**Friday June 4, Day 1- Weaverville NC to Louisville KY**

I left home at 7am on Friday with hugs and best wishes from Cathy, Eli, Emily, and my folks.  The familiar setting in my rear view left a lump in my throat and an unexpected melancholy.  This was interesting.  A full adventure lay ahead but all I could think about was how much I would miss them.  I don't suppose (or hope) that  those feelings disappear entirely.

Dad suggested going the back way through Greenville Tennessee and across the Cumberland Gap.  What an amazing ride.  Enough fog to give a "Great Smoky Mt brochure" look to everything in the morning light but not enough to make it dangerous.  The bike was perfectly balanced and ran the twisties almost as good as unloaded.

As I moved through the Cumberland Gap area I noticed a problem upshifting. I stopped to find heavy grease around the shift shaft.  Further inspection indicated this was the new chain grease/wax dumping on that spot.  Still didn't explain the shifting issues.

Corbin Kentucky..  Stopped at a light and "PING"...the shifter broke off at the shaft and fell to the pavement.   I kicked it to the side of the road and nursed the bike to the shoulder.  OK...first gear...good.

25mph is top speed but still faster than walking.  According to my GPS the closest Kawasaki dealership is 100 miles away.

Is this an omen?  Will I spend the rest of the day hunting down a part?  How much is a cab ride to Kawasakiland?

I pulled out my new Droid, accessed the map on GPS Nav and typed in "MOTORCYCLE".  (not spelled right the first three times I tried.  Ever typed with your elbows?  Big old thumbs on a little bitty keyboard...)

Up popped "Adrenaline Cycles" very close to my location.  Travis answered the phone and said they had a 2008 shift lever in stock (GREAT...much stronger than my wimpy stock one!).  Apparently they part out bikes and sell on eBay etc...

A two mile ride at 25mph through parking lots, across medians, and to the shop- 10 minutes of wrenching, and I'm back on the road.

Rain on and off but a gully washer just inside Louisville.  On to my bride’s cousin's (Mark Atwell) home- greeted by his lovely wife Laurie and great kids - Wesley and Sarah (I want to spend more time with them all), and a spectacular dinner of filet mignon and some other stuff...but the steak  UMMM.

Great conversation late into the evening.  Mark was an F-15 pilot and trainer and now flies for UPS.  I could talk to him for hours about this stuff.  Thanks Atwells for the wonderful hospitality!

8:30 am I'm in Indiana at a McDonalds (free wifi) for a quick breakfast before continuing on to Chicago to visit Clay, Lydia, Clare, and Helen.  See you soon guys.  Have a towel ready...looks like more rain.

Problem with downloading pics.  I'll figure this out later and give you all eyes.

**Saturday June, 5 Day 2**

At 8:30am Louisville and all of Kentucky is in the rear view mirror as I cross the Ohio.  What a lovely state sweet with the smell of creosote near the mine areas to sweet feed and manure at the numerous and stately horse farms.  Expensive poop.

Pardon the white below.  I tried cutting and pasting to allow spell check (come on Verizon...) to weird results.  Patience with the pics...

Rain....rain, rain, rain....

Traffic is moving along at a brisk pace despite the rain and that is good.  At the speed limit, 70mph, this creates a bubble of dryness for the dashboard and electronics.  Even though I weatherproofed all of the wiring, I don't want to test it just now.

At a service station, a truck with trailer pulled up and out jumped a fellow with his daughter on their way back to Chicago to pack up the last of their belongings for a move to Lexington Kentucky.  The driver Steve had leap-frogged me for several miles in the pouring rain while his daughter Rachel took some pictures.

Steve had recently acquired a KLR and recognized it right off.  We talked for several minutes before I climbed back on for more rain all the way into Chicago.

Luckily the rain stopped just before traffic backed up on the interstate around Chicago then after pulling into Clay's garage, the bottom dropped out.

I remember Indiana from a trip a few years ago- corn-corn-corn.

A cool new wind farm has gone up since then.  While stopping to do my 100 mile make-my-back-better exercises, I snapped a couple of pics from under an overpass.  Be patient with me...trouble adding pics.  I'll get it figured out.

I want to give a shout out to the 10,000 people that didn't run over me in the rain Saturday.

I have a new best friend.  Clare Cannady, my goddaughter and coolest girl ever has me under her thumb.  The last time I saw her she was learning to crawl.  Now she is three and although she holds up three fingers and looks at them when she tells you how old she is, Clare has a much older soul.  To quote her grand dad Tom "she will be a force".  Thanks Lydia for the scrumptious rib dinner and tasty conversation. Clay, carry that testosterone torch high and bright (two daughters, two

graceful female Weimereiners (spell check can't even figure that one out and I ain't goin'

to Wikipedia), and a girl African Grey... }

**Sunday June 6 Day 3- Lake Forest Il to Albert Lea MN**

Clare helped me load up the bike this morning.  She and Lydia fixed me a couple of bags of grapes and celery for the road.  Little sister Helen was orchestrating the movement from moms hip and dad was looking for his glasses.

I love that family.

Clay pointed out a cut across northern Illinois that would take me through the countryside so I aimed the mule in that direction and with the grace of a seasoned rider slipped the clutch and killed the motor, almost dumping the whole load in the middle of Lake Forest.  That would have raised a few window blinds.

Wisconsin is green, blue with white puffy clouds and happy cows.  Hey California, they ARE happy!  But they do talk like the cast of Fargo.  I could listen all day.

I stopped at the Wisconsin Dells for fuel.  I didn't know what a dell was so here was my chance.  I still don't know what a dell is.  Maybe I should have pushed further into the "dells" but all I saw was outlet stores and tourist attractions.  Kinda like Pigeon Forge with Cheese.  Maybe it's the Wisconsin "Deals".

Cheese.  I stopped at Eichelmans (or something) for a quarter pound of extra sharp, a piece of cheese bread, and dried sausage.   That with the celery and grapes from Clare and Lydia, I had lunch under the blue blue sky at a roadside pull off and watched some kind of bugs wrestle.  They liked the cheese.

Crossed the Mississippi and on through eastern Minnesota.  The exits really start spreading out putting fuel stations few and far between.  Even with the spectacular weather, the wind was strong and steady.  Blowing from the north all day resulted in me riding with a lean into the wind.   I suppose it looked like I had a training wheel.  Another symptom of the strong head-side wind was dramatically reduced fuel mileage.  When the startling sound of a fuel starved engine groaned about 50 miles early, I quickly reached and flipped to reserve then started doing head math to figure how far reserve would take me.  I backed down from the speed limit of 70 to 60 until the cypherin' was done and the GPS could point me to the closest station.  Twenty two miles ahead or 9 miles behind.  No exits so it would mean crossing a grassy median.  I pushed on.  Three miles from the gas exit the starving groan was back.  Neutral took me to the bottom of the hill and shaking the bike back and forth got what little was on the right side of the take sloshed over to start it again.  At the top of the last hill, she was out for sure.  I coasted to the bottom of the ramp to see the station was still two miles to the right of the exit.  Ok.  Extra fuel in the storage tube on the front, right.  Wrong.  I didn't want the extra weight until I had to have it in Alaska.  Shake shake shake the bike and lowering it almost to the ground gave me a half cup or so.  Enough to start it and allow me to get enough momentum to coast into a pay-at-the-pump only station in town.  Whew.  I'm paying WAY more attention to fuel stops.  Back home, it seems there is a gas station anywhere two or more roads cross.  That and a CVS.

Roll along through Minnesota with the strong wind continuing all the way to Albert Lea.  I found a KOA next to the highway for a reasonable $20 per night with wi/fi.  Sitting on the picnic table until well after dark penning the day's events on the tiny keyboard of my netbook.

Night night kids, love you Cathy

**Monday, June 7 Day 4 Albert Lea MN to Chamberlain SD**

I'm really struggling with this blog tool.  It is picky about file names for pics and won't show the enlarged image when selected.  Adding to the frustration, Verizon chooses to allow only 10meg for total blog size.  10 meg!  When you can buy a 1gb of memory for three bucks I wonder whose making the storage decisioning at the big V.

I'm adding pics as I can process them to work on the blog.  For a complete, unedited, uncaptioned, out of order view, go to this link

<http://s188.photobucket.com/albums/z119/furtledurt/NC%20to%20Alaska%202010/>

Anyway.

The remainder of Minnesota was like the first half.  Huge farms and lots of land between them.  While running the speed limit on a warm dry morning, I flipped up my visor just a little for air.  A bee came from several acres over and nailed the small hole provided by the ventilation.  With traffic all around, I gave my signal to move to the emergency lane.  Emergency being the key word.  Of course it only took 30 seconds to slow and stop.  Another 30 to get my gloves off, fumble with the helmet latch and yank it it away ears and all.  In that short minute the bee moved all around my head checking out both ears (thank God for earplugs) and both nostrils.  I fought it by poking at it with my tongue and wiggling my nose and snorting like a bull.  I named the bee something special.  Something I wouldn't name any other pet.  He decided to find something else to bother.

I pulled into Blue Earth Minnesota for fuel- earlier than usual but I ain't going through pushing again.  When approaching a gas attendant/waitress/pedestrian, I always ask "so what is this city/town/exit/wide place in the road known for?"  The lady behind the counter in Blue Earth exclaimed "the green giant".  "Where" I asked.  She pointed out the window to a fifty foot tall Jolly Green Giant.  How in the world did I miss that?

I strolled over and stared up at my arch nemesis. Yep.  I hate peas.  There he stands with that look on his face.  Looking beyond me.  Not even at me.  He has no underwear.  Or anything else.  Heh heh heh.  Look what peas will do to YOU!

Turning my back on this evil man I walked to a small shack designated as the "info center/gift shop"  The nice lady quickly began to tell me about a million dollar pea planting machine and how it's going to revolutionize pea production.  She offered a history book on Green Giant but I politely refused.  She continued explaining soil conditions and probably knew more than anyone else....what's this?  A green giant sticker.  A very small green giant.  I'll take it.  This puts him into perspective.  Turned out to be a tattoo but I made it stick on my windshield.  The lady's husband stopped in and we talked for quite a while about my trip and his days in the armed services stationed in Alaska and the Bering Strait.  Mr. Gaylord was a real gentleman and I couldn't help but be reminded of Henry Fonda in On Golden Pond.

More wind and pretty farms all the way into South Dakota.  I intended to stop in Sioux Falls and see the Wells Fargo headquarters and maybe look up a couple of the folks with which I've been working projects.  Somehow I missed the exit.  No tall buildings near the interstate.  Several miles down an exit deficient road I decided to roll on.

Mitchell South Dakota.  Home town of my friend Bill Farris.  Gotta see the corn palace.  While navigating the streets of Mitchell, I noticed a Yamaha dealership.  Since two business had already turned down my offer to purchase oil if they would let me use a bucket to catch the waste and dispose of it I decided to have it done.  The great guys at Palace Motorsports took me right in at the last minute, changed oil and gave the bike a quick look-over and had me out in time to see the Corn Palace.   Google the history of this place.  My fingers are tired.  I looked for Bill's picture of his championship 1964 basketball team but no luck.  Sorry Bill.

Covering a lot of ground to get to my daily goal of Chamberlain South Dakota, I noticed a BIG storm moving in on the Droid weather map.  A fellow and his wife on a Harley recommended a motel back in town.  Just about dark I checked into Allen’s Hilltop Motel, Bait, and Tackle.  Freshly cleaned fish were on a paper in the lobby with mounted fish, pics of fish, and the people that get them.

After a BLT at the bar next door, off to sleep.

Nighty night kids.  Love you Cathy.

**Tuesday June 8, Day 5 Chamberlain SD to Custer SD**

Woke to a very wet parking lot and evidence of a storm that made me glad I grabbed a motel last night.  30 bucks for a dry room and shower was only 10 more than the strange campground across the river.

VERY strong headwinds today.  Enough to kill my mpg even more.  A sudden and surprising no-fuel groan presented itself at highway speeds way too early, I instinctively switched quickly to reserve and headed to the closest station.  After getting back on the highway I noticed a loss of power on the top end.  Hmmm.  Stopped and check the bike all over.  The air filter was a little dirty but not enough to cause this.  Fuel/air mixture seemed reasonable for the altitude, no smoke or sign of a rich mixture.  Eyes rolled at the Harley rider that smirked that it sounded like it was only running on one cylinder.   Since the bike was still running at 90%, I plodded along.

Wall South Dakota.

