. It starts to rain. At Soda Butte, a huge cone of a former hot spring, which I walk around, I turn around. Drive back to West Yellowstone, where a warm motel room awaits me. Video chat with Ruedi and Christa.

16.10.2008 West Yellowstone-Jackson, Wyoming Upon leaving West Yellowstone in the morning, it is snowing. There is just a thin layer of snow on the road. I drive very, very slowly towards Madison Junction. There is a low layer of clouds, the snow is falling constantly. At Madison Junction I turn once again to the left. At Norris Junction I turn right in direction Canyon Village. The road is climbing, the snow is increasing. I drive even slower. At Canyon Village I quickly explore the village - nothing to speak of, but the Visitor Centre is open and so I visit the museum. I then drive across the bridge of the Yellowstone River and stop at the trailhead of Uncle Tom's Trail and then at the Artists Point, where I have a spectacular view over the Canyon and the falls. Meet two men, one from Oregon and the other one from Pennsylvania and take their picture. Continue to the Sulphur Cauldron, a hot sulphur spring, and the Mud Volcano which is today only a mud spring. At Fishing Bridge I stop again and explore the facilities and the Lake Village which is completely

abandoned, closed for winter. Two miles later I stop at Bridge Bay, where there is a marina, now closed for winter. It is still snowing a bit, but it immediately melts now. I do the Gull Point Drive with a picturesque view of Yellowstone. When I see a lot of cars at the roadside I stop and indeed! there is a Grizzly bear with a killed Bison. I am allowed to watch him through one of the telescopes and even take a picture. I then continue to West Thumb, where there are another lot of hot springs right on the shores of Yellowstone Lake, in a quite picturesque setting. I quickly ride into Grant Village, which is abandoned for winter, then drive past Lewis Lake and leave the park via the South Entrance. From here the Grand Teton National Park starts. I drive past Flagg Ranch and Colter Bay. At Jackson Lake Junction I decide to take the more scenic drive past Jenny Lake. The sun comes out, I can even open the sunroof. Visit the Willow Flats, where one can see many moose, but cannot get close because of a stream. I ride around Signal Mountain, have good views of Jackson Lake and the Teton Mountain Range. I do the scenic ride to Jenny Lake and continue to Moose Junction. From there it is Highway 89 up to Jackson. In Jackson I try to put up at Anvil Motel, but they are fully booked! In Winter! So I just purchase a shower to be allowed to use their Internet.

17.10.2008 Jackson, Wyoming-Salt Lake City, UT I get up at 6am. The night was ice cold, several degrees centigrade below zero. My sleeping bag gave up, I felt very cold. The windscreen froze inside and outside and the ice is so hard, I have difficulty scraping it off. I long for a hot coffee, but everything is still closed in Jackson. So I hit the road. The sun only rises around 8. But a beautiful day is dawning. I have breakfast at Burger King in Afton. Now I feel much better. The sun is shining and I can even open the sunroof. I get past Geneva, which consists only of a couple of houses, not much further is Montpelier, quite a big town and then Paris, a lovely Mormon village, but still in Idaho (they thought it was in Utah when they founded it). At the Bear Lake Lookout I get maps of Salt Lake City. In Logan, a big city idyllically situated on a ridge, I stop to gas up and have a dirt-cheap, big and tasty lunch at Smiths Supermarket. I ask at the Visitors Office where Wal-Mart was and drive there to have my Volvo's oil changed. It turns out that there is a serious oil leak somewhere, but it is difficult to pinpoint where. I continue through sunny Utah. When I get onto I-15, traffic builds up and there is a lot of construction so I have to drive faster and more attentively than usual. When I get to the International UTE Hostel in Salt Lake City, I call my brother Daniel while I wait. I am then not only checked in, I get a free bowl of delicious Minestrone!

18.10.2008 Salt Lake City In the morning to Temple Square. The weather is beautiful. Salt Lake City is a modern city, generously planned, with plenty of greenery and water features. First I visit Temple Square, where I am immediately allocated by two "Missionaries" to a group. Visit the statues in Temple Square, then the Visitor Center North. Interesting the photo-realistic paintings of Biblical history. The guiding is very professionally done by young ladies, always one from abroad and one from the United States. When the one speaks, the other one looks at the one talking and nods. As in TV advertising. Visit the Beehive House, where Brigham Young, the city founder, Mormon leader, railway pioneer and first governor of Utah lived. To Maurice Abravanel Hall, which is unfortunately closed - inside I detected a Dale Chihouly sculpture. On the pavement, I am asked if I wanted a free loaf of bread. Happily, I accept and choose a cheese loaf - and eat the entire bread for lunch. To the Family History Library, where I search for my ancestors, unfortunately without much success. But it is impressive to investigate in here. Then I walk to Capitol Hill. Visit the Capitol from the outside. To the LDS Conference Centre, where I first take part in a guided tour of the roof, then in a guided tour through the interior. The centre is ultra-modern. Inside, everything is of the finest. Next to the Museum of Church History and Art, where I am instructed by my guide David for hours in the religion of the Mormons, which is quite alright with me, because until now I knew little about it. Then I chat with his wife, also working as a guide in the museum. Meanwhile, it is dark, the evening sky is of a beautiful colour, I walk back to the hostel.

19.10.2008 Salt Lake City Early in the morning I walk into town, to the Tabernacle where the Mormon choir concert takes place. I get one of the best seats in the middle of the balcony. The concert is fantastic, the acoustics of the Tabernacle excellent. I record parts of it with my camera (audio only). Then I walk back to the hostel, buy a thermostat on the way and fit it to the car. Thus another part, of which I am not sure whether it is still good, is replaced. Then I drive by car to the "This is the Place Heritage Village". In winter, the houses are not accessible inside, but I get a ride with the "train" (a Ford F150 disguised as a locomotive) and have a long chat with the chauffeur, whose ancestors came from St. Margrethen (Switzerland) and were known by the name of Bruderer. He still speaks a little Swiss German. Then I explore the village on foot. Many of the original settlers houses were moved here, when their location in town got too crowded. Lunch at "Carls Jr.". Afterwards, I go to the Capitol, which I explore inside and then to the University where I visit the (unfortunately closed) Stadium. Back to the hostel where I try to organise my onward journey.

20.10.2008 Salt Lake City Early in the morning I drive to Herm's Volvo. Herm is Dutch and repairs only Volvo - and he knows them in and out. We are looking for the oil leak, but the engine appears tight. Perhaps the old oil filter was leaking. He asks me only for 21 USD - a nice gesture. The exhaust patches of La Pine have fallen off, so I go to Auto Zone, buy an exhaust bandage and fit it. Hopefully this lasts a bit. Then I go to Carls Jr. and have a huge hamburger for lunch. From here it is not far to the Utah Pioneer Museum, a enormous collection of pioneer belongings, far too much to see in one day. Particularly noteworthy are the well-preserved ox-carts and the fantastic, newly renovated steam fire pump. From here I drive to the Bingham Canyon mine of Kennecott Utah Copper, the largest open-cast mine in the world, even visible from space. The ore contains only 1% copper, which is reduced by a largely mechanical process

from the ore. From here I drive to the Great Salt Lake. I park at a Taj Mahal-alike warehouse and walk about a mile on crusts of salt and sand until I reach the water. To my great surprise, there is a fairly large marina on the lakeshore. Then I drive back to the hostel, Google the nearest Dollar Tree Store and go there to stock up for the Bryce Canyon trip.

21.10.2008 Salt Lake City-Bryce Canyon I leave Salt Lake City at 8am. Ride on Interstate-15 until I see a sign "Route 89". I follow the sign and get into Lehi and Provo, wide-spread-out cities with much infrastructure. But it slows me down too much, I have to get back onto I-15. In Gunnison I almost have a collision: An old woman drives without stopping or looking left or right across the busy Route 89. Although I am slower than allowed, I have to do an emergency stop in order to avoid an accident. Without ABS this would certainly have meant two write-offs. At Burger King in Salina I eat a huge burger for very little money. Then I continue to Panguitch and up to Bryce Canyon. Bryce Canyon's sandstone formations were eroded to bizarre columns by the rain of thousands of years. The reddish colour and the warm evening light make it even more beautiful. Most lookouts are best viewed in the evening, so I need to hurry to explore them. I drive straight to Rainbow Point, where I do the Bristlecone Loop Trail and enjoy breathtaking views. An enormously strong and ice-cold wind blows. Then I stop at Black Birch Canyon, at Ponderosa Canyon, at Agua Canyon and the hugely impressive Natural Bridge, which is actually an arch. Then I continue to Farview Point from where there is a long stretch without lookouts, until I arrive at Paria view and Bryce Point. Meanwhile, the sun is almost too low, wide areas are now already in the shadow. I explore the stunning Inspiration Point. Back to the Visitors Centre, where they recommend to trade my two day passes tomorrow against an annual pass for all parks. I will gladly do so. Still visit Fairyland Point, which already has more shadows than light. Then I drive to Bryce Canyon Pines Campground, where I check in for the night. It is only two U.S. Dollars more expensive than camping in the park, but it has showers and Internet.

22.10.2008 Bryce Canyon-Zion National Park At 4am an icy cold creeps up. I close the head-end of the newly-bought sleeping bag, which is supposed to be for up to -17C. But I feel the cold. As I wake up at 7:30h, there are large ice flowers on the windscreen. Take a hot shower, then I leave everything as is in the boot and ride off, to warm myself up with the car heater. Trade my two single entrances to national parks plus 30 USD against a year pass for all parks. Now I won't have to pay any more entrance fees for National Parks. Visit first Sunrise Point and then Sunset Point, both very cold. Then again to Inspiration Point, Paria View and Bryce Point. A busload of Scandinavian tourists arrives. I leave the park and ride in direction Zion National Park. Get quite a fright when I have to add 2lt of oil at Carmel Junction. It gets a bit less dramatic considering the 800 miles (1300km) I have done in the meantime. As I arrive at the Zion National Park, I enter on the Zion-Mount Carmel Highway. Make numerous stops at picturesque places. There is a short tunnel, then a long one which may only be used one-way, probably because it is so narrow. At the Visitor Centre I inquire about the most efficient way to visit the park. Then I check in at the campsite, a unnecessary measure as it doesn't fill up in the evening. The Zion National Park - what pleasant surprise - may not be visited by car, they provide a free shuttle bus. First I explore the Temple of Sinawava and do the Riverside Walk, which enters the Canyon until it gets pretty narrow. Then I take the bus to Big Bend, where I take a few snaps, then to Weeping Rock, where I explore the said rock, an overhanging cliff where a trickle of water runs off. Then to Zion Lodge, where I first visit the Lower Emerald Pool, then the Middle Emerald Pool and also the Upper Emerald Pool. In contrast to the given times of several hours, it only takes me a couple of minutes. From here I walk back to the Grotto, about a mile away. Then I ride by bus to the Court of the Patriarch, with a view on the three mountains Abraham, Isaac and Moroni. By bus back to the South Campground. Spend the evening with my campsite neighbours, Jens and Silke from Osnabrueck.

23.10.2008 Zion National Park-Monument Valley I leave at 8am, in direction Page. I stop at Mount Carmel Intersection where I gas up and get something to drink. Then I continue to Page, stop at the dam. At the lookout I meet a young Japanese who cycled from Alaska to here. At Burger King I munch a hamburger. Then I continue driving up to the Navajo National Monument. I stop at the Tsegi Overlook where I get a good view of the Canyon. I hike the Aspen Trail up to the Rest Forest at the bottom of the canyon - all around is steppe - then back and on the Sandal Trail up to the Betatakin Overlook. Interesting are the 13th Century Navajo ruins in a recess in the sandstone cliff, which may be seen on the other side of the valley. Then I continue to the surprisingly big city Kayenta, in the midst of the desert, then to Monument Valley. I pay for the entrance fee and the campsite and ride off in the evening light, to explore the park. The road is a rough dirt road, only suitable for SUVs. I visit West Mitten, East Mitten, Merrick Butte, Elephant Butte. In the back-light the Three Sisters. Camel Butte, the particularly poorly accessible John Ford Point (with a cenotaph for Ericson Cly, probably fell in the war), the Hub, then Totem Pole, Yei Bi Chei and Sand Springs at the foot of Spearhead Mesa, Artists Point with a good view on Spearhead Mesa, North Window and the Thumb. Then I return to the campsite.

24.10.2008 Monument Valley-Page (Lake Powell) When I wake up I peep through the window and see the sun rising over Monument Valley. A great vista. When I am ready with my camera, I can almost document the sunrise. Three dogs come to greet me. I give them some of my stale bread and they devour it. I then follow the sign "Wildcat Trail". Well, there are hardly any signs and the stone markers disappear at times. I get lost, backtrack, try the other path at the fork and find the right path again. The path takes me around West Mitten Butte. The second time the markers suddenly stop and it is impossible to determine which of the paths would be the one. I get lost, but I can see my car parked on top of the cliff about two miles away, so I decide to just walk across the desert in direction of my car. There are a few small

canyons that I have to cross, and in the end the steep ascent to the campsite, but I do succeed. All the while the pack of dogs was merrily following me, clowning around and here and there digging after a rabbit or a prairie dog. I gratify them with some more stale bread and start the drive back to Page. In Kayenta I fill up with incredibly cheap gas - 2.66 per gallon - and this is enough to take me to Page, where I think I arrive around 1pm, but because Page is in Arizona, it is only noon. So when I get to Glen Canyon Dam, they tell me that the tour is already full. I drive back into town to the Tourist Office, where I get a map and some minimal information about the sights. I return to the dam, where the tour soon begins. We are taken onto the dam wall, then inside and into the powerhouse, where huge GE turbines generate a maximum of 1.3MW of electrical current. The turbines are soon to be replaced by stainless steel ones from Alstom Brazil. I then visit the lake access near the bridge. Afterwards, I drive to the hostel, where I check in. Greg, the owner says that it was not busy, so I get a dorm all to myself. I then drive to Wahweap, where I do the Lakeshore Drive. There are several vistas of Lake Powell, but it is more aimed at people with their own boat. I then drive to Lone Rock, where the last mile is on sand. I'm praying not to get stuck, because every now and then I can feel the wheels churning. Eventually I feel how I get stuck, but manage to wriggle out. But a branch gets stuck underneath and has to be taken out. I make the pictures of Lone Rock, then I carefully ride back to the tarmac road. I stop at the lake access near the bridge and take some snaps of the evening light. Back at the hostel, I enjoy a shower and Internet.

