



Fock 2: Track Town, USA

My only planned Oregon stop in 2000 was the city of Eugene, not quite halfway up the state on I-5. Leading into that city, the roadgods gave me two little treats. This is really pretty pathetic, but the longer the ride, the more reasons you seek to celebrate or take note of something extraordinary.

Well, as you know, I'm a numbers guy heart. I like words and toss them around with alacrity, but numbers click with the pragmatist in me. So when an eye-catching numerical arrangement appears, I note it, and often toast it with a sip of my beverage. If that requires opening a new beverage, well, so be it!

One year, while helping to plan the Dedham 4th of July Road race with Richie and the gang, we faced a dilemma about how to distribute a medium-sized pile of leftover awards. They were not significant (plastic logo cups, actually, as I recall) and there were not enough for everyone, but too many to just give to the top category winners. As we threw out suggestions, someone laughed, why not give them to prime numbers?

Bing!! The idea immediately sang to me. Most of the guys in the room knew what prime numbers were – numbers that can only be divided evenly only by 1 and themselves – but they were still like, WTF?

But I was on it, and my mind was whirring. In seconds, a plan was in place. Instead of the pin-on numbers that the runners would wear, we would go by finish place. In those days, we always gave each runner an index card with his/her place on it, just so they would know right away where they finished overall. The stack of cards would be white, as usual, but all the prime numbers would be pink. Anyone holding a pink card – 1, 2, 3, 5, 7, 9, 11, 13, 17, 19, 23, 29, 31, 37, 41, 43, 47, 59, 61, 67, 77, and so on -- got the extra prize. It ended up working out just right, and it accomplished what I always like to accomplish: it left everyone just a little bit baffled.

So, ya, anyway, when it comes to numbers on a ramack, the odometer is a great pal. It feeds me a steady stream of facts and formations. My notbook teems with mileage readings: state borders, tank fill-ups, time zones, on/off Interstates, and daily totals.

But the rare treat that the odo feeds me is the palindrome: something that reads the same backwards and forwards. Racecar is a palindrome, for instance. So is Otto, and mom, and prullurp, which is a word I just made up as an example. Well, that works numerically of course, too. My birthday, 626, is a palindrome.

As the numbers get larger, however, a strange thing happens. They seem to get more rare, but they also seem to get more frequent. In double digits, you have one every 11, starting with 11 (22, 33, ... yeah, you get it). In triple digits, you have one every 101, and then every 10 after that -- 101, 111, 121, 131 ... 454, 464, 474 ... 989, 999 – plus the triples, like 666. If you include things like 050 and 090 as three-digit numbers, as you *should*, that means that 110 of the 999 possible 3-digit numbers are palindromes. That's 11%!

With 4-digits, it gets even more complex: 0000, 0110, 0220 ... 1001, 1111, 1221 ... 7007, 7117, 7227, 7777, and so on. Every 110, you have a palindrome. Again, 11%.

Now, Blue Man's odometer had five white digits on rolling black dials. There was no 1/10th dial; that was below on the resetable trip odo. You probably see the pattern by now. Palindromes would occur quite often:

10001, 10101, 10201, 10301, 10401, 10501, 10601, 10701, 10801, 10901,
11011, 11111, 11211, 11311, 11411, 11511, 11611, 11711, 11811, 11911,
12021, 12121, 12221, 12321, 12421, 12521, 12621, 12721, 12821, 12921,
13031, 13131, 13231, 13331, 13431, 13531, 13631, 13731, 13831, 13931...

Basically, within each 10000, you get a palindrome every 100 miles, so we're down to only 1%. That's frequent enough that I don't go hoppy over it, but infrequent enough that I will often chitch a new frosty if I happen to catch one. In a standard 500-mile day or ramacking, I'll pass through five or six of the little bastids.

But, if you've been thinking ahead, you have caught the rarity that the roadgods served up for me.

When the 5-digit numbers rolls over to the next 10,000, you get a rapid-fire rim-shot of palindromes. In this case, as I approached Eugene, the odometer showed 89998. Yay! Woo-hoo! *Chitch!*

Then, two miles later, it was 90,000, which is an obvious milestone (hahaha). *Chitch!*

Then came the bonus. Just nine miles after that, came 90009. Two palindromes in just 11 miles! *Chitch!*

I eagerly looked ahead to the 100,000-mile rollover, when I could have **three consecutive** numerical celebrations: 99999, 100000, and 100001. Oh mannnnn, what a time that would be!!!! Yeeeeee-haaaaa!!!!!!!