For the last 335 miles, I've seen signs for Wall Drug.  "Have You Dug Wall Drug".  "5 cent coffee at Wall Drug".  "Dinosaurs at Wall Drug".

Every half mile or so another sign.  That's ok.  With nothing else to look at except redundant but stunning landscape.  Miles and miles and miles of the same, the signs give me something to study while listening to Neil Young and the drone of 38 impotent horsepower that made it past my ear canal and the cheap earphones booming "Live Rust".

I really studied.  Font, color combo, guess how old the sign is....

So when I reached Wall South Dakota I couldn't not take the exit.  Could anyone?  Had to see it once.  However, the three things I needed from a drug store were not there.

I dove down to the Badlands for a quick loop before heading down through the black hills.

The Badlands are indescribable.  Raw and big and scarred, they draw you in.  I wanted to sneak off and find my own roadless path.  Only 20 miles in I turned to see Rushmore before sundown.

The federal management decided to give the owners of the big heads (us) and visitors little glimpses of Mt. Rushmore before asking for 10 dollars to proceed to a place where you can take it all in.  I stopped just around the corner and shot a pic of Washington.  Want to see more, Google Mt. Rushmore.  Lots of pics there.

I finished the day in Custer South Dakota at the camp of Tom Pressley, a former bank executive that retired with the lovely LeeAnn to the comforts of a very homey travel trailer and eye-popping Harley trike.  This trailer even has a garage for the bike.  Want to live in South Dakota for a while? No problem.  Ready for Florida?  Load the bike baby.  I like their style.

LeeAnn fixed a wonderful dinner and we talked around the camp until well after dark.  I pitched my camp in the woods behind and slept better than I have the entire trip.  Tom and Leanne, I hope we catch up again soon.  You guys are the best.  Happy travels!

Nite nite kids, Love you Cathy

**Wednesday, June 9 - Day 5 Custer SD to Ranchester WY**

The sun rises earlier up here.  At 4:30 am I was wide awake (thanks also to my embedded biocycles) and began packing.  Tom Pressley soon brought out a cup of fresh coffee and the sweet smell of bacon oozed from their rolling home.  With much too much to eat I bid them a goodbye with promises both ways to stay in touch and visit...

Thanks Tom and LeeAnn for taking this traveler in to your gypsy camp and making it my home for the evening.

There was still a noticeable loss of power on the top end under load of the 650cc  power plant and this was beginning to get in the way of my enjoyment of this place.

It's rather cliché to mention Robert Persig when speaking of motorcycle travels but the thread of "Zen..." lays a foundation that the classical approach to life, in this case his relationship with his motorcycle, requires one to be a logical thinker.  Problem is, something like a 10% loss of power in the mountains causes me to obsess a little.

Crazy Horse monument seen.  Pics taken....  I wonder if it's bad gas?

When I pulled into Deadwood SD, I parked under a shade tree in the lot of a museum and went for a stroll around town.  A fan of the HBO series Deadwood, I looked for familiar names and points of historical comparison.  They were there too!  The location where Wild Bill Hickok was killed is clearly marked and the chair where he held the famous poker hand of "aces and eights".  The cemetery where he and later Calamity Jane are buried is on the hill just above town.  I want to come back here and spend more time after reading up on historical to contemporary transformation of this town.  Neat place.

When I circled around to the bike a meter maid was making her way down the line.  Knowing it would take me a few minutes to mount and scoot, I dropped a couple of quarters in the meter and noticed it took me to one hour.  Time to figure this power thing out once and for all!

I spread out a small plastic tarp on the ground and laid out my tools and started taking the carburetor off.  By the time I had it in pieces on the ground the meter maid had worked her way over to me and raised one eyebrow but followed with a smile as if she knew we were going nowhere until it was back on.  Besides I wasn't taking up much room and had to feed more revenue into the skinny silver taxman before it was all over.  I found crud in the bowl and varnish on other parts- remedied with some filter cleaner.  Back together and on the road by 10am.

A couple of riders from Texas that stopped to offer the kind of help one can give with one's hands in one's pockets, mentioned a detour north to Devils Tower.  A little ahead of schedule this sounded ripe for testing the results of the newly cleaned carb.

The path they described turned out to be a well out of the way remote road up into northern South Dakota then over to a connecting road that brings you south to the monument.  Good ride but not one for testing as I only saw three other people on the road for the entire one hour trip.  However the power was back.  That-a-girl.  I knew you had it in you...

I jumped back on I90 north to deep Wyoming territory to find and follow a ranchers access path that ran along the interstate.  It broke up the monotony but put me behind schedule.  Still lots of wind and another storm brewing.

In Ranchester I dove into a clean but oddly quiet motel called the Western Motel.  The "free wifi" sign drew me in as well as discovering the closest campground to be back in Sheridan.  The proprietor, his wife and their two small sons had whipped what was obviously a fifties style single story motor court with an office on the end, into a really nice well maintained home away from home.  If you are in the area and desire a very reasonable quick stop, check them out.

Unload the mule, cover her from the elements and blog until my eyes cross...

Nighty night Emily and Eli, Love you Cathy.  PS.  I'm really missing you guys

**Thursday June 10, Ranchester WY to Ennis MT**

Woke early again and had a hot diet Mountain Dew with a squishy Power Bar that had been lurking in the bottom of my tank bag.

I picked a road out of town that somewhat paralleled I90 north but not so close that you could see or hear it.  This road was the original link to Montana years back and had been the path of least resistance from Sheridan Wyoming to points north before roads.  This might have been the route that Major Reno led his troops from his fort in Sheridan to confront the pesky Sioux and Cheyenne up the road (figure of speech) at Little Big Horn.  The route to his rout you could say :-).

This two-lane ran about thirty five miles along a creek and railroad track.  At one time a coal train was pacing me and we exchanged a wave.

I saw a school bus ahead and backed off the throttle to find the bus getting smaller before me.  I sped up to find the bus doing the posted 65 mph speed limit on this little two lane road.  The driver stopped one time in twelve miles to pick up a child before turning off on a long ranch road.  The dust cloud soon obscured the diminishing yellow bus as I wondered how long the drivers route was before filling her bus and making it to the school.  Where was the school?  This is really big country with miles between homes and light years between civilizations.  Even then the small town signs quote populations of double digits.

The Little Big Horn battlefield is another must visit if you are anywhere near south eastern Montana.  I slowed on my walk up to the point of the final battle when I overheard a native American park ranger beginning her micro history lesson- some in native Crowe language (yes there were Crowe there too) and became mesmerized by the cadence and color of her voice and found myself still there standing in the sun thirty minutes later.  She teaches the native language and is clearly passionate about the young people of her tribe learning it.

I walked all of the paths and read all of the markers where both US cavalry and Indians fell.  The battlefield is unchanged sans the info center, the miles of car and walking paths, and damage done from a fire storm a few years ago.  It is a captivating but somber place.

More open highway.  More wind.  More rain.  Four hours later, I spoke to my friend John Liposchak who was meeting me in Ennis Mt for a couple of days of fly fishing and rest.  John was already in Ennis and estimated I was only an hour away.  One hour of the coldest, hardest driving rain on a wet, gravel strewn road through what I would expect to be otherwise beautiful country.  Even with the heated grips and jacket vents snugged tight, I was shivering like a wind-up toy when I reached the cabin.  John had found a wall heater and had it on full tilt when I got in.  Cathy thinks John will make a good husband.  Any takers?

Night kids, Love you baby.

**Friday June 11 Day 7 Ennis MT to Missoula MT**

Today was supposed to be the day to check the mighty Madison river off of my "greatest rivers to fish" list.  Not going to happen.  Thirty-nine degrees and a steady rain set in for the whole day, on top of a blown out (very high and very muddy) Madison River either relegated John and I to watching the World Cup at the bar next door or pushing on to Missoula.

There on the other side of the mountains, the weather is breaking and the rivers, although still pretty high, are clearing up a bit.

Putting on all of my clothes, the heavy winter gloves, a newly purchased silk scarf wrapped around my neck and lower face (note to self- don't stop at the bank), and loading some of the heavier bags into Johns car, we headed north with our two vehicle parade.

The downpour continued with small pockets of sun peeking through the ominous clouds around the high altitude pass but turned to wet, dark and cold as we crossed.  The heated grips again on HIGH but not high enough and with the cold seeping in through the space between the gloves and my jacket- come on Missoula.

As we crossed over the Bonner pass (not Donner, that's CA) the clouds began to part and the world switched to high definition.  Pages ripped from vacation magazines unfolded before me.  The familiar Bitterroot mountains to the south and rolling green hills to the north appeared soon after.  This is the Montana I love.

John and I checked into the Mountain Valley Inn just after noon and proceeded to unload his car and my bike.  I had much more stuff.  Make-up and all you know.  John, Clay, Brendan, Blake, and I had stayed here five years ago when we did a eight day whirlwind fishing tour of the Bitterroot, Big Blackfoot, Rock Creek, and Clark Fork rivers.

I had mailed a fresh set of tires to the motel over a week ago and was pleased to see them sitting behind the counter when we plowed into the motel office.

A quick call to Kurt's Polaris and Victory down the road on Broadway resulted in a personable Lucas with the invitation to "bring it on down".

John and I hit a local sporting goods store that was in the same place we found it half a decade previous.  We knew just where the discount flies, fresh tippet, racks of clearance winter stuff, and knowledgeable fishing consultants were stationed.

A small but valuable paper bag of fly fishing necessaries under our arm we rushed to the BBQ restaurant we noticed across the street.  Into my third rib and fourth hushpuppy, Lucas at Kurt’s Polaris and Victory called and said all is ready.

John dropped me off and I did about ten minutes of tight figure eights in the abandoned parking lot out back to scrub the snot slick coating that motorcycle tire manufacturers apply for no other reason than to provide entertainment to the shops that mount them.  Many are the brethren that exit the parking lot quickly to beat the light, turn left and find themselves inspecting the pavement from just inches away while polishing the side of their bike with any number of pavement grit grades.

Tomorrow FISH!

Night offspring, Love you wifey

**Saturday June 12- Day 8. Day off...Fish**

John and I grabbed a quick make-it-yourself waffle from the lobby before pointing the rental Impala south along the Bitterroot River.

Conversations with the locals quickly dimmed our hopes of finding many fishable spots on the river because of the very high conditions.  We were cautioned to avoid wading and be aware of walking on the unstable banks.  A fellow lost his life yesterday on Rock Creek when he fell in and became tangled in a tree washed into the river.  Nuff said.

We visited most of the places we were familiar with but only had a few feet of safe bank from which to roll cast at best.  Moving 60 miles from Missoula to the east fork of the Bitterroot south of Hamilton and Darby we spent most of the day leap-frogging up and down both sides of this usually docile river. Only once did I have a fish rise to a salmonfly pattern I was using.  John will surely have better luck the rest of this week when the salmon fly hatch opens up and the river calms down.

I'm going to try my luck farther north tomorrow as I move toward Canada by Flathead lake and it's feeder streams.

I was disappointed to hear that the Road to the Sun was closed putting a halt to my plans to cross that high mountain pass tomorrow morning and see the Glacier National Park I've read about for years.  Oh well...another time.

Nighty night Emily and Eli.  Sweet dreams love.  I really miss you all.

[12:25 am est](http://mysite.ncnetwork.net/resum9ga/2010.06.13_arch.html#1276406747938)

**Sunday June 13 Missoula Montana to Glacier Park Montana**

The alarm rattled the nightstand at 6:30 and I had to cross the motel room to disarm it.  I had been up since 6am packing the big duffle and assembling the smaller bags to stuff in the side boxes for a half hour.

John stirred in the other bed then snatched the tv remote to check out any updates on World Cup football.  After prepping most of the load to tote down to the bike, I plopped back down, snatched up the covers over my clothes and checked out the map.  With the Road to the Sun closed on top of the mountain at the best spot, I considered my alternatives.  Idaho and Washington maybe?  I could check them off the list but would only be doing it to do it.  Not really enough time to enjoy the states.  Head start on the Canadian Rockies?  Perhaps.

Let’s let the road decide.

I gave the bike a once over tightening loose bolts last night  as the single cylinder tends to give them their freedom on a regular basis.  Some folks say KLR stands for “Keep Loctite Ready”.  Others say it stands for “Kinda Like Ridin’”.  John being John was there to carry the load, check air pressure, suggest alternatives for the lost strap that secures the tank bag and providing support for the next big leg of my journey.   Any race car drivers needing a cracker jack crew chief, you know where to look.

Even with the sun strong the air had a chilly Montana bite.  With the liner in my jacket and long underwear (top and bottom), I pulled onto I93 north toward Canada.. .

