

This monthly article highlights one of our branch members. We hope that you enjoy knowing a little more about your fellow members and the interesting life they have had. If you have someone you would like to nominate or if you would like to help author an article, please email the editor, Ron Nakamoto, at ron.nakamoto@yahoo.com.

ROBERT PITTMAN



A member profile as Robert tells it:

“One of my first travel experiences was in quest of money for school. Three of us “students” were having a beer when we heard of the Anchorage earthquake earlier that day. *(Editor’s note: The 1964 Alaskan earthquake occurred at 5:36pm, Friday March 27. Lasting four minutes and thirty-eight seconds, the magnitude 9.2 earthquake was the most powerful recorded in North American history and the second most powerful recorded in world history. About 139 lives were lost.)* We quickly decided to get up there, get jobs, make big bucks and get back for the fall semester. We thought momentarily of

transportation, recognized hitchhiking was the only possible solution and met the next morning. We were fortunate to catch a ride to the rail yards in Roseville where we caught a very slow moving train going north and knew life was OK. We spent a long night parked on a spur line. Riding on the rail cars was too slow and a day later we were all back on the highway, thumbs begging for a ride. A truck stopped and picked up my buddies but left me because there was no more space! Perhaps a week later, I got to Anchorage – the only way I knew the guys were still ahead of me were messages written in gas station restrooms – all pleading “God help us catch the hard-bouncing grounders thrown at us.” I was lucky that year and got a job repairing roads in Kodiak and was able to work for the same company during the summers for several years after that.

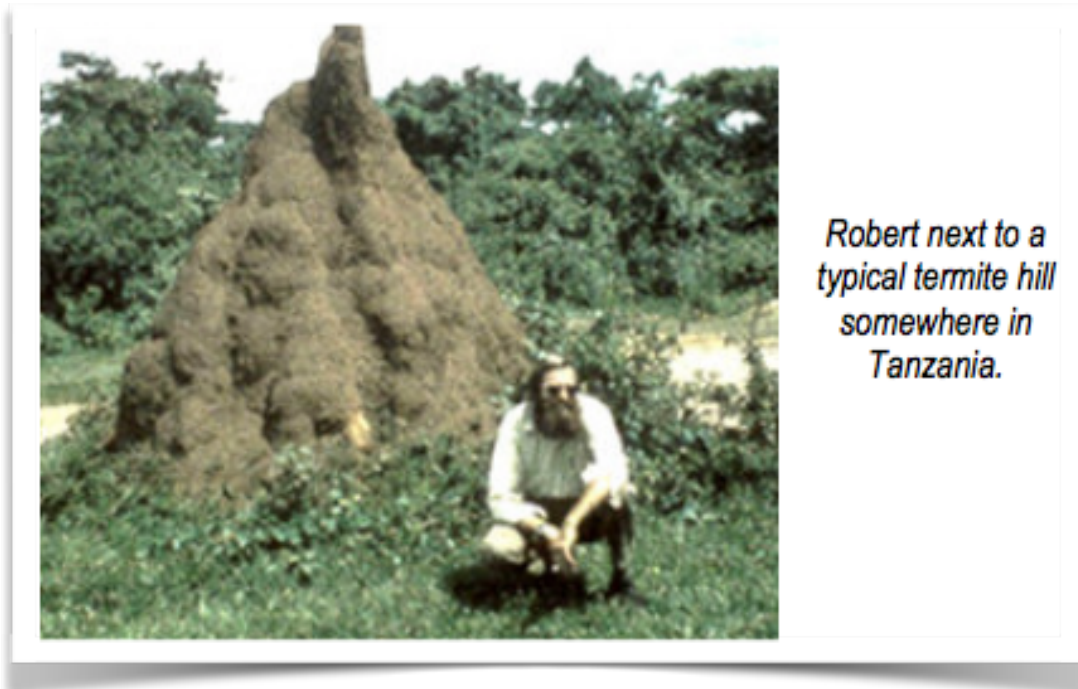
“The travel bug was still driving me and rather than stay in California to continue school, I ultimately decided to go to Paris to attend the Sorbonne. But that proved too staid when I could take the Euro Rail to Austria, Italy, Switzerland, etc. Never had a dime but I had fun! Somewhere along the roads, I remembered I was broke – then remembered I’d always been broke.

“I was born in Alberta, Canada. We lived on Grandpa’s farm where the nearest neighbor was maybe three miles up the road. The little farming town was six miles away. As the single son, my early life was farm work seemingly from morning to evening. Then I got lucky and the family application to immigrate to the US was approved after five years of waiting. So, in my 10th grade we moved to Palo Alto. The first day of school at

Cubberley High School was shocking – all these suntanned, beautiful blond and tall kids, most driving their own cars and all blissfully happy!