Then, I realized, sadly, that I would never see that. You can't have a six-digit display on a five-digit odometer, now, can you? I would simply recycle the 5-digit experience. Ah well...

Yeah, so anyway... that was exciting, huh? (Jeez, what a dork.)

Eugene is the home of the University of Oregon. UO, in turn, is the home of Hayward Field, probably the most storied Track & Field facility in the Americas. Pre ran wild here in his college years, never losing a race. And, in 1972 and 1976, the U.S. Olympic T&F Trials thrilled the best domestic track audience you could hope to assemble.

This was a repeat for me, despite my edict. Bobby and I, good track people that we were, had stopped here in 1990 as well. On that mid-July afternoon, we found the facility deserted, and we frolicked foolishly around the track, the warm-up track, the pits, the runways, and the famous wooden grandstands. We took photo after photo from every possible angle.

We sat under the overhanging roof and imagined being part of the capacity crowd as Pre tore through another race, leaving all challengers in his wake, or as the USA's best athletes ran, jumped, and threw their way towards the Munich and Montreal Games.

For a runner, it was almost a religious experience. Almost. Pre wasn't exactly a god, but, then again, neither was Hercules and people still talk about him.

Both the funniest and saddest part about that first Hayward Field visit was what happened after we left. Both of us took pictures, and, at one point I remember Bobby saying that he got a bonus because his roll of 24 exposures was up to 26. Good deal, I thought. The same thing had sometimes happened to me. You thread the film right and you sneak an extra one on the front end, and then there might just be enough to sneak one of the ass end before the spool says "stop!" I had always congratulated myself on that same bonus, so I was glad Bobby got it. He needed a lift after his wretched morning.

Digital photography was not an option for the common man in 1990. We still bought film and paced our snap judiciously, knowing that impetuous shutter use would yield a rise in both developing and replacement costs, and that the worst photo in the world would cost just as much as the best.

To be frank -- if Frank doesn't mind (and fuck him if he does) -- the extra expense never daunted me that much. I clicked with unfettered abandon while on the early ramacks, and just chalked it up as a necessary trip expense. With the Roadhouse, and the Moose, and Max, and Blue Man all saving me hundreds and hundreds of dollars in motel costs, the few extra dollars for a few extra rolls of film was a mere write-off.

But when I got in one of those photographic feeding frenzies, as I did in the Canadian Rockies in '90, or driving across the plains that first time in '84, or on any of the first three Olympic Trials trips, I would go through 36 exposure rolls like they were potato chips. I'd have to ice down my thumb afterwards from all the winding.

Then I'd end up with a handful of decent prints, and a few hundred that I never looked at again.

So, anyway, encouraged by his 26, Bobby kept clicking away. When he reached 30, though, it was obvious to us that he had put in a 36 roll without realizing it. So much for the bonus.

Further down the SR-58 en route to CLNP, as we were stopped at Salt Creek Falls, at Willamette Pass, Bobby began to show some uncharacteristic pessimism.

"I don't think this is right," he said. "I'm past 36 and still clicking."

"Just rewind it and put in a new roll," I advised. I didn't pay attention. I just sat there gaping at the waterfall and the gorge it plunged into. There is something hypnotic about rivers, waterfalls, and fires. The view is always essentially the same, but it is constantly changing too. You can stare for a long time and lose yourself in the flutter and flow.

Bobby was getting into Laugh Mode again. "It won't stop!" he said, cranking away. He wasn't the most seasoned photographer, and he had a borrowed camera, so I offered him my "expert" assistance.

"It must be all rewound," I said. "Open it up." I went back to waterfall gawking.

"Ohhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh..." I heard him moan. I looked over.

He sat there with the camera on his lap, back opened. It was empty.

"No film???" I asked.

He shook his head and started to laugh at his folly, but caught himself. He suddenly looked very sad – the first time I had ever seen him anything but upbeat, including all the retching – when he realized something. "All my Hayward Field pictures..."

I put my hand on his shoulder consolingly, in an *it's-ok-little-feller* kind of way. "I'll give you copies of mine."

He shrugged, "but these were mine..."

Trooper that his is, though, Bobby rebounded from the setback and was his laugh-track self again just a few minutes later as we got back on the road.