25.10.2008 Page I visit first the Horseshoe Bend Outlook, where I hike the 3/4 miles to the lookout. A great view, but it is much too early, the flat sun does not reach the bottom of the Canyon. I proceed to the Lower Antelope Canyon, where I must pay \$26 entrance fee. There is not even a tour! However, the Slot Canyon is quite impressive, because the sun shines from above into it and lets the sandstone walls appear in warm colours. I take many photos. Then I drive back to Horseshoe Bend Outlook, hike again the way down. Now the sun is high enough, the bottom of the Canyon is at least partially lit up. I can take a couple of good snaps. Then I drive to Burger King, where I eat two One-Dollar-meals. That is - to my astonishment - far too much and I almost cannot finish them. Afterwards, I drive to the Upper Antelope Canyon, where I once again pay \$25 for a guided tour. After all, here I get much better value. First, we are driven by SUV about three miles through the desert to the Canyon. Then the guide helps us with the photos, tells us how to take best them, tells something about the acoustics of the Canyon. The Slot Canyon is partially closed at the top, so that very little light penetrates to the bottom, although it is midday and the sun stands vertically. My photos don't come out well, it's too dark for my junk camera. Then I return to Page, where I leave the car at the 17th Street and begin the Rim Walk. The path is barely marked. It is miles along the airfield, with views of the Navajo Coal Power Plant. Then a piece is missing, because in the meantime new houses were built. The western part of the path is much better and much more beautiful. There are a lot of hares, which show little shyness and jump around everywhere. Finally, I get back to the car and drive back to the hostel where I Skype with my brother Daniel, when Windows Vista cuts the connection suddenly and reboots, because it secretly downloaded some update.

26.10.2008 Page-Grand Canyon Before leaving, I chat with Greg, the owner of the hostel. Then I drive to Grand Canyon. The oil loss of the car has worsened. I keep having to add oil. On two lookouts before getting into the National Park I get a taste of what I have to expect. At one, I buy some curios. I enter the Grand Canyon National Park via the East Entrance. There I stop at Navajo Point, Lipan Point, Moran Point, Grandview Point and some more. At the Grand Canyon Village I stop at Mather Point. I ask at the Visitors Centre how to structure my tour. With the Green Bus I ride to Pipe Creek Vista and South Kaibab Trailhead, from where I hike to Yaki Point. On the way there I meet some biologists who count raptors. As I arrive at Yaki Point, one of them is holding a lecture on raptors in the Grand Canyon. then I take the bus back to the Visitors Centre and ask for campsites. They tell me that there are plenty. Thus I cancel my hostel bed in Williams and book two nights at the campground. Unfortunately, I get a site about a mile from the entrance. I will thus not be able to use the showers which are near the entrance. By bus to Yavapi Observation Point and walk from there to the El Tovar Hostel, where I watch the sunset. As the sun is very flat, there are lots of shadows. At the railway station I watch a quite tame deer which I can approach quite close. Then the bus arrives to take me back to the campground.

27.10.2008 Grand Canyon In the morning I walk to the bus stop, but as there is no bus right now, I walk to the rim, where I catch a bus to Heritage Point Transfer, I drop off there and start hiking the Bright Angel Trail. I soon meet an elderly Dane, who is now living in Long Beach and is still in excellent shape. We walk and chat together. A good part of the path is still in the shadow and thus cool. At the bottom, the Grand Canyon looks quite different: Wider, greener, flatter. In Indian Garden my old problem with the pains in the left ankle starts once more. I have to break off. The Dane walks to Phantom Ranch, while I hobble to the 1.5m distant Plateau Point. From there one can see the Colorado River. Then I start backtracking. I watch a squirrel, how it collects nuts in a bush. For some time I walk with a German from Duesseldorf. Then again on my own. Then I meet a group of three Swiss from Haerkingen/Aargau, with whom I first chat, then we walk together to the top. One of them works for ABB as commissioning engineer, just like my brother did. At the rim we walk to Mather Point, from where they take me by car to the campground.

28.10.2008 Williams I get up very early and drive to the rim in order to watch the sunrise. There are quite a few other tourists who had exactly the same idea. First, I go to Yavapai Point, where I do not have a good view. Therefore, I continue to Mather Point, which is terribly overcrowded, but offers a slightly better view. Then the sun rises over the

rocks, I shoot my pictures. Back to the campground, where I wash and repack my luggage. Then I drive off to Williams. There are still 50 miles to go and my tank is almost empty, but since I've replaced the rubber hoses, the car is much more economical and easily makes it to the first cheap gas station in Williams. Then I check in at the hotel - how cool: The Grand Canyon Hotel offers me a single room instead of the dorm bed booked, at the same price! Now I must first get on the Internet and immediately all sorts of people contact me whom I've neglected in recent days. I chat with Rudi, speak to Jarek, finally manage to call Aunt Erna. Then I wash the engine of the Volvo with a steam cleaner and drive to Malone Garage, with whom I agree that I leave the car with a hot engine. I drive on the highway and ride at 75 mph, then back to Malone Garage, where we take the car on the lift. And indeed, it splurts from the turbocharger return oil line. I finally know what is wrong. The O-ring at the bottom of the pipe is defective. A repair is not possible, there are no spares available here. Via the Internet I try to find out how to get hold of the O-ring, but it will be difficult, it will take several days. On top of that, I am not sure which make turbocharger I have. Then I call Volvo Las Vegas, they quote 300 USD for the repair. But probably this is my best chance. Sealing with two components putty would be an option, but then it would be impossible to repair it properly. Reluctantly I make a repair appointment with Volvo. Then lunch at Jack-In-The-Box - expensive and bad. From the Visitors Centre I get a guide to the Historic City Walk and go on sightseeing tour: Santa Fe Railway Depot (now Visitors Centre) with Warehouse, the Grand Canyon Railway Depot (still train station) with a great steam locomotive in front, former Windmill Cafe, Polson Building, Sultana Saloon and Vaudeville theatres, Pollock Building, 1930s gas station (now cafe) with hot rod on the roof, seven shop buildings on the south side of Route 66, the former Duffy Bros Grocery Store, the former Citizens Bank, the Grand Canyon Hotel (where I stay), four shops (1907) adjacent to the Hotel Bowdon Building of 1947, the Saloon Row on Railroad Avenue (now only two buildings, a third one was demolished), the Methodist Church. Then I walk to the Wild West Junction, where there is a replica of a Wild West village, similar to a movie set. Then I walk to Safeway, where I buy water and fruit.

29.10.2008 Williams-Las Vegas Checked out early in the morning, loaded my car and drove off. It is sunny and hot weather. The landscape is monotonous. In Kingman I gas up and have to fill up loads of oil. I stop at the Hoover Dam and, although I am already late, take part in a guided tour. First we are shown a movie about the dam, which was already built in 1935, then we may enter the dam, see the water tunnels which vibrate strongly, then we are taken to the machine room on the Nevada side, where there are 6 generators. Eventually we are taken to the museum, which I skip, because I am late, and the viewing platform. Now I am already far too late, the exercise has taken 1.5h. I continue in direction Las Vegas, where I follow the instructions of Google Maps and arrive exactly (but not on the fastest route) at Volvo Las Vegas. There I leave the car for the necessary repairs. They tell me somewhat scoldingly, that it was dripping oil all over the entrance. I am taken back to the city, to Binions Casino, where I have a room. Then my cellphone rings and I get the very bad news: The repairs are going to be absurdly expensive, all rubber tubes are rotten and have to be ordered and replaced. Generously they offer me a 10% discount, which is not very helpful at these prices. I have no other choice but to reluctantly accept, because I cannot drive this scrap any further. In the meantime I have invested almost the entire purchase price into repairs. It is a bottomless pit, a dreadful piece of junk, which is falling to pieces. And this will certainly not be the last repair. Walk into town, walk along the strip. Have a very expensive and bad supper at Hennessy's Pub.

30.10.2008 Las Vegas In the morning I have a hamburger for breakfast, then by bus to the Excalibur, then to the Luxor. Explored the MGM Grand. Each of these casinos is full of slot machines and poker tables. At the MGM Grand I take part in a pre-screening of a TV show. It is a dead-boring TV serial, though, which I do write about in my evaluation I have to hand in. By bus to the Chinese Buffet, where I eat plenty and good. To the New York New York, the Monte Carlo, the Planet Hollywood, Paris, Ballys, Bill's Gambling Hall and Saloon, Flamingo. Volvo calls to tell me that my car would be ready tomorrow morning. By bus back to Fremont Street, where I go to a cafe with terribly slow WiFi. I meet an Englishman there. By bus back to the strip, where I watch the show "Sirens of Treasure Island" with the two big pirate ships in front of the casino, one of them really sinks during the performance. Then I watch three musical fountain shows in front of the Bellagio. I gamble the last Dollar away of the twenty Dollars I reserved for gambling at the Riviera, before I take one of the few and ultra-slow Deuce buses back to Fremont Street.

31.10.2008 Las Vegas-Los Angeles In the morning I call Volvo Las Vegas, they say that my car is ready. I run quickly to the post office, but it is still closed. Shortly afterwards Nora, Volvo's driver, calls, and tells me when she was going to fetch me at the hotel. I run again to the post office, but now there is a queue of around 20 people there, who laugh at me, because obviously it would take hours until it was my turn. I leave it. Nora then picks me up and takes me to Volvo, where I have to pay the high bill - 425 USD - but in return, for the first time, my Volvo is losing no more oil. I drive off. There is a huge traffic jam along the Strip on Interstate 15. When I'm finally through, I make good headway. I can now drive a little faster, because I have more oil in the engine, which can dissipate the heat better. In the ghost town of Calico, I stop. The entrance fee is much higher than usual because of Halloween. The houses are thus adorned with skeletons and bones and torn-off body parts made of rubber. Unfortunately, the former silver- and borax mine town has been more or less completely rebuilt, because after 1915 there was not much left. It is somewhat similar to Disneyland, in any case not for me, so take a walk through a mine and then decide to proceed, in order to arrive during daylight in LA. In the agglomeration of LA there is a traffic build-up, and that at 70mph! Suddenly all the signs say San Diego. I

fear I have passed a turnoff, and want to leave the highway. So I get onto Highway 210, but for a long time it has no off ramp. Finally, I can stop and study the map. Not so bad, the 210 goes to the same direction, suddenly there is a turnoff to 605th. I stop again, consult the map and take this turnoff. Actually it leads me back to I-10 West, almost to the hostel. Shortly before the Hostel the Google maps instructions don't match the actual road, there is an unlisted intersection. I stop at a gas station and ask for directions, then I find the Hosanna Hostel without any problems. It is run by a Korean and in the middle of Koreatown! I check in.

1.11.2008 Los Angeles By Metro to 7th Street/Metro Centre. As I am riding in the Metro, I get a sudden attack of severe diarrhoea. At my destination, I run into the first fast-food place I see, but their toilets are locked. I run to the Rite Aid Pharmacy Supermarket across the street. They do have a toilet, but it is occupied. With difficulty I wait until it free and rush in. Just in time. Thereafter I walk to the nearby Visitor Centre, where I pick up three brochures on Historic City Walks and some maps. I walk first to the historic Pueblo de Los Angeles. Mexicans all over. They are celebrating “el Dia de los Muertos”, skeletons and people dressed up as skeletons everywhere. I visit the Catholic Church Plaza, the Town Plaza, the Firehouse Museum, Felipe de Neve Statue, Olvera Street, the historic Avila Adobe house, the Sepulveda House. On the Placita de Dolores is a tent city, they are having a hunger strike in favour of illegal immigrants. I then continue to Union Station, built in 1939, even today still an oasis of luxury. From here to Patsoura Transit Plaza and the MTA building, the administration building for the Metropolitan Transport Authority, with its murals. I get back into Union Station, from here the large mural with personages of all races is very prominently visible. Continue through the Pueblo de Los Angeles, quickly peep into the Nuestra Senora Reina de Los Angeles Church, where a wedding is just about to start - the stretch Hummer Limo is already parked outside. Walk to the gate to Chinatown and through it. Explore Chinatown and have lunch in a small Chinese Vietnamese restaurant. Walk past the US Courthouse to the Fletcher Bowron Square with its weird Triforium statue. Across the footbridge to City Hall East, where I look at the mural above the entrance, then to the Roybal Federal Building, where there is the “Molecule Man” statue and the frieze “The New World” by Tom Otterness. From here I walk to Little Tokyo, where I visit the “Go for Broke” Monument to the Japanese American soldiers, the “Friendship Knot” and the Challenger 7 monument. Again I have a violent bout of diarrhoea and there are no public toilets whatsoever here. I search and search and when it is almost too late I find a fast-food store. But the toilet just eats up my quarter and doesn’t open. My second attempt is also fruitless. Eventually one of the employees opens it for me. I am saved. From here to the Los Angeles Times Building with the Globe Lobby, which is closed but the Globe is visible through the window. In the meantime, it is raining hard. To the city hall, unfortunately closed to the public. To the Court of Flags (which are limp in the pouring rain), the Civic Mall and the Criminal Courts Building. I duck under a roof, where all the homeless are also gathered, so I quickly leave again. To the Performing Arts Centre, where Jacques Lipchitz’s “Peace on Earth” fountain is situated in the centre. The round Mark Taper Forum is very impressive. South is the ultra-modern Disney Concert Hall built by architect Frank Gehry. I continue to the modern Cathedral of our Lady of the Angels, built by Spanish architect Jose Rafael Moneo. the building looks awful from the outside, like a nuclear power station, but inside it is quite all right. They just have a Latino wedding, the service is in Spanish and English. From here I follow the signs to the historic city centre. I walk down Broadway with its Chinese and Latino shops. Then my left ankle starts causing me pain again and I have to head towards 7th Street Metro. There after some rest my ankle gets a bit better so I decide to take the Metro to Hollywood Boulevard. I drop off at Hollywood/Highland. Glitzy shops everywhere. At the Chinese Theatre there is some function going on. The pavement is cordoned off, there are spotlights and cameras everywhere and I have to cross the road. I walk north-west up to the L. Ron Hubbard Building and then back (past more scientology strongholds). There are stars with names of movie and entertainment celebrities on the pavement, I even find the one of Arthur Cohn from Switzerland. I battle to find the entrance to the Hollywood/Vine station, as the entire block is under construction. Back to the hostel, where a new guest has arrived, who is snoring very loudly.