I93 is more of a fast access road than an interstate and slows unexpectedly at several small towns around Flathead lake.  With one more day on my Montana fishing license, I stopped at one of the public access points to drag a streamer along the bank.  With my riding pants on and little room to move along the bank I really didn’t the fly much of a chance as I soon grabbed the camera and sat on a big rock taking in the view.  This is some very blue and very clear water.  I quelled the temptation to strip down and jump in.

Just outside of Kalispell MT, I saw a Yamaha dealership open at 10am and stopped to buy a few quarts of fresh oil.  Last time I changed it I anticipated much warmer temps and went with a heavier 20w50.  With mornings in the 30’s and barely warming up past 60 I went back with a thinner 10w40.  Changed in the dirt parking lot and left to make a decision on how to proceed north.

The Glacier Park website indicated that the Road to the Sun was closed at avalanche 18 miles into the park.  Well that’s something.  I decided to burn the rest of the day seeing as much as I could before heading to the border.

After paying the obligatory twelve dollars (enjoy the free Smokies folks) I wandered into the most breathtaking topography I’ve ever seen in my life.   Roaring deep green water with cotton candy froth cut a path next to the Road to the Sun.  Each turn delivered a unique vista that can’t be captured with camera.

On the way back out of the park I found a great campsite next to Lake MacDonald.  It was just a few feet from the water but sheltered from the strong breeze by tall pines and aspens.  As I was preparing to fix supper, a fine looking BMW GS1200 rolled up and Terry Logan, Montana resident and Alaska-by-motorcycle alumnus rolled in and stopped to chat. As always I took the opportunity to grab my trusty but worn notebook and grill him on his trip.  By now most  of the suggestions and “must sees” offered are redundant but Terry was able to deliver  good advice on points of interest that I didn’t have penned.

A quick camp stove pot of Pad Thai and leftover hard sausage from Wisconsin washed down with lemon water and I now sit to read the literature on Glacier and bang on this little keyboard.   Oh, I also have to wash my pots and store them with virtually everything else I am carrying in a large bearproof box back near the road.   I suppose I could leave all of this stuff on the ground and just sleep in the box but I don’t think the rangers would look kindly on me poking holes in the top to get air.  These folks are REAL serious about bears around here.

This blog is brought to you by the fine folks at Gold Bond Medicated Powder.  Shovel a scoop in your drawers and your good to go for 500 more miles.

Good night kids.  All my love Cathy

**Monday June 14-Day 10 Glacier Park Montana to Banff Alberta Canada**

Nature called very early this morning.  The quick rip of the tent zipper broke the peace usually reserved for God's other creatures. Trust me...it had to be fast.  Sorry creatures.

Around 3am I awoke to hear the door on the closest bear box rattle.  Then another farther away.  I wanted to look out of the tent and maybe get a picture but I wasn't sure what a flash would cause a bear to do.  Ah, go back to sleep.

Speaking of bears.  I passed a drive through grizzly park on the way out of Glacier this morning.  For a second I thought that might be cool.  For a second.  Ever heard of a moveable feast?

Anyway, I packed the bike and before putting on all of my layers of clothes and riding gear decided to take a hike down the lake bank from my campsite.  Some fresh tracks that I found out later were beaver were stamped in the soft mud along with birds.  Three loons were playing a hundred yards off shore and their call was the only sound other than the soft lapping of the water on the shore rocks.

This is a remarkable place.  Terry Logan, the guy that stopped by last night quoted his dad "I wish someone made a camera that would capture this as I see it."  It's almost depressing to take a photo, even with a good camera, and expect it to convey the whole feeling.

I sat on a log for over an hour and just watched... enjoyed.  Go see it for yourself.

Backtracking to Whitefish and northward, I crossed the Canadian border unceremoniously.

Border Guard:  Passport Sir

Me: Here ya go

Border Guard:  Guns or weapons?

Me: (pulling out my pocket knife and pointing to my machete)  These..?

Border Guard:  Where are you going in Canada

Me:  Banff, Jasper, Stewart, Cassier Highway

Border Guard: Anything to declare?

Me: (I just about screwed this one up with a smart alec but pretty funny remark)...No sir.

Border Guard:  Have a good day sir.

North on I93 then right to Kootenay National Park and across Vermillion Crossing.  The temperature dropped the more I pushed into the mountains until it was in the mid-30's.  Then the rain.  Then the snow.  Then thunder and HAIL.

Along side of the two lane road that ran through the park with only me on it today, there was a large statue of an elk just inches off the road.  I was wondering out loud in my helmet (as I'm doing way too frequently) why they would have put it so close to traffic.  Just then it turned and walked to the river.

 I was having problems pulling up the campground loaded in my GPS and rolled on into Banff.  Stopping a lady walking her dog to ask her if there was affordable lodging in Banff (Think Aspen, highly unlikely) resulted in more of a conversation than I had bargained for in the rain but successfully ended with her pointing across the street at hostel style lodging for ski instructors in the winter.  The hotel next door administrated the rooms.  Fifty bucks a night.  I'm in brother.

Parking the bike in a secure parking deck and carrying the two loads to the room (I know there's a bed in here somewhere) I walked down Banff main street in the rain ducking in and out of storefronts.  This place is too expensive for my blood.  I bought a Canadian flag sticker for my side bags on the bike.

A bison burger and bison brew capped off my evening in Banff.  Just as the weather cleared and reveled tremendous craggy mountains jutting up from the edges of town.  For the second time today I sit in awe with my camera in my pocket.

Goodnight my little ones, hug your mommy for me

**June 15 Day 11 Banff Alberta to Mt. Robeson Alberta**

June 15 Banff Alberta to Mt Robeson Alberta

Someone in a room above me or next to me sure is taking a long shower. When I pull aside the drapes and peek out to the alley I realize it’s pouring rain. Oh well,…I’m in an underground parking deck so at least I can pack and dress in the dry. By 8am I’m loaded and pulling out of the small inn in Banff to see the famous Icefields Parkway.

According to the lady in the little hut at the beginning of the Kootenay park entrance to whom I reluctantly paid $9.80 US (doesn’t matter, the exchange rate is nearly the same) I have until 4pm on the 14th to get out of Banff/Jasper provincial park or pay another $9.80. That means covering the full length of the parkway and 10 kilometers west of Jasper.

The rain broke almost immediately but it was still quite chilly. I had dressed accordingly and was glad of it just miles from town. A young girl from New Zealand mentioned that I might want to take a side road- not in as good of condition than the prepped-for-RV Highway 1 but more apt to find wildlife and certainly suitable for the KLR. Within 3 kilometers of Banff, two black bears were picking something from bushes on the roadside. Because of the heavy fog and threats of rain, I had left my new camera (thanks mom and dad!) in the tank bag covered with a unwieldy plastic rain cover that resembles a big shower cap. My smaller camera that was mounted on the handlebars had quit working sometime yesterday (sorry Eli). Just around the next curve, two elk were grazing on the roadside. I had to stop for these guys. With the bike turned off and layers of gloves, helmet, headphones, and the rain cover to remove I felt a little safer with the deer as the focal point instead of the bears.

The two roads merged just east of Lake Louise and I took the detour to hike near it and Moraine Lake. As majestic and frighteningly in-your-face as Glacier National park was, the terrain of the Icefields Parkway made Glacier look small. Pulling into the parking lot of the regal inn at Lake Louise it started raining again. I left on my riding gear but fitted my rain hat and began the trail around the lake. If you ever see (if I can ever load) the pictures of Lake Louise and Moraine Lake, it appears that the water color is either dyed or Photoshopped. The deep teal of the lake is it’s true color. Emanating from Victoria Glacier at its West end, and bordered by six unique mountains, it is the quintessential Canadian post card shot. Or I thought so until I saw Moraine Lake.

Moraine Lake is not as big as Louise but more compact and nestled tightly within the arms of Mount Babel and Mount Little. I’d like to be there when they named that mountain “Little”. Don’t know what they were thinking.

Is that a snowflake?

North from Lake Louise the air turned bitterly cold as I tractored up the Bow Summit, a high mountain pass, wrenching my neck to the left at no less than ten glaciers, each more spectacular than the last, the air became even colder with a little wind to boot. Stopping at one particularly stunning view, I wanted someone to take my picture but noticed no English being spoken within the dozen or so tourists at the pull-off. German, Korean (maybe), French, another language that I think was made up on the spot, but no English. I took a chance with an Asian gentleman who thought I was giving him my camera and wouldn’t accept it so I thanked him for his humility and turned to the German lady. “You vant me to picture you?” So she steps back with her camera….no, no…let’s try this again. By the way, talking louder doesn’t help. I handed her my camera and verbalized my request in syntax that I didn’t even recognize while flailing my arms around like I was getting ready to fall off a cliff. Somehow she figured it out and took a couple of pictures and while handing the camera back said in perfect English “I took another just in case”. "Guttentag" I said.

Pushing toward the high mountain pass, it started to snow. Not just flurries but heavy and thick. I had to wipe my visor off every few seconds, pushing the snow to the right side of my helmet where it stuck until it finally accumulated enough to break free only to splat on my waterproof duffle behind me then slide down my back. The road didn’t freeze but the snow created a spring slush and slowed traffic down from the molasses-like Canadian speed limits to a metric crawl. My heated grips have been on HI for the last three days but just not hot enough right now.

On the downhill side of the pass the snow turned to rain then to the inevitable break in the clouds for a little warm sun. Someone mentioned that on the Icefields one would experience all four seasons. I’ve yet to experience late spring, summer, or even fall but I’m only a third of the way up.

The granddaddy of glaciers presented itself just up the road. Columbia Icefield is a monster of a chuck of ice. Even as big as it is it’s retreating at an alarming rate and leaving hundreds of acres of mounds of rock in its wake. I notice some small dark dots and larger but proportionally tiny rectangles on the upper portion of the glacier. I realized these were people surrounding the all-wheel drive (six of ‘em) buses used to tote folk up for a closer look. This put it all in perspective.

Pushing on faster than I wanted to get to camp and out of the park before accruing another day’s charge, I covered another hundred and fifty kilometers of otherwise outstanding landscape that I normally wouldn’t pass up. My head on a swivel and up and down trying to soak it in from the seat of a steady motorcycle.

Jasper lay at the northern most point of the parkway sandwiching the north and south with its more upscale sister Banff. Not to say it’s any less expensive. I walked out of a small village pizza joint when I realized a single serving single topping pizza and drink would set me back some twenty bucks Canadian before tip. A stop into a small drug store scored a hot dog and bottle drink for ten dollars. I passed on the obligatory “Jasper” sticker for my sidebags when the Korean lady behind the counter (Grandma, everyone was calling her) quoted five dollars. Really neat town but for crying out loud…Hey folks, it’s summer, the skiers you usually fleece are long gone!

Seventy kilometers up the road was one of three Mt. Robeson campgrounds. One on a river, one in a meadow, and one kinda between. I saw a couple of other riders on the way to Alaska earlier pull into the meadows but couldn’t find them. They must have gone back to the river campground as it’s on the way toward their chosen route. Maybe I’ll catch up with them in Alaska. Mt Robeson is the highest peak in the Canadian Rockies and requires me to look way up to see it’s peak from my campsite.

I quickly set up camp and went for a walk. The well trodden path followed the river for a few hundred yards then turned up the back side of the camp. Deer signs all over but no bear. Maybe because I’m whistling loudly the last song I herd on my MP3 player as I walk. *“Dee dee didilup dee dee. Dee dee deeUP de de de de..Dee EE didliup de dee… singing his cattle call. He’s brown as a berry from ridin’ the prairie….”*If there were bear, I’d surely have heard ‘em laughing.

Two gentlemen about my age crossed the parking lot quickly earlier at the Mt. Robson info center wearing matching t-shirts and wanting to know about my trip and the bike. They were just talking about how they wanted to do be riding but were leading a group of young people (in matching t-shirts) on a hike and camp this weekend. Suddenly I felt a little selfish taking all this time for myself while they give their time to all of these kids. I don’t remember their names but they were from Prince George.

I started feeling lonesome too and missing my family dearly. When one is on automatic pilot, simply twisting the throttle a little and scanning for wildlife, one has a lot of time to go down thought tangents- wandering around in the past, poking the present with a what-if stick, and laying out the mental cards of the future like a game of solitaire on a clean kitchen table.

Am I going where I want to go? Not on this trip, but with my life?

Am I doing what I really want to do? What will my impact on this old world be?

How badly did I screw up my kids? Is that a new vibration from the back of the bike?

