

FOREIGN ASSIGNMENT IN THE UNITED STATES

T

he high that February afternoon was minus-22 degrees Fahrenheit. We had not seen another car on the road for at least two hours. Over in the distance a small blue elevation across a snow-swept field was grandiosely known as the Turtle Mountains.

Brad Kirbyson, the consulate's political-economic specialist, and I were about halfway through our two-day visit to all 12 of the U.S. Customs and Border Protection posts located between Pembina and Antler along the North Dakota-Manitoba border, when we stopped on a stretch of gravel road to take in the view.

That North Dakota would seem like the end of the earth never occurred to me in my prior assignment, when I was walking the dusty streets of Timbuktu. Still, exoticism is in the eye of the beholder. And making sure one has a passport to be able to get the best chicken-and-fish dinner in five counties is pretty exotic.

Fortunately, this is not a tale of a sudden blizzard sweeping in and our having to spend a night awaiting

Mary Speer, an FSO since 1986, is consul and principal officer at the American Presence Post in Winnipeg. Brad Kirbyson is the post's political-economic specialist.

MAKING SURE ONE HAS A PASSPORT TO BE ABLE TO GET THE BEST CHICKEN-AND-FISH DINNER IN FIVE COUNTIES IS PRETTY EXOTIC.

BY MARY SPEER AND BRAD KIRBYSON

the Mounties to dig us out. We may have been out of cell-phone range, but our old Jeep got us to where we were going.

Together with our counterparts across Canada, we were visiting each of the border-crossing posts in our district. This trip was followed three weeks later by a second one to cover the seven border posts between Lancaster, Minn., and International Falls, Minn. Any fantasy I may have had of a Foreign Service tour at one of these border stations to catch up on my reading was quickly dispelled when I learned about the full workload of truck and passenger vehicles regularly passing through ports seemingly so distant from any major city. The volume of traffic may not be high at some facilities, but the value of the loads passing through even the smaller ones makes it worthwhile to keep them open.

Prior to 9/11, most of these posts had one person per shift, catering almost exclusively to local traffic. A majority of the facilities were identical brick buildings dating from the 1930s that have since been abandoned. (Local agents now commute from nearby towns.) Not worth the expense to move, the old buildings mainly provide shelter for local critters escaping from the cold. Nothing else was in sight except for the Canadian border station just up the road — or down it, depending on how you view the world.

Changing with the Times

Every section of the U.S.-Canada border seems to inspire an anecdote that, to someone's mind, is reason enough to keep crossing procedures as they always have been. Yet most people we encountered on both sides of this prairie section of the border acknowledge that a changed world situation requires updated procedures. At every port, officers were now documenting 100 percent of arrivals. As Brad noted, after a CBP official greeted a driver with "Did you get the price you wanted on that heifer, Andy?," he or she would then dutifully ask for Andy's ID and type the data into the computer. It never felt as if this were a show for our benefit.

Most officers expressed gratitude that a machine-readable passport obviated the need to tediously enter in all the required information. Finding a high degree of professionalism among officers at all the ports, we felt assured that appropriate judgments would be made within the discretionary authority of each officer to permit the necessary flow of traffic in anomalous situations. At one port, Sunday morning was the busiest time as members of a local church crossed back and forth, holding services some weeks on one side of the border and some weeks on the other.

While we were assured that a way would be worked out to deal with these anomalies over time, these situations do demonstrate that some consideration has to be given to local practices in areas where a line across a map is simply an arbitrary designation. For example, the closest hospital for Canadians living across the border from Roseau, Minn., is an hour away. Emergency cases can be taken to the U.S. hospital 10 minutes from the border. Because the port is closed from 10 p.m. to 8 a.m., ambulance drivers can obtain a key to the gate for night emergencies. The driver just opens the gate and proceeds to the hospital, reporting to the Border Patrol after the fact.

Working the Angles

Nothing could be more arbitrary in its boundaries

Prior to 9/11, most of these Canadian border-crossing posts had just one person per shift, catering almost exclusively to local traffic.

than a little section of Minnesota that sticks above the 49th parallel at Lake of the Woods. The Northwest Angle, as it is known, is the product of imperfect 18th-century geographic knowledge incorporated into various treaties, and the lack of any resolve to straighten out the line. This folded envelope of land has been held in trust by the Red Lake

Indian Reservation since 1945. Accessible only by boat or by land through Canada, it raises challenges for border security, but may not be the significant risk suggested by Anderson Cooper's investigative journalism piece several years ago on CNN.

In any case, CBP officials play down concerns, point-



Courtesy of Embassy Ottawa

The Peace Bridge connects Buffalo, N.Y., and Fort Erie, Canada.

ing to the area's isolation and the difficult journey from it to the United States mainland. Even if terrorists could get to the Angle, the only potential targets are a few fishing camps, and they would still need to access the mainland. There are also many places in the Boundary Waters region between Lake of the Woods and Lake Superior that would be easier to cross than the long and treacherous stretch from the Angle. And even those easier routes would require a knowledge of wilderness and winter survival potentially too bothersome to acquire for the likely result. After all, many a seasoned local has taken a wrong turn and found him-

F O C U S

self or herself lost in a cove.