2.11.2008 Los Angeles I love this city, so I am very excited to continue my sightseeing today. I start with the Wilshire Angels Walk. It is raining hard, I use my umbrella. Right where my hostel is, on Western Avenue, there are the Getty Oil Headquarters and the still operating Wiltern Theatre. Walk past modern Wilshire Park Place, Wilshire Colonnade and Aroma Wilshire Center. The Wilshire Boulevard Temple is a huge Synagogue, built in 1929. On to the 1969 St. Basils Catholic Church, with a very unusual statue of Our Lady of the Angels in front. Looked at the murals in Wilshire/Normandie Metro Rail Station. Further down the road is the Romanesque Wilshire Christian Church, next door the Indonesian Consulate in the former home of Auburn-Cord Automobiles. Across the street Tishman Plaza (shopping centre), on Normandie Avenue The Langham Apartment Hotel, where Ronald Reagan used to stay. The Equitable Building is a faceless skyscraper, next door the Brown Derby Plaza with its weird cupola, behind is the Chapman Market, a shopping centre built in the style of a Spanish fortress, then the Gaylord, the Immanuel Presbyterian Church, the 1920s Wilshire Office Building, the huge brick Talmadge Building, the South Korean Consulate, the 1939 Wilshire Galleria, the lovely 1929 Bullock’s Wilshire Department Store, today a part of Southwestern University School of Law, the small Clark building, the huge square block of the former Town House Hotel. Off Wilshire is the mirror-like Los Angeles Superior Court Building, the Anglican First Congregational Church, behind the Precious Blood Catholic Church. Right across the Felipe de Neve Library (1929). Youngsters play soccer in the Lafayette Recreation Center. In the meantime, the rain has stopped and the sun has come out. Impressive the whiteness of the Bryson apartment

building and the similar Wilshire Royale. Past the La Fonda Restaurant and branched off to the Ashbury Apartment Hotel. Past the Mexican consulate and the memorial for the Hungarian insurrection of 1956 on Jozsef Cardinal Mindeszent Square. Peeped into the deserted but impressive Park Plaza Hotel. Looked at the modernist American Cement Building with its concrete latticework. At the corner of the park is the Harrison Gray Otis Statue (he looks rather like Jan Smuts) with the paperboy statue nearby. Through Macarthur Park and along the lakeside. To the Wilshire Theatre, today a Hispanic Market, with a mural depicting Edward James Olmos and Jaime Escalante. Here I check out the Dollar Store and buy some rubbery but cheap bagels. Walk along Wilshire into town. Pop in at Home Depot. On Figueroa Street I quickly have a look at the Engine Co No 28 House and take the DASH Weekend Bus (only 25c!) and ride, to the great surprise of the driver, the entire loop, first north to LAUSD headquarters and then south along Figueroa, past LA convention centre, Mount St. Mary's College, AAA of Southern California, Felix Motors, to the University of Southern California (USC). At the Convention Centre I drop off and start the Figueroa Angels Walk. Visit the Convention Centre Annex with its terrazzo map floor. Past the Gilbert Lindsay Memorial (made up of photo tiles) to the Staples Centre Stadium. Impressive the bronze statue of Ervin "Magic" Johnson. To the Standard Oil Building, the Petroleum Building (both on Olympic Blvd), the FIDM and Grand Hope Park. Then back to the 1925 Figueroa Hotel with a dark and homely interior. Across the road is the Variety Arts Centre. Visited the strange group of sculptures "Homage to Cabrillo Venetian Quadrant". Past the Original Pantry Cafe to the intimidating Zanja Madre Courtyard. To the 1990s Ernst & Young Plaza and 7+Fig Shopping Centre, which is built three storeys deep into the ground. Past the Wilshire Grand Hotel and the 7th & Figueroa Streets high-rise to the modern skyscraper Bank of the West Plaza. To the slightly decaying Jonathan Club. Across City National Plaza with its fountain sculpture by Herbert Bayer. They are shooting a commercial for Pantene. I chat with the security officer. To Maguire Gardens with its fountains and past the huge and jail-like brick structure of the California Club to the Standard Hotel, whose only outstanding attribute is the upended sign. In front, there are umpteen young ladies lined up for the Pantene commercial. Across the street is the unremarkable Pegasus Building. Past Roosevelt Building. In front of the Fine Arts Building they are shooting a commercial for some Nachos. I enter the hall but am immediately expelled again (I don't heed to that and still look at the richly detailed artwork). Across the street is the Barker Brothers Building. See the strange ceiling murals of 7th Street/Metro Centre Station. I then stroll around Broadway, return on 6th in direction Wilshire Boulevard. Walk into a gay demo, apparently there is some vote on some gay issues this weekend. Return to Wilshire Boulevard, where I walk back to the 99c-Store and by ample food to replenish my exhausted travel stocks. By Metro back to Wilshire/Western.

3.11.2008 Los Angeles Today started slow. First I got into a long Skype- and MSN Chat. When the banks opened, I went to Washington Mutual, but they were crammed with people. So I walked west on Wilshire to the next branch, where there were much less people and I could change my travellers cheques. I then went back to the Hostel, where I called Christian Gerig and congratulated him to his newly-born son Florin. I then research which studio would offer the most authentic tour. NBC offers a studio tour where nothing is made up - real stages, real shows. Unfortunately, it is far off any public transport. So I quickly eat lunch and then get into the car and drive through heavy traffic to their studios in Burbank. But this is the first time Googlemaps sets me up: I arrive at a completely wrong address. Fortunately I had memorised the map and made my way to 3000 Alameda Ave, where I do find NBC. I buy a ticket for a studio tour at 14h. There are only four of us. They take us through the studio complexes, show us memorabilia, mainly from Jay Lenos Tonight Show. We may peep into some stages, but the Tonight Show stage is not accessible, as they had already started preparing it for the show. It is quite amazing, how many spotlights there are on the ceiling of the soundstages. In front of the building, on a labelled parking, is one of Jay Leno's 200 cars - a probably custom-made Audi. At the end of the tour I am told that I may have a complementary ticket to the Tonight Show. I gladly accept. The ticket does not guarantee access to the show, so I stand in a line and wait my turn. The guests are seated group by group - the studio must always appear full. I do make it in. The show is just amazing - I am sitting a meter from Kevin Eubanks and see Jay Leno very, very close. The best part is, as usual, his stand-up comics. Then a woman, Julie Scardina, introduces some wild animals. An anorexic starlet, Kate Walsh, is interviewed. A country group, Sugarland, plays. During every break, when they change the stage in a jiffy, Kevin Eubanks band plays. When we have to applaud, a sign "Applause" comes on. After an hour, the show is recorded and we have to leave the studio. I drive home - in the meantime I know my way in Hollywood and Burbank quite well - quickly go to the post office to post my last photos to Sevi and then continue to Wal-Mart, where I return my warm sleeping bag - the compression bag had split up. Unfortunately, they don't have this type here so I just get my money back and still have to find a replacement somewhere. I buy a MP3-Player, so I can eventually continue listening to the audio books, and load it. Make a big steak for supper, which someone had forgotten in the freezer, for myself and my roommate.

4.11.2008 Los Angeles-Phoenix AZ Early in the morning I get up, pack and drive off. I am lucky: The morning traffic has not yet begun. I get into a traffic jam on the way to the city centre and then again in the suburb of Alhambra, but to my great surprise, I am almost entirely out of the suburbs after an hour. Between Banning and Cabazon, I stop at a huge shopping centre with factory stores and buy a replacement for the returned sleeping bag at the Columbia factory shop, this time in first-class quality and hardly more expensive. Then I drive on. Pass countless wind generators. At Chiriaco Summit I have to gas up and there is a General Patton Museum, which I don't visit, but there are a few tanks in front of it. Already at 17h I arrive in Phoenix, but because of the time difference it is one hour later here. The HI Hostel is run by

a cheerful, spleeny woman. I do a short walk to Safeway's to buy something to eat.

5.11.2008 Phoenix AZ I walk into the city centre, to the Visitors Centre. There I get a map and information about the sights. I then take the free(!) Government Loop Bus to 15th Ave, to visit the Arizona Mining and Mineral Museum. There are many very attractive displays, in particular much malachite and azurite and some huge copper nuggets, but unfortunately not very well arranged. It appears a bit stuffy and dusty. I then leave for the 10am tour of the Capitol. The tour guide, an old lady, does and does not get ahead with her recollection of completely obvious and trivial details. Even the story of the Pearl Harbour survivor, contents of which are quite gripping, appears flat. So I leave the tour and explore the museum on my own. On the first floor, there is Arizona's state symbols (state seal, -colours, -flag, -anthem, -flower, -bird, -neckwear, -gemstone, -fish, -mammal, -reptile, -amphibian, -fossil, -butterfly...but not yet state toilet paper), the Gratitude Train (of the French after WW2) and USS Arizona (which was sunk at Pearl Harbour). On the second floor it is the Mars space project, Arizona government offices, the governor's office, water vs. rattlesnakes, Secretary of State's office and Arizona game and fish. On the third floor the rather shabby House Chamber, the Road to Statehood, Bill Becomes Law and Nature's Mirror. On the fourth floor are the plaster figures of Arizona's past and the Gallery of the Chamber. I take the bus back to the centre. There I visit the Superior Court complex, the historic City Hall, the Goode Building and across the road the Wells Fargo Tower and the present City Hall. I then visit the Wells Fargo Museum, which tells the history of the bank, founded by Henry Wells and William G. Fargo in San Francisco on July 13, 1852. They originally offered stagecoaches, banking services, gold trade, safekeeping, fund transfer and mail. The express services were nationalised in 1918, the bank remained. There is a stagecoach and some telegraphic equipment on display, as well as guns and some movie excerpts. After a quick lunch I continue to Heritage Square, where there are replicas of historical houses. I continue to the Heard Museum, where they have Indian art, Indian artefacts, a documentary of the ill-advised Indian re-education campaign, displays about the different Indian tribes in Arizona, some Inuit art and some (in my opinion here misplaced) international Aboriginal collectors items. I walk back to the Hostel, pick up my car and drive to the Desert Botanical Garden. See the many cacti, some of them bizarre. Visit the Sybil B. Harrington Cactus Gallery with an international collection of cactus under a weird steel canopy, do the serenely beautiful Desert Discovery Trail. Branch into the Plants and People of the Sonoran Desert Trail, with a Saguaro forest, a Pima house and an Apache house and Hispanic gardens. I then branch off to the Sonoran Desert Nature Trail with more Saguaro and Palo Verdes, a tree with green bark, so it can continue photosynthesis even after shedding its leaves. The sun is setting, the entire park in a golden glow. Outstandingly beautiful. At the Webster Auditorium I branch off to the Ullman Terraces. The Herb Garden is already closed. So I walk back and do the entire Desert Discovery Trail again, because now the sky is dark and the lighting is on. On my ride back into the Centre, I have a most stunning view over the city lights before the background of a red sky. Back at the Hostel, the landlady shows me a cell phone that one guest has left behind. We discuss what to do with it. After a short while I find the saved phone number. One says "Daddy" so I skype this number (the cell phone's battery is flat) and indeed talk to the father of the young lady who lost the phone. He is going to send a money order for the postage and receive the phone back. Late at night Brooks, an American Portuguese commercial pilot, comes in. We chat until midnight.

6.11.2008 Phoenix-Tucson I get up early, but the Internet which died last night, is still not working. So I call the Hostel in Tucson and make sure that my reservation is held. Then I take Brooks to the airport - he flies to Hawaii. Thereafter I drive rapidly to Tucson and arrive shortly before noon. I check in at the Roadrunner Youth Hostel. Then I drive off again to the Visitors Centre. There I get information about Saguaro National Park and a guide to the Historic City Walk. Then I eat at a supermarket and continue via Gates Pass in direction Saguaro National Park. I stop at the Desert Museum. Visit the museum, some of which is almost identical to the Botanical Garden in Phoenix, but with animals - fantastically well presented, there are hardly any fences visible, and animals living underground may be observed in their caves. Furthermore, there is a beautiful and interesting exhibition of minerals and a deceptively well-made imitation of a cave of stalactites and stalagmites. By the time I've seen all, it is four o'clock and I have to hurry. Drive to Saguaro National Park, where I first do a hike around the Visitors Centre, then the Desert Discovery Nature Trail. The cacti, here in free wilderness, are as varied as at the Desert Museum. Then I drive the Bajada Scenic Loop Trail, a dirt road. Hike the Valley View Overlook Trail, through saguaro cacti. Then I drive to Signal Hill, where I watch the sunset. I quickly want to do a brief hike, which says 0.9 miles. It is already dusk. But the trail suddenly stops. I've already gone too far and would not like to backtrack, because it will soon be completely dark. So I just run across, according to compass direction south and indeed easily find the way back to the parking lot. But I am pretty relieved! Drive back to the hostel.

7.11.2008 Tucson In the morning, I start the Historic El Presidio Trail: Armory Park, Independent Order of Odd Fellows Hall, Hotel Congress where the Dillinger Band stayed, historic Railroad Depot, Fox Theatre (bioscope - South African for cinema), Pima County Courthouse, Presidio San Agustin del Tucson (partial replica), Telles Block (Old Town Artisans), Tucson Museum of Art, Mormon Battalion Square (where they have a fair), Soldado de Cuera Monument, Allande Footbridge, Garces Footbridge, Plaza de Mesilla, Sosa-Carrillo-Fremont house (where I take part in a guided tour), Jacome Art Panel and Tucson Convention Center, El Tiradito (The Wishing Shrine), La Pilita Museum, Carrillo Elementary School, Teatro Carmen, former Ferrin House (prominent Jewish citizen), Barrio Viejo, Temple of Music and Art, St. Augustine Cathedral. I then walk back to the Hostel, fetch the car and drive to where I thought the Pima Air and

Space Museum would be. But I am at the wrong end of the Davis Monthan Air Force Base and have to drive around it. The Museum is overwhelming. Hundreds of historical army and civilian planes are here, some of them uttermost rare. Many of the airplanes are in working condition and are from time to time used. I take part in a guided tour of the "Aircraft Boneyard", where superfluous army planes are first stored and after a certain time cannibalised for spares. We see everything, from F-16 fighter planes to B-52 bombers, Boeing 737s, helicopters and even missiles. Back at the Museum, I continue marvelling at the endless collection of fantastic historic airplanes until I am asked to leave because they want to close for the day. This is probably the best Aircraft Museum I have visited so far. Back at the Hostel I walk back to the fiesta near the Pima County Courthouse. A bizarre rock band in the make-up of "Kiss" plays.