I wonder what Eli is doing right now. Probably eating or hanging out with his friends. Emily is probably at work saving up for her trip to Africa next summer. Cathy is probably at school or reading on the porch. I love looking out the of front screen door early in the morning and seeing her curled up with a book in her red rocking chair marking the spot occasionally with her finger to gaze through the morning fog or to see what made the horses snort. I like to watch her when she doesn’t know I’m watching.

As I write this I suppose mom and dad are wondering why I can’t call tonight. No cell service for forty miles. That’s probably going to be the case for the next 1000 miles so I’ll have to make a point to keep an eye on the “bars” for opportunities.

Excuse me while I load up the fire, the mosquitoes are out to play.

Good night way over there on the other side of the continent kids…My love will travel to the moon for you Cathy

**Tuesday June 16 Mt Robeson British Columbia to somewhere in the boonies near Hazelton British Columbia**

I'm writing this from a Starbucks in Prince George as they were the only free wi/fi I could find in town.  Since it's only mid day, I can't finish this story day until I find another place with at least cell service.  That might be a while.

As cold and rainy as it's been for the last few days, this morning was as beautiful.  These Canadians have some really blue sky and cotton white clouds...when they want too.

Breaking camp with little dew to dry and very early daylight (4:30 am), I set out for what will be one of my longer days.  Break it in two.  Prince George by lunch and within a couple hundred miles of Alaska by campdown.

Long desolate two lane Hwy 16 pressed into the pine forest giving me views like so many postcards held for a few seconds in front of my visor.  Each new creek following curve shuffled the deck a little. No sign of civilization for a two hundred kilometers or so.

Forcing myself to stop every 80-100 miles to stretch and drink water is required due to quick dehydration and subsequent muscle pains.  The wind really dries you out in a hurry.

I saw a wide pull-off and clamped down on the brakes to make the gravel entrance at a gravel entrance speed.  A small sign indicated this was BC's Ancient Forest.  The farthest inland rain forest anywhere.  I hid the bike in the bushes and after removing my riding jacket set out for the 2.5 kilometer loop trail through the area.  This is hobbit land.  Mossy, primeval, old.  The smell of wet pine and decomposing plant matter moved up the mountain in waves pushed by a gentle wind.  The walk was over far too quickly but I needed to cover more miles so...drink...stretch...drink again.

Time for fuel in the small village of McBride.  Much more so than in the states, you can't fool around looking for better prices.  Fuel up everywhere.

Across from the small petro station was an abandoned hut with several log carvings like you see around the Smokies but these were GOOD.  I started across the side road to get a better look when a very used Dodge Caravan groaned to a stop next to me.  A rugged fellow slid out of the driver's side and immediately began asking about my trip.  Destination?  Home?  Stayed last night?  Going today?  The voice was east block European but I wouldn't try and guess where.  He stuck out his hand..."The call me Darda, short for O'Darda".  He welcomed me to McBride and professed to be the local carver.  "You did these?" I inquired.  "Nope.  My friend Garth Elliott"  Garth lives in Alberta and, like Darda, carves in the winter and sells in the summer.  "These are mine" Darda said as he opened the back of his van and began pulling smaller but more detailed carvings of cowboys, Indians, faces not unlike "face jugs" from the Appalachian mountains.  Remarkable expressions and attention to mood were gouged carefully from each piece of wood.  Darda continued pulling these from every corner of the old van.  "I live in the bush about 10 miles upstream and come down every morning in the summer to make enough for the year" Darda said as he pulled a hand sized carving from his dashboard and handed it to me.  "Here is for your travels".  I told Darda how much I was appreciative and touched by his generosity.  He handed me another even larger and more detailed one.  "This one is for you too Mark"  "Keep them both for your journey".

While I spoke to Darda he sold three pieces to travelers wandering in off of the road.  I took his picture with a couple of them and he took mine on the bike next to Garth's big log carvings.  Darda came to North America in 1978 from Czechoslovakia and wandered around as far north as Alaska before settling here.  He sported a newly bandaged hand from a bandsaw accident that morning.  Apparently a little glue took care of most of the damage.

o'Darda Kirchschlaeger is one of the rare artists-historian-survivor that typifies the rugged folk of BC and gives McBride the type of character that seeds a small town like that for greatness.

If you make it through McBride British Columbia, Look for the roadside wood carvings and a robust gentleman with sandy-grey hair and beard talking with his hands.  Look carefully at his art.  It is astounding.  You can also reach Darda at his link to the outer world..

o'Darda Kirchschlaeger

PO Box 157

McBride BC Canada

VOJ2EO

Time to suck the bottom out of my green teal half-caf, non-fat, hold the whip, blended, frappuccino.  I'm not sure how I ordered it.  I pointed a something someone else got then nodded my head when the barista started asking questions.  She offered sizes but I just pointed at a cup on the counter.  Clay would have known what to do.  I feel fine next to a creek camping with the stuff on my bike but get a little nervous pulling off a Starbucks order.

Bye for now.  The next post will probably be a while.

Glad you found the cat Emily.  Take care of things Eli.  Big hugs Cathy.

**Wednesday June 17 Smithers BC to Hyder Alaska**

After leaving Prince George I moved west on Yellowhead Highway (hwy 16) noticing the road was running out of people.  A couple of  small towns grew from rest stops when it took much longer to traverse this stretch.  I stopped in Smithers after having ridden for much longer than I intended or should have and found a small municipal primitive campground next to a large river.  Quickly setting up camp next to a couple working in the area I fixed a  quick Thai Noodle dish and lemon tea.

Maggie and Nicolas had just finished a stint as tree planters in the vast bush of BC between catching semesters at school.  When a site is logged, the company then contracts a team to replant by hand what had just been harvested.  They showed me the quality tools used.  Strong cast mini-shovels.  I like good tools.

  Nicolas shrugged when he said it's still a monoculture but as long as the world uses paper, pencils, and builds houses this sustainable scientific approach is the way to go.  Besides.  They are oozing trees up here.

Maggie drove her old Subaru from her home in Nova Scotia.   (hey Emily, this is from back when Subarus were kinda square shaped like my old blue one).  She, Nicolas and their dog Boreal worked the plant camps in the bush for the season.  It was fascinating to hear about the camp coming together to run off the bears and how one particular set of very large grizzly tracks were concerning.  Boreal was a dog's dog.  Alert, curious, and playful.  Bright sky blue eyes caught your attention too.

Nicolas and Maggie were good peaceful souls.  Sprinkles on the ice cream of my travels.

Pine trees stretched from horizon to horizon becoming mesmerizing at Canada's maximum 100 kph limit.  That's 60 mph max no matter how long, wide, or desolate the road is.

I ride the speed limit for a number of reasons so twist the grip on the right to the correct position and resume my vigilant scanning of the roadsides for signs of Bambi.

I saw a moose this morning.  I really didn't realize how big these suckers are.  Like a Subaru on stilts.  He didn't run fast or particularly gracefully.  Actually quite clumsy.  Kind of like the steampunk spider in the remake of Wild Wild West.  Deer, on the other hand are like Mother Nature’s suicide bombers.  I suppose automobiles haven't been around long enough to weed the bad geometry gene from their DNA.

As I neared the beginning of the Cassier Highway, a long mostly paved two land road from south BC to the Yukon, I saw signs for a Petro Canada just ahead.  Pretty much the last chance before Stewart or Hyder or beyond.  Fuel up, bacon and eggs, stretch and hydrate.

The Cassier is the less know little sister to the Alaska Highway running to it's east.  The dense brush grows to within a couple of feet of the road making wildlife scouting more frantic and dropping one's speed here is a good idea.  Three bears playing at the edge of one curve disappeared instantly into the foliage inches away.  To be as big as they are they can be stealthy when they want.

Ride, ride, ride, ride, stop and become mosquito food while I hydrate and stretch (quicker this time), ride, ride, ride, ride...

A long one-way-in-and-out spur off of the Cassier takes me 40 miles or so to the BC town of Stewart, just across the river is Hyder.

Goal 1.  Alaska, check.

Hyder is not unlike Cicely Alaska, the fictional town in the TV series Northern Exposure.  All dirt roads, a hodgepodge of small stores but mostly bars servicing the fishing industry along the Portland Canal and tending to the few tourists that wander in looking for the famous bear watching place.  When the salmon run in this area, grizzly and black bear come like parishioners to a buffet at Ryans as soon as church is out.  Before the runs, few bears, while the salmon are running, they are everywhere.  Sorry that I'm a couple of weeks early this year.

I did see a couple more black bears poking their heads up above the grass for a better view of me.

The Bear Glacier and Salmon Glacier are must sees in this area.  The Salmon is at the end of a 20 mile long freshly scraped dirt road but worth the dust to see.  It's the fifth largest in North America.

Supper was at an old school bus transformed into a kitchen by Diana, wife of a local fisherman.  Diana serves whatever is fresh and does it well.

Fish and chips.  Halibut with homemade tartar sauce was amazing.  Stop and see Diana when you are in town.

I've been slowly eeking out a cold/sinus/achy feeling for most of the day and decide to curl up deep in my mummy bag and sleep it off.  No drug store for miles so I'll eat some Advil and drink more water and see what happens in the morning.

Night Emily and Eli, all of my love Cathy

**Friday June 18 Day 14-Hyder Alaska to somewhere north of Dease Lake British Columbia Canada**

Still feeling pretty crappy but this is one of the days I anticipated when planning the trip.  Mark-get up.  Pack up.  Point North.  Go.

I had to dig out my big girl panties this morning.

In Stewart, a little village between Hyder and the rest of the world, there was a Swiss-German grocery store in town that had Advil Cold and Sinus tablets.  Cup-o-joe, energy bar...

I gotta say.  Having a runny nose and sneezing in a full face helmet takes some of the romanticism out of an epic road trip.

The ride out of Hyder between the mountains- lush at the bottom- snow covered and jagged at the top, was even more stunning in the late morning light.  In this valley, the sky takes up less room than the terrain.  A sharp contrast to the Dakotas, Wyoming, and Montana.

The Cassier highway above 37a consists of smooth well lined blacktop that ends in brush just inches off the edge of the road.  The farther north you travel the worse the road conditions become until south of Dease Lake it becomes loose gravel and construction.  Not bad riding but hyper focused attention is critical.  Many critters call this remote road home.  I passed three moose, several deer, four bears and a poor puppy that I hope didn't look distressed.  I only hope he had a home in the bush where some side roads would be an overnight camp for the ever present 4x4 trucks with slide-in campers.

At Bell II, an oasis in the middle of the Cassier, I stopped for fuel and a snack.  As soon as I raised the shield on my helmet, mosquitoes filled the void.  I snapped the shield shut and squished as many as I could with my face on the helmet liner and proceeded to pump gas in all my gear.  These guys are vicious.  Even in the middle of nowhere they swarm you in seconds.  I wonder what they eat when I'm not around?

At Dease Lake I decided to stop at the only store, a small reservation stop-in, to replenish my dwindling stock of dried soups and noodles when I saw a BMW GS across the parking lot.  Swinging in to make conversation the rider asked my name as I noticed his NC plate and "Boone" sticker.  We both realized that each other was the faceless person on the other end of the Adventure Rider forum where I had asked if someone had an extra bed in Dawson for a gathering of ADV riders.  David Kellner had been the one that answered my plea and after a couple of days of exchanging emails we realized we lived only 80 miles apart.  Fancy that.  4500 miles from home and we accidently find each other in a remote part of British Columbia.  With the only phone for hundreds of miles in either direction, I snagged it to call home and wish Cathy a happy anniversary.  22 years.  I still don't know how I pulled that one off.

I had intended to push on another 150 miles to take advantage of the light but David had already put in a extra long day on his GS so we decided to hit a local campground on Dease Lake.  Again, magic wifi in the wild.

So I sit here with my mosquito headnet on at 10:45 pm banging on this little computer toy in broad daylight.

On one side of us are a couple of gentlemen from Oregon and Colorado on nice new KLR650's on their way to Anchorage and on the other is Simon who hails from England by the way of Vancouver in his new Toyota Forerunner with all the Africa Safari gear including a tent that pops up on the top in case of lions.  Really cool rig.   Simon just completed a whirlwind tour of the Yukon and Alaska hitting some of the same back roads I intend to ride.

David and I are planning the rest of the trip up to the circle and back into Alaska via the Top-of-the-World highway, a unpaved winding road from Dawson to south of Fairbanks.  Depending on the weather it could be a breeze or a muddy mess.  We'll see.