The International Peace Garden is another border anomaly. This 2,300-acre park straddles the U.S. and Canadian borders in the Turtle Mountain region and has been a symbol of peace and cooperation for the past 75 years. Established in 1932, it is a popular tourist destination and features a pre-eminent summer music camp. Visitors are not inspected at a port of entry in either country before entering the Peace Garden, and everyone is free to mingle freely while inside.

Fans of intrigue imagine people meeting face-to-face in the Peace Garden who, for some reason, are not permitted to cross the border to accomplish the same end. While CBP officials consider such possibilities and make contingency plans for them, it is highly unlikely that "bad guys" would go to such lengths to enter the park when long, unpopulated stretches of land would allow clandestine activities to take place in any number of locations.

However, it is possible that some Americans may not


be aware that they have left the country when they enter the Garden from the U.S. side, and so may not be carrying a passport or the necessary documentation needed to re-enter the United States.

Although no one seems to think this will present a major difficulty even when the Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative goes into effect, Customs and Border Protection officers realize that they will have to establish a way to keep American citizens from being stuck in the Garden like Charlie on the MTA.


Working Together

What the northern border has working in its favor is the diligence of local residents, well aware of what is happening in their regions, and good support from Border Patrol officers, equipped with snowmobiles and the recent acquisition of reconnaissance aircraft.

Our section of the border, as would be the case further west, is located near reservations. The United States, unlike Canada, acknowledges the Jay Treaty and



PIED-À-TERRE PROPERTIES, LTD.
EXCLUSIVE INTERIM RENTALS
"Washington's First and Finest Purveyor of Furnished Interim Homes"



Mother/Daughter Owned & Operated since 1990

"My friends all envied me and thought I had a great find - and so do I!
When I come back for TDY training, I hope you'll take me again"
- Constance Jones (FSO Client)

info@piedaterredc.com
O: (202) 462-0200
F: (202) 332-1406

Dupont, Georgetown, Woodley Park, Foggy Bottom,
West End, Penn Quarter
www.piedaterredc.com

Studio * One Bedroom * One Bedroom plus Den * Two Bedroom
- Month to Month -

Executive Lodging Alternatives



Interim Accommodations for Corporate and Government Markets

*Apartments,
Townhouses &
Single Family Homes*

"FOR THE EXECUTIVE ON THE MOVE"

*

finder5@ix.netcom.com

Locations throughout Northern Virginia and D.C.
Units fully furnished, equipped and accessorized
Many "Walk to Metro" locations
Pet Friendly

5105-L Backlick Road, Annandale, Virginia
Tel: (703) 354-4070 Fax: (703) 642-3619

FOCUS

permits Indians to cross the border freely if they can prove that they are at least 50-percent Native American by blood. CPB officials are concerned that such determinations are being given just for the asking. One does not have to be aboriginal by tradition to receive a tribal card, which is also available to spouses and other categories of individual. Concerned that some people may take advantage of the Jay Treaty exemption to engage in illegal cross-border activities, CBP officials are interested in how Canadian First Nations peoples will be treated under the Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative.

When the WHTI rules come into effect, a passport or other specialized document will replace the previous birth certificate and photo identification needed for entry to the United States. Under the new system, it seems certain that U.S. Native Americans will be treated like any other American citizen, so they will be required to use a passport. What documentation will be required for native peoples resident within Canadian territory must still be determined.

Ten miles north of Roseau (population 2,000) and three miles south of South Junction, Manitoba (population 50) is the Roseau port of entry. This enormous building, with at least 40 workstations in one of two areas, was built as a pilot project with the expectation that U.S. and Canadian Customs could share the same building. Objections to the carrying of firearms or some other hurdle has kept the Canadians from occupying "their" half of the building, so for the time being, it stands virtually empty.

Still, this building, one of the last stops on our trip, symbolized for us the ongoing U.S.-Canadian conversation on how best to operate a secure border between our two countries. Its large glass windows, looking both north and south across the pine forest, conveyed an open and airy feeling. The intent expressed in the port's architecture mirrors that of those of us representing the United States on the northern side of the border: to work side-by-side with our Canadian counterparts. ■

www.suiteamerica.com

HOME TO GOVERNMENT PEOPLE ON THE MOVE
PAGE



Our new website is easier than ever to use. Browse our properties, check out specials, manage your account—whatever you need. You can even book a reservation online, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. We're always on, always there. It only takes a click of your mouse to find out why we mean it when we say, "there really is a difference."

- Rate within Government Per Diem
- FEMA/PLP approved locations
- Room & Ride packages available
- Completely furnished and accessorized accommodations
- Locations within walking distance to metro
- Washer and dryer in every home
- Local phone, 25i TV, VCR and basic cable included
- No security deposits or exit fees
- Most major credit cards accepted

877-827-8483
703-461-1932



HOME IS A FEELING, NOT AN ADDRESS.

At Marriott Execustay® we'll find the perfect furnished space to fit our guests' needs and complement their lifestyles.

- Flexible rates within federal per diem
- Fully furnished apartments for stays of 30+ days
- Earn Marriott Rewards® points for the entire length of stay.

Call 800-735-7829 or visit execustay.com to reserve a stay with us.


EXECUSTAY