8.11.2008 Tucson-El Paso I get up early and as the staff doesn't come in at 7 as promised, I make my own breakfast. I leave at 7:15 and drive in direction Chiricahua National Monument. There is no traffic in town, so I get out of town quickly. In Willcox I get off the freeway and have to drive another 40 miles on byroads to get to the Park. First I visit the Historical Faraway Ranch, then I drive the Bonita Canyon Drive to Massai Point, where I have a good view of the eroded rocks, which are covered in bright yellow-green lichen. I then drive to Sugarloaf, from there back to the entrance. On my way back I branch off to Fort Bowie. I ride many miles on a poorly maintained dirt road. Eventually I get to the lookout, but the ruins are still 1.5 miles away. I don't have the time to hike there, so I continue until I get back to the Freeway at Bowie. When I gas up near El Paso, I quickly eat a hamburger. I should not have done that, as I only just about get to the El Paso Hostel at the Gardner Hotel, when a violent diarrhoea strikes. It is only 17h, but already dark. I walk into town to get a decent map, which I find at the railway station, but get stuck at the Transport Museum, where they have the magnificently restored Engine #1. I am shown a movie on the restoration of this engine and another one about the Nevada Northern railway and their Engine #40.

9.11.2008 El Paso Early in the morning I do the Downtown Historic Walking Tour: Martin Building, US Post Office, Hotel Cortez, Abdou Building (wedged in a corner), Roberts-Banner Building, S.H. Kress Building (a strange tower with colourful tiles), San Jacinto Plaza (with the fibreglass statue "Los Lagartos"), Mills Building, the Centre, Plaza Theatre, the Plaza Hotel, Pioneer Plaza with a statue of Fray Garcia de San Francisco, Camino Real Hotel, Palace Theatre, Merrick Building, site of the former Stage Station, Montgomery Building (with a false front), First National Bank, Wigwam Theatre, (former) State National Bank, Acme Saloon (where John Wesley Hardin was shot), Caples Building, former popular department store, O.T. Bassett Tower, Singer Building. Then I drive to the National Border Patrol Museum. But, contrary to its leaflets, it is no longer open on Sundays. I drive back and decide spontaneously to drive into Juarez. There are no border checks. I ride around Juarez without finding any motor workshops open. They are all closed for Sunday. I then decide to park the car on the US side (for safety) and walk back. So I get into an endless queue at the customs office. After an hour's wait, it is my turn. But, to my horror, the officer is not content with my passport. He tells me to drive to the side. I am taken to a room and suddenly I am handcuffed and detained. Then they do a body search. They find nothing. I ask what they have against me and they don't give me an answer, but I understand the situation as: We don't know yet what we will accuse you of, but we will find something. Eventually the chief and his deputy, both very Mexican(!) and their English very poor, speak to me. I had entered the US on a visa waiver although I had been travelling for two years. It was not even clear whether after this time I was still a Swiss citizen, but I certainly have no right to enter the US on a visa waiver when I had been leading such an unsteady life. Subjects like myself were required to have a full visa. Furthermore, because I registered the car in my name, I had given the impression that I was a US resident. I plead with them. They are uncertain. I wait and wait, handcuffed. After an hour's time, they suddenly take my handcuffs off, return my passport and car registration and tell me that I could go. They remind me, though, that the next time they catch me crossing this border they will lock me away for good. I got the message. And I drive off quickly. A close shave, it could easily have turned nasty, I know many Mexicans who served numerous years in US prisons being accused of illegal entry. I spend the afternoon at the not very interesting El Paso Museum of History and the surprisingly good El Paso Museum of Art. But the shock still sits in my bones.

10.11.2008 El Paso-Guadalupe Mountains National Park I am leaving early, but miss the exit to Route 180. Its not worth backtracking. Only in Sierra Blanca is the next road north. The detour is 60 miles! Drive through ranch country. When I arrive in Guadalupe Mountains National Park, I decide, in spite of the problems with my left ankle, to attempt the trail to Guadalupe Peak. It is supposed to take 6 hours, but since I have only 5 hours to dusk, I have to hurry. The weather is overcast, the mountains have light spots where holes in the clouds let the sun shine through. I listen to audio books on my MP3 player. At the summit there is a storm wind which almost throws me to the valley below. The left ankle has begun to hurt, I walk like a rickety old man. I enter my name into the summit book. Then I begin to backtrack. Approx. 1 mile before the parking lot my ankle hurts so much that I can no longer continue walk properly. Stumble a few times and almost fall down the valley. Rest again. Finally, I make it back in daylight. Got to sleep very early in the car at the campsite.

11.11.2008 Guadalupe Mountains National Park-Lamesa Early in the morning I explore the historical Frijoles Ranch. Then I drive to Carlsbad Caverns, where I am one of the first guests to enter. The caves are overwhelming. Some of them are up to 50 meters high, full of stalactites and stalagmites as well as "Popcorn" and curtain-like build-ups. There are some deep holes, too, which are not accessible. A wheelchair-compatible footpath leads through the whole system. I

walk through the natural entrance with the Bat Flight Amphitheatre (which is of course only for the evenings) in a winding path down to the Bat Cave and the Devils Spring. Through the Devils Den through the Main Corridor. Chat a long time with one of the rangers at Witches Finger (actually two, one looks like a cut-off finger on top of a candle). To the Iceberg Rock, the Boneyard to the Elevator Shaft, where there are a few lovely caverns right next to it. To the Hall of the Giants with the Giant Dome and the Twin Domes, continue to the Temple of the Sun, Caveman Junction, Totem Pole, View of the Lower Cave, Top of the Cross, Mirror Lake, Bottomless Pit, Crystal Spring Dome, Rock of Ages and Painted Grotto. By elevator back to the top. In Carlsbad I refuel. I then stop at Wendy's to have a burger. Upon continuing, the engine suddenly develops problems. But when the problems seem to disappear, I continue. Halfway to Hobbs I lose power and I can only continue at 20mph. In Hobbs the power returns suddenly and I can continue normally, but only up to Seminole, where the problem appears again. I buy Octane-Booster and 3 gallons of premium gas. But the problem continues. At a garage they tell me they want to go home now and cannot solve the problem. Then the power comes back and I can drive up to Lamesa, where the engine lamp comes on and I decide to sleep in the car the yard of a garage.

12.11.2008 Lamesa-Dallas In the morning, when I try the engine, it runs normally. I drive to Snyder (along the road are wind generators, cotton fields, oil wells and refineries) and Anson, where the problem surfaces again. After consulting on the phone with Herm in Salt Lake City, I buy some Isopropanol in Abilene and add it to the gas. This seems to be the solution. I test-drive the engine. No apparent problems anymore. I get on the freeway and drive in direction Dallas. In Eastland I have to refuel. Of course, when I restart the engine, the car only creeps. At a motel I ask to use the WiFi and Google up the Volvo repair shops in Dallas and Fort Worth. If I don't make it to Dallas, I can already get out at Fort Worth. Call both of them whether they are prepared to repair a Volvo. Both of them agree. The Indian owner of the motel sees me using his Internet and although I was given permission earlier on, he chases me away. I ride the Volvo up and down a by-road until it starts running normally again. I then ride a few miles parallel to the freeway and when I am sure that I can attempt it, I hit the freeway. At Fort Worth I feel confident that the car will make it to Dallas. Just before off Ramp 34 the engine starts to cut out again. Creep to Rapid Volvo, where I can make an appointment for tomorrow. Then through the already dark city to the hostel, whereby I first get terribly lost, because construction sites are everywhere and the road signs are hard to read. Meet Ivan, the owner and check in.

13.11.2008 Dallas I get up at 6:30h, take a shower for the first time since two nights and make my breakfast. Then I drive to Rapid Volvo and bring my car in. To the train stop, but the last train has just left and I have to wait for about an hour until the next comes. A passenger gives me a day pass. I drop at Dallas Union Station. On the way there, I see that there is a firm Binswanger Glass which is probably a fellow Swiss. In the centre I go to the Visitors Centre in the Old Red Courthouse, where I get maps. Then I walk to the 6th Floor Museum in the building from where Lee Harvey Oswald shot President Kennedy. In front of the building a small collision has taken place. In Switzerland, an accident form would be filled in and then they would drive on. Here it is quite different: Three police cars, two police officers on bicycles, a fire brigade vehicle with a ladder have already arrived. And more are to come. I enter the museum. The history of Kennedy and his assassination is well and quite fairly presented. Of course you can look through the very window from which Oswald is supposed to have shot. Apparently there are still huge doubts about the theory that Oswald was alone. From here, I do the City Walk: John Neely Bryan Cabin, John F. Kennedy Memorial (like a hovering concrete cuboid), Pioneer Plaza (a bronze Longhorn Cowherd crossing a ford, complete with three bronze cowboys, quite impressive), Main Street, Pegasus Plaza, Stone Street Gardens (a restaurant street), Neiman Marcus, Thanksgiving Square Chapel and Museum, the Arts District with the Dallas Museum of Art, Crow Collection of Asian Art, the only 1902 constructed Cathedral Santuario de Guadalupe and the Morton H. Meyerson Symphony Centre. Bad news from Rapid Volvo: Because the problem no longer occurs, they do not know what is broken. But yesterday I took the car there in a broken state, and I was told to return this morning! Back to St. Paul Street, where I catch the historic McKinney Avenue Trolley for one stop. Then I walk down McKinney Ave, chat with a policeman, go past the Dallas World Aquarium and back to the West End Station. Once more massive pain in the left ankle. I wait until 16:30, then I walk back to the Dallas Museum of Art. The wait would not have been necessary: I am still on Mountain Time, and in Dallas it is one hour later, in fact 17:30. The entrance to the museum would have been free for an entire hour! Browse through the fourth and parts of the third floor, their collection of Central- and South American artefacts is small, but outstanding. Then I have to, despite my bad ankle, hurry to the station, so I can catch the train back. It takes me back to South Irving, where I take the bus almost to the hostel.

14.11.2008 Fort Worth Good news from Rapid Volvo: Shaw calls and tells me that they found the problem and fixed it. With Hendrik from Germany I walk to the South Irving railway station, where I catch the train to Fort Worth. I drop off at Fort Worth ITC from where I walk through the pretty deserted Centre. At the post office I stop and send a postcard to my brother. I then go to the bank, where I cash some travellers' cheques to pay for the car repairs. I continue to the Visitors Centre, where I get maps and then walk through the CBD and around the Tarrant County Courthouse towards the Stockyards District. As it is too far to walk, I just get onto the next bus. A passenger attempts to speak German to me, but I have to admit that I did not understand a word he said. I drop at the Stockyards. This is just like OLMA in St. Gallen, the area where the big cattle shows are held, but also Rodeos and cattle auctions. I visit the not-so-historical Stockyards Railway Station, the Cattle Pens, the Stock Exchange (which is the cattle auction place and real auctions, via

satellite direct from the ranches, take place here) and visit the Stockyards Museum there. I continue to the Cowtown Coliseum where Rodeos take place, Fridays and Saturdays at 20h. I walk past Billy Bobs, through the shops which are all pretty deserted, to the Texas Cowboy Hall of Fame. There is a very comprehensive exhibition of horse carts, but also has for every rodeo celebrity a booth with some memorabilia, some photos and a TV which plays a video about him. Now it is 15h and I have to return to the CBD to take a train back in order to pick up my Volvo. Unfortunately, there are no trains right now and I quickly visit the Fire Station No 1 - 150 Years exhibit. Then I hurry back to the station, where I am just in time to catch the train to West Irving. After a two mile walk I arrive at Rapid Volvo, where I am charged a very reasonable amount - \$100 - for the tedious repairs. Apparently the bad fuel had choked up the fuel filter, which is located in an awkward position under the car.

15.11.2008 Dallas Drive with Hendrik to the Frontiers of Flight Museum at Dallas Love Field. The Museum is not so well equipped, but it does have a few outstanding exhibits: An Apollo 7 capsule, a few Cruise Missiles, the largest of which even has a three point landing gear(!), airplane models and a interesting collection of model engines, including a 4-stroke radial engine! A particularly beautiful remote-controlled airplane model is a B-26 with retractable gear. From here I return to the Hostel where I drop off Hendrik, then I test-drive the car to determine whether the problem reappears. Drive on the highway and zip through the dense evening traffic. Somehow I find my way through the jungle of highways back to the Hostel. Then I explore historic Irving: Otis Brown House, Gilbert House, Heritage House, Caldwell House, Centennial Park. Then I walk to the Main Street shops (a few shops in historical wood-front houses) and the Heritage Park, where a few historical houses were erected.

Food in the US is still very, very cheap. If you know your way round, you can shop your groceries at the Dollar Store, where everything is one Dollar - a loaf of bread, a can of goulash, 2lt of coke... At McDonald's, Burger King or Wendy's they have Dollar menus, whereby you get a proper burger - much bigger than what you ever get in Europe - for one Dollar. But there is a lot of taxes, usually at least 10% on the purchase. And apart from Subway, where you get quite healthy sandwiches with lots of salads, the food is often greasy, unhealthy and seeing all those ultra-fat people, some of them not able to walk anymore, really makes you wonder.

16.11.2008 Dallas-Houston I leave early in the morning. The car is running fine, but much heavier on gas than before. I stop shortly before Huntsville to have a picnic with the groceries I bought yesterday. In Huntsville I gas up and visit the Texas Prison Museum. The "Walls", as the Huntsville Prison is commonly called, is famous for its prison rodeo. I then drive into town, around the prison and may even peep into the rodeo arena, which is otherwise used as a employee parking. Through very heavy traffic (and the Texans drive much more aggressively than up north) I drive to the Houston International Hostel. Nobody is in, so I venture into downtown, and Steve from Queensland, who also just arrived, is joining me. We take a tram to Main Centre, walk to the Visitors Centre, which is closed on a Sunday, and the Library and Main Square. Then we visit a Dollar Store and return by tramway to the hostel, where we both check in. Internet is outrageously expensive here - \$10 - which I am not prepared to spend.

17.11.2008 Houston I leave at 8:30 with Steve and Iacobo in direction Space Center. We follow the directions of the Hostel and get really easy to the Space Center. Here we only have to wait a short while until we are let in. We are immediately sent to NASA Tram Tour, but the first Tram tour is cancelled. In the meantime we visit the Starship Gallery: First a short movie (most of it is only sound, the picture only towards the end), then exhibits of the various NASA missions and large chunks of moon rock. Then we again try the NASA Tram Tour, but this time there is no more space. So I visit the rest of the Starship Gallery, until we try again at noon. But now Iacobo is missing. We are waiting a bit, then we decide to go anyway. We are shown Mission Control Centre, from where the Apollo moon landings were monitored. Then dummy spacecraft centre, where the astronauts can practise in the ISS space station or the Space Shuttle in actual size. Next we visit the Rockets Hall, where a real Saturn V, spare from the unlaunched Apollo 18 mission, is on display. Back in the museum, we visit the Blast Off Tour, where we are informed about the ongoing space programs and may monitor them on live screens. At the Northrop Grumman Theater we are shown the movie "To be an astronaut". Iacobo joins us again. We attend the presentation "Living in Space" where we are told about life in the ISS Space Station, then we drive back through the dense evening traffic. It is incredibly difficult to navigate, there is little signage. They reckon that the storm had blown them away, but I doubt that they ever existed. Nevertheless, we find back to the hostel without the slightest detour!