At least for the next week, I'll have a riding partner for the hardest and most remote parts of the trip and I can show him how to fix things with zip ties.

Gotta force the sleep.

Good night my precious little kiddies (20 and 16), Happy Anniversary my bride.

**June 19 Day 15 Deese Lake to Teslin Yukon**

The Yukon....Yeah!  Somehow this feels more goal achieving than Alaska.

Dave and I left Dease Lake early enough to catch the mosquitoes sleeping and rode for 250 kilometers before catching brunch in Watson Lake home of the famous sign post forest.  Back in 1942 the Alaska Highway was being constructed by the Army in some of the most inhospitable terrain in the world under constant battles with moquitoes and terrifying temperatures.  At some point a signpost was erected and pointers indicating the distance to a couple of local outposts were attached.  Some of the soldiers with time on their hands (no internet access) decided to add distances to their homes.  The tradition grew and now 69,752 signs exist.  Add one more for the one I attached reading "Jupiter NC 2637 mi" with an arrow pointing roughly in the direction of our fair community.  Of course that's distance in crow flying.  My total now is nearly a doubled 4990 miles.

My old mule is performing wonderfully.  A few tweaks as we go including tightening the new chain, another oil change, adjusting the clutch and lubing the cables made her smile a little.

Today was a long and relatively uneventful day covering nearly 500 kilometers but crossing paths with more of the wildlife.

The original plan was to cover another 220 kilometers but the availability of civilized or bush campsites were suspect at best.

Tomorrow we intend to complete the ride to Dawson where we will set up a base camp for rides to the arctic circle, back across a rough high mountain pass to Alaska, pan for gold, fish a little, and day trips around the area.  I expect we will be there about a week.

There are a few things that I can't get over about this land.

First is the amount of daylight.  I went to bed last night at 11:30 and it was like 6:00 at home.  I have a pair of the fancy eye patch thingys like the women wear on airplanes in first class that help but the birds don't wear them so they sing all night.  I don't know when it gets dark because it was light again at 4am when nature called me.

Second is the cost of everything in Canada.  Regular gasoline is $1.15 per liter or around $4 per gallon US.  A baked lasagna and side salad was $25 and my BLT and drink was $15.

Third is the vast space between civilization here.  Most seem to be build around gas stops, most spaced about the distance between the average automobile distance capability.  From central British Columbia, other than the road beneath my wheels, there are few signs of man's impact on the land or sky.  No jet contrails, no power lines, and certainly no homes.  Just the anticipated "wide place in the road" with a few shacks, gas station, and maybe a small business catering to the road weary traveler.  One must wonder what serves as entertainment.  The snowmobiles are probably more necessity in the winter than fun but who knows.

I must shut this thing off and get to bed.  11:30 and the sun just dipped over the horizon.  Maybe the locals will come out to play.

Good night kids, where ever you are.  Wish you were here Cathy even though it's not the first place you would choose. :-)

**June 20- Day 16 Teslin Yukon to Dawson City Yukon**

Breakfast will have to wait.  Dave and I have a lot of ground to cover today so we'll put a few miles under us then stop in Whitehorse.

Most of the early travel was just grinding out miles in sparsely populated areas until we hit the capital of the Yukon, Whitehorse.

Whitehorse has a Wal-Mart albeit not a very big one.  Kinda like Roses in Weaverville but they did have the oil I desperately needed to continue on to the arctic circle.  We grabbed more power bars, snacks, oil, and a McDonalds meal.  Even the McDonalds prices are high.  Ten dollars for a double cheeseburger, fries, and drink.

More wildlife on the way to Dawson...

Let me share a little about the Yukon.  There are 32,000 people in the entire providence with 22,000 of those living in Whitehorse.  About 1600 permanent residences in Dawson, the second largest city, and the rest are scattered around in small villages across the remainder.  This for an area more than twice the size of California.  As remote as BC seemed, the Yukon redefines the term desolate.

The Yukon also has 14 indigenous groups of people, 13 of which have settled with the government for rights to their own land and self governance.  They prefer to be called people of First Nation.  First Nation over Eskimo or Indian or aboriginal.  Charlie David was one of the First Nation residents that told me about the civilizations, or lack of, around Teslin.  Charlie was a slight man with dark black hair thick glasses and a silk shirt.  He a habit of walking off without finishing the conversation only to return a few minutes later and begin where he left off.  Charlie talked about the temperature difference in the last couple of years where the low last winter was only -35 Fahrenheit as opposed to the -50 or -60 just a few years ago.  I told Charlie once it's below 0 it doesn't matter.  He walked away again.

Dave and I put in a lot of miles, nearly 500 today and arrived tired and sore to camp at a provincial site across the river from Dawson.  A ferry ride, compliments of the Yukon government, is required to access the sight and road to Alaska.

The mosquitoes are out in force as the rains begin.  We hunkered down in my relatively large tent to pour over the route to the arctic circle and how to get there with the gas we can carry.

Nearly midnight and we force ourselves to sleep.

Night Emily and Eli.  I miss you dearly.  Wish you were here my love

**June 21 Dawson City to the Arctic Circle**

Up early.  Packed our stuff with handfuls of mosquitoes.

We ride over to the Downtown Hotel previously owned and now run by a fellow Adventure Rider Dick VanNorstrom.  Dick is a pilot, president of the Yukon tourist board, Dawson City Chamber of Commerce and armloads of other activities that should keep 10 men busy.  He took his time to escort us to his house a few blocks away where we had free reign of his well stocked garage.  I changed the oil in the KLR while Dave replaced the tire on the back of his BMW GSA.

BMW GSA vs KLR....

Winnebago vs. Station wagon with a sleeping bag

Battleship vs. dingy

707 vs. hang glider

You get the picture.

The contrast between the capabilities of the two bikes are fodder for civilized banter for the entire trip.

Bikes prepped- everything tightened, extra fuel loaded, extra weight jettisoned, extra oil and fluids, recheck all tools needed.

Riders prepped- beef jerky, power bars, and quarts of water and camping stuff.

A thirty mile ride to mile 0 of the Dempster highway, named for a Royal Canadian Mounted Police inspector William Dempster.  Dempster led a group to find the lost patrol who died enroute from Dawson City to Fort McPherson.  The Dempster highway runs 457 miles to Inuvik and several more in the winter when the lakes are frozen.

The Dempster highway is a raised bed of gravel over the tundra conditioned by the Yukon government to allow for transportation of goods to the handful of small support towns along the way.  We happened to catch it when it wasn't raining very much.  The rain turns the Dempster, coated with calcium chloride to hold down the dust, into a pudding like quagmire rendering it nearly impassible for two wheel vehicles and a show stopper for many four.

Rain for the first fifty miles or so kept us at a tempered pace but it quickly let up and we were able to travel at 45-60 mph across the hard compact gravel.  The conditions changed every twenty five miles or so from pea gravel topped (ride a bicycle on an ice rink) to a bone jarring washboard surface, to a nice smooth, almost paved hard pack.

I split my time looking hard at the road surface for the optimal path, scanning the treeline for wildlife and trying to enjoy the scenery.  The road is elevated above the tundra about six feet but hugs the hills in places with no guard rails to keep you pointed in the right direction.

I put on a couple of albums to add a soundtrack to the ride-  Rolling Stones Sticky Fingers, and the Grateful Dead- Cornell '77 kept my foot tapping through the first hundred miles or so of the jaunt.  Music has been a big part of this trip be it chosen tracks or random play.  I'm putting together a blog entry on that aspect of the trip soon.

With the sun over my left shoulder Dave and I switch places so we each won't have to breath dust all of the time.  We pause every seventy five miles or so to stretch, drink, and talk about what we've seen.  At one point we crested the top of a hill to find a wolf in the road.  Stopping to retrieve my camera from the breast pocket of my riding jacket (Dave stopped just behind me), we watched as the wolf moved directly toward us, passing by me and sniffing Dave's boot before moving on.  I wasn't sure what to do so I sat motionless until he was gone snapping a few pictures as he passed.   Amazing animal.

The wind picked up as the temperature dropped until riding was more like sailing.  The wind would push the KLR hard from the side and move it across the road on the loose gravel quickly requiring an instant response to keep from joining the deep undergrowth down the bank on each side of the roadbed.  Swamps gave way to creeks and rivers then long expanses of tundra with large rolling hills and eventually mountains raising in the distance.  The smell of honeycomb and cinnamon was strong at one point.  I'm not sure what plant did that but it was welcome.  The one constant was the mosquitoes.  At any stop they would be there in droves within seconds of lifting the modular helmet.

We pushed on for 250 miles taking approximately 6.5 hours to get to the first fuel stop of Eagle Plains.  This was where we first intended to camp.  The arctic circle is only 30 miles beyond but the wind had picked up even more making the desolate oasis- two pump station- grill and bunkhouse (mostly for the truckers that use this road and Helicopter pilots making a stop) an easy place to dive into and escape the elements.  The parking lot was blown smooth by the driving wind taking much of the dirt with it off of the mountain.  The bunkhouse had a room available for the night so we jumped at the chance to rest for a while and drop off our stuff before heading on the circle.  The time was ten pm but it was very sunny.

Back on the bikes we pushed on for the remaining thirty miles across a standard steel mesh bridge over the Ogilvie river  and up to a high mountain pass before descending into the valley where the demarcation point of the arctic circle is marked with a lonesome but elaborate sign.  The sign is visible from the downside of the pass and looks out of place since the only thing we've seen other than the oasis thirty miles previous was what nature had assembled over the ages.  Rolling up to the pull-off at 10:45 pm we couldn't dismount quickly enough.  This was it.  The big goal.  The stake-in-the-ground that seemed unattainable just months ago.

Long hours of reading about others journeys, late nights in the garage switching out the bolts that came on the bike with tempered ones to ensure nothing was left to chance, the right sleeping bag, the right exercises to make sure my back would survive.  This was it.

We posed for pics staring into the sun slowly inching toward the horizon while leaning into the wind.  An old station wagon and camper truck was sitting there when we arrived awaiting the moment of solstice.

A young couple whom we had met earlier on a summit arrived in their new Toyota 4x4 with the brakes squealing from the coating of calcium chloride on the road.  We talked to Dylan and Tamala about their trip from Vancouver Island though BC and the Yukon and the similarities and differences with our journeys.  Again I had the privilege to meet another wonderful couple enjoying this spectacular land.  Happy trails you two!

We were tired.  Tired and very very sore.  The last thirty miles back to the bunkhouses in Eagle Plains seemed the longest of the trip.  I walked out to the edge of the parking lot to watch the final dip of the sun while Dave showered the road muck off and engaged in a well deserved teeth brushing.

I snapped a couple of shots with my watch and the sun in the background only to return with the main door locked.  No phone service, no resident stirring, no idea which window on the outside belonged to our room.  This was a fine how-do-you-do.

A geologist staying with a group suddenly slammed into the front door on his way out to smoke, unaware it was locked.  "hey, I'm staying here too" , flashed my key, ran in, he ran out.

Good night Emily and Eli, I did it.  Thanks for your unending support Cathy.  More to come later on the trip out.  It's a hoot.

**June 22 Arctic Circle (Eagle Plains) back to Dawson City**

Two eggs over easy, big hunk of bacon, hash browns, four slices of toast orange jam, two cups of coffee and juice.  The grill at Eagle Plains sure takes care of weary travelers.

As we didn't carry fresh clothes or much in the way of unneeded provisions, it didn't take long to redress in yesterday's threads, eat, and jump back on the bikes.  We agreed that the trip back would be at a less hectic pace than we pushed to get that far north.  That didn't last long.

A beautiful morning surrounded us with little wind making the trip back down the Dempster a pleasure ride.  Sustained 55mph was attainable for most of the road.  The rutted and washboard sections required more attention.  Freshly scrapped or applied pea-gravel still mandated hyper-attention and quick reflexes.  My hands would hurt from my death grip on the handlebars.  I would have to constantly remind myself to relax my arms and allow the bike to find it's own way- a more efficient and safe way to traverse loose stuff.  Once I got the knack of this at speed, I was Jonah Street barreling down the desert on his KTM in the Dakar Rally.  At least until I realized that we were still 150 miles from a pay phone in case my Dakar moment ended like so many participants in the real rally- bike and rider separate as does shoulders and other body parts.  Ok...back off a bit.  Still 6000 miles from home.

We met up with another familiar ADV rider, CaptUglyDan, at Two Moose Lake.  Dan was heading north and asked about conditions, time frames, and food.  Dan had run the Campbell highway, another 500 mile bulldozer path from southern Yukon almost to Dawson City.  He cussed that road for all it was worth.  Dan's old airhead BMW GS only had about an inch and a half of travel left after his weight and load.

