

## Prince George, Canada

After three months in Alaska, we eventually left the state to enter Canada. Our visa was expiring, so we had no choice. But we were glad to discover something new too! From Prince Rupert, BC, we hitch-hiked to Yellowknife, Northwest Territories. Around 2500km (1500 miles) and 6 days later, we finally arrived in the capital situated on the edge of Great Slave Lake. At that time of the year, in the beginning of July, the sun never set. During a week, we explored the city and went to the Assembly of First Nations meetings almost everyday, trying to understand what were the main issues and claims of the First Nations of Canada. We could hear the National Chief Phil Fontaine expresses himself about the issues concerning the big trauma caused by residential schools among Native communities.



Qui a dit que nous étions en vacances ?

Every night, traditional hand games and drum dances were played at the river site and big feasts honored the guests of the city. People from all over Canada, but also from the USA and other countries shared their joy and learned about the Dene culture. Within a

week, David and me discovered a lot about Dene people and started planning our next weeks in the North. Dene people opened their spirituality to us, inviting us to attend a sweat lodge where we learned to pray and communicate with the Great Creator and all our relations.

After the festivities, Yellowknife became quiet again and eventually too big for us. We wished we could go to a small village called Lutselk'e, situated on the other side of the lake, at about 4 hours by motor boat (the only way to go there is by boat or plane, as there is no road). As we could not afford to buy two plane tickets, we decided to "hitch-hike" at the small harbor, hoping we could find a boat which would take us there. No way, all the boats were already full! We thought we would probably have more



Une indienne derrière ton dos.

opportunities to find a ride on the “real road” and eventually left Yellowknife by car. We visited different communities on our way to Fort Smith, on the southern tip of the lake. We discovered the joys of camping in the middle of the arctic summer, trying to stay alive in spite of thousands of mosquitoes biting us every second. This experience made me think I probably have a very sweet blood compared with David who had half the bites I had! In a small village called Fort Providence, we pitched our tent in front of the house of the only French guy living there. We’ve been lucky enough to enjoy French cuisine and wine, as



Première prise du pêcheur.



Et derrière coule le Mackenzie.

well as good moose and caribou meat and fresh fish from the Mackenzie River.

We eventually arrived in Fort Smith a few days later and visited Francois, a Chipewyan Dene who invited us to spend more time with him. With his small boat, we sailed on the Slave River up to Fort Chipewyan, on the Athabasca Lake. There was organized the annual Dene gathering where a chief had to be chosen for the Chipewyan tribe, one of the five Dene tribes. It was

very interesting for us to attend to the meetings, listening to the claims of the chipewyan people as well as the advices the elders wanted to give. We also saw more drum dances and hand games, which are very popular up there. We came back at Francois’ place just for a night and left again the day after to Fort Reliance, a very small hamlet on the Northeast arm of Great Slave Lake. We sailed again for 11 hours to get there, admiring the beauty of the lake. The weather was very

calm; the water seemed like mirror... This part of the lake is still preserved from the mining, allowing people to drink the water straight from it. I’ve never tasted such good water before. On the shore, people were settling their teepees and tents for the coming spiritual gathering. We were welcomed to attend this gathering with them and were very honored by this invitation. One day, we flew from the camp to Our Lady of the Falls, a very sacred place for Dene people. The water is holy and can cure all diseases. We were allowed to join the pilgrims, walking in the bush for an hour after landing on a small black lake. Together, we prayed for our relations, our family, friends, and Mother



Portrait de famille devant Monument Valley



Jimmy le joueur de flute.