“After graduation, I next went to Foothill College and then to U.C. Berkeley. I enjoyed world history and the study of how economics determined the various outcomes of countries' and world destiny. Studying Economics and generally participating in all the protests, marches and Vietnam War/Peoples Park issues of the day became my passion. Just before summer break I received a card from a friend in the Seychelles Islands who was working at a Satellite Tracking station. Bingo! *(Editor's note: The Air Force established a set of Remote Tracking Stations around the world to keep in contact and command various satellites in orbit. The original Satellite Operations Center was located in Palo Alto, CA.)* I flew to Europe, then on to Nairobi, then a bus trip to Mombasa and a slow freighter on the Indian Ocean to the Seychelles. For four nights I slept under one of the stacks because of the cargo stench on this voyage from Africa to India. But talk about paradise! When we finally docked, there were wonderful beaches, people and even traces of Blackbeard and a supposed treasure buried just over the next rocky mound. I was in love with the islands.

“Too soon (eight months), I had to return to earth, eventually find a job and get back to being solvent. It took the next three years to motorcycle throughout eastern and central Africa: Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Ruanda, Burundi, Rhodesia, Mozambique and finally South Africa.



The Suzuki 250cc I rode was the perfect mode of transportation at that time since there was nothing but dirt trails to try to follow. From Johannesburg, I eventually got a job in

Durban, building 2,100 Government housing units for the local Indian community. What an experience – blacks were forbidden from using tools, Indians allowed to do only carpenter work and the whites were absolute masters. I had a crew of over 100 men. Yet I admit - it worked - as houses were completed, occupied and peace prevailed.

”After that long adventure it was again time to move on. I sold my motorcycle to purchase fare to get to London where I was able to convince the government, because of yet another relapse of malaria to loan me enough money to fly to California. I was “home”; thanks to the Queen!

“I had to shave my three-year beard to become presentable; applied for a job and was lucky enough to get one. Fairchild had an opening and I stumbled into an eleven-year career first in Purchasing and then as a Project Manager building various types of facilities, concentrating on wafer fabrication and Test/Assembly projects. I travelled extensively through the Far East and Europe. I also got married to a fellow Fairchild employee who worked as a production coordinator. I was stationed in Germany for three glorious years. My wife also loved Europe – we were in Bavaria and had full access to all of the splendors and wonders of Europe. Almost every weekend, we would drive to Austria, Italy, and Switzerland or wherever, meet very good people, see the country and simply enjoy our lives. Language was not a barrier to a traveler.

“Unfortunately, Fairchild eventually closed the plant and I transferred to Schlumberger in Cambridge, UK, for a few months to help with the construction of an R&D facility and then it was back to California. Schlumberger was going to create pressures and temperatures equivalent to those deep in the earth for experimental purposes. All in all, Fairchild was a wonderful experience - I met so many truly outstanding people and participated fully in the European lifestyle that was available to us.

“Then, there was the quest for a job once more. My ex-boss in the beginning of my Fairchild career suggested we start a company based in Hong Kong to source products and processes for the US electronics industry. One of our first clients was World of Wonders, a Disney spin-off. We sourced, subcontracted the manufacture and monitored the QC of the Teddy Ruxpin talking teddy bear. (*Editor’s note: Teddy Ruxpin was a best-selling talking bear in 1985 -1986. The bear’s mouth and eyes moved while reading stories that were played on an audio tape cassette and later a digital cartridge.*) We were running most of Worlds of Wonder off shore operations. Sometime later they gave us notice that they were going to either buy our Hong Kong Company or simply steal our employees. We sold!

“Then I met fellow SIR Jim Holman. (*Editor’s note: See the April 2017 “Members Profile” article in Trail Tips.*) We were both looking for something to work at and we ultimately teamed up with an old construction hand and started a General Contracting Company we named Devel Construction. The company specialized in clean rooms and later expanded to general manufacturing and office construction. Business was pretty lean for the first years but the company grew and we ultimately settled for small and successful. Then the semiconductor manufacturing business in the Valley went looking for less regulation, cheaper labor, land and power leaving very little new construction.

Years later, I had a stroke and that led directly to my retirement. Fortunately, I was able to sell my interest in Devel to fellow employees and the company is still in business.

“I have, thus far, weathered the resultant ‘loss of purpose’ to good advantage. Getting with the SIR group has been a real blessing and I have been amazed at the members and activities available. I can’t physically play much golf anymore (never really could play) but I do enjoy the guys and the entire BS we generate. I’ve lived my passion for history and certainly have fond memories. My happiest memory was the birth of my son. He has since grown up and is working in Hollywood as an Associate Producer. His previous shows were “Gossip Girls”, “American Astronauts Wives Club”, and “American Crime”. His current project is an upcoming series for Hulu. He is a huge blessing, an inspiration, a great guy and he loves to travel!

“As for me, hopefully there will be a continuation of good cheer in the foreseeable future.”