Dave and I stopped one more time at Red Creek to hydrate and reintroduce the result of our last hydration stop.  Red Creek is indeed red.  The iron and mineral content of the surrounding exposed sedimentary rock results in a very deep rust color of the creek and surrounding rocks.  It looks like a drain basin in New Jersey.

The last 75 miles were through light showers and cool air coming down off of the Tombstone mountains.  Pavement!  Five miles of  it takes us to the small mile zero station where the $1.39 per liter (5.25 per gallon regular only) fuel was a welcome site.  I had been running on reserve for the last fifty miles and while I had a gallon of extra strapped on the back, I didn't want to chance it.  Soon after fueling up, I pulled up in front of the small wooden building to pay, stepped up on my foot peg to dismount and followed the bike to the ground.  Note to self...side stand must be in vertical position to keep the bike in the same.  This was twice in two days the bike has been on its side.

On the way back from the arctic circle to the bunkhouse, the wind caught me in such a way to drive the bike off of the right side of the road.  Luckily it was only a six foot drop to the scrub covered permafrost and I was able to push up a little ramp to power back up to the roadbed.  By the time Dave realized I wasn't behind him, I was well through the gears and only a mile behind.  The extra engine guards and hard cases kept the bike from sustaining any damage.

We opted for a in town pay campsite to avoid the skeeters and ferry ride, and be able to walk to supper.  Several ADV riders were already in town for the D2D gathering.  Dust to Dawson is a gathering (not a rally :-)

of a hundred or so riders that leave Anchorage to ride across the Top-of-the-World highway.  Again, highway is a relative term because it's more like a 200 mile driveway.

To celebrate our ride, we splurged on Chinese food and a cold beer.

Soon after blogging and curling up in my sleeping bag, the cold rain started and poured steady through the night.  My tent is a dry one.  I enjoyed the noise.

Good night guys...Love you Cathy

**Wednesday June 23 Dawson Break**

The patter of the rain on the tent this morning was welcome.  It gave me the OK to roll over and go back to sleep.  The ride down from the circle must have used all of my muscles because they were all whimpering.

When the frequency of drops slowed to a dodgeable dribble in the late morning, I fumbled around for my "townie" clothes and water bottle.  Other dual-sport riders were starting to trickle in for the annual D2D (Dust to Dawson) gathering.  This is its 19th year and has grown to about 150 riders from all over the country.  It started with some friends riding from Anchorage to Dawson across the "Top of the World" road.  It now includes a stop by a tree for a memorial service where a fellow rider lost his life several years ago.

Dawson City in the Yukon Territories, on the Yukon river was a fishing village for the Tr'ondek H'wechin tribe before the Klondike gold rush.  40,000 people lived there during its heyday- more than in the whole providence today.  The local historian said San Francisco and Seattle were both built as support for Dawson.

Of course Robert Service and Jack London both spent time here and wrote much of their Klondike themed stories and poems here.

A few of us from the camp walked into town and up to the cabin Robert Service occupied in time for the period dressed parks representative to go over the Service's history and read some of his poetry.  We sat in the drizzle and after thanking the parks rep, wandered around town until we found a tavern with a small tv hosting the Cup games.

A much needed rest day that ended with a walk back to camp and a deep nights sleep.  Sorry nothing exciting happened.

Night kids, Love you muchly Cathy.

**Thursday June 24 Dawson YT to Chicken Alaska to Dawson YT**

A mosquito made her way into my tent last night.  I didn't swat this one before going to sleep.  This morning she was propped up on her elbow on my duffle all fat and smiling at me.  For a moment I felt unfaithful but came to my senses and whacked the snot out of her.  Ugg.

A fellow ADV rider said there wasn't a single mosquito in the Yukon.  They are all married and have very LARGE families.

The guys are riding from Tok Alaska today across the Top of the World road, a mostly gravel road in varying conditions with a few mystifying strips of pavement a few hundred feet long on the Canadian side.  The road is 190 miles long with the town of Chicken Alaska somewhere near the middle.  Dave and I decided to meet the bulk of the gang in Chicken and ride back with them.

Light rain fell early but soon blew away.  The road winds up to follow the highest ridges in the glacial mountain range and is the third farthest road north second only to the Dempster (we traveled that Monday to the Artic Circle) and the Dalton north of Fairbanks.

The contrast of the Blue Ridge like mountains and the rocky monoliths of the Richardson Range is evident from the first vista.  This road is more like a unkempt dirt version of the Blue Ridge Parkway but the views go on for hundreds of miles.  Each curve unveils a new powerful set of peaks and gorges.  This road was the original route to Dawson for Mackenzie River traders.

After the 500 mile ride on the Dempster, the 50 mile ride to the boarder and 50 more miles to Chicken seemed elementary.  The Canadian/American boarder is the most northern and most remote in the system and judging by the attitude of the American customs inspectors, it doesn't pay enough to live in this high cabin and ask the same questions over and over.

Chicken Alaska consists of a small restaurant, liquor store, tavern, and gift shop.  They are somewhat under the same roof.  A log post office sits just up the road with one employee that is post master, pilot, mail deliverer, and stamp licker.

Many of the riders, male and female, were already in Chicken when we arrived.  Susan owns the businesses in Chicken and lives there year round.  She depends on the summer months to make a go of it for the rest of the year and by the looks of traffic, she's doing fine.  Two of her three kids help her there.  Chicken Air supports mining and sports in the area as well.

We started back east on the TOTW highway spacing out enough to avoid breathing the acrid calcium coated gravel dust from the folks in front.  About 45 miles east of Chicken, a few old log buildings with a "best coffee in Border Town" sign out front turned out to be the new business of a gentleman and his son.  They have a lot of work to do and as the only residents of "Border Town" need to venture into the big city of Chicken to find a suitable bride for junior.

Dave had a reservation at the Downtown Hotel offered weeks ago to split it with me as the place was full for the D2D gathering.  This is a treat.   We parked the bikes along the wood plank sidewalks on the dirt streets of Dawson next to dozens of other bikes with plates indicating the owners came from Alaska, Florida, Canada, Texas, and North Carolina.  Many other states and countries were represented but there were no trailers hauling in these bikes.   Many, like ours, had a fine cement coating from runs up the Dalton or Dempster highways.  All were bestickered with badges of passing from all over the world.  Most were high mileage and more were vintage.

Thursday night consisted of wrenching, story telling, reminiscing, and fabricating parts to get them to the next milestone.  Several fellows were in their seventies, others were teens.  All were dirty.

Tomorrow is the big event.  Dual sport games, banquet, local runs...

Tonight I sleep in a bed with drapes to block out the ever-present sunlight.  OH...A shower that doesn't require skipping back to the tent with wet dirty feet.  Luxury.

Good night Emily, Good night Eli (thanks for taking care of the heavy lifting for me), All my love my love.

**Friday, June 25 Dawson and local attractions**

One of the locals said that when the Harley Riders come to town the bars and gift shops get all the money.  When the BMW or ADV riders come to town, the museums and campgrounds get all the money.

While a sanctioned run started near noon today, dozens of us decided to take in a tour of the No. 4 gold dredge just outside of Dawson.

After the Klondike gold rush subsided because the easy gold was "panned" out or the diggers weren't getting the stuff out at the pace needed to sustain the effort, dredges were brought in to rip up and automatically "pan" the earth to a few feet below bedrock.  This process leaves huge piles of rock that when viewed from air looks like the pattern of a brain.  These dredges, up to four stories in height, are floated in a pond while a chain of large buckets dig back and forth to a depth into the bedrock dozens of feet down.  When all of the earth within reach of the bucket chain is panned, the dredge is moved a few feet to begin the process again.  A map showed where the No. 4 dredge started back in 1910 and where it wound up in 1959.  Fascinating mechanics and amazing process for steampunk technology.

Many of us rode up to the Dome.  This high mountain above Dawson allows a 360 degree view of the town, Klondike and Yukon rivers and three mountain ranges in its periphery.

Back in Dawson, a steak dinner at the Palace Grand Theater awaited us.  The Palace Grand is one of many buildings built during the gold rush.  One of the historians in town said many of the local dance hall gals would dance with a miner for $1. That's $720 in today's money.  I saw an old menu that listed a bowl of soup and bun for $5.  That's enough in today's money to buy any one of our cars.

After the dinner the serious games begin.

Slow drag racing down main street.  Who can drive the slowest without touching their feet down while staying in their lane.

Tight slalom.  Ride feet up through traffic cones .

Rider on back tries to take a bite of a hot dog hanging from a fishing line.

A paper plate is placed in the middle of the road.  A rider is blindfolded and tries to stop with his/her front wheel on the plate.

You know, high brow stuff like that.

At midnight the big finale.  All the bikes line up on main street for a group picture and the official "Dust to Dawson 2010" decals are presented for all that participated.

Dawson was then quickly turned into the ghost town it was in the 60's.

Dawson is well worth a visit for the history, local hiking, local color, and stunning scenery.  Bring your wallet loaded because like the rest of Northern Canada, the prices reflect the transportation involved for both durable goods and consumables.  Expect gas to be $1.40 per liter (3.78 liters to the gallon).  You do the math.  RVs are everywhere and come from everywhere.

My plans initially had my northern run happening in Alaska but with my schedule I chose the Yukon and Dempster road instead.  After talking to others that went up the Dalton in Alaska, I'm glad I chose this option.  The Dalton was busy, dusty, muddy, and miserable all at the same time.  Tomorrow means loading up and pointing South.  My trip is half complete.  My real destination is home.  That's where my gold is.

Goodnight E and E.  Love you C

**Saturday June 26 Dawson YT to Teslin YT**

While Dave retrieved my spare tire from the campsite we occupied earlier in the week, I loaded the mule and bid my farewell to old friends and new.  Larry Correll, whom I met in Asheville last year and keeps a home there and in Venice Florida, was heading in a roundabout way home on his GS.  Dick VanNostrom (sp?), previous owner and man about town was sweeping the road back to normal.

Dave decided to go back across the Top of the World road and visit southern Alaska on his way back to Boone via California.  I've only known Dave for a week but we've quickly become friends.  He's quite a character and a hell of a lot of fun.

Dave, you've been a great wingman even though you fly a c-130 transport :-).

I wanted to get to Teslin YT and the cheap wi/fi campsite I used on the way up.  I arrived to find the campground full and after pleading with the proprietor got a site between holes 3 and 4 in their putt-putt course.

Just lots of miles and the expected roadside wildlife show today.  Early to bed as the wi/fi was being used by so many people I couldn't get access to the blog.

I'm ready to hear English as a first language and use money that doesn't look like I stole it from a Monopoly game.  I have to go through my receipts each day to make sure I didn't wad up a fiver as trash.  They have no singles only "Loonies", a dollar coin with a loon on the back, and "Toonies" a two dollar coin that looks like a cookie.

Nighty night kids, be home in a couple of weeks baby.  Love you.

**Sunday June 27 Teslin YT to Fort Nelson BC**

I noticed last night that rain would be moving in early today and I didn't sleep well listening for the first drops.  They arrived at 4pm so I jumped up and packed the tent while it was somewhat dry.  15 minutes from opening the tent door to having a loaded bike.

The fuel pumps didn't open until 7pm and I wasn't going to wait in the rain.  I had a half of a tank and a full 1 gallon jug onboard as well as the standby liter mounted on the crash bars.  That should be more than enough to get me to the first fuel opportunity- Swift Creek.

I rode slower than usual because of the amount of wildlife about at dawn before, with the exception of a few brave souls, disappear into the woodland.  150 miles of desolation later I saw a sign "Swift Creek" with the international symbols for fuel, bathrooms, and food.  Another sign covered all of the above.  Closed.  Forever.

Quick calculations of the remaining fuel indicated that I could proceed at 30mph and make the next fuel stop on my list.  I hope they are open on Sunday.  I didn't have enough to make it to Watson Lake so I might be knocking on camper doors for handouts.

While puttering at moped speed along the rain soaked tarmac in pretty rough shape, I caught a glimpse of something to my right and upon turning saw a large bull moose running somewhat along side.

When you scream like a little girl in a full face helmet it hurts your ears.  My camera is stored in the dry safety of my tank bag so the best I could do is grab a handful of brakes and watch him turn to look at me then scoot off into the brush.  Wow is he big.  I remember he was looking down at me like I was a toy.