18.11.2008 Houston-New Orleans I leave at 7am, a good choice as the traffic not yet so dense. In Louisiana I quickly get bored with the straight I-10 and want to deviate to the coast. I thus turn right in Sulphur to Hackberry and Holly Beach, take the (free!) ferry to Cameron and continue to Grand Chenier. From Holly Beach onwards, all the houses are badly damaged, most of them beyond repair, only the brick houses survived. I was told that the area was hit by a flood wave. Apparently it was caused by hurricane Gustav. At New Iberia I get on the Freeway 90 which takes me almost to New Orleans. In New Orleans I follow the instructions of Google Maps, but suddenly everything is different. There is an intersection where there should be none, the off-ramp I should take does not materialise. Eventually I still find the place, but only after much unnecessary searching. The Hostel room is full of rubbish when I arrive, so I ask them to clean it.

19.11.2008 New Orleans Before breakfast, I have to clean the filthy kitchen, the microwave is encrusted with food remnants. I go to the Visitors Centre, where they reluctantly give me some information about the New Orleans Jazz National Historic Park and the self-guided walking tour of the French Quarter. I start with the Walking Tour: Kolly Townhouse, old Bank of Louisiana, old Bank of the United States, old Louisiana State Bank, New Orleans Court Building (where I am not admitted because I have a camera and a pen knife on me), Casa Faurie, Hermann-Grima-House, Maison Seignouret, Merieult House, Casa de Comercio (Spanish style), LeMonnier House, Maison de Flechier, Maison Lemonnier (the same owner as the LeMonnier House), Louisiana State Arsenal, Pirates Alley (where the Lafitte brothers dwelled), Faulkner House (where William Faulkner stayed), St. Anthony Square, Orleans Ballroom, Pere Antoinet Alley, the Presbytere (today State Museum), St. Louis Cathedral (where I take part in a guided tour), Jackson Square, Pontalba Buildings (left and right of Jackson Square, I visit the historical 1850 house), Moonwalk (along the Mississippi River), French Market, Old Ursulines Convent, Le Carpentier/Beauregard-Keyes House, Soniat House, Clay House, LaLaurie House (the mistreated servants are said to haunt the house up to now), Gallier House. I break the tour here to attend a performance of the pianist Joe Krown at the New Orleans Jazz National Historic Park. I battle to find the place, as the lady at the Visitors Centre made a line so long on the map, that it may well be two miles. Eventually I find it at the French Market. I then continue the Walking Tour: Laffittes Blacksmith Shop, Cornstalk Fence House, Miltenberger Houses, Madame Johns Legacy House (where I meet Hendrik again and visit the museum). Most houses have cast iron grids as ornaments and look very colonial. On every corner there is either a Jazz band or a lone guitarist. Lunch at Subway, my left ankle is in utter pain now. Walk to Midtown where there is still a lot of damage from Katrina visible, whole lots where all the buildings were cleared off. Then to the Basin Street Station, where I watch a video about New Orleans. Walk to the St. Louis Cemetery No 1 and then to the Louis Armstrong Park which is under reconstruction. Now my left ankle does not let me walk any further. Back by streetcar.

20.11.2008 New Orleans After breakfast I start with the Historic City Walk of the Garden District: Lafayette Cemetery, then 18 examples of typical southern mansions. Some have been damaged during Katrina and are now being repaired. Then I fetch the car to visit the more distant neighbourhoods of New Orleans. First stop is the Chalmette Battlefield (Jean Lafitte National Historic Park), where the last decisive battle against the English was won. There is a tower, the original ramparts, some guns, a southern mansion (the Malus-Beauregard House), a large soldiers' cemetery and descriptions of the battle. The Ranger is incredibly happy that finally a tourist found it's way there and I battle to leave. Then I drive through the Chalmette area and visit the damage that Katrina has caused. However, there is little to see. Here and there foundations, where a house was probably completely razed. Some houses were no longer repaired and the windows boarded up. A few commercial centres were hit hard, apparently the money for reconstruction is lacking. The streets are pockmarked with patches. But the sugar- as well as the gasoline refinery - is running. Most shops are in excellent condition. It seems more likely to depend on individuals who either died or have no money when sometimes there is still a pile of debris. Then I drive to the Wisner Boulevard, along a beautiful canal lined with mansions to Lake Pontchartrain. The lake is enormously big. Drive along the lakefront, where some devastation is still visible (but restoration is in progress), passing by some anglers. On television one has always seen this paltry wall to protect the residential areas, but in reality this wall stands along a canal, which is separated from the lake by a gate. Huge diesel pumps are at the end of the canal, where it flows into the lake. New Orleans is an outstandingly beautiful city, no wonder that the inhabitants are not going to give it up so easily. I go back to the Hostel where I park the car and take the tram to the city. To the Spanish Plaza and the Riverwalk shopping centre, certainly half a mile long. I eat there the typical "Gumbo". It tastes good, like seafood curry. Then I hear the steamship "Natchez", as it plays on the calliope. By public ferry I cross the Mississippi and I return right away. Then I visit the museum in the Cabildo, which explains the Louisiana history with too many words and too little exhibits. It's like bewitched, I constantly have to run to the loo. Finally, I return by tram, not without stopping in at Burger King having one of these fantastic \$1-salads with a \$1-burger!

21.11.2008 New Orleans-Tallahassee I am leaving very early in the morning and take US-90 in direction Biloxi. It is slow travelling, but very beautiful, with some spectacular bridges across bays and bayous. I have to stop at one pivoting bridge, as a small fishing vessel is just passing through. When I arrive in Bay St. Louis, I quickly find Julius Egloff's place, but he was not in. The house has been razed to the ground and there is only a trailer now. His dog, Zimt, was barking but he was securely chained. I started looking for the Mockingbird Cafe, where I knew Julius would be found. But it was like jinxed, as there was a funeral, all the roads were blocked off and I kept getting lost. I had to ask four times until I found it. I met Julius Egloff there and his friend Al, the baker. Al immediately promised me two loaves of special European-type bread. Julius took me to the museum, where they keep records of before and after Katrina. There are pictures of his house and his neighbours, all of which were razed to the ground. We visit a friend of Julius' who at times does car repairs to ask him whether he could patch up my exhaust, but he has no welding equipment. We then return to the Mockingbird Cafe, where Julius treats me to lunch. Al has in the meantime baked the bread and offers me not only two loaves, but also smoked salami and cheese to go with it. Now it is 14h and I have to leave as I want to hit Tallahassee tonight. I continue driving, over most amazing bridges until I get back to I-10 in Biloxi. In Mobile I leave the freeway to take the US-90 through town. As I see a quick-lube place, I stop and let them change the oil. In Bay St. Louis I must have lost the lens of my front left flicker light. So I go to a scrap yard where I cannot find a new lens, but a

few other parts which were broken. I also try to take a pretty good exhaust pot off, but due to the lack of suitable tools I don't manage until they close and have to leave it behind. In the meantime it has got dark and it makes no sense anymore to drive through Mobile, so I head back to I-10 and continue driving in direction Tallahassee. The riding is good, the cruise control works better than usual and only at 23h I stop at a Rest Area in Tallahassee, where I sleep.

22.11.2008 Tallahassee-Tampa Shortly after midnight I am woken by terrible stomach cramps. I rush to the toilet - thank God I am here and not in some crummy camp area - and it is a terrible diarrhoea. I had drunk some cranberry juice (as it is said to help a weak bladder) which obviously does not agree with me. For an hour it is to and fro to the loo. Then I eventually find some more sleep. When I wake up, my watch shows 6h, but it is actually 7h as I have once more changed time zones. I drive past Tallahassee and stop at the Car Museum. But unfortunately, on Saturdays it only opens at 10h, too late for me. I cannot wait for hours until it opens. I continue, but branch off the boring I-10 and get on the US-19. But this is as boring as the I-10. From Homosassa onwards it is one single megalopolis. There is a robot every quarter mile, and red of course. The travelling gets slow. Somewhere along the way I stop at a Wal-Mart and change the spark plugs which suffered when I had the bad gas. I arrive at the Grams Place BnB in Tampa after 15h, check in and borrow a bicycle. With the bike I cycle into the city centre. The Visitors Centre is already closed, but I get a map and some ideas what to visit at the Hyatt Hotel. I then cycle past St. Pete Times Forum to Channelside, where a cruise ship is just leaving. Then past the Aquarium to Ybor city, the historic Cuban Quarters, where the cigar factories are. Today it is more a theme park with many shopping opportunities and bioscopes. When it gets dark, I cycle back to the hostel.

23.11.2008 Tampa-Miami Beach I leave Tampa, as soon as the hostel opens its door. But the directions I have are unclear, there is one extra intersection and I get very lost. Eventually I make it onto the I-4, but miss the I-75 turnoff and have to make a 15 miles detour. The ride is fast. Shortly after the tollbooth I see the sign Everglades National Park and I follow it to City of Everglades. At the Visitors Centre of Everglades National Park I book a boat tour. We are taken into the Gulf Coast Everglades, the 10'000 islands, but there is surprisingly little to see: A few herons, ibises, pelicans and a dolphin which follows the boat for some time. The mangrove swamps, here in backwater, are pretty barren. I drive on the US-41 through the Everglades in direction Miami and stop at the HP Williams Roadside Park. There is ample wildlife: Big and small herons, many other birds, an abundance of alligators set in a pristine mangrove swamp. The difference: This is freshwater. Some of the alligators are only a few meters from the road, obviously without separating fence. I ride on in direction Miami, whereby I stop again to marvel at the beauty of the mangrove swamps. When I get to Miami, I have to ride for many miles through town. When I eventually get to I-95 I get on, but after a few hundred yards there is a sign 2nd Street. As I know that the causeway is 5th Street, I reckon to have passed it by mistake, get off the freeway, ride back and start again. This time I ride past 2nd Street and - indeed! - get to the Miami Beach Off-ramp and on the causeway to the island. On the island is dense traffic. I park the car in a forbidden place near a hotel and despite the protests of the valet rush off to 750 Collins where my hostel is supposed to be. But there is nothing. The hostel has moved. I rush back to the car and call them. They do answer the phone. Yes, they have moved a couple of days ago. They are now in 411 Washington Ave. I get directions. Get out of the narrow parking and drive there. I can park the car in a no-parking zone right in front of the hostel and check in. They are still in the process of getting everything working. They get the Internet WiFi which was dead, back to work.

24.11.2008 Miami Beach In the morning, I start with the Art Deco Walking Tour: Leslie Hotel, Carlyle Hotel, Cardozo Hotel, Winter Haven Hotel (all in streamlined Art Deco Style); US Post Office with its murals, Wolfsonian, Hotel Astor, former Tiffany Hotel, Colony Hotel. To the impressive Holocaust Memorial, a hand with fearful people protruding, some on the floor. The Visitors Centre is - closed. By bus to Omni, from there by futuristic Metro train to Government Centre, where I catch a 207 Bus to Little Havana. I ask the driver to tell me where to get off, but he forgets but gives me a transfer so I can take a 208 to SW 8th Street, from where I explore Little Havana. There is nothing spectacular see, just a few monuments and some Cuban shops. Walk down to the seashore at Brickell Key and to Bayfront Park, where there is a posh marina and many ultra-expensive yachts moored. In W Flagler Street I buy a huge duffel bag in a Chinese store. I then take the bus back. On the bus I meet a pretty young Somalian lady with whom I chat until I get off at Alton Road. Check on my car, it is still there and unharmed. To the Wolfsonian Museum, which displays mainly design from the 1930s and 1940s. Meet Miron and Hana in Calle Española. We chat until 23h. There is no peace during the night at the hostel. All the time someone is coming, going, looking for something, causing some noise.

25.11.2008 Miami Beach-Jacksonville I leave Miami shortly after eight. It is easy to navigate, the I-95 is one of the main thoroughfares through Miami. I get into a traffic jam in Fort Lauderdale, but it never completely comes to a stop. When I approach Viera, I get into a very serious traffic jam. For about an hour, I am stuck. Shortly afterwards, I get past the Cape Canaveral off-ramp. Initially, I wanted to skip this, as I imagined that it would cost an arm and a leg. But I was magically drawn towards it, I just had to see it. I paid the 40 USD entrance fee and got onto a tour of the LC-39 Observation Gantry from where one can see the crawler track and the two launch pads A and B. I then proceed to the Apollo/Saturn V Centre, where an entire Saturn V Rocket is on display, as well as the launch control of the Apollo Missions and an Apollo spaceship. From there I go to the International Space Station (ISS) centre, where we can watch the assembly plant of the ISS from a glazed gallery and explore a life-size model of the ISS. Eventually I get to the

Shuttle Launch Experience, where a space shuttle start is simulated and then visit the Rocket Garden. In the meantime it is 18:30 and they close. I drive up to Jacksonville, where I put up at the Rodeway Inn Motel.

26.11.2008 Jacksonville-Savannah I get up very early and drive off in direction Savannah. Although the distance is only 100 miles, I only arrive around 10am in the suburbs. I gas up and change the last travellers cheque. Try to find the Visitors Centre, there are signs, but no Visitors Centre. I will have to find the one in downtown. Then I drive into Savannah, whereby I take a wrong turn and have to backtrack about 5 miles. Go past the Dollar Tree Store, where I buy cleaning materials for the Volvo. In a spares store I buy tyre blackener and they give me directions into town. The directions are excellent, I find the Visitors Centre without any problem. There is no free parking in Savannah, I have to park the car at the Visitors Centre. Buy a trolley tour of the Historic Downtown. But the tour is not good; we whiz far too fast past and the comments are irrelevant. Savannah has more squares than any other city I ever visited; every three streets or so is a square, the entire centre is dotted with squares. When the tour ends, I hop off and do the more interesting parts on foot: River Street and Riverfront, City Hall, Washington's Guns (given by George Washington), Cotton Exchange, Factors Walk, Emmett Park with the Vietnam Memorial, Washington Square, Pirates House, Warren Square, Reynolds Square, Johnson Square, Wright Square, Independent Presbyterian Church, Chippewa Square with John Wesley Monument, Savannah Theatre, Colonial Park Cemetery, Franklin Square with Haiti Monument, City Market. Ride back to I-95 and back to off ramp 87, where I find a cheap motel room at Travelodge.

