

## ***West Coast USA***

Having grown up surfing Illawarra beaches in the sixties, talk of a West Coast USA tour conjured up in my mind images of the Beach Boys, Jan & Dean, Huntington Beach and Ventura Highway. And it is all that, but planning for this tour included the rugged coastlines of Washington and Oregon states, the magnificent Redwood forests, and eventually grew to include some spectacular US National Parks.

The idea was first mooted on our 2016 Beautiful Balkans tour, and all participants had subsequently toured together again in various combinations and various countries. The magic of the internet enabled our scattered group to exchange ideas, and eventually the tour was locked in. Andrew decided to ship his Harley across from his Ontario home, while Kurt from Florida and the rest of us (Aussies) rented an assortment of BMW's from Cycle BC in Vancouver, the start and finish point of the tour.

Despite cool but clear weather leading up to our departure, it was cold and raining as the 6 bikes / 8 riders set off, and continued on and off through heavy traffic in Vancouver, Seattle and Tacoma, as well as the 50 minute wait to cross the Canada / US border into Washington State. At dinner that night there was a sense of relief that the first day was done and dusted and we could get on with the tour.



*waiting in the rain at the Canada / USA border*

After our night stay in Olympia, the first touristy must-do was a visit to Mount St Helens volcano, infamous for the 1980 eruption that claimed 57 lives and generated the largest debris avalanche in recorded history. Although the rain held off briefly, cloud cover prevented a good view of the mile wide opening on the crater north face. The roads had partly dried as we headed towards the coastal resort of Seaside, finally giving some reasonable riding conditions through the winding countryside.



*Mount St Helens volcano, Washington State*

Six days were allocated to travel down the west coast from Seaside, staying in Gold Beach, Mendocino, San Francisco (2 nights), Morro Bay and Long Beach. The route occasionally hugged the rugged cliffs, and also passed through forests and farmland. Road conditions were fairly good with generally light traffic, making the riding enjoyable, particularly after mid-day on the third day when the sun finally came out.



*welcoming blue sky along the Oregon coastline*

On several occasions the cliffs were shrouded in a low level mist, presenting an eerie scenario trying to determine the true outline of the coast. Unfortunately this impression is not obvious in my photos.

Redwood Highway is a section of Highway 1 in California and as the name suggests it passes through magnificent Redwood forests. A helpful lady at a coffee stop recommended we detour through Prairie Creek Redwood State Park giving the opportunity to get up close and personal to these mighty trees.



*first time for all together since the Beautiful Balkans tour in 2016*

At one stage a lengthy delay gave rise to fears of a traffic accident, only to find the road was blocked by a large stag and his entourage. Naturally we added to the delay by also stopping to take photos.



*Prairie Creek Redwood State Park, California*





*rugged coastline in northern California*

Even at this early stage it became evident the GPS systems fitted to the bikes had a mind of their own, and it wasn't unusual for conflicting directions to arise during the course of the day. With input from the other participants, I had planned the route using Google Maps, and it was more than a little frustrating that some route towns chosen from Google Maps did not exist in my GPS. Mind you, some of the towns turned out to be "blink and you miss them", and many certainly never achieved the lofty status of having a road sign named after them. Perhaps they represented those occasional isolated mail boxes.



*another day and another rugged California coastline*



Philippa and Kurt had booked all accommodation well in advance, while fuel and food stops were determined on the day with the assistance of the GPS and TripAdvisor. The smaller BMWs and the Harley required more frequent fuel stops, and the Canadian and USA requirement to pay for fuel before filling caused many frustrations with acceptance of our credit and travel cards in the auto-pay machines.

Paying with cash was more easily facilitated but needing to guess how much to pay up front didn't always result in a full tank. Despite this lack of trust, they didn't mind us entering the servo with our helmets on. Trust returned in restaurants and bars, where running up a beer tab was the norm.

The group number increased when Kurt's wife Barbara, who no longer rides, joined the tour in Mendocino and accompanied us in a hire car until South Lake Tahoe.

