

Our USA Associate friend, Hugh Brien, sends IPA Journal another "Recuerdos" (Memories) from a retired Border Patrol Agent, Dan Gibson, now living in Florida who approves of it being published in our magazine.

Hugh explains that Border Patrol Rules require a member to serve on the Southern Border for first few years and then may apply for service on the Northern Border or Florida or Puerto Rico or some other location. The town of Calexico used to have an observation tower near the 'Port of Entry' and Border Patrol Agents were assigned to the tower with binoculars and a radio to advise if they observed any smuggling or illegal entry; he says that Sault Saint Marie is on Lake Superior and that Dan Gibson mentioned Saint Ignace which is a small coastal village opposite Mackinac Island. Apparently, the US Coast Guard kept a cutter there and it was also served by a ferry!

THE GREAT FROZEN NORTH

By Dan Gibson

The southern border and the northern border each has its own brand of terror. I was in the tower overlooking the port at Calexico in October 1969 when a small quake came through. If that tower is still there and you look closely, you will find my fingerprints pressed into the steel of the rungs. I am from Baltimore and have been an Oriole fan since they arrived in 1954. I was listening to the worlds series up in that tower and thought nothing could be worse than the Orioles being beat by the Mets. Till the tower began to shake. The only good thing that can be said about that experience is that it only lasted a matter of seconds.

When I arrived in Sault Ste Marie, Michigan in March 1968 (I was on detail from there to Calexico the following year) the papers were full of the news of the city manager and his young son who had gone through the ice on their snow machine and were lost. The son wasn't found till the ice thawed in May. There was another occasion when the four guys in the station hit a bar in Raber where we had information that



Signs of civilisation



The Frozen North

Canadians were coming. They just crossed the ice without being inspected to drink on the American side. I think we must have gotten about two dozen and just wrote them up and sent them back across the ice to Canada. There was a part time customs inspector in the bar that night and I later heard that a lot of the people thought he was the one who called us. He never made it home. He went through the ice that night.

After these two experiences, my brain was properly programmed for the next event. We worked on Mackinac Island in the summer by getting a ride from the Coast Guard from St Ignace to the island or just take the tourist ferry. If you have seen the movie, "Somewhere in Time" with Christopher Reeve and Maud Adams, that was shot at the Grand Hotel on the island. It's a chick flick and my wife and daughter love it. In the summer we would find a lot of aliens working in the gift shops on the island.

The coast guard and the tourist ferry did not operate in the winter once the ice set up. A very few people lived out there in the winter and they travelled back and forth by air or across the ice on snow machines. No matter how thick the ice is, somewhere out there will be a thin spot waiting to swallow you up. The old hands from the island used to mark a trail of safe ice by laying Christmas trees along the trail.

One day I found I had business on the island and the station had no snow machine. So I drove to St Ignace, parked the car and started across the ice on foot, to the island. No problem, I just followed the Christmas trees and in five miles I was there. This was my first time to do this and some things that should have been obvious never entered

my mind. I wasn't concerned when my business took longer than I had planned and the sun had gone down when I started back.

I was a quarter mile out on the ice when I discovered that I couldn't see the Christmas trees. The moon was behind me and everything in front of me was black. Black except for one red light on a pier in St Ignace. I started walking toward it, kind of like a guy with stones in his shoe. When the sun went down and the temperature fell, it started making ice. When that happens it cracks and booms and in this case probably shortened my life by ten years. I was scared silly. I just knew I was going to go through the ice and perhaps never be found. When I climbed to the parking lot at St Ignace I realised I had been talking out loud to myself the whole time and the part that was being talked to was too preoccupied to listen to the talking part.

If I had to choose between the two, the tower in the earth quake or crossing five miles of ice in the dark, I'll take the tower. At least your done with it, one way or the other, in a few seconds.