27.11.2008 Savannah-Charleston I try to sleep late, have a big breakfast and start out in direction Charleston. I have to leave I-95 to US-17, which has a 9 miles-long construction site. In the suburbs I steam clean my car and take pictures for the Internet. I try to follow the Google Maps directions to the hostel, but the street names are not well signposted, so that I miss it and get onto the bridge to Mount Pleasant. I have to go all the way there and back. Then I consult all the maps I have - I have no accurate map of Charleston as all Visitors Centres are closed today. But I somehow manage to find the Youth Hostel on my own. I then walk into town. Charleston is very pretty, even the outskirts are full of historic houses. I walk to Battery Park, where there are historic cannons on display. Then along East Battery Street to Tradd Street with its many beautiful houses, all of them with big steel bolts through the walls to secure them in case of another earthquake. Walk north on East Bay Street, past the Old Exchange and Provost Dungeon to Waterfront Park, with its fountains and jetty. Explore Broad Street. To Market Street, where I walk through the market. These days, there are no more vegetables or fish on sale, but curios, esoteric stuff and jewellery. To Kahal Kadosh Beit Elohim, said to be the oldest surviving Reform Synagogue in the world and the second-oldest Synagogue in the USA. North on King Street, past Marion Square. Back to the Hostel, where I wash the car again, this time manually, because it still had stains.

28.11.2008 Charleston I get up early, have a hearty breakfast and start placing ads for my car. Then I walk to the totally crowded Visitor Centre, where I buy a self-guided Historic City Walk. I follow these instructions, which partially include what I had already seen yesterday: Market Street, the megalomaniac US Customs House, Waterfront Park, South Adgers Wharf, Rainbow Row, Old Exchange Building and Provost Dungeon, Union Insurance, Old Slave Mart Museum which I visit but is utterly confusing and devoid of any useful information, Fireproof Building, Historic Charleston Foundation (a shop), Mills House Hotel (newly built in the old style), Hibernian Society Hall, Broad Street, Four Corners of Law, South Carolina Society Hall, First Scots Presbyterian Church, Nathaniel Russell House, Otis Mills House, Daniel Elliott-Huger House, Single Houses, Thomas Heyward House, Calhoun Mansion, Double House, Two Meeting Street, South Battery Homes, White Point Gardens, View of Fort Sumter, William Roper House, Edmonston-Alston House, 29 East Battery, George Eveleigh House, First Baptist Church, 69/71/78 Church Street, Heyward-Washington House, Catfish Row (in Porgy and Bess, really Cabbage Row), Dock Street Theatre (all scaffolded), French Huguenot Church, St. Philips Protestant Episcopal Church. The weather is closing up, I return to the Hostel, where I continue depleting my food stocks.

29.11.2008 Charleston-Florence As I am riding to Washington DC, along the seashore, there is heavy rain. One road even has some snow in the middle. I decide to cut to the I-95 which is more inland. Suddenly, the engine stalls. It is raining hard. On a parking lot, lying in the water, I take the fuel filter out, getting all drenched. But I can't see any fault, put it back and the car runs again. A friendly bypasser gives me some rainproof clothes. I continue on US-52 but when it turns sharply to the left in Kingstree I miss the turn and continue about 30 miles straight, until I decide that I am definitely wrong and turn around. But now the engine stalls again. I creep back into Kingstree, where nobody is prepared to touch a Volvo and eventually I find an old black man who lets me work at his shack, so I am shielded from the rain. I exchanged the fuel filter and the car runs again. But only until Florence, where the same problem reappears. In complete darkness, I change the fuel filter again and the car runs again. This time until the border of North Carolina, where I can just about roll into a Rest Area and sleep there.

30.11.2008 Florence-Lumberton In the morning, as usual the car runs fine again, so I ride into the next village Lumberville. No workshops open today. The cheap motels do not want to give me a room in the morning. So I have to take an expensive motel room, because I am so cold that I need some warm shower, warm room, warm clothes. I call the Capitol City Hostel in Washington DC and they tell me, they were not interested in my stories and I had to pay now for two nights or they would let my two mailings go back. All day I Google up Volvo pages in the Internet and check up the car, but of no avail.

1.12.2008 Lumberton-Fredericksburg VA I prepare my breakfast - despite the high price - not included here. The rain has subsided, the sun is out again, but there is an ice cold wind. I seek out OK Auto Service. The place is known to be good, but booked out for days. No chance. So I try Import Alternative Inc which specialises in European cars. They are willing to fix it today. First a loose wire connector at the fuel pump is detected. But this is not the problem. It seems that the fuel pump controller has packed up. They complete the repairs - I have to pay \$215. I drive off, get on the freeway to Fayetteville. In Fayetteville I leave the freeway, park the car and switch the engine off. Then I start it up again - the same problem reoccurs. I creep on the freeway back to Lumberton, stop again and unplug the fuel pump and plug it back in. Now the car runs fine again, I manage almost back to Lumberton, when the problem reoccurs. I do the same, but it only helps for 100 meters. Suddenly it works again, I can pull back into Lumberton, before it starts missing again. I return to the Import Alternatives Inc and complain. It is now obvious that the fuel pump has a certain position from which it cannot start up. They tell me that they could organise a new fuel pump within the day, but I had to pay \$170. I don't agree. After all, I just paid \$215 for a useless repair. We eventually agree that I pay for the fuel pump \$100 extra. They fit it and I get back on the road. It is past 18h. Of course, now I fear every time I switch the engine off, that the same problem reoccurs, but this time, it was the real cause. The car is running fine again. I drive through until before Fredericksburg, about 60 miles short of Washington DC. There I stop after 23h at a Rest Area and sleep in the car, this time on the rear seat, which is less comfortable than on the load bed.

2.12.2008 Fredericksburg-Washington DC At 05:30 I leave Fredericksburg in direction Washington DC. The freeway is already utterly congested. Whenever a traffic jam loosens up, the next one is around the corner. After hours of stressful driving I arrive after 8am at the Capitol City Hostel. It turns out that Bill is much nicer face-to-face than on the phone. I check in, carry all my stuff into the room (most of which I will have to discard now) and clean the car. Then I call all those interested in buying the car and tell them that I have arrived. I update my online advertisements. But fail to connect my laptop PC to the Internet. Eventually, I find the right settings. I spend all day long waiting for appointments to see the car, some of whom don't turn up. In the evening I walk with Elias, an Armenian Archaeologist from Quebec down Benning Road to find Burger King, but they don't exist anymore. Call Dan.

3.12.2008 Washington DC Early in the morning I take the X2 Bus to North Capitol Street, from where I walk to the Capitol and am the first visitor this morning. I get a free visitors' pass for the tour. Until it starts, I visit the museum. Then we are shown a short video, are shown the cupola (made of cast iron) with the elaborate murals and paintings. There is an abundance of statues - marble, plaster of Paris, bronze... every state may send in statues and thus the Capitol is becoming like a store room for bad art. A side room of the cupola is already overfilled with statues. We are shown the old Senate Chambers, the crypt, filled with columns and the old Supreme Court Chambers. Thereafter I get a permit to visit the House of Representatives, which was not included in our tour. I am quite astonished that the chamber is quite shabby, the visitor gallery's seats worn. Every state chamber I have seen was by far superior. Through a tunnel I walk to the Library of Congress, from here I walk around the little lake and past all the neo-classicist museums to the George Washington Memorial, a huge obelisk. From here I walk to the White House, but to my greatest disappointment I am not invited to have tea with George Bush, not even allowed to set foot on the grounds. Seek out a Subway for lunch and then proceed to the Vietnam Veterans' Memorial, the Lincoln Memorial (the Temple with Abe Lincoln sitting in a chair) and the well-made Korean Veterans' Memorial. Here I get a call from Kenneth, that he was at the parking lot where my car was parked and wanted to see it. I rush to the next bus stop, but the X1 does not run during the day. So I hurry on to a X2 Bus stop, a couple of blocks away. There I am just in the loo as the bus arrives. I jump out and only just make it onto the bus. When I get to the parking lot, I do a test drive with Kenneth. He is quite happy with the car. We negotiate the price, but his offer is so decent that I can accept without haggling. We decide to drive with the two cars - he has already a 740 - to his house in Arlington. The route we made out on the map does not work out, because of the one-ways. We somehow still manage to muddle through the dense traffic and arrive at his place, where I take off the number plates. We conclude the deal and he drops me at the Metro Station. There I take the Metro to Capitol South. I take a few pictures of the Capitol at night and then take a completely overcrowded X2 Bus in direction of my Hostel. When I want to drop off and ring the bell, the driver ignores my signal and rides on. I have to walk a mile in complete darkness back to the Hostel.

4.12.2008 Washington DC I start the day walking to FedEx to complain about the bungled-up delivery of the flicker light. I lodge my complaint, they vow to deliver today. I then walk to the Smithsonian National Air and Space Museum. The collection is overwhelming: Apollo 11, the original Wright Flyer, the original Spirit of St. Louis, an original Lunar Landing Module, a Bleriot Monoplane and much more. I spend all day long there. Personally, I am most fascinated with the unmanned observation planes which are like model airplanes, but with much better electronics. They close at 17:30h, I take the bus back to the Hostel and go to the launderette to do my laundry. The washing machine is broken though, so my clothes still smell a bit of gasoline even after washing them twice.

5.12.2008 Washington DC I take an early Metro to L'Enfant Plaza where I change to Bus 5A to Dulles Airport. There I have to wait a long time for a shuttle bus to the Air and Space Museum. At the museum I spot Kenneth's Volvo on the way in, drop off the bus and give him the left flicker light, which I received yesterday. Then I want to walk through the gates, but the gatekeeper won't let me in. He tells me to pay \$12 parking fee. I tell him that I am obviously a pedestrian.

This is too complicated for him. He has to call someone, gets authorisation to let me in as a pedestrian... The museum is great. There is the original Enola Gay Bomber which dropped the nuclear bomb over Hiroshima, some of the earliest helicopters I have ever seen, including the first Bell helicopter and some captivating Hillers. There is the last Concorde, the first Boeing 707, a Space Shuttle, two Mercury Capsules (which I have seen nowhere else), an almost complete collection of Cruise Missiles which, I learnt here, were all derived from the German developments and initially were based on the V-1 and V-2. There are some of Germany's finest warplanes, like the Arado Jet Bomber, the twin-engined DO-335, world's fastest propeller plane, some of the smallest experimental planes I have ever seen, best known is the Bede BD-5. On my way back I have to wait for an hour at the airport until I get the Bus 5A back to L'Enfant Plaza, where I catch the Metro back to Stadium. My travelling time is, like on the way there, three hours; by car it would be a couple of minutes.

06.12.2008 Washington DC To town, but I am too early at the National Gallery of Art, they are not yet open. I wait outside in the cold. At 10h they open and I start exploring the incredibly large collection: Lots and lots of Edgar Degas, Leonardo Da Vinci's Ginevra de' Benci, many famous German painters like Cranach, Duerer and Dutch painters like Peter Paul Rubens, Rembrandt van Rijn, Johannes Vermeer. French painters like Monet, Manet, Cezanne. A special exhibition on the Dutch painter and Rembrandt contemporary Jan Lievens. An utterly interesting exhibition on Pompeii and the Roman Villa in the East Wing. A whole room just early Picassos. Many Mark Rothkos, a few Lichtensteins. An exhibition on small French paintings. A surprisingly good exhibition George de Forest Brush: The Indian Paintings. When I am leaving at 17h, it is snowing. I walk back to the hostel.

07.12.2008 Washington DC-New York Early in the morning I take the bus to town and visit the National Museum of History. The exhibitions are very interesting: Transport, steam engines and electrical energy, the American wars and American Presidents. At 15h I return to the hostel, pick up my bags and immediately catch a X2 Bus. I drag my ultra-heavy bag to the Bus Terminal, where the New York Bus is just about to leave. In New York, I try to find out where to catch the underground, which is not self-explanatory and only for those who know how it works. I drop at 96th Street and walk to the Hostel. I am very surprised that I have to pay about 30% taxes on top of the Hostel price. Upon unpacking my stuff, I reckon that I left my toiletries bag at the Capitol City Hostel in Washington DC, because it is missing. When I want to slip into my sleeping bag, I feel something inside and it is - my toiletries bag!

8.12.2008 New York Breakfast from a street stall, by subway to South Ferry station. It is bitterly cold, way below zero Centigrade. Through Battery Park to Castle Clinton National Monument. Buy a ticket for the Statue of Liberty and Ellis Island ferry. There is a security check, more strict than anything I ever experienced so far. They find my penknife. I am given the alternative to give it up or leave. I leave. There is no place to leave my penknife. Return to the completely deserted Castle Clinton Museum and deposit the penknife in the pamphlet holder. Then I go through the security check again, this time without any trouble and even manage to still catch the ferry. I get off at Statue of Liberty. The light is fantastic, the sun shines right on its face. Nevertheless, the cold is biting. I attempt to get in, but there is at least an hour's waiting time, so I give up. At 11h I take part in a guided tour around the statue. I then continue to Ellis Island. I explore the Immigration Station, built in 1892 (before that Castle Clinton was the Immigration Station), which is now a museum. Particularly interesting is the information about the East European Jews, who left the Shtetl around the end of the 19th Century because of the constant persecution. I then take the ferry back to Castle Clinton, pick up my penknife from its hiding space in the museum and walk to Ground Zero, where the World Trade Center used to be. There is a gaping hole now, with lots of construction work going on. Surprising how tall the buildings around it are, obviously not very much damaged, and how small a surface Ground Zero covers. The view on Ground Zero is mostly impaired, there are walls and barriers, but from Burger King, where I have my lunch, I can have a glimpse. From here I walk to Wall Street, dark and narrow, with the Trinity Church at its end. On Wall Street I visit the Federal Hall, another National Monument, where George Washington was inaugurated as first US President. Right now it houses a photo exhibition about the US Presidents. I walk down Wall Street to Seaport Historic District. There are historic sailing ships moored here: The Wavertree (1885) and the Peking (1911) from Hamburg as well as a small steam tug, the Helen McAllister. I have a good view of Brooklyn- and Manhattan bridge in the sunset. Walk to City Hall and along Broadway through Soho and Greenwich Village to Union Square. In the meantime night has fallen. There is a Xmas market on Union Square. I walk west on 14th Street and catch the Metro to Times Square. There I marvel at the lit-up advertisements, nowadays mainly large screens. They obviously must use the electricity to the equivalent of a small city. From here I take the subway back to 96th Street. The coaches are crammed full. I drop at 96th Street, pick up my passport which I had to hand in at the hostel last night and seek and find a shop where I can buy a new watchstrap, the old one broke yesterday.