But Eugene was more than just the track. The other part of our quest was to find and run on the famed Prefontaine Trails. We had heard descriptions of the wood-chipped, shaded paths that wound through the woods somewhere near UO's campus. However, in typical wing-it fashion, we never did any research about them, or bother to ask anyone where they were. Somehow, we just figured that they would present themselves to us.

Well, we never saw any signs of any kind, so we just started running in the direction of the Willamette River and a large wooded park. I think it was called Alton Baker Park. It was a big expanse of land, so it must have had signs, but, as usual, we missed them.

Bobby was a much better runner than I was, but he was still reeling from his own personal Seattle Slew, so he was happy to trot along at my pace, and I was happy to go even slower than usual. We were on holiday, and all training was optional. This run was not a run for the sake of running; it was just a way to cover more ground than we would if we were walking, and a means of making the just claim that we "ran" on the Pre Trails.

And the run was very entertaining.

Before we even got into the park we passed through a neighborhood of small shops. On the sidewalk, sitting cross-legged, were several shaggy haired and shabbily dressed hippies. Yes, honest to gawl-dang hippies: long hair, beads, bare feet, the whole hippie shebang. They all looked very baked and were sitting behind a few blankets that had small cheap handmade bracelets and braiding things spread out on it. I don't imagine they were making much money off those trinkets. It was 1990, but for a few minutes, it felt like 1967.

Moving on, we reached a bridge over the river and saw a more ambitious and active covey of hippies. They were down at the river's edge, right at a point where the banks narrowed and forced the water into a short white water flume. It was churning pretty good.

The hippies had gotten downright clever here. I'm guessing that a few of them had migrated up from the southern California beaches and missed the surfing life, so they had fashioned a reasonable substitute. A rope had been secured to a medium-sized tree that hung over the riverbank, and a surfboard was tied to the other end, about thirty feet away.

The more daring hippies were taking turns climbing from the water onto the board, standing up, and riding the white water. We stopped and watched for a while, not worried about hurting our pace-per-mile. Though most of them toppled quickly into the foam, a couple of hippies stayed vertical for maybe as much as ten seconds. That doesn't sound like much, but on a set-up like this, it must have seemed like surfing to Corvallis.

Damn clever things you can come with when you're stoned, eh?

We entered the park and began following this trail and that, finding some wood chips, but mostly narrow dirt footpaths. There was plenty of shade, and we were barely breaking a sweat. We were in Oregon, and we were chillin'. Life was good.

Until...

It wasn't Bigfoot, but we kinda wished it was.

Out of the thick bushes next to the path we were on, a large figure came crashing. About 6'7" inches tall, barrel-chested, and sporting a bushy red beard – and **nothing else** – a burly lumberjack of a man emerged from the thicket, striding purposefully toward the path, as if to say, "ahh, here's the trail I've

sought.” But he was buttass naked! Not even shoes!! He was as big as Paul Bunyan, but he was Paul Buns-bare. There was no sexual overtone to this whole thing. He didn’t seem to know he was naked. He certainly made no attempt at either modesty or exhibitionism. He just wasn’t wearing anything.

Our pace, ummm, quickened. His course and ours seemed bound to intersect, so we bolted, rallying into a stride worthy of the UO runners who traversed these trails over the decades. We were no more than six feet past Paul when Bobby just started howling laughing. When he cranks up the laugh, it is audible for blocks, and in this case it was pretty damn obvious what he was laughing at.

There was a moment of concern that Big Paul might not take kindly to being – are you ready? – the **butt** of a joke, but I quickly relaxed about that. I mean, he might have had an ax concealed in his clothes, but they were nowhere close enough to matter. Still, to make sure, I stole a glance over my shoulder and, sure enough, Big Paul was just striding away in the direction that we had just come from ... the picnic area. Oh my.

So, when I returned to Eugene in 2000, a day north of Sacramento (!), I came armed with a plan, a strategy, a course of action. I had three things to accomplish: a run (yeah, I know...), a pilgrimage to the Hayward shrine, and a meal. The order definitely mattered. The run had to precede the eat. After eating, a casual walk around Hayward would be a good way to digest. Given the heat of the late afternoon, delaying the run would have made some sense, but the way things were, “delaying the run” would have just been a euphemism for “canceling the run.” I had already abstained from beer for two hours, and I did not relish lengthening that more than necessary.

