

Lightening the Bucket

Our 2017 Motorcycle Camping Adventure

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Like many folks, my wife Lisa and I have things we hope to do and see during our lifetime. Many people refer to this as a 'bucket list'. Since we are retired and still blessed with decent health, we decided to tackle some of these items. These included seeing and riding along the west coast, visiting Yosemite and Glacier National Parks, and to see the giant Redwood and Sequoia Trees. Since we met 37 years ago, we have always enjoyed camping together. So naturally, we decided to make this a camping adventure.



OUR GEAR.

We ride a 2015 GL1800/ABS and tow a 2008 Time-Out tent camper. Although we have done more than our share of pure tent camping, with and without a motorcycle, we now desire to be off the ground and usually insist on electric campsites. With our camping gear and luggage, the trailer weighed in at 720 lbs with a 40 lb tongue weight. This is admittedly a very heavy load and is the reason we selected an ABS Goldwing to replace our previous motorcycle. Our wing towed this flawlessly even over several mountain passes without breaking a sweat. Even though we rode many areas with 70 and 80 mph speed limits and could have easily done so, I set a personal max speed of 65mph when I tow this camper.

DAY 1 to 4.

We left our home in east Tennessee on June 15 and began our journey west. On day 1 we hit some extremely severe weather with high winds and heavy rain. Surprisingly, this was the last time during our 34-day adventure that we encountered any rain. As we entered Missouri we saw a sign for Route 66 State Park so stopped to visit. A very nice, well-kept park with a nice little museum in the visitor center. We made a stop to visit Dodge City Boot Hill Museum. A bit touristy, but worth a stop. Shortly after entering Colorado, I spotted an old steam train as we rode through a small town called Lamar. Being a train buff, we just had to stop. It turns out it was a small Colorado visitor center. Inside I met a very sweet woman named Verna who gave me several tips on things not to miss along our route which I had not had planned to visit. It reminded me that often, these small little visitor centers are a wealth of local information when travelling into unknown areas. On day 4, we arrived at our first basecamp at Lake Pueblo State Park.

Day 5.



We started the day by riding

Skyline Drive, a narrow one way road that follows a ridgeline overlooking Cañon City, Colorado. Having a fear of heights, these type roads are always a challenge for me.

Next we rode to the Royal Gorge Bridge and walked across the bridge.

We then rode to the summit of Pikes Peak. The ride was a lot of fun. Despite having a long wait at the entrance gate, within a few miles, traffic thinned out. Once at top, we walked around a bit and took a lot of pictures. We realized it was time to go when we both started feeling a little lightheaded from the 14,000+ elevation. Made it to Pikes Peak. Remove that from the bucket!



Day 6.

Today we visited a little known attraction called Bishops Castle that some friends told us about. It is a very unique building started in 1969 by Jim Bishop. After climbing around the castle for an hour, we then rode some fun backroads to the old mining town, Cripple Creek.



Day 7.

We broke camp and headed west on US 50 again. Our first stop was the Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Park. This is one of the places Verna at the visitor center told us about. It is a very impressive, little heard of canyon.

We then drove one of my favorite scenic roads. Hwy 128 from Cisco, UT to Moab, UT that runs along the Colorado River.

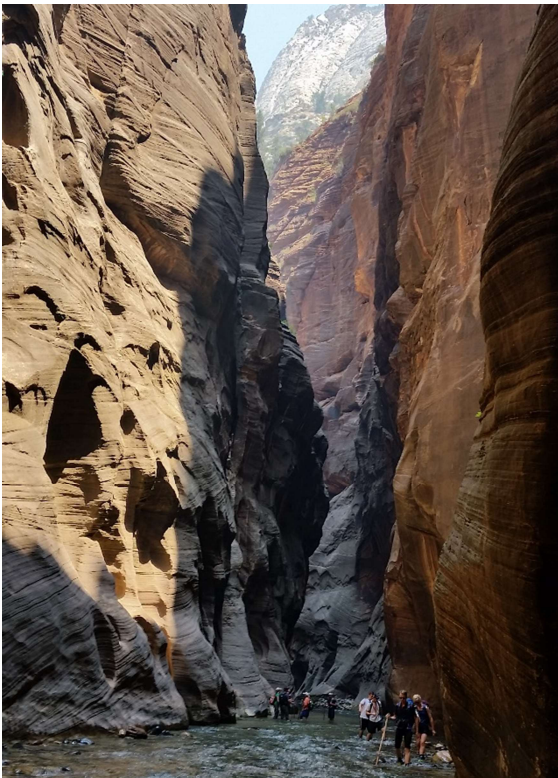
We arrived at our next basecamp in Moab, UT.

Day 8.

We spent the day riding to and visiting Canyonlands National Park. The extreme heat was starting to wear on us so we made a short day of it and spent the rest of the day relaxing at the campground pool.

Day 9.

Our next planned base was near Zion National Park. We had already ridden and camped in temperatures nearing 108 degrees. The forecast was showing highs nearing 115 degrees so I reluctantly decided to cancel two nights of camping near Zion, UT and one night at Pahrump, NV and instead booked motel for those three nights. On our ride to Zion, I saw 119 degrees on my dash read-out. On our ride toward Zion, we encountered very heavy smoke from a large wildfire.