I put the last liter of fuel into the bike at Cool Creek.  Just around the next bend, at 7am, a new service station/cafe had just opened for business.  The leathery lady that was unlocking the pumps said I was wet and to quit hugging her.  She offered hot coffee as an alternative to her affections.  Works for me.

After one of Friday's leftover muffins, strong coffee and all fuel containers filled to the brim, I entered the lonesome road and continued the same half-throttle pace to see/avoid the critters.

Watson Lake with it's now familiar sign post forest was the next stop.  I fueled up again and was quite proud that I had covered 250 miles and it was only 9am.  Another cup of muddy coffee and I was on my way to Liard hot springs.  They were another 180 miles ahead but I thought that would be a good half-way point for my day and a dip in the springs might get the chill out of my bones I've been feeling all morning.

I couldn't help but to think about the record highs the folks back home have been experiencing for the past couple of weeks.  I don't think I've seen a high above 62 since I left home.  Most mornings have been from freezing to about 40.  I get the metric temperature thing just fine.  0 is when water freezes- 100 is when it boils.  It's just the numbers in between that gives me a headache when trying to compute.  It's not as easy to translate as distance or volume.

With the pungent loamy smell of the deep forest amplified by the rain providing a contrast to the dry absence of smell from the "high desert" of the far north, I pressed on south east.  The random album selection logic of my gps/mp3 player chose for me Charlie "Yardbird" Parker's One Night in Birdland.  Good choice.  Smooth bebop and smooth showers.  This followed by the Cowboy Junkies Trinity Sessions and Aretha.

I like the serendipity of random music choices when I ride.  It's a soundtrack of the trip not dictated by me and is a surprise.  As much as I love being amazed by the views that unfold before me on a motorcycle, I smile at the choices my mp3 player makes from my 650 albums as I ride.  Sometimes.

When I was crossing the high mountain pass followed by John in a rental car to Ennis Montana, the Australian lady that gives me directions (I reckon she's the one that chooses the music) pumped the Beach Boys into my helmet.  This while I was being pelted by sleet and freezing rain in very very cold conditions.

The Australian lady had a little fun with me in Gillette Wyoming.  Gillette is cowboy land.  When I pulled into a little gas station/horse tack shop to refuel, Hank Williams Greatest Hits was playing.  Alrighty then.  When I removed the headphone jack to pump the fuel, the Australian lady had a little fun with me.  When I unplug the headphone jack, the music comes out of the GPS speaker.  She chose a song from a compilation of show tunes from a play that Cathy and I saw.  Just as I began pumping gas, Liza Minnelli burst out in "Ring Them Bells".  The cowboys glanced over at me for another look.

I fully expected them to break out into a Busby Berkley routine- arm in arm with a grace reserved for the stage.  I was three menu layers from the stop button or volume control at the quickest.

Lots of buffalo on the roads today.  Those are big like moose but with fatter heads and shorter legs.  The little ones are cute.

I saw so many bear that I didn't even slow down to take a closer look. I do still wave at them though.

Three hours from Watson Lake, I pulled into Liard hot springs.  The rain stopped.  Just like that.  What to wear....hmmm.  I chose a pair of nylon pack pants that the legs zip off.  The guy from Georgia that pulled up on a Harley behind me decided his red BVD bikini briefs would work just fine.  As far as anyone was concerned, he was the only one at the springs.

A ten minute walk down a board path led me to a kidney shaped natural pool about 125 feet long and 25 feet wide.  The upper end was where the hot water (enough to boil an egg) entered the pond so the closer you got to it the hotter the water.  I started with the side that the old ladies and men with heart conditions were paddling around in.  I moved quickly toward the hottest part until I began feeling like a shrimp.  I was certainly the whitest person in the water having been in full bike gear for three weeks.  My face had a nice raccoon tan from the face shield and sunglasses.  Now I was turning a nice translucent pink all over.  Tartar.  Done.  I moved back down with the old ladies.  The guy from Georgia must have left.  Everyone is talking again.  Only a dozen or so folk in here this morning.  As I was leaving a school bus pulled up and they were off in a sprint down the long wood path for a certain cannonball.  That will give them the old folk something to shut up about.

Three hundred more miles through the Canadian Rockies on the Alaskan Highway finished my day.  One $15 dollar hamburger, five gallons of $1.79 per liter fuel at the only stop for 200 miles in each direction.  I hope they choke on that money.  More expensive than what I paid on the Dempster Highway.

The last provincial campsite in the Rockies was cold and wet so I pressed on the next 50 miles to Fort Nelson.  Hopefully they will have another site near town.

Not going to happen.  The "town" sites were full.  Sites for 100 miles are full.  I started checking motels.  What is it with this town...Almost all motels are full and those that are not are terribly pricey for the dives most of them are.  Even the Motel 6 wanted $150 for a room.  I had to ask the guy at the counter "why"?

Fort Nelson is experiencing it's annual seasonal influx of workers for the logging and gas field work.  They fill the campgrounds with their RV's, tents, and pick-up trucks, and even rent motel rooms for the season.  They can charge these prices because of the healthy wages paid these workers.

I got a ground room in a six unit building in the parking lot of a tire store for $75.  A budget buster.  Dried Thai noodles for me this week.

But it does have fast wi/fi so here I am- catching up.

1% Chocolate Milk and a weird Canadian candy bar for supper tonight.

Goodnight Emily and Eli.  Hug mom for me.  Cathy, pretend it's me with a shave.  Love you.

**Monday June 28 Fort Nelson BC to somewhere south of Grande Prairie**

Fort Nelson being the hub of industrial BC is not a place to hang around sniffing the air and taking in the surroundings.

A quick Powerbar and water and I'm heading south.

Yesterday's ride throughout the lower Alaska Highway was refreshing and made it easy to put in a lot of miles.  I hope for the same today.

Early on the Alaska Highway gets back into the routine of lots of space between small villages.  The scenery begins with long spanning vistas but quickly immerses the traveler deep in the gorges and peaks of the Canadian Rockies to the west of the main road.  A spitting rain keeps the camera away for all but the most handsome photo ops but stopping every now and then to listen, smell, and soak was the order of the day.

I didn't see the number of animals today that I did yesterday.  I think the span up to Ft. Nelson had the most animals per mile of anywhere on my trip to this point.  At one point I quit even looking at the buffalo.  The first was a brake grabber.  The next was a few together then a herd.  Then they were everywhere.  Not very fast though so no issues with hitting them as long as you prepared for each turn.

At Dawson Creek, not to be confused with Dawson City where I was based the previous week, the "Mile 0" for the Alaska Highway sign was prominently displayed in several places in town.  A quick sandwich and stop at the Polaris store for oil and a borrowed pan resulted in a quick service and the beginning of the next 200 miles.

At 9:30 I noticed a dirt road that left the highway and dove down a bank towards a river.  As many times in the past few weeks, this would provide a place to bush camp.  The prettiest places to camp so far have been these unmarked logging roads or goat paths off the main road.  I started a small fire, set up camp, and consumed a pot of chef-Boyardee lasagna and meatballs.  A  quick look around for bear signs and locking up the washed pans and extra food in my top box I heard the sound of a motorcycle coming.  It had to be a fellow ADV rider as it was quiet and could make it down the stony rutted road to my camp.

The mad Irishman Martin whom I had met at our camp in Dawson City popped his helmet and joined my by the fire.  Martin came to the states a few years ago from his farm in Ireland near Cork and works in San Francisco.  He and I had hopscotched each other back down the Alaska Highway.  In his thick Irish accent that took a while to distill, he was quick to offer a beer from his heavy stock in his seemingly bottomless side case.  In spite of being ready to hit the sleeping bag, I accepted his offer for one (to his five) and we talked until midnight about tractors, farming, engines, politics, and his plans to possibly move back to Ireland and start where he left off.

I saw the first stars, and near darkness, that I had seen in a few weeks.  It's amazing what a thousand miles of latitude does for normalizing my biocycles.

At three am I thought I heard something walking around outside my tent and discovered what I thought was a large moth flitting around the mesh inner layer.  I rolled over and went back to sleep only to be awakened an hour later by the critter.  Fishing around for my cell phone to provide a little light I found a small mouse clinging to the bug screen looking for a way out.  He had already chewed a thumb-sized hole in the corner of the tent.  I zipped open the door and he scurried out.  I don't eat or drink in the tent so he must have been disappointed.  The next morning I saw where he had left little presents around the inside of the tent.  That rascal must have walked all over my sleeping bag.  I shook everything out for a long time.

Look for me soon guys.  Love you babe.

**Tuesday June 29, woods south of Grande Prairie to north of Calgary Alberta Canada**

Little dew this morning so after a vigorous shaking of everything in the tent and the tent itself to make sure mouse poop wouldn't make its way to my next camp I loaded and prepared to leave.

Martin's heavy snoring was still flapping his tent as I checked the air in the tires and plugged in the next coordinates...

"mernin...winna coop eh cahfee?"  I pondered his offer for a few seconds before fiending bad hearing and asking him to repeat himself. "cahfee, winna coop eh cahfee afer ye goo?"  Ah coffee!

Thanks Martin but no thanks.  It interrupts my first 200 morning miles before I'm somewhere that doesn't require a shovel to take a break.

We bid our safe ride farewells and I turned back up the rocky road to the Alaska Highway.

A quick stop in Grande Cache for fuel and my standard question "so what's this town famous for?".  The lady behind the counter responded "why the Canadian Death Race?"  Apparently the Death Race is a 125k foot race that crosses rivers and has a 17,000 foot elevation change.  Much of the course is above 4000 feet.

I don't think I want to compete in anything that contains the word "death".

Martin pulled in for fuel as I was leaving.  He is taking the western path back down the Icefields Parkway, my route north, as I peel off east to continue down 40 towards Edmonton Alberta.

I soaked up the changes in topography and geology for the next 200 miles.  Things flattened out a bit to reveal a Minnesota like terrain with large grain bins and fields of unknown crops in every shade of green.

Clouds of all shapes and sizes filled the growing sky.  Bob Ross must have been on weather duty today in heaven.  He used all of God's titanium white and phthalo blue on these monsters balancing them softly on the magic pane of glass suspended a few thousand feet above terra firma.  Bob pulled out his big brush to smear the bottoms of a few into the ground.

 These pockets of rain stayed just to my right or left for miles.  It was as if the road was being built quickly in front of me by a crew that forgot their raincoats.  My luck ran out just east of Edmonton.

While zigzaging south and east to avoid the big city, I found myself entering a large dark void.  What started as sharp peppers of rain suddenly turned to strong winds and small hail.  Then large hail.  Then rain so hard traffic could not proceed.  I don't mind the wet but when the lightning started popping around me I had to bail in the other direction.  There was no shelter anywhere so moving was the only way to escape the brunt of the storm.

This storm didn't burn itself out like most do but this one settled into a steady pour.  I turned at the next road that had a sign restaurant and four more turns led me to the town of Winfield.  Three farm related stores, a small park, and a smaller building with a dry front porch and simple sign that said "Restaurant" drew me to the side to leave the bike to suffer the elements and rush to the porch to shed several wet layers.  A cup of coffee and slice of pie later it looked like the worst of it had passed.  I wanted to put in a few more miles to look for a dry place to camp but the farther south I rode the wetter it got.

Bluebird Motel-  Way off the beaten path but $36 per night with wi/fi.  And so I finish another day wimping out in a roadside roadhouse with a shower.  I can handle being a wimp.  Hope my account can.

Hope to make the Montana border tomorrow as Canada Day is July 1.  The whole country shuts down.

Night night Emily Rose and Eli Beckwith.  All my love Cathy Jean. :-)

**Wednesday June 30 Calgary Alberta to Great Falls Montana**

Gotta get across the Canadian/American border today.  I hear that on Canada Day everything closes and things get fun.  Don't know how much more fun I can take.

Lot's of wind early in the ride.  Alberta is like a great big Minnesota.  Large farms with larger vistas that go on forever.  The Canadian Rockies are tiny peaks on my right (which happens to be the way I'm leaning all morning) and grasslands to my left.  Interesting fissures in the earth every now and then can probably be attributed to erosion but I'm not sure.

Just head down riding all morning until I see a sign "Head-Smashed-In Buffalo Jump national monument.  How can one pass up a chance to see what this is all about.

Head-Smashed-In Buffalo Jump is the location where Native Americans used to prep for winter by herding buffalo through cairns to a cliff where they fell into piles to be processed for food and supplies.  Ten dollars for entry was well spent.  This sight is on the must see list from UNESCO along with the pyramids, Taj Mahal, and other really cool stuff.  The work that went into developing the sight and ensuring that the info transferred is correct is remarkable.