This time, I consulted a map first – what a novel approach! – and wended my way to the south end of Alton Baker Park, near Autzen Stadium. There was plenty of parking, and a large grass field to cross to get to the cover of trees.

Blue Man was the only vehicle in the lot. This was very good. I knew when I finished I would be needing a jug shower, and those always go over better when you don’t have someone sitting in the car next to you, watching you rinse your secluded areas. The shorts may still be on, but it still can look a tad odd. There are certain areas, though, that you just gotta clean. Hygiene, baby, hygiene.

In the ten years since I had been here last, my perception of acceptable running pace had changed quite a bit. What I would have scorned as a waste of time as a 35-year-old, I was actually quite satisfied with at age 45. I was feeling like Boston traffic – heavy and slow – as I reached the safety of the woods.

By safety, I mean, visual safety, as in, nobody could see me. This was another shift in the 35-to-45 decade. Whereas the younger Rick would stride along with confidence, knowing that the average passer-by would acknowledge the *runner*, the senescent Rick feared the smirk of the passer-by who was observing the struggling *jogger*. As a life-long runner, being perceived as a jogger just will **not** do.

I have spent my entire running life, from age 15 to present, quickly correcting those who have said things like, “hey, I saw you out jogging yesterday.”

“No, you didn’t,” I will interject, “you saw me out *running*.”

Lately, however, their jests – “Well, you looked like you were *jogging* to me!” – have become harder to refute.

But, anyway, the shade also served as shelter from the sun. RR2K had been a very lazy ramack. While Ed and Bryan and Doon had made efforts at daily runs around the bike trails behind the Heritage Hotel, I only attempted one such exercise session, and aborted it. The ride west had not exactly been filled with activity either. There was a short and sweaty run at Burns park in Little Rock; a feeble, lung-straining jaunt at Fisher Towers; a couple of pedestrian hikes at Arches; a water walk through Zion’s Narrows; a futile attempt at looking good at Golden Gate Park; and a crack-o-dawn shuffle where I dropped off early at Lake Tahoe.

Pretty lame calorie burnage for a 25-day span. No wonder I felt heavy and slow in Eugene.

So, it was good to be hidden from view, and it was good to be hidden from the sun. The effort of lifting my legs forward would take enough of a toll on my heart; I did not need a core temperature boost from direct sunlight on top of that.

Fortunately, the only people I encountered were a pair of college-age girls who were jogging the other way. I made no silly attempt at speeding up. They’d never see me again. Why tax the system just to impress two strangers? Plus, I think I was moving faster than them anyway.

I did give them a jovial “hello!” as we passed, lamely making it look like I was not trying to go fast, but was just having a leisurely look around on this fine summer afternoon. Had to save face somehow.

The ground was very nice underfoot, too. Lots of mulch kept it soft and quiet. In many places, too, the trees created a very cool tunnel effect. They were tall, and their limbs easily spread wide enough to totally cover the trail. Most had been trimmed to allow unhindered passage, and no part of any branch hung lower than 6'6" above the path. To a 6'3" person, that seems like a close call, but it also gives you that coveted illusion of speed as those branches shoosh by the top of your head.

My 32:17 jog (sigh) barely covered three miles. Or, at least, it felt that bad. BUT, it was 32:17 more than I had done most days, so I patted myself on the back, awarded myself a beer for finishing first in this run, and took a two-gallon jug shower behind Blue Man.

So, dreaded duty done, it was time to feed.

Like I said, to a track fan, Eugene is Mecca, so as I scanned the roadsides for a suitable supper spot, I was pleased but not surprised when I spied Track Town Pizza (see logo, next page). There was no point looking any further. It was a modest-but-nice looking place, but with a name like that, I would have pulled in to sample their goodies even if it looked like that redneck biker shack called The Roadkill Grill back in South Carolina.

I would love to report that TTP had the *best pizza I have ever had*. Trouble is, they didn't: it had a strange seasoning to it, and it was oddly cold in the crust. They did have good beer though, and in nicely chilled glasses. I enjoyed a Quail Springs I.P.A., and an Alaskan Amber.

I was given a card by Melanie, the counter girl, and she punched a hole in it, explaining that when I got twelve such holes, I would get a free pizza. I was very excited by this, and immediately asked if I could borrow her puncher. This seemed to ruffle her a good bit, and she indignantly retorted, "Nooooo." Oh, well, I tried.