Day 10.

While visiting Zion, we had hoped to hike the Angels Landing trail. However, due to the extreme heat, smoke, and some issues with my blood pressure, we opted not to do that hike, but instead re-do a hike into the narrows which we did in 2012. It was the perfect hike for a hot day. Wading knee to waist deep in cool water through a narrow canyon.

Day 11.

We rode from Zion to Pahrump. Another brutally hot day. On this day, Lisa and I made a decision. We have visited the American southwest four times including this trip during the summer. We vowed we would never again travel in this region during the summer. Maybe during late fall or winter, but never again would we subject ourselves to this heat.

Day 12.

We had planned to ride through Death Valley, National Park, but opted to bypass it due to the heat. We have ridden through Death Valley twice before and doubted much had changed. We ended the day at our next stop in Bishop, CA in the Sierra Nevada's. Wow, what a change in one day. Overnight temperature was in the mid 40's. Today was also the first day we were travelling into virgin territory to us. Up until now, most of the areas we visited we have been to before.

Day 13.



Our plan was to ride over Tioga Pass and to our next basecamp west of Yosemite National Park. However, due to the heavy snowfall the west has received this year, the pass was still closed today. Therefore, we had to reroute further north and come in to Yosemite on the west side. The good part was that we got to ride Hwy 49 which was a real treat. A very scenic, twisty mountain road. We setup our basecamp and relaxed enjoying the much cooler temperatures.

Day 14.

Today we rode into Yosemite National Park for sight seeing. Roads were very busy and crowded and parking lots full. But because we were on a motorcycle, things were much easier. At Bridal Veil Falls, the parking lot was full but there were corner spots large enough for a motorcycle. Then when we started up the road to the top of Glacier Point, the park rangers had the road blocked and were forcing everyone to park and wait for and take a shuttle bus to the top. But because we were on a motorcycle, we were waved on to drive to top.

At one busy overlook, we entered a completely full parking lot. As we were about to exit, a gentleman standing beside his tour bus stopped us. He asked if we were going to be longer than 20 minutes. I answered no. He invited us to park directly in front of his bus. We talked for several minutes. His name is Allen and is a fellow GWRRA member from Marietta, GA, Chapter B2. Thank you Allen!

Visited Yosemite. Remove that from bucket.



Day 15.

To our delight, today they opened Tioga Pass. So we rode that today which was a great ride. Very scenic and fun road. We also took a short hike among some sequoia trees. That lightened the bucket.

Day 16.

We left our basecamp at Yosemite and headed to the coast. We rode to and through San Francisco to see the Golden Gate Bridge. Another item from the bucket. We then rode north up CA-1 to our next camp at Mackerricher State Park. Remove riding pacific coast highway from the ole bucket.

Day 17 & 18



Today we continued north along the coast. We rode to Humboldt Redwoods State Park. Pull redwoods from the bucket.

As we headed up the Oregon Coast, we heard BANG THUMP THUMP THUMP THUMP. Oh great... blown tire.

I was able to slow down and safely pull to a wide area of the shoulder. I think the heavy trailer helped to stay upright.

Here we are, Saturday at 7pm, weekend before July 4th, nearest Honda dealer 130 miles away. Be-a-uuuutiful!

I immediately go to my Gold Book, but unfortunately, there are no nearby members listed. My first priority was to find a place to stay since it was clear we will likely be here a few days. Nothing! Every local campground and motel was booked full due to the holiday weekend. Then a couple pulled up in a pickup truck and ask if we were OK. Their names are Lori and Tim and both are riders. I explained our situation. After some attempts on their part to help us find a campground failed, they decided to go back to their home, get a trailer and haul my bike to their garage. Then they came back and towed our camper. They offered us a guest room but not wanting to be more of a burden than need be we opted to camp in their driveway. Meantime, I posted on the internet our plight and asked if anyone knew any local dealers. A fellow Goldwinger from Virginia started googling and later that night I get a text from him letting me know he found a small motorcycle shop listed 30 miles away and it shows open on Sundays. So in the morning we called and sure enough, he had a tire that would fit. But, all his lifts were tied up until Monday. I asked him if I were to carry in the wheel could he mount it. He said sure. The folks that took us in did not have a lift that would work on a Goldwing. But I remembered that the Goldwing rear wheel can be removed by gently laying the bike on it's side then extending the centerstand. So that's what we did. If you don't know how to do this.... Learn!

If you would have told me I would blow a tire on Saturday evening along the Oregon coast, July 4th weekend, and be back on the road with a new tire mounted by 1pm Sunday I would have told you that you were nuts. But due to several wonderful people, that is exactly what happened. Since we got a later start Sunday, we skipped much of the scenic riding planned for the day and instead took the fastest GPS route to our next basecamp near Olympia, WA.

Day 19.

We rode around the Puget Sound area and took a couple ferries to visit lighthouses and scenic vistas.

Day 20.