On the rest day in San Francisco, we took the opportunity to explore this interesting city on a hop on-hop off bus tour. The Golden Gate Bridge shook off the usual fog, the cable cars rattled (then broke down), Fisherman's Wharf dished out Bubba Gump seafood, and hippie Height-Ashbury provided the inspiration for purple borders around these photos.



*Golden Gate Bridge in all its glory*

I'd had a 4 day stop-over in San Francisco on the way to Vancouver, and the usual fog had shrouded the tops of the Golden Gate Bridge towers, so the clear view was a pleasant surprise. I also did the Alcatraz night tour and a city bus night tour, and the rest day had me feeling I was in familiar territory.

Unfortunately for Phil & Liz, the rear brake pads on their R1200RT disintegrated and hasty repairs were organized by Cycle BC at a local BMW dealership. During the course of the trip, Andrew's Harley overheated and required a new water pump, while another R1200RT, the F700GS and my F800GT all blew headlight globes at different times. I still haven't untangled my fingers trying to replace them.



*hippie Height - Ashbury, and flowers for your hair*

Leading out of San Francisco, I took the group on a detour to find Maverick's Beach, noted for its big wave surfing. Unfortunately my motorcycle version of Garmin got seasick at any indication of a swell and led us around in circles for a while. We eventually reached a pair of locked gates and warning signs threatening fates that only the US military can dish out, so gave up on this particular expedition.



*US military keeping an eye out for big waves at Maverick's Beach*

The Maverick break is a mile out to sea and only happens when there's a big winter swell. Despite the poor behavior of my GPS, the sea that day was as flat as some of the craft beers we had sampled, so it's unlikely we would have seen anything.

We stopped in Carmel-by-the-Sea for lunch, not only because Clint Eastwood had been the town mayor but it is a pleasant town and has plenty of nice restaurants to choose from. Hope we made Clint's day.

Big Sur is a section of road between San Francisco and Morro Bay, and features in many travel blogs, in particular photos of the Bixby Creek Bridge. This road was closed by landslides in May 2017, and while planning the route I anxiously monitored the Caltrans website sweating on its scheduled July 2018 re-opening date. We weren't disappointed, nor were the dozens of other photographers at the site.



*the iconic Bixby Creek Bridge at Big Sur, California*

A visit to Hearst Castle at San Simeon was also on the itinerary, but due to various delays, not all the fault of my seasick GPS, we arrived just after the final shuttle bus was leaving for the fairytale estate. The "castle" was partly visible on a nearby hilltop but we weren't allowed to ride up on the bikes.

Morro Bay was covered in a thick blanket of fog next morning. The lady at reception said the fog was a regular occurrence but assured us it would lift soon. It finally lifted after Guadalupe, almost 1 hour down the road. Easy to understand why all the fishing trawlers were fitted with marine radar, particularly with the imposing Morro Rock stuck in the middle of the harbour.



Travelling Ventura Highway was as delightful as the song depicts and artificial intelligence in the GPS gave us a pleasant detour through hills leading to Malibu, but the traffic getting into, around, over, under and through Los Angeles did little to cheer us. Imagine riding a 6 lane freeway (each direction) with seemingly endless traffic, and passing over another 6 lane freeway (each direction) with seemingly endless traffic. Perhaps some don't have homes and just live in their stationary pick-up trucks.

We did have a home for the night, in the majestic Queen Mary moored permanently at Long Beach. Fortunately the mooring was stable and secure, and I was able to program my GPS for the next day's adventure heading east. Leading the group each day was shared between Kurt, Archer and myself, and I found it helpful to research interesting stops, fuel availability and food outlets beforehand rather than chance it on the run. When the GPS co-operated, that is.



*cruising the West Coast in a famous ocean liner*

With the West Coast behind us, it was time to travel the iconic Route 66, albeit in reverse to the original and traditional journey. By this stage we didn't always ride together, occasionally breaking into smaller groups to suit individual preferences and to avoid the complications a larger group can incur.

On this day we set off in 2 groups and agreed to meet at Victorville Starbucks for coffee. Traffic was still heavy until we reached San Bernadino, then became less congested as we passed over the hills into the desert beyond. Despite the drop in local traffic, there were still a lot of freight vehicles on the roads. The targeted Starbucks was closed, the new one 8km down the road was still being fitted out, and the desired coffee fix was replaced by a healthy dose of fruit juice.