9.12.2008 New York In the morning I walk through Central Park to Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis Reservoir and to the Guggenheim Museum of Modern Art. The world-famous spiral staircase looks quite impressive. There are a few good Picasso, Van Gogh, Cezanne, Marc, Kandinsky. The photo exhibition of Catherine Opie is irritating, first there are quite banal architectural images, but on the top floor there are pictures where she has hundreds of syringe needles pierced in her arms and a tattoo carved into her skin, really sick. This has nothing more to do with art. From here I walk through Central Park, visit the totally irrelevant Arsenal Gallery in Central Park, then to the Rockefeller Tower. In front of it,

there is an ice skating rink. To the "Top Of The Rock" viewing platform. From here past Radio City Music Hall and "The Pond", another ice skating rink, to Grand Central Station. On the way there, I am "intercepted" by some Chabad Lubawitschers who lay up Tefillin in their parked camper-van and give me a picture of their rabbi. In a photo shop, I see a Lumix TZ3 which is offered for the incredibly good price of \$125. Strangely the seller does not want to sell immediately, but sends me away again. I walk to the Port Authority Bus Terminal, where I buy a passage to Burlington VT. By Metro to Park Place, where I look at cameras at JR. But the prices are not so low that an import would be worthwhile. Walk over Brooklyn Bridge, where I take many photos. Then I walk to Chinatown, where I eat a great dinner for \$4.25. It is pitch dark. From here to Greenwich Village, then back to the corner of 5th Street Ave/42nd to the photo shop, but he throws me out. I do not understand why. I go to the next photo shop, just around the corner, where they even have a better offer: A Lumix TZ4 for \$150. But when I want to pay, I am asked for \$240. The charger had to be exchanged against a 220V, which was \$60 extra. That is of course total nonsense, it is a standard multi-voltage charger. Thus the price was raised above the official retail price. I simply walk away. Now I know why was I thrown out the other shop. They are only interested in stupid customers. Whoever is likely to see through the scam is not welcome here. I walk to Times Square, where I take the subway back to the Hostel.

10.12.2008 New York It rains in torrents. Walk through Central Park and over the Great Hill to 125th Street in Harlem. Along Malcolm X Boulevard to the very top and then west on 145th Road to Clayton Powell Jr. Boulevard and back to 125th Road. Harlem is not the dump anymore it used to be described as. Neat buildings and shops. With the subway to 50th Road. Walked to 53rd Street, but the Visitor Center no longer exists. To Times Square. Gossip with a private guard. His wife is Congolese and works at the Congolese Consulate. Go to the Visitor Center, but they are pretty useless. They have no useful brochures, nor do they know anything about town. Self-guided city walks are not available. I walk down 7th Ave, visit Penn Station and Macy's Herald Square Store, then down to Greenwich Village, where I do the Lonely Planet Walking Tour: Oscar Wilde Bookshop, Christopher Park, Chumleys, Churchill Park, Little Red Square, Fat Black Pussycat, Minetta Tavern, Cafe Wha?, Caffe Reggio, Washington Square Park. The rain is getting so strong that I have to abandon the tour. Take the subway back to the hostel.

11.12.2008 New York Breakfast from a street stall in the pouring rain. I buy a day pass for the Subway. First I explore Brooklyn. To Fulton Street, from where I explore the Center. But the rain, storm and cold make it very miserable. Warm up in a Burger King, but then I have to continue. Take the subway F to Coney Island Stillwell Avenue. Walk along the (now closed) funfairs, restaurants which line the beach. Brighton Beach is "little Russia", all the shops have signs in Cyrillic. By subway Q to Atlantic Avenue. But subway Q doesn't intersect with G. I look for the subway G. The subway stations are really hidden, have hardly visible signs which are easily obscured by luggage or parked cars. After much walking I eventually find it and ride to Long Island City Court Square (Queens). I explore Queens on foot. The area is extremely ugly, with a big, rusty double/triple-decker bridge for cars and subway, many small, crummy workshops and many buildings and plots in a state of utter disrepair. From Queensboro Plaza with subway 7 to Grand Central, where I change to a Subway 6 to the Bronx. I drop at 3 Ave 138 St and walk to Cypress Avenue, where I take the subway back to Canal Street, from where I walk to Chinatown and have a delicious supper. Walk past Ground Zero to Chambers Street Subway Station and take the crammed full subway back to 96th Street. When I am writing my diary, another guest, a drunk Indian, trips over my power cable and rips the plug off the motherboard. Right now it still makes contact, but it is obviously loose. He doesn't feel sorry, couldn't be bothered. In the pouring rain I go out again, only to return shortly afterwards soaking wet.

12.12.2008 New York I walk across Central Park to the Metropolitan Museum. It stopped raining. The Metropolitan Museum is the largest museum that I have ever seen. I spend the whole morning in the section of ancient Greece and Rome, probably one of the world's best collections. Then modern art, with many Picassos and Braques, European interiors and art, primarily interiors from historical houses which were completely removed and transported here. Then knights arms and armours. In the forum is a Christmas tree with a sound and light show. I visit the giant department of Egyptian art, probably with more exhibits than the Egyptian Museum. There are even two temples, one is set in a newly built room, surrounded by a pool of water. Very interesting is the American wing, where the exhibits are more or less just stored behind glass, but there are some really worthwhile exhibits. Unfortunately, I don't even get to the second floor when I am leaving at 20h for the subway around Central Park and back to the Hostel - I do not want to walk through Central Park at night.

13.12.2008 New York-Johnson, VT At 12:30am we board the Greyhound Bus to Boston. I sleep during the journey. We arrive at 04:30 in Boston. The Greyhound terminal is cold. When McDonald's opens, I can at least get hot coffee. At 8am the connection to Burlington VT is boarded. The journey is cold, the bus has no heater. From Boston onwards, the landscape and most of the road is covered in snow. We stop in Montpelier and continue, now on clean roads, to Burlington. A car in front of us loses a huge chunk of ice which hits the bus with a thump in the windscreen, but nothing breaks. We arrive in ice cold, snowed-in Burlington VT. After a short while my brother turns up and drives me (another Volvo!) to his house in Johnson. His sons, Kai, Oliver and Liam have grown a lot in the last 6 years! I go walking in the snow with my brother and it is so cold that my feet are freezing.

14.12.2008 Johnson, VT A very cold and grey day. We all have brunch at a restaurant south of Jeffersonville. I take a

family picture. We all sit in the lounge, where the wood-stove is blazing. I fix a remote-controlled model helicopter. The kids immediately test it out and it flies fine.

15.12.2008 Johnson VT A quiet day with Dan's family. The weather is getting warmer, there is a lot of snow falling off the roof. In the evening, Dan and I drive to Stowe and Morrisville, where I buy some toys. Tomorrow Dan has to leave for China. We chat over a Ben & Jerry ice-cream until midnight.

16.12.2008 Johnson VT Dan leaves very early in the morning. All morning I edit pictures. The sun comes out, but it stays below freezing. In the afternoon I walk about 5 miles into Johnson and back. On the way back, Suzanne picks me up about a mile from the house.

17.12.2008 Johnson VT I read up Dan's book "The World's Worst Cars" to the early hours of the morning. All day long I make panoramas from my digital photos. Take water to the chickens; their water keeps freezing up. The new camera arrives, just as the other one has given up. Repair Kai's laptop power jack.

18.12.2008 Johnson (Montpelier) In the morning, Suzanne takes me over snowed-in roads to Montpelier, the smallest US state capital. I visit the Capitol Building with its impressive chambers. I then stroll through the tiny capital, which can easily be crossed on foot within 10 minutes. I meet her again at the Intersection Main and State Street. She does some more shopping, I get a sandwich at Subways. On the way back it is snowing heavily. We stop in Morrisville, where I get some gifts for the boys.

19.12.2008 Johnson VT-Hartford CT I get up very early in the morning. Susan takes me to Montpelier, although she has to go to work later. About 20cm of snow fell last night, the streets are covered in snow. In Montpelier, the Greyhound office is closed, although the Internet says it would be open. I take all my luggage to a cafe with WiFi access and book the bus ticket online, to be sure to get a seat. Then I write job applications until 10am. Shortly before 11h I am back at the Greyhound office which is now open. I am told that the bus would be 45 minutes late. At a supermarket I buy some lunch. The bus arrives at 12:30, an hour late. Until White River Junction, the road is well cleared of snow. The bus is even heated. In White River Junction I have to change to the Springfield Bus. A snowstorm sets in. Soon the roads are covered in lots of snow. The driver, an Afro-American, is all on edge. No wonder, because the road conditions are dismal. We ride over byroads, which anyway never get cleared, to Bellows Falls and Brattleboro. Often, we ride very slow. The bus has no functioning heater, so that the window wipers keep freezing up, forcing the driver to stop and shake the ice off. Three hours late we arrive in Springfield, where to my greatest relief a bus to Hartford had been waiting for us. When we eventually arrive around 20h in Hartford, I take all my luggage to the bus stop and wait. But no bus arrives, it is too late. I have to take a taxi. When I explain to the taxi driver, that I had been waiting for the bus which never came, he wants to reduce his tariff. A really nice gesture. I obviously pay him the full fare. He cannot enter the road, where the Youth Hostel is. There is too much snow there. I walk in the wrong direction, because Google Maps has marked the Hostel on the wrong end of the road. Eventually I arrive huffing and puffing under the heavy load at the Hostel, where the Taiwanese couple in charge of the Hostel welcome me despite my late arrival.

20.12.2008 Hartford CT It has snowed all night, the streets and sidewalks are deeply covered in snow. And more snow was ploughed there, so that one has to walk on the street. Breakfast at Burger King, then to the Mark Twain House. I am the first visitor. At 10am I am the only visitor in the tour of the Mark Twain House. No expense was spared to build this very noble mansion. Everywhere there are "hidden" stairs for the servants and a separate wing for the domestics as well as a coach depot. Many rooms were decorated at an enormous expense by Louis Comfort Tiffany himself, possibly the cornerstone to his fame. Where furniture is concerned, Twain had a penchant for pompous kitsch. In his ornately carved Italian bed, he is said to have always slept with the head at the foot end, to adore the carved headboard before falling asleep. Then I visit the museum part, where a lot of Mark Twain paraphernalia is on display, even the infamous Paige-typesetter, causing Mark Twain to lose his entire fortune. The adjacent Harriet Beecher-Stowe House is closed, as well as the Katharine Seymour Day House. From here I walk, still in the snowfall, through Bushnell Park to the Connecticut Capitol building. The ill-proportioned, ugly, ostentatious building is easily recognised by its golden dome, which is visible from afar. Unfortunately, today is Saturday, so it is closed. I walk from here, after lunch at Burger King (unfortunately, without being able to warm up, it is unheated, obviously to deter the homeless) to the Old State House in Main Street, also closed today. Now I am really cold and so I visit the Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art. The huge collection is impossible to view in a single day. I just visit the classic art, the Egyptian (with a mummy), Asian and Quilt(sic!) art, some modern art, an exhibition about the leading American furniture designer Gustav Stickley, a photo exhibition "Young Americans" by Sheila Pree Bright, a small but good exhibition on African-American Art and Faith and Fortune - Five Centuries of European Masterworks. Then they close and I just about manage to leave the museum. Walk to the Connecticut River. There are many Christmas illuminations, which glow romantically in the dark. But it is terribly cold. I return to the Hostel, buying some food in a supermarket and have Ramen for dinner. It takes one hour to recover control over my fingers.

21.12.2008 Hartford CT-Boston MA I am getting up very early. The landlady, although breakfast is usually not provided, gives me coffee, sugar and milk so I can have coffee before leaving. I then venture into the cold. It is snowing hard. I wait for the bus and chat with another passenger, a cook for an Italian restaurant. The bus arrives almost on time.

I get to Union Station, where I am so early, that I even still manage the 08:15 bus to Boston. The lady driver, Mary, takes the road conditions quite coolly. When the door suddenly flops open on the Freeway and couldn't close properly again, I volunteer to lock it, which I achieve. The Interstate is better cleared than the other roads. We have a short stop in Worcester. To my greatest surprise we arrive almost on time in Boston. I take the Red Subway, change to the Orange one up to Sullivan. But no No. 104 or 109 Bus in sight. Eventually a 109 appears. But when I want to get in, he changes his designation to 93. After almost an hour's wait a 109 Bus appears. A young lady chats with me and tells me when to get off and which direction to walk. I find the Prescott Hostel easily. I share only with one roommate, Ben from Oregon. Unpack my stuff, buy something to drink and a few cookies from the supermarket and I get on the bus back to the subway. I drop at Haymarket and walk, with some detours as the street signs are all covered in snow and cannot be read, to the Paul Revere House. There I visit the inside of the house, a small museum. I then venture to the city centre. I need to go to a restroom, but there are none, not even at the fast-food restaurants. And the snowstorm is getting worse, blowing the sludge almost horizontally into my face. Eventually I find a bookstore where I can use the restroom - obviously the only one in the entire CBD, looking at the extremely busy loo. Then I start looking for the State Subway station, but I find nothing. I ask a snow shoveller who only speaks Spanish. He tells me that there was one near the robot. I look and look and eventually find a small door, without any markings - and behind is indeed the Subway Station. Why don't they mark them? My feet are in the meantime soaking wet and ice cold from stepping into the more than ankle deep sludge on the road. I get the Orange Line back to Sullivan, where I again wait ages for the bus. Eventually it turns up and I get back to the supermarket, where I buy something for supper before returning to the Hostel. Skype with Brooks.

