"Prostrate pine on a granodiorite dome". The whitebark pine, Pinus albicaulis*, is a survivor of tough environments, often growing on exposed rock where winds whip at hurricane speeds. It is a keystone species, providing habitat and an important food source for birds and mammals, even native peoples. This tough and important species is also endangered. The existence of the species is under threat by many factors, including fungal disease and increased insect outbreaks, as well as climate change and fire suppression. Photo: Melissa Schwan.*

BEHIND THE WOODSHED: TIME AND SPACE TRAVELING

by Steve Leavitt

The dendrochronological horizons of the Laboratory of Tree-Ring Research extend well beyond the friendly confines of Tucson and the United States. The articles and newsbits appearing in the Tree-Ring Times make that eminently clear. There is also plenty of evidence around our tree-ring campus to see that this has been the rule rather than the exception over the 80-year history of our department. One has merely to look at old archived boxes of wood to find labels of "S. Africa", "New Zealand", and "Argentina". A. E. Douglass, himself, during his early 20th Century years developing dendro-methods and establishing facilities, might have also originated vagabond dendrochronology with his visits to Scandinavia in 1912 and 1913 to meet with local foresters and other scientists to examine specimens from the region. A major expansion of international efforts and collaborations began in the 1960s into the early 1980s, largely through the travels and contacts established by Bryant Bannister in the Middle East, Russia and China, and Valmore Lamarche's forays into the Southern Hemisphere to three continental regions- S. America, Africa and Oceania. The late-1980s to present has seen numerous international excursions and collaborations involving virtually all faculty members (Japan, India, Chile, Morocco, Turkey, Russia, Kazakhstan, and many more). International Tree-Ring Conferences are now taking place at a regular pace, with the next scheduled for Bhutan in Summer 2018.

Unfortunately, these trips never go off without some inevitable glitch, witnessed by countless (usually temporary) unintended culinary adventures, loss of luggage, illness, and injury. Among other problems are language barriers that resourceful dendrochronologists can usually outwit. For example, one LTRR delegation to Russia (to remain unnamed) was cleverly able to associate the signs above some shop entrances boldly emblazoned with "PECTOPAH" (correctly pronounced "peck-tow-pah") as indicating some kind of eatery, thereby ensuring proper sustenance throughout the trip whenever they could spot the sign. The exotic nature of increment borers also make for potential problems when packed in luggage, even those checked in. This is nowhere better illustrated than in 1972 when x-rays revealed the presence of a mysterious metal object in a checked bag on a New Zealand flight, and all previously-boarded passengers had to cheerfully/miserably debark and identify their baggage neatly laid out on the tarmac of the originating airport.

As the expanding international branches of the LTRR tree are nourished by visits of students, post-docs and scholars from abroad and through collaborations, meetings and field work taking LTRR students, staff and faculty around the world, undoubtedly many more remarkable told and untold stories about these adventures will accrue. This could be likened to unparalleled hijinx and misadventures that result when you rely on the trainee porcupine cuddler working at the flea market veterinary clinic for all of your medical and dental needs. But rather than going through all that, why not just ask LTRR folks if they have any interesting travel stories?