Victorville promotes itself as the gateway to Route 66 and does have a Route 66 museum, but it really doesn't deserve the 3 visits we were subjected to by my GPS that morning, initially while trying to find Starbucks and twice trying to find the real Route 66 road out of town. This setback aside, the ride was an interesting exercise made somewhat melancholy by the deserted cafes, service stations, farm houses and "For Sale" signs scattered along the road. It is now a popular tourist route and the remaining establishments seem destined to survive and thrive.



*Elmer's Bottle Tree Farm on Route 66*

While still lost in Victorville, I received a text message from the other group that they had stopped at Peggy Sue's 50's Diner in Yermo for lunch, as you do. The diner owners had been in the movie business and their statues of Elvis Presley and the Blues Brothers, many movie posters and much more memorabilia fitted this setting perfectly. What did seem out of place was the extensive array of army tanks, personnel carriers and other military equipment stored in an open air depot across the road.

With the temperature in the high 30's, I was tempted to continue along Route 66 and pass through really cool sounding places like Klondike and Siberia, but with the time lost in Victorville we decided to take the highway for a while. At least we didn't have to pass through Bagdad.

The temperature reached 40°C riding into Needles. We refueled and bought ice creams, primarily so we could stand next to the freezer in the non air-conditioned shop. To prolong our attempt at heat dissipation, I struck up a conversation with the proprietor and asked what they do when it really gets hot. He casually replied they go and jump in the river, referring to the nearby Colorado River that forms the border between California and Arizona. I think he was hinting I should do the same.

Darkness was falling as we finally reached Kingman for the night. After a quick shower it was a short walk to a Mexican restaurant to celebrate Kurt's birthday. A large group of Harleys was parked in the hotel reception area, and we subsequently met up with them at several other locations. Turns out they were a group of French riders and generally were having a very good time each time we saw them.

There weren't as many bikes on the roads as I had expected, and it's no surprise which brand dominated. Those that were out riding would always acknowledge you with a very casual movement of the left hand, made easy when riding on the other side of the road. I'd also expected to see more muscle cars and hot-rods, but it appears pick-up trucks have taken over.



*Seligman, Arizona – the self-declared home of Route 66*

The route beyond Kingman included more sections of Route 66 with the usual quaint diners, including a coffee stop at the Road Kill Café in Seligman and a photo stop in Williams. It's really a road for the history and the nostalgia more than the riding and again we also took some highway sections to allow more time for a ride along the edge of the Grand Canyon that afternoon.

Unfortunately the rain returned with a vengeance as we parked at the Visitor's Centre, held us captive during lunch in the café and then the gift shop, and barely let up for the rest of the afternoon. At least we had somewhere dry to put on our rain suits.

We stopped at several scenic lookouts along Grand Canyon Drive but the view was somewhat spoiled by the rain and mist, so we saved our diminishing dryness for the remaining 2 hour ride to Kayenta.





*Grand Canyon - more misty than grand this day*



*Monument Valley, near the border between Arizona and Utah*

Although accommodation had been booked well in advance, we were unable to secure bookings at our preferred stops on the Monument Valley leg, and the remaining options meant this became the longest day of the tour. We left Kayenta at 7:00am and didn't arrive at Hatch until 7:15pm, including a long stop to read the sign (and buy a souvenir) at the Navajo Nations Monument Valley Tribal Park Visitors Centre, but this was one of the most enjoyable rides of the tour.



*keep running, Forrest*

The scenery was exhilarating, straight out of a John Wayne western, the weather was kind, and most roads were rather enjoyable. In his movie, even Forrest Gump stopped running here to fully appreciate the scenery, but I would recommend he do it on a motorbike next time. It was that good.



*on the lookout for John Wayne in Monument Valley Tribal Park*

To top off a special day, Bryce Canyon was an amazing array of rock formations called “hoodoos” standing up to 60m high. We arrived around 4:30pm and the shadows were just starting to impact on the impressive sights. There were many walking trails to access “Sunrise Point” and “Sunset Point”, but in our bike gear we were sufficiently satisfied with scenic points closer to the carpark.