There were two major events that occurred in the year 1980. One is Mount St. Helens erupted. The second was I met, and fell head over heels for, the prettiest coal miner's daughter in western Maryland.

So it only seemed fitting that we start the day by visiting Mount St. Helens.

We then rode south to the Historic Columbia River Highway and visited Multnomah Falls.

Two more items removed from bucket.



Day 21 & 22

These two days we travelled to our next basecamp near Glacier National Park. On the first day it was heavy traffic until getting north of Seattle but then we got onto the North Cascades Scenic Highway, Hwy 20. Wow this was a fantastic ride that I encourage all riders to add to their bucket. The second day was more Hwy 20 which eventually turned back to a desert environment.

Day 23.



We travelled north to British Columbia, Canada then headed east to Alberta, Canada and over Crowsnest Pass. We visited the town of Frank and learned about the slide that buried the town in 1903.

We then headed south back to the US and rode the Going to the Sun road through Glacier National Park. A stunning scenic ride. We both loved this ride so much.

The bucket just got lighter.

Day 24.

We took a vacation from the vacation today. We slept in, rode to a nearby town for some shopping, washed the bike, and did some laundry. Although the trip so far has been incredible, we realize for future trips, we need to build in more 'down' days where we do nothing.

Day 25 to 28.

We travelled to North Dakota and spent several days visiting my brother and family.

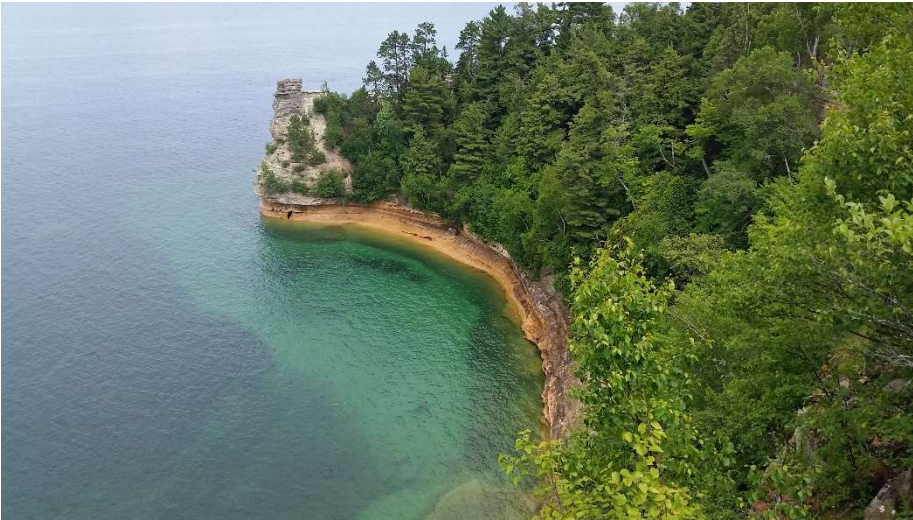
Day 29.

We travelled from North Dakota to Duluth, MN. Not many stops today, however we did deviate a few miles off course to visit the spot where the Mississippi River begins its journey. That was something interesting not everyone gets to see. We later had dinner and drinks with a friend who lives in Duluth.

Day 30.

We left Duluth and headed east along the southern end of Lake Superior, We made a stop at Amicon Falls State Park. It was a perfect day to ride with sunshine and mid-70's temperatures. When we entered Michigan today, Lisa and I can now say we have ridden together in all the lower 48 states. So Alaska and Hawaii have been added to the bucket.

Day 31.



We continued our ride along the southern side of Lake Superior. We stopped at Canyon Falls, several lighthouses, and Miners Castle in Pictured Rocks National Lakeshore.

We usually take any opportunity to talk with local riders. It is a great way to learn of attractions and roads not to miss. Several told us to ride H-58. So of course, we did. Although somewhat of a peaceful ride, it made us appreciate our east TN roads. 😊

Day 32 & 33

We travelled along the west side of Michigan and along Lake Michigan. We stopped at many lighthouses and scenic overlooks. We discovered on the northern end of the 'Mitt' the backroads were well maintained and in very good condition. Seems the southern end of the state doesn't get quite the same level of attention as the secondary roads were in pretty bad condition.

Day 34.

Today was our last day of travel and arrived back at our home. Early in the day our bike, which we bought two years ago, turned over 50,000 miles. I guess it is now broke in.

We had an incredible trip. We plan to continue doing trips like this as long as we are blessed with good health. Next year's camping adventure is hopefully going to be a trip to Nova Scotia and Newfoundland.

Here are few quick stats:

- Days on the road - 34
- Miles traveled - 9,852
- States visited - 19
- Days we needed rain gear - 1 (this amazes me)
- Tires blown - 1
- Temperature range - 42 to 119 degrees
- With this loop, Lisa and I have now ridden together in 12 countries, all 48 lower states, and 3 Canadian providences.
- We have now visited 21 of the 59 national parks.



This article contains mainly the highlights of our trip. If anyone desires to read more detail and see many more photos, feel free to visit my trip blog at www.facebook.com/garylmace