What made TTP the best though, was the decor. It was so good to be in a restaurant, and instead of landscapes, or flowers, or even athletic posters of Jordan and McGwire and Woods, there are well over a hundred photos of Cross Country races and Track & Field athletes in action. I walked around and looked at some of them, but I thought it would be impolite to lean my roadrank body over a table while people were eating at it, so I didn't get a good look at most of them. Still, it was great to be there.

And as I left, Melanie gave me a big wave from the back steps where she was sucking down the noxious fumes from a Parliament Light on what I had to assume was yet another butt break.

There were only a few people at Hayward when I arrived, and they were athletic types who were gathered in a loose huddle in the infield. Clad in workout garb, they had the aura of "authorized personnel" while I, well, didn't.

Undaunted, though, I strolled across the track and the infield, and casually climbed the backstretch grandstand. Act like you belong, and chances are no one will question you. I don't know who I thought might question me, or why, but whatever.

I settled in about two-thirds of the way up the middle section of stands and took in the scene. The athletic types set about their tasks. All had apparently finished warm-ups just as I arrived, had received some words of coachly wisdom from the only guy wearing long pants (did I mention that it was mid-July?), and were ready to rock.

The woman set about running long intervals, starting with a two-lapper at a strong pace. Even her recovery periods were jogging, not walking. She was serious: a 5K runner with a specific goal in a specific race that was not far off.

The younger black man went to the runway and began doing various sprint drills. He looked like the long jumper type, and the drills fit that event's needs.

The older (40's?) man just started running. His pace was not fast, but it was not dawdling either. More than likely a marathoner doing some tempo running on an accurately measured tract, and giving his legs a treat on the softer rubber surface.

Then, there was Spandex Dude. He was in his late twenties, carried ten pounds too many on his somewhat wide frame, wore black spandex shorts that clearly showed where most of those ten extra pounds were, and made a bit of a show about changing into his sprinter's spikes.



I watched, bemused, mainly because I had nothing more compelling to do at the moment. He laced them up and tested and retested the snugness. He took a few high-knees strides, shook his head, and repeated the process. He did numerous getting-ready and almost-ready arm swings and leg shakes before finally approaching the track. He looked back to see where the woman was, and, satisfied that he would get underway before she made her way down the track, he stepped out at the 200 meter mark (that's the half-lap point for you non-trackies).

He assumed an aggressive start position, took in a few deep breaths, and, at some inner command, launched into action.

He made what seemed to be a good decision by beginning his run before the woman reached him, but after about 100 meters (the length of the turn), I muttered aloud, "you gotta be shitting me." She was gaining ground on him. For lack of a better word, he was lumbering. Those spikes were like racing wheels on a logging truck (get it? lumber-ing?).

The woman did not catch him, but he made a bit of a flourish when he finished his half-lap, and put his hands on his knees to regain his breath. But the bloated moron did it in lane one, forcing the woman to detour around him as she pressed on to her second lap.

Spandex Dude then walked slowly across the infield, occasionally huffing audibly and repeating some of his favorite leg shakes. He got all the way over to his starting point again, and promptly sat down on the infield. Stretches and slow torso twists ensued. Finally, he got back up and readied himself for another half-lap dash.

This one was noticeably slower than the first, and he immediately sat down and removed his spikes. After a minute or two, he got up, carried his spikes to a small pile of clothing, slipped his feet into a pair of unlaced training shoes, and walked out of the facility.

I felt like bellowing, "Nice workout, douchebag!!" but I figured I'd just save it and tool on him in my book.

Like so.

Now, all this took maybe fifteen minutes, tops. And in that short time, some grad-student-looking guy came walking into the stadium, much like I had, crossed the infield, much like I had, and climbed the backstretch grandstand, much like I had. In fact, way too much like I had! He sat down only four rows in front of me and just a few seats over. WTF? There are two people sitting in a 100-yard-long grandstand made for a few thousand, and they are sitting fifteen feet from each other.

This was a violation of both airspace and protocol. I gave him a bit of a disbelieving look. He must have felt it because he turned once and looked at me. He gave a slight smile and turned back. He just didn't get it.

OK, time for me to leave, I guess. So, to make my point, as I began my exit, I walked within a foot of him on my way down the stands towards the track.

I did have one thing left that I hoped to do, though, but would only do it if it could be done right. I wanted to post a ramruns sticker somewhere in Hayward Field. This would require great care: I had too much respect for the place to make any gesture that could ever possibly be construed as cheap graffiti or vandalism, but I wanted to leave a discreet stamp of approval that the spirits of the place would approve of.