22.12.2008 Boston MA The day starts with sunshine. The snowstorm has ceased. But it is bitterly cold, they say around -25°C. I take the bus to Wellington and get an Orange Train (actually only a subterranean tramway) to Downtown Crossing. There I walk to the Visitor Centre, get some maps and start the Freedom Trail: Capitol Building, Park Street Church, Granary Burial Ground, Kings Chapel and Burial Ground, Old City Hall (where I quickly warm up), Old Corner Bookstore, Old South Meeting House (a mix of a Church and meeting hall, with cubicles for the more important members of the congregation). From here I return to the Capitol, which I explore: Doric Hall, Nurses Hall, Hall of Flags, Main Staircase, Stained Glass Window, Great Hall of Flags (new), House of Representatives which is just in session and I can watch from the visitors gallery (but photos are prohibited), Senate Chambers, Executive Chamber, Women's Memorial. From here to Old State House, Faneuil Hall (with a shopping mall on the ground floor, a meeting hall on first and the Ancient and Honourable Artillery Company of Massachusetts on the third floor, mixture of museum and club), Quincy Market (today an upmarket food court), Paul Revere House, Paul Revere Mall (actually an alley), Old North Church (the inside just like the Old South Meeting House, with a bust of George Washington), Copp's Hill Burial Ground, Charlestown Bridge, USS Constitution (built 1797, closed) and USS Cassin Young (closed), the museum at the Visitor Centre, the USS Constitution Museum, Bunker Hill Monument (closed), Bunker Hill Museum (about the battle of Bunker Hill). Back to North Station, from where I take a train and eventually a bus back to the Hostel. It has become considerably warmer, about -5°C. At the Hostel, the heater has stopped working. Three new roommates arrive.

23.12.2008 Boston MA By bus through the morning traffic jam to the subway, from there by train to Harvard Square. Explore Harvard University, visit the Peabody Museum and Harvard Museum of Natural History. On the ground floor there is an exhibition on the Copan Temples in Honduras, which I had visited too. The exhibition on the American Indians is not all that different from the others I had seen previously. The exhibitions on the Mexican Temples on the 3rd floor is very interesting again, there is an exhibition of minerals, gems and meteorites and the world-famous exhibition of glass flowers. They are lifelike replicas of real flowers, made between 1886 and 1936 at Blaschkas Studio in Hosterwitz near Dresden, Germany. There is also an exhibition of sea creatures made by Blaschka. A few special exhibitions visualize the Language of Colour, photos of leaves by Amanda Means, and Climate Change. The Natural History Galleries are an unattractive, dusty collection of stuffed animals, including the compulsory whale skeleton hanging from the ceiling. On the fourth floor there are some artefacts from Oceania. From here I explore Cambridge Central. Then I take a train to Kendall, where I visit the MIT (Massachusetts Institute of Technology). It is housed in imposing buildings in the Greek-revival style and some ultra-modern buildings, like the very attractive Ray and Maria Stata Center by star architect Frank Gehry. As it gets dark, I manage to take a few pictures of Boston across the river. By subway back, the bus once more creeps through the traffic jam back to the hostel.

24.12.2008 Boston MA The Orange Subway had a broken-down train on its tracks and it takes almost an hour until I get a train into town. Back to Harvard Square, where there are no free tours today, but I can buy a self-guided tour plan and do the Tour of the University on my own. Holyoke Center (1966), the yellow Wadsworth House (1727); Grays Hall (1863) and Matthews Hall (1872); Massachusetts Hall (1720, oldest building on Campus); Johnston Gate (1890); Harvard Hall (1766), Hollis Hall (1763) and Stoughton Hall (1805); Holden Chapel (1744); Holworthy Gate (1876), Science Center (1972); Memorial Hall (1878, the domineering building on Campus); Gund Hall (1972); Arthur M. Sackler Museum (1985); Fogg Museum (1972); Carpenter Center for the Visual Arts (1963 by Le Corbusier); Faculty Club (1931); Dana Palmer House; Barker Center for Humanities (1901); Lamont Library (1949); Loeb House (1912); Houghton Library (1942) where I visit amongst others the Emily Dickinson room; Pusey Library (1976, underneath);

Widener Library (1914, Greek Revival Style); New Yard; Emerson Hall (1905) and Sever Hall (1880); Memorial Church (1932); University Hall (1815) with the "Statue of the three Lies" of John Harvard (1884): It does not depict John Harvard (his features are not known) nor was he the founder of the University and it was founded in 1636 and not as it says in 1638. I then take the train to South Station, from where I visit the sad remains of the Boston Tea Party Jetty, a few rotten poles in the river. I then walk through Chinatown and catch another Orange Train back to North Station, where I get a ticket for the Train to Lowell. The train leaves at 13:10 and at 13:47 I am in North Billerica, where Cynthia picks me up at the railway station. Cynthia is my neighbour Hans Zingerli's cousin. She still speaks Swiss German, despite being born and bred in the USA! I get to know her husband Steve, her daughter Danielle and her daughter's husband. All afternoon we chat and I nibble from all the good food on the table. We go to feed the horses of a hippotherapy project (where Cynthia and Steve are volunteers). Cynthia's favourite is Lexicon, Steve's is Danny. One horse gets such a fright when it sees me that it actually bangs its head on the stable door. In the evening, their friends and family join us. We have a fabulous supper buffet. And cheesecake for dessert, who could resist? Upon leaving, I am given a sweatshirt that says "Hoboken". One family takes me back to Sullivan square, from where I get the bus back to the Hostel.

25.12.2008 Boston-Philadelphia-Munich When I get up, it has become much warmer than the day before. I quickly get ready, get some cold coffee which I warm up in the microwave and eat the sandwich that Cynthia gave me yesterday for today's lunch (whenever I am in possession of good food, I either forget to take it along or eat it immediately in order to minimise this risk), even have some of the blueberry cake that somebody left on the coffee table. Then I schlepp my heavy duffel bag to the bus stop. After a short while, indeed a bus appears and so the most difficult part of today's journey is mastered. I drop at Sullivan Square, catch an Orange Line Subway to State where I change to the Blue Line. From the airport stop there is a shuttle bus to Terminal B, where I check in my bags. Their heavy weight is no problem! The airport is well heated so my five coats of warm clothing are definitely overkill in here. I then proceed to security. Indeed, my ticket has been marked with "SSSS" which means highest security alert, basically undetected 9-11 terrorist. I put my backpack, pacsafe, coat and shoes on the conveyor belt and step through the detector gate. I first get reprimanded for not including the subway map and the bus timetable in my pocket. I then get reprimanded even more for putting my boarding passes with my valuables, for not taking the notebook out of its pouch and for asking the security to handle my camera with care. Then I am taken aside and body searched. But the procedure is quick and this time without any further accusations of corrupting the very foundations of the United States. So after only five minutes, I am through, two hours early. I have some coffee and read. When my flight is called, I board the small Embraer airplane and take the last couple of pictures on the ground. We take off. A beautiful day; the sun is out and I have a marvellous view of Boston. At midday we touch down in sunny Philadelphia, where there is positively not a trace of snow. Blue sky, pure sunshine and it is quite warm, so I have to take most of my warm clothing off. WiFi access is quite pricey here, so I only get online for an hour.

Back to Europe

26.12.2008 Philadelphia-Munich We touch down in Munich at 08:50 local time. As promised, Otto and Katrin Egloff and their four children are waiting for me at the airport. We have coffee at the airport. There is a big confusion as we want to buy tickets for the S-Bahn: The automatic vendor machines are ultra-complicated, they don't tell the correct fare and they are extremely slow; meaning utterly useless. In the end, end up buying the tickets at the ticket counter, where the lady is very snappy and nasty. We get to the main railway station, where the Egloffs have put me up at the posh Muenchen Deutscher Kaiser Hotel. We have lunch at Burger King at the Hauptbahnhof. Then the Egloffs take a nap while I go to the Internet café and then explore Munich: Stachus, St. Anna Kirche, Marienplatz with the Neues Rathaus (new City Hall), Viktualienmarkt (market), Residenz, Hofgarten, Feldherrnhalle, Platz der Opfer des Nationalsozialismus (Square of the Victims of National Socialism), Obelisk. Upon returning, I miss the turnoff to Hauptbahnhof and end up at Sendlinger Tor, from where I have to backtrack to the hotel. It is freezing cold and the roads are all iced up. Supper in the city centre. When the children are asleep, we have apple strudel in a nearby restaurant.

27.12.2008 Munich-Thal We leave Munich at 11h, but get into a terrible traffic build-up about halfway, where the Freeway ends. There are no customs checks at the border. We arrive shortly past 16h in Thal. My cottage is still in good condition, but there are dead wasps everywhere. I say goodbye to the Egloffs who even have bought a months' supply of food and start vacuuming the dead wasps. Say hallo to my neighbours Roland, Jacqueline, Sandra and Pietro. Go the Zingerlis, where I also say hello and get invited for supper. Suddenly I remember that I had already switched the electricity on, but forgot to fill the geyser. So I quickly return, turn the water on, remove all the rubber-like oil covers (congealed vegetable oil) from the drains and siphons and clean them. It is very cold. I then assemble the bicycle, because it's box is blocking my kitchen. I chop up the box and clean the kitchen. I battle to sleep, as I am all worked up now.

28.12.2008 Thal Visit the Tanners, the Zimmermanns, the Zingerlis. Do some more cleaning up. Take part of the ceiling off and spray the wasp nest with insect poison.

29.12.2008 *Thal* I visit my old university, the HSG in St. Gallen, where I get free access to the Internet at the library. Then I visit my brother Severin, who has been taking care of all my finances during my absence and collect all my DVDs with the photos.

*** This concludes my journey ***



Between Nairobi and Karatina, Kenya



Bus from Moyale to Hagere Maryam, Ethiopia



The author as hyena man in Harar, Ethiopia



Bet Gyorgos, Lalibela, Ethiopia



Broken down bus, Shire to Zarema, Ethiopia



The author in the train from Khartoum to Wadi Halfa, Sudan



Sphynx and Pyramids in Giza, Cairo, Egypt



Luxor temple, Luxor, Egypt



Imam Khomeini Shrine, Haram-e-Motahar, Tehran, Iran



Imam Square, Isfahan, Iran



Si-o-Seh bridge, Isfahan, Iran



Arg-e-Rayen, Rayen, Iran



Persepolis, Marvdasht, Iran



Temple of Varsupal, Girnar Hill, Junagadh, India



Taj Mahal Hotel, Mumbai, India



Cave No 16, Ellora Caves, Aurangabad, India



Cows eating rubbish in Gaya, India



Dar Ghat, Ram Ghat, Mesta Ghat at the Ganges rivershore in Varanasi, India



Chaterbhuj Temple, Orchha, India



Taj Mahal, Agra, India



The golden temple of Amritsar, India



Leh Palace, Leh, Ladakh, India



Procession of monks in Leh, Ladakh, India



Wat Suthat Temple, Bangkok, Thailand



Wat Chai Watanaram, Ayutthaya, Thailand



Wat Bhutaisavan, Ayutthaya, Thailand



Wat Rong Khun, Chiang Rai, Thailand



Ho Chi Minh poster, Hue, Vietnam



Hon Chong Promontary, Nha Trang, Vietnam



Sculpture in Wat Tam Rai Saw, Battambang, Cambodia



Prabanan, Yogyakarta, Java, Indonesia



Royal Family Temple, Denpasar, Bali, Indonesia



The Author and a Koala Bear, Caversham Wildlife Park, Perth, Australia



The Ghan at Alice Springs Railway Station, Australia



Opera House seen from Sydney Harbour Bridge, Sydney, Australia



Franz Josef Glacier Tour, New Zealand



Volcanic Spring, Rotorua, New Zealand



Valparaiso, Chile



The author in Ushuaia, Argentina



The Perito Moreno Glacier, Argentina



Soldiers in Buenos Aires, Argentina



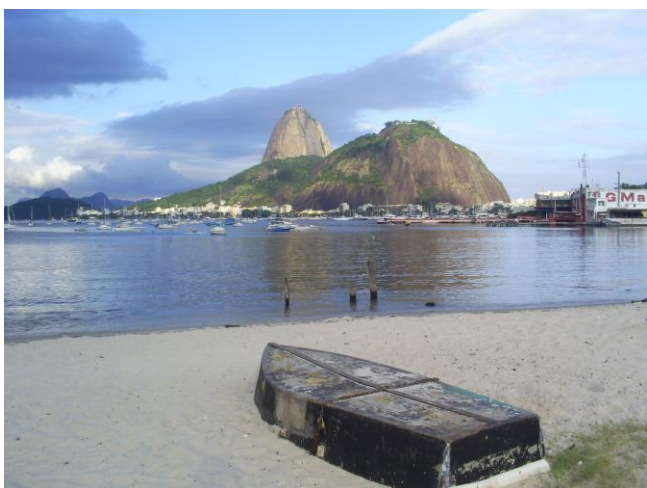
El Carnaval de Montevideo, Uruguay



Blumenau, Santa Catarina, Brasil



Curitiba, Brasil



The Pão de Açúcar, Rio de Janeiro, Brasil



The Catedral, Brasília, Brasil



The author in Foz de Iguaçu, Brasil



Stuck on the road from Salta to Cachi, Argentina



The Salar de Uyuni, Bolivia



With a coca-chewing miner in the silver mines of Potosi, Bolivia



La Paz, Bolivia



Traditional boat on Isla del Sol, Lake Titicaca, Bolivia



Guinea pigs under the kitchen table, Canon de Colca, Peru



Street vendors in Cuzco, Peru



View on Machu Picchu from Waynu Picchu, Peru



Fried Guinea Pigs, Cuzco, Peru



Traditional Dancers, Lima, Peru



The author paddling a canoe in Belen, Iquitos, Peru



Riverboat on the Amazon river in Tabatinga, Brasil



Our group on the Roraima, Venezuela



Street vendor in Cucuta, Colombia



Stone phalluses in El Infiernito, Villa de Leyva, Colombia



Plaza Bolivar, Tunja, Colombia



Bus in San Agustin, Colombia



Patrick, Maex and the author in Bogota, Colombia



Clube de clases y tropas, Panama City, Panama



Election poster in Managua, Nicaragua



Maya Pyramid in Tikal, Guatemala



Piramide de la Luna, Teotihuacan, Mexico City, Mexico



Street Car, San Francisco, CA, USA



The author between Seattle and Spence's Bridge, BC, Canada



At the Alaskan border near Dawson City, Canada



With Canadian Mounties in Victoria, Vancouver Island, Canada



Old Faithful, Yellowstone Park, USA



Bryce Canyon, USA



Sixties style garage, Williams, USA



Las Vegas, USA



Disney Concert Hall, by Frank Gehry, Los Angeles, USA



Kiss-alike band in Tucson, AZ, USA



Oil well between Lamesa and Dallas, TX, USA



Devastation after hurricane Gustave, Holly Beach, LA, USA



Quartier Francais, New Orleans, LA, USA



Kennedy Space Center, Cape Canaveral, USA



The Capitol, Washington DC, USA



Map of Peet Lenel's journey around the world. The distance, if measured as the crow flies between major cities, was 141'398 km. Thereof , around 27'000 km were done in the red Volvo in Canada and the USA.