*Spectacular! hoodoos in Bryce Canyon National Park, Utah*

After a day like that, the Outlaw Saloon was the obvious (and only) place for dinner. Fortunately the cowboy comparisons ended and we didn't have to slaughter any wildlife for our cook-it-yourself BBQ.



*on the lookout for John Wayne at the Outlaw Saloon, Hatch*



The temperature was a cold  $-1^{\circ}\text{C}$  leaving Hatch next morning, in contrast to the forecast  $37^{\circ}\text{C}$  for our destination Las Vegas, but fortunately the ride was comfortable for most of the morning.

Zion National Park was another amazing combination of colourful rock formations, different again from previous National Parks, and had a heavy concentration of slow traffic. It was worth taking it easy to take in the stunning scenery, and progress was further slowed by a couple of darkish one way tunnels, not ideal with a blown headlight. Parking spots were available but generally ignored when stray desert bighorn sheep appeared to tease the photographers.



*even desert bighorn sheep were on the lookout*



*following the bighorn sheep trail, in Zion National Park, Utah*

It was 35°C when we stopped for a late lunch at St George, and after a series of highways the weather forecast proved spot on while making our way through heavy Las Vegas traffic. The city features in so many movies and TV shows that I felt almost familiar with the surroundings, easily recognising Caesar's Palace, MGM Grand, the Luxor Pyramid and of course the Eiffel Tower replica at Paris Las Vegas.

We arrived at the hotel around 3:30pm and the discomfort elevated when I found our room wasn't ready and there wasn't a bar on site. To top it off, the friendship between Dennis and I didn't extend to the single king bed they eventually offered, and more precious beer time was lost waiting for a twin room to be made available. That night we had a fancy Chinese dinner in the Bellagio Resort and Casino overlooking the dancing fountains, and despite my concern about getting sunburnt from all the neon lights, I was happy to experience the glitz and glamour and chaos that is Las Vegas.

The next day was a rest day, and a helicopter flight into the Grand Canyon for a champagne lunch on a glorious blue sky day made up for the inclement Grand Canyon weather a few days earlier. The blue theme continued well into the night, attending a Moody Blues concert in Wynn Casino. My helmet resonated with Justin Hayward and "Nights in White Satin" for many days thereafter.



*the mighty Hoover Dam, hiding behind it's more recent bypass bridge*

We caught taxis to the Moody Blues concert, and almost needed another taxi to get to the theatre within the casino. Our taxi driver regaled us with his love for the city, the fact he doesn't pay any taxes, and the temperature range from over 40°C in summer to occasional snow in winter. He also warned us not to walk down this particular street at night. His ploy worked and we caught taxis back to the hotel.

Judging by their evening wear, some of the young ladies obviously didn't expect it to snow that night.





*after a misty initial introduction, the Grand Canyon didn't disappoint*



*nor did the Moody Blues in concert at Wynn Casino, Las Vegas*

After a busy “rest” day we had another long day ahead of us, and what better preparation for the ski resort of Mammoth Lakes than a ride through Death Valley in 42°C heat. To be fair it did occasionally drop to a relatively chilly 38°C. The landscape was fairly barren, and the road passed between distant rocky mountain ranges. The weird and craggy rock formations would have been a geologist’s delight, and John Lodge singing “Isn’t Life Strange” occasionally displaced that other tune in my helmet.





*no further explanation needed*



*chillin' out at 42°C in Death Valley*

It may seem odd wearing all the protective gear, but I've had my share of working near boilers and blast furnaces and knew it was better being covered than exposed to the searing heat. The temperature gradually fell as we gained elevation from 282 feet below sea level to 4,000 feet above, climbing up and down the craggy mountains. ( I remember the elevation data from the road signs. Remember feet? )

More exhilarating riding was in front of us before reaching Mammoth Lakes, and a refreshing 14°C .



*no snow cover on these rocky mountains*

Even better riding was to come next day. There were snow caps on mountains leading into Yosemite National Park, and a herd of bison grazing in a field were oblivious to the throng of photographers. The park itself was a cool but pleasant ride through many corridors of trees, more mountains and several small lakes, and the usual fairly slow traffic. Leaving the park we stopped for a refuel then lunch at a friendly Friesian-besotted diner in classic Jamestown.