Under the homestretch stands, there was a restroom. I needed a pit stop anyway, so in I went. The far wall had a row of urinals, with stalls and sinks on the flanking walls. As I finished at the middle urinal, and turned to leave, my peripheral vision caught a shape overhead. Hanging from the ceiling was a drab green, metallic, exhaust fan case. It, like the rest of the facility was not very modern. It hung only about six feet out from the wall of urinals, with the fan facing the room in general, and was a good seven feet above the floor. It was perfect.

I affixed a ramruns to the middle of the back of that box. There is no way any maintenance people would ever notice it, unless they painted the box, and that didn't seem likely. I'd wager that fewer than 1% of all users of the room even notice the box at all, and that fewer than 1% of those would look up at the back. But those who did, well, they would see an unknown runner, fit and in full stride, and they would think it was a damn cool thing.

Pleased beyond belief with myself, I walked to the fence, nodded to the track, and headed off to the van. Time to hit the road, Blue Man!

My hands fumbled in my pockets. Hmph. I patted down the vinyl cover on the spare tire. Hmmmm. I reached behind both rear wheels to feel the leaf springs. Damn! Where the hell are the keys? Oh, this was not good.

A gaze inside assured me that I had not left them in the ignition, though I could not rule out having left them somewhere else in there. I may have put them on a seat and forgotten to grab when I de-vanned. Done it before.

It should have been a No Problem because I always keep a spare key in my wallet and another in my shoulder bag. But, as you probably guessed, my wallet was in my shoulder bag, which was inside the van. Smooth move, Ex-Lax.

There was only one logical thing to do: retrace my steps and hope I found them.

They were not in the bathroom, not on some sink where I might have placed them as I vandalized the room, or on top of the urinal.

They were not on the ground under the stands, or near the short fence where I had hopped it.

I had to practically graze right through the re-huddled group of athletic types (minus Spandex Dude, of course), because they had settled in just feet from where I had walked. No doubt they deemed this an airspace violation. One of life's little ironies, eh?

I sighed as I looked up and saw the grad student still planted there. I did not relish retracing my steps past him. Yeah, it was dumb, but there was some stupid pride thing working there. He had infringed on me first, but when I left, I surrendered my airspace rights to that area. Now, I had to commit the same offense. This bothered me, I guess, because it gave me a lot less reason to resent him. How humbling.

I hopped the short fence and climbed the stands, looking only at the ground. I didn't even glance at him when I passed close by him. In my mind, I imagined a smirk on his face as he gleefully held my keys in his pocket and awaited my supplication.

But, to my relief, my keys lay on the grandstand, right beneath the bench where I had been sitting. The little bastards must have toppled out as I leaned back to watch Spandex Dude's grueling workout.

I tried to look as casual as possible when I picked them up, as if they had been left there on purpose as part of some mysterious metallurgy experiment. There was no "here they are!" or "thank God, I found them!" display. That would have made me look like I had done something stupid. Instead, it was like picking up the kids after soccer practice; I pulled up at the designated place, they got in, and off we went.

So, just to show that I wasn't embarrassed, stupid, or forgetful, I re-retraced my steps, walking right past the grad student and right past the athletic types on the way back out. At that point, I was just trying to muck with their minds a little bit.

As if any of them gave a turtle turd.

It was getting late by now, and there was an excellent sunset just as I crossed the McKenzie River on I-5 North. The sky was a clean slate of blue that deepened to indigo as you looked higher, and one small tight pack of clouds hung just above the horizon, blazing vivid pink against the golden glow behind it. Nice way for the sun to say goodnight.

Somewhere up the road, I passed a 30-wheel rig. Three trailers on one truck! I imagine that was still called a "semi," but there didn't seem to be much semi about it. I hope he was just dropping one or two of those at some state line weigh station, because I could not see any way that a driver could negotiate a train like that around ordinary streets.

The goal for the night was Washington, which lay just across the Columbia River from Portland. Nearly one out of six Oregonians reside in that city, but I never met any of them. All I saw was a splendid view of the illuminated urban and waterfront areas from the high bridge that carried me out of the Beaver State. I was not eager to leave – Oregon is a grand place – but I was eager to revisit The Evergreen State. I was confident things would go more smoothly than last time...