Earth, hoping that we, her children, we'll better take care of her in the present and future. We left the Dene country not long after this wonderful experience, traveling again to Alaska to attend a great event on Prince of Wales Island: our friend Jon, one of the best Tlingit carvers, made seven totem poles which had to be raised on mid-August. That's why we crossed again Canada to the West, spent a week in Alaska before going South again, to the beautiful Banff and Jasper National Parks. We spent more than a week with our friends Pat and Baiba, had a good rest in the mountains, hiked a bit and took great pictures. We then decided to stop hitch-hiking, not being too sure it was safe enough, especially in the Lower 48. So we bought two bus tickets to Phoenix. After more than three days in the bus, we eventually arrived

very young kids who were riding better than some adults! Navajo people welcomed us in their reservation with enthusiasm and surprise. They could not

in the capital of Arizona, where the temperature was still very high. After all the rain we had in Northwest Territories, it was good to be hot! But I guess it was a bit too hot for us anyway, so we kept on going further North, up to Flagstaff, a pretty little town with good coffee shops and book stores! We would have liked to spend more time there, but our goal was to visit the Navajo Nation. We ended up in Shiprock, were took place the 94th Navajo Nation Fair. We watched rodeo for the first time of our life and we really enjoyed it! Navajo people are very good horse riders and can make crazy things, like jumping from the horse to catch a young cow or a sheep and tie up their legs as quick as possible. We were especially impressed by

believe that French people could travel all the way from France to attend their fair! We started to hitch-hike again, which was very easy. We never had to wait more than half hour on the road (in Canada, we stayed sometimes more than seven hours at the same spot!!!). We became kind of famous in the city because people were not used to see white people traveling around without a car. Actually, Arizona is a very touristy place: Grand Canyon, Monument Valley, Canyon de Chelly... Roads are crowded with big RVs and cars... We visited those places too, discovering the beauties of the state. We really liked the scenery, but we also felt more like tourists than travelers. It was harder to meet local people. However, we have been invited once in Andrew's family (Andrew is jeweler and sells his jewels in touristy places along Canyon de Chelly) to share with them a traditional meal of fried bread and corn and mutton stew. We then visited Monument



Pause croquis devant spider Rock



Bergers à Tsegi Canyon

Valley, which is more than a famous décor for Western movies. It's also a sacred place for Navajo people where we can see both Mother Earth hands pointing out of the ground. We met Jimmy, a very good and modest flute player who introduced us to his mother, an accomplished 85 years-old weaver. As we really wanted to see her weaving, we ordered her a traditional

rug called "third phase chief blanket". We spent many hours watching her working quietly and enjoying her sense of humor. Weaving is very important for Navajo people. It's said that Spider woman taught them this art, allowing them to wear blankets which make them perfect and complete. After this interesting experience, we spent a few more days around Monument

Valley. In need of clean clothes, we went to the Laundromat where we met Sally, a very understanding person who agreed to help us finding a traditional family where to learn more about Navajo culture. Actually, her mother needed a shepherd for a few days... Why not? That's how we ended up in Tsegi Canyon, a wonderful place where we spent a week herding sheep and goats. Everyday, we could discover new places, taking the sheep further North or South with our new friend, an old but very king horse. Further south in the canyon is Navajo National Monument, a group of old ruins dating back to the Anasazi people or Ancient Pueblos. Those remains of stones and mud houses are more than 800 years-old but are extraordinarily preserved because well protected against the rain and the wind.

After those few days herding sheep, we helped Sally's parents, Keith and Mary, to harvest the blue corn in their field, then to sort it and make it dry for the winter. With this corn, they will make flour with which Mary will cook corn mush and



Travail du maïs chez Maty et Keith

bread, or stew. Keith and Mary were very thankful for our help, and we were too for opening the doors of their world to us. Living without water nor electricity, they have to work everyday for their survival. This year is a pinon year: every five to seven years, pine trees make fruits called pinons, enjoyed by Navajo and Pueblo people. Mary will go pinons picking everyday until the first snow and will sell them at the market to make a bit more money. Those last weeks have been tiring for us. We're having a short rest now before leaving the United States very soon, our visa expiring mid-

November. Our next news will be sent from the Latino world!!!  
A bientôt.

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