*Yosemite Sam's pesky varmints*

The return loop through Stanislaus National Forest and Sonora Pass over the Sierra Nevada was an excellent ride with good roads, light traffic, great scenery and some forest scarred by recent fires.

I had made enquiries before we left regarding National Park fees but was led to believe the US\$80 annual pass was only available for US citizens. Having paid US\$30 entrance fees to ride through Grand Canyon and Bryce Canyon National Parks I wasn't too embarrassed to ride past the auto toll station at Death Valley. Then a helpful ranger at Yosemite told us we did qualify for the annual pass. Go figure.



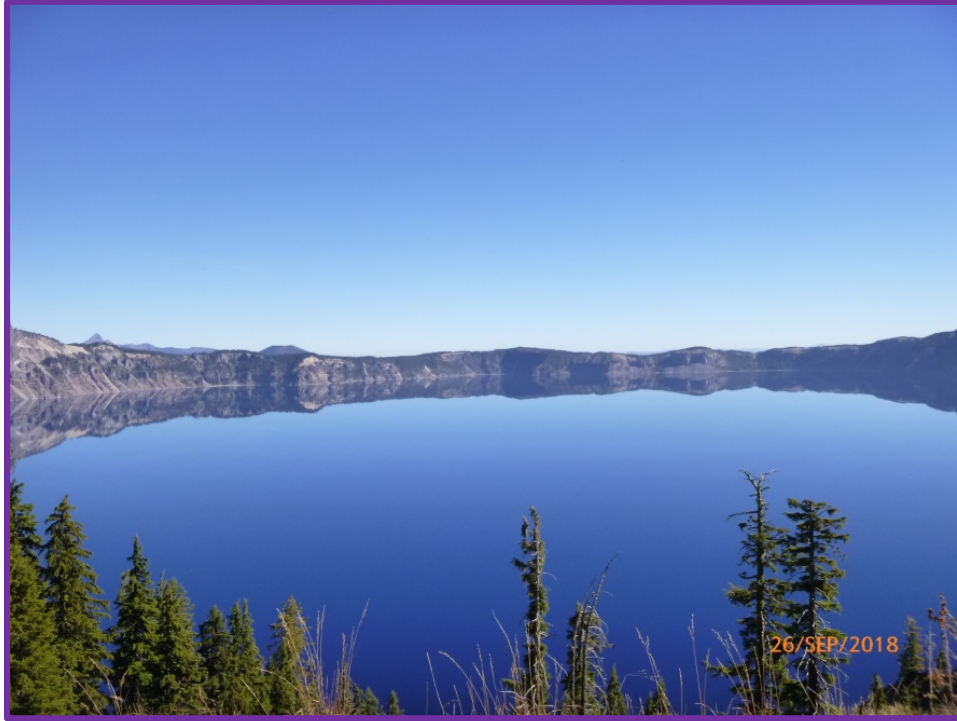
*on the way to South Lake Tahoe*

The planned route from South Lake Tahoe to Klamath Falls was to pass on the east side of the lake, but while reviewing stops to plug into the GPS I thought I'd try the west side instead. At least I thought I did. Still, the east side did give a picturesque ride beside the lake for a while, then a good ride over a mountain range, and a loop past Carson City, named after the famous frontiersman Kit Carson.

The route then took us through agricultural areas, mainly cattle but some crops, a long relatively straight run through Modoc National Forest, then a lot more agricultural endeavours before our hotel at Klamath Falls. Nibbly's restaurant was the venue for dinner. The waitress handing out menus could serve meals but was too young to serve us the alcoholic drinks we so desperately needed, despite the fact here in Oregon, with her parent's permission, she could have been carrying a loaded rifle. Fortunately other waitresses were able to serve the almost forbidden life-threatening alcohol.

We again deviated from the planned route next day to visit the stunning natural feature that is Crater Lake, formed within the caldera of Mount Mazama volcano. It is the deepest lake in USA and is covered in snow for 8 months of the year. We were fortunate to visit on a clear still day, and marveled at the striking blue colour and the mirror image reflections on the water. There were several stops at view points along Rim Drive, and the scene was equally impressive from any direction.





*a perfect day at remarkable Crater Lake*



*reflecting on life with my buddy Kurt, at Crater Lake, Oregon*

We had a coffee at Crater Lake café but, too early for lunch, continued on to La Pine. Once again my choice of diner was not up to scratch so we continued to the much larger city of Bend. I hadn't put any Bend food outlets in the GPS but took a turnoff displaying a knife and fork sign expecting to find eating opportunities. Eventually we found a yuppie area with trendy cafes, but not before we'd passed through an industrial area where I presume there must be a small factory producing cutlery.

On the road again and a group of Triumph sports cars including TR3As, TR4s and a TR6 passed in the opposite direction. Among them was a Triumph Herald. I suppose they are part of the family, and a pleasing change from the pick-up trucks and blocks-of-flats on wheels populating the roads. In fairness, we did see more Prius and Tesla than we would normally see in Australia.

During the planning stage, some stops were selected simply because they were part way between more significant stops, but this did give the opportunity to become acquainted with contemporary mid town America instead of staying in the more touristy locations. The Dalles fitted this description, and did feature several wall murals that warranted our attention before setting off next morning.



*contemplating wall murals in The Dalles, Oregon*

With this inspiration, we moved on to Toppenish to see some of that town's 78 wall murals, stopping on the way at a full scale Stonehenge replica dedicated to district servicemen who fought in World War 1. Apparently a local farmer who had served in the war and visited Stonehenge thought it a suitable memorial to those who lost their lives. (At the time, Stonehenge was thought to be a site of human sacrifice, although this concept has more recently been discredited). We also saw a parade of Corvette sports cars from the 60's to late models coming out of the memorial parking area, restoring my faith in good old American values.

Toppenish was also meant to be a lunch stop, but despite most parking spots taken up by cars and pick-ups there were very few people around, a lot of vacant shops, and again we struggled to find an appealing eating venue. We moved on to Union Gap and a reasonable diner.

After consulting Google Maps, Dennis and I decided to take a 50km deviation called Canyon Road that promised an interesting ride through several small rural towns skirting the Yakima River. None of the small towns were accepted by my GPS and I still haven't seen the turn-off. In fact, if I hadn't seen a sign to "Canyon Road" at the intersection where we should have eventually come out, I might have even less trust in Google Maps than the GPS.



*Sam Hill Memorial Bridge and the Columbia River, viewed from Stonehenge Memorial*

Our final rest day was Leavenworth, a town styled on a Bavarian village and certainly boasting no shortage of fine wining and dining options. Our Friday rest day fell before the annual Autumn Leaf Festival weekend (hence the significant increase in accommodation costs from Thursday to Friday night) and the town was all dressed up and ready to party.

During dinner the first night Kurt and Andrew tried to explain the rules of NFL football, but if I can't understand some bunker interpretations of NRL rules I've no chance of understanding NFL. Still it was a relaxing and interesting evening leading into a rest day.

This was an opportunity to do some laundry, try to replace the headlight globes, catch up on emails and pay some bills, and have a casual walk through town and a garden park beside the Wenatchee River. The Dirtyface Amber beer I had at lunch may have spoiled my tastebuds for our own afternoon party in a couple of wine tasting cellars, but I'll stick to Clare Valley Annie's Lane Shiraz. Dinner was in the packed Andreas Keller Restaurant, where I enjoyed the spicy pork cutlets but laid off the weinkraut.





*a restful day in Leavenworth, Washington*



*replacing Draggin' jeans with lederhosen in Leavenworth, Washington*

After Leavenworth, we travelled north to Kelowna in Canada, following the Columbia River for over 100km, and this time with a much shorter wait at the border. The final section included a pretty route along the Okanagan Highway, liberally scattered with fruit orchards and boutique vineyards.

Kelowna was a much larger city than I expected, and we had dinner in the Craft Beer brewery boasting more than 100 local beers on tap. I imagine it would be fun participating in the think tank that comes up with names for their beers.

Rain was threatening as we left next morning, and we decided we'd have a coffee and refuel stop in Vernon to revisit the weather forecast. Determined to learn the hard way that meteorology is a science and not an art, we agreed to follow the planned route, travelling further north through Salmon Arm before turning west to Kamloops then south towards our stop in Princeton.

Rain threats turned to sprinkles as we rode into Kamloops, and I blame the GPS for another poor lunch stop selection. Many hours of playing Monopoly in my youth has me subconsciously expecting all streets will be one-way when travelling clockwise around a block, but while looking for the café district the GPS demanded I ride anti-clockwise into oncoming traffic. In desperation I took what was on offer. Still the café was dry, the fare was warm and reasonably priced and no one died from food poisoning.

Gastronomic idiosyncrasies were forgotten when it started snowing shortly after, and though not heavy, it didn't let up for around 50km. One would think that heading towards the Equator would give improved weather conditions, but this was Canada, the Equator was a long way away, and every road seemed to have at least one high and challenging mountain pass. The snow did melt rather than build up on the road, but would stick to the helmet visor instead of washing off as rain does. The heated grips seemed useless at a wet 0°C, and there wasn't much feeling in my fingers to wipe the visor effectively.



*caught without snow tyres after Kamloops, BC*

In the poor visibility I could barely read the road signs warning that after 1 October all cars were to have snow tyres fitted and all trucks were to carry snow chains. No mention of motorcycles!

The snow stopped before the descent into Merritt and we took Highway 5A past Aspen Grove. I was leading in the cold and light rain, and conditions improved as we settled into the long sweeping bends dotted with small lakes and isolated homesteads, with little traffic to upset the rhythm, and splashes of colour as the trees changed between greens, yellows and rusty reds.

This was more pleasant riding, probably enhanced by our snow experience, and a large deer blocking the road added to the atmosphere. I slowed as he idled off and disappeared into the forest before I could wield my camera. Without any photographic evidence, the others denied even seeing him.

We arrived at Princeton around 3:30pm cold but relieved. The hair dryer got a good workout then gave up, so we wandered down to the nearby Brown Bridge Pub for a couple of beers while the hair dryer was sent to the neutral corner for the requisite cooling off period.



*inquisitive visitors in the Princeton, BC hotel car-park – rather deer than grizzlies*

The penultimate day's planned route was a long ride heading north to a ranch stay and possible horse ride at Sundance Ranch, near Cache Creek. We visited the Mounties Station and Visitors Centre in Princeton, and after viewing the excellent British Columbia website ( [www.drivebc.com](http://www.drivebc.com) ) decided the final day's planned route would be too unpredictable. The website lists road closures and weather alerts, and has a series of cameras fitted along highways showing real time road conditions.

The main concern was the higher northern section of Highway 99, the route planned for the last day's ride back into Vancouver. The majority decided to go to the ranch and return to Vancouver by a more reliable route, while Kurt decided to return direct to Vancouver. Something about a football game.



Being wary of unleashing any horsepower fuelled by hay, and not wishing to miss an opportunity to visit Whistler, Dennis and I decided to ride to Squamish for the night and take on the lower section of Highway 99 for a ride to Whistler on the final day.

We had been cautioned about mountain passes near Manning Park on our revised route, but the rain stayed away and the ride was very comfortable and the weather pleasant. It was only as we stopped for lunch in Hope that the rain and cold returned, then disappeared again as we passed through Vancouver towards Squamish.

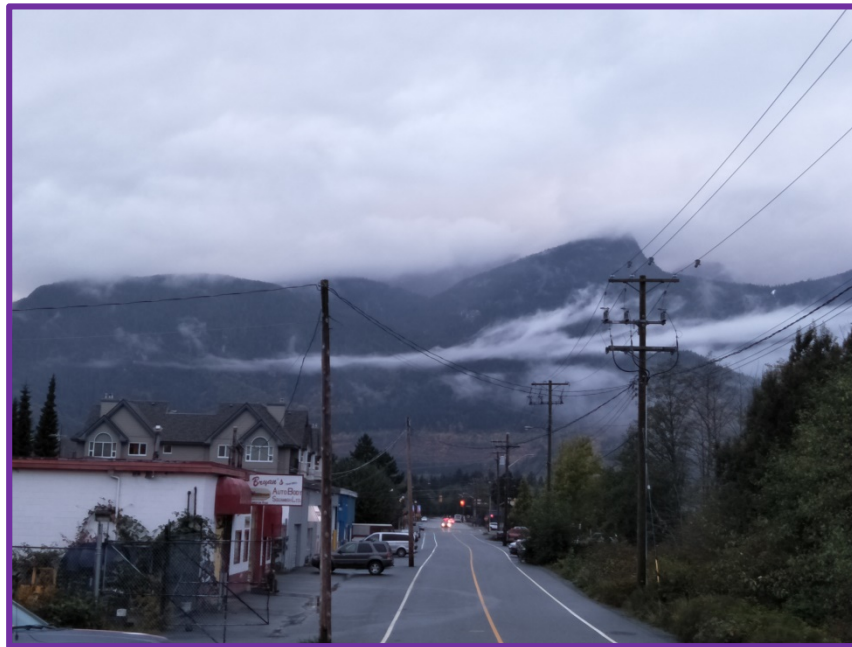


*dry roads, blue skies and colourful trees, a wonderful combination near Manning Park*

Vancouver to Squamish was also a good ride with the large islands in Howe Sound on the left and imposing cliff faces on the right. Occasionally the clouds cleared enough to show the islands, but the wet road and lack of view points gave little opportunity to stop for a better look.

The rain held off as we walked into town for dinner, but returned later that evening to dash any hope of a fine day in Whistler. Next day the weather gods were as ruthless as the All Blacks in a Bledisloe Cup decider. Not only did we have constant rain and strong winds for the ride to Whistler but the ski slopes were wrapped in mist and cloud sufficient to make the Grand Canyon white-out reminiscent of an old, under-performing backyard sauna. To top it off, the GPS again sent me the wrong way down one way Whistler streets, causing more interference than the great Richie McCaw at his intimidating best.

Abandoning hope of further exploration around Whistler, we returned to Vancouver around lunch time. There the roads were dry, the sun was shining, the traffic was frustrating, and the GPS had one final shot at getting us lost while looking for a fuel station before we returned the bikes. Kurt had returned his bike the previous day, and the others had not yet arrived, so we caught a taxi to our hotel and had a late lunch while an early room was made available. And another hair dryer got a good workout.



*overnight in Squamish – hard to believe this was the same day as the previous photo*

At least I was satisfied I hadn't given up on my desire to visit Whistler.

Choosing the right time of year to travel will improve the chance of good weather, but I put it down to just plain bad luck that it rained part of every riding day in Canada. After all it was fine both days before we picked up the bikes and both days after we returned them. The discomfort of rain and cold may be temporary, but the disappointment of being unable to fully experience the great roads and beautiful scenery is permanent. Unless of course you go back sometime and do it all again.

Later at the hotel Dennis and I caught up with Kurt and we went for a walk and a beer while waiting for the others to arrive. Kurt had had an uneventful return trip, and the others experienced some trepidation on the ranch's unsealed entrance, had been introduced to the horses but didn't really go for a ride, and successfully negotiated the roads there and back with less foul weather than that which beset Dennis and I. At least we had all survived safe and sound.

Total distance travelled in the 20 riding days was 8,760km.



*enquiring where the mountains went - in Whistler, BC*

We held our “Last Supper” in a Japanese restaurant a few blocks down the road from the hotel. I don’t mind some Asian foods, but Japanese can be a little too exotic for me and I wondered whether this was pay back for my culinary faux pas(s) selecting lunch stops. After watching Phil’s reactions while eating, I knew I hadn’t been singled out.

Fortunately my late lunch ensured I didn’t starve. Instead I found myself contemplating the diners that didn’t quite win a place in the starting team, salivating for an oversized buffalo burger skewered with a Sioux arrow and surrounded with fries and ketchup. And a slight touch of something green. And washed down with chocolate and coffee flavoured Deschutes Black Butte Porters instead of Sapporo.

Of course the table talk was not only about this trip, but where to next.....



# WEST COAST MOTORBIKE TOUR

USA & CANADA - 2019