Cross the border with no issues.

I forget that night actually happens down this low so I find myself rolling into Great Falls well after dark looking for the Great Falls park and campground.  Nice park but no campground.  A fellow recommended the local KOA just down the road so as the time neared ten thirty, I pulled in for a quick spot.

The terribly nice young man at the desk gave me the paper to fill out while he rambled on about the amenities.  The sound of my chin hitting the counter when he told me the fee for a tent site would be fifty dollars woke many in the campground.  No turning back now.

The site was pretty cool with a shelter, granite counter tops, coffee maker, power, water, and locking storage.  The cooking site next to it had Jenn-Air ranges with granite tops as well.  Still.

At eleven pm I had set up a tent in the dark and followed the strong smell of chlorine across a hedge row and over a fence to the closed hot tub.  I dare them to run me out.

What was an overpriced site at midnight turned out to be Disney World in the morning.  Check out their website. KOA Great Falls.

Night night Eli and Emily.  Much closer Cathy.

**Thursday July 1 Great Falls MT to Hardin MT**

Well it's official.  My butt fell off today.  Not sure what happened but when I shook out my riding pants it blew out and skated across the prairie like a plastic grocery bag.  I tried a couple of times to step on it but it was gone in a flash.  Just my two hip bones and that little tail thing on the end of my spine.  At least the bones have no feeling.  Not sure how long it will take to grow one back.

I took my time at the fifty dollar camp sight. Taking advantage of their pancake breakfast in the Hoe-Down Cabin next to the Wash Stone Cabin where I did a load of well needed laundry.  I wandered over to the Wild West Swimmin' Hole with slide and streams of water that squirted up from the battlefield that included a fort and water cannon.

RV kids would love this place.  Check out is eleven o'clock.  I checked out at eleven o'five.  Take that!

I gave the bike a good going over before heading up to the river to see the series of falls that gave the town it's name.  Lewis and Clark spent a lot of time here because of the numerous game and to have a base to send scouts out to look for a good place to cross the mountains.   On the way back from the falls, my clutch cable frayed and became stuck in the cable.  I had an extra so a fifteen minute tools-on-the-ground regiment and I was back on the road.

89 south from Great Falls follows the Lewis and Clark path through the Lewis and Clark forest.  I bet they were surprised to see that.  What a coincidence!

Long sweeping asphalt through a seven thousand foot pass then a sudden drop to the gorge lay in front of me.  After taking this long way around and knowing this was a short riding day, I decided to see what the little dirt road on the left had in store.  Visiting a topo map showed it cutting off a great portion of the road ahead.  About seventy miles in all, the road was slippery from the small dry round stones that made up the surface.  Probably a ball in a rally car but a handful on a fully loaded bike.  Still, it was a beautiful ride and put me in shot of Billings before dark.

Back on the pavement I saw a storm brewing with quite a light show ahead.  According to my GPS a small town was just ahead with the possibility of some kind of shelter.  I was thrilled to see an old drive-in just seconds before the bottom dropped out.  Dry bike under the abandoned shelter and fresh pie on the counter inside.  Cell service to boot!

When the storm passed I met up with a fellow dual sport rider Greg coming from Glacier where he was riding with his friend.  His friend continued up into Canada but Greg had to head back to Nashville to his job as a mortgage officer at Regions Bank.  I was going to camp in Billings but he suggested pushing on to Hardin where he had a reservation at a KOA.  I agreed to meet him there  and stopped to look for a quarter inch drive extension to replace the one laying in a dirt parking lot somewhere in America.

When I got to Hardin, Greg already had his cabin and a pizza I can only guess he picked up on the way.  I went down to the tent city and set up in a windstorm while the lightning played just in the distance.

Greg and I sat on his cabin porch and chowed some beef and jalapeno pizza, swapping riding stories but I needed to log on and write a little so we bid each other safe riding and I walked back to the tent in the dark.  That's when I shook out my riding pants and my butt blew away.  I'm going to miss it.

Good night all.  Miss you dearly baby.

**Friday July 2 Hardin Montana to Rapid City South Dakota**

The wind died down during the night and a dewless dry Montana prarie morning meant a quick camp breakdown and fuel up by 7am.  Good windless riding in the morning but heading east means the sun in my face for a while.

I had a choice to make.  Safe big I95 south to Wyoming or little winding remote 212 across the Northern Cheyenne reservation.  The thought of 75mph on hot tarmac for the next 250 miles caused me to aim east and take the smaller more desolate road.  This is an extension of 212 south of Billings that the late Charles Kuralt called "the most beautiful drive in America".

Three villages in the 230 mile shortcut across eastern Montana, Wyoming, and into South Dakota were mostly made up of small collections of mobile homes, box houses, one pump fuel stations, and maybe a saloon.  I'm sure these saloons cater to the crowd from Sturgis that venture out from the herd each year.  The random anti-meth slogans and posters lends credence to the stories I have heard about the addictions many First Nation residents suffer and the toll on family and community.  This is heart-breaking as the native people I have met have been helpful, humble, and interested in sharing their story.  These very tough people have gotten the short end of the stick from us immigrants for so long I'm surprised they are interested in even talking to me.

I had the name of a friend of Dawson Dick that lived in Spearfish and since I was coming right through the heart of that wonderful little town I decided to stop by unexpectedly and say hello.  It was as if they knew I was coming.  Griz and his lovely wife Sherry opened the door to their covered porch and brought me in like I've known them all of my life.  Griz and Sherry own and operate a Grizzly Sign and Design Studio, and have both ridden bikes and know the local area like the back of their hand.  Griz asked me if I had ridden the Spearfish Canyon Road.  I wasn't sure if I had but I had criss-crossed the Black Hills on the way up.  After looking at the map it was clear that I hadn't.  Sherry said that I had to ride that road.  They were very very right.  This road winds through the north eastern quadrant of the Black Hills and although the speed limit is 35mph, you really want to twist the right grip a little more and lean a little more and smile a little more.  It was a good thing for my budget (no tickets) that there were a line of cruiser bikes that had their hands full with the posted limit.

I had intended to be at Powersports motorcycle dealership in time to spoon on a new rear tire before the evening was done but pulled in fifteen minutes after closing.  Keith, the parts manager was closing up and checked to see if the tire was on the shelf.  It was and we agreed to hit it first thing in the morning.

Googling for a campsite I found the Lazy J on top of the mountain over looking Rapid City.  Ashley checked me in and Frank jumped on the humvee golf cart and showed me to a great little tent site.

Supper was at the Colonial House, a well established restaurant where $12 got me a flank steak, salad with home-made blue cheese dressing, a loaf of home-made cheese sausage bread, and roasted garlic.  Take that Canada.  Quite possibly the best meal of the trip short of those from the Atwells, Cannadys, and Pressleys.

Off to bed.  Gotta tire up and cover about 500 miles tomorrow.

Night all.  Sweet dreams sweetie.

Again the wind was brutal.  Fighting the bars and leaning into the wind for three hours is a workout that needs to be patented.  Figure this one out somebody.  There's a fortune to be made.  "The Ronco dirt bike-in-a-windstorm body shaper.  Call now and receive a free

**Saturday July 3rd Rapid City SD to Mitchell SD**

As promised I broke camp early and back-tracked to the Powersports dealership to have the new Shinko 705 rear tire installed.  As promised Keith and Jeff took me right in and began work on the tire as well as checking out the chain that I had problems getting tight (or too tight) in the past few days.  The BMW at home doesn't have those problems as it is shaft drive.  One of the many reasons the GS guys have me stuttering to justify a chain.  It's tough to get it just right by yourself on the road.

The guys at Powersports in Rapid City knocked out the service in no time flat.  We talked about my trip so far as they remembered me stopping by to get a recharge kit for my air filter on the way up.  Thanks again guys!

Because of the carb problems I had in Western SD on the up trip, I had only had a glancing blow in the Badlands.  I intended today to scrub in the new tire with the full tour.

I hit 44 on the way in and saw a small dirt road to the left.  On the topo map this road wound for 20 miles or so into the heart of the Badlands.  Not a problem.  Problem.  The road was covered with 3-4 inches of fresh pea gravel.  It was more like skiing than riding.  20 mph for the entire ride.  The heavy top load on the pacmule was very evident for this part of the trip.  Soon the road dropped into the park and while this section was still unpaved, it was more heavily traveled and navigable tracks were an option.  The Badlands are much like the surface of a foreign planet.  Pictures won't do it justice but you can see some in the pic link to the left.  Erosion has exposed layers of sediment and the effects of deposition have opened up the most concentrated fossil bed in the US.  Of course taking any fossils or rocks from the park is a big no-no.  My plan to ride through and see the park in a couple of hours were sidelined by my inability to pass a photo op or ignore a trail head.  I walked several 1-2 miles trails in riding boots and pants causing my feet to demand notice this evening.

I didn't exit the park until nearly 2pm.  Prairie dogs were everywhere and would do a little dance and squeal to communicate.  Another would pop up and do the same little dance.  Like whack-a-mole it was near impossible to catch them in action with a camera.

A bighorn sheep and her offspring (kid?) lounged on a rock almost out of sight.  A family took some time to point them out to me.  "see the small green bush...three o'clock and just up there"  No sorry..."  See the V in the mountain?  Go down just a little then over that far"  Sorry, I really am but I don't see them.  "  Ok...look at the three bushes and the white place on the hill...then go down and to the right"  Bless their patience.  I finally saw them blended into the infinite color of the rock strata.  They were moving from Illinois to southern California and this trip took them through some nice places.

Three ladies on three bikes (Harley, Suzuki, and BMW) were parked at an overlook and we took turns snapping shots with each other’s cameras. (forgive me for not remembering names, did I know?)  They were members of "Motor Maids" a female riding club founded in 1948.  They were on their way from Nashville to Wyoming for a rally.  Looked like they were having a ball.

More miles slabbed on I90 east with little wind and no rain.   I caught up with a Concours rider, Randy, at the exit to the park and we hop-scotched all the way to Mitchell where he was staying the night on his way to points north to visit a friend.  I stopped in Mitchell to find the nearest state campsite near Sioux Falls but none were close.  All of the private sites are filled due to the July 4 weekend.  I really wanted to push on at least that far but even the motels were full or wanted premium prices for the privilege.

A chance call to the Siesta Motel back up the road a mile scored a room for $40 with wi/fi and a microwave.  My last can of Chef-Boyardee noodles and meat balls were the fare of the evening.

Coincidently, a BMW GS1150 was parked next to my room and it was bestickered with Team Pterodactyl logos.  Team Pterodactyl was a club started by Griz from Spearfish, where I spend time yesterday.  Griz mentioned a friend from east was on his way in and it was here I bumped into Reed.  Reed is from the Detroit area, a large soft spoken fellow with a straight white beard that is a lighting expert for live theater in the area.  Summers are the off season so he gets time out for good behavior.  He is meeting Griz and another "dactyl" coming in a few days behind me from Dawson at Griz's pad before continuing on to the BMW MOA rally in Redmond Washington.  I could have sat in the plastic chairs in front of the motel for hours talking to Reed but hunger pangs and the need for a shower moved me to demarcate the conversation with wishes for a safe ride tomorrow.

Reed covered his bike and mentioned some weather might be coming in but I decided to leave mine uncovered...until the marquee scrolled across the TV screen that a front was moving through with damaging winds, hail and flood warnings.  I covered my bike too.  An hour later the 4th of July started early with heavy lightning, powerful winds and sheets of rain.  Man I'm glad I'm not in a tent somewhere in the middle of a prairie tonight.  I'm not sure if a tornado can tell the difference between RV's and mobile homes.

Good night Emily and Eli (thanks Eli for taking care of the sound system this week)(great job on the grades too!)  Night baby.  I'm officially one time zone away from you now.  See you soon.

**Sunday July 4 Mitchell SD to Kansas City Kansas**

The fourth of July.  A time to consciously consider our freedoms.  A time to be thankful for and exercise each one with complete and confident composure.

It's 7am.  I'm going to exercise my freedom to roll over in my $40 per night bed and go back to sleep.

The effects of the heavy rains and high winds were evident two hours later as plastic motel chairs were scattered around the pool area and large puddles remained scattered about the parking lot.

Reed's bike was gone but given the girth of the GS I don't expect that it blew away.  Reed is probably near Chamberlain SD by now with his "Santa meets ZZ Top" whiskers wrapped around his collar.

Options here.  Either head east and follow the storm front that extends from Texas to Michigan with a chance of getting in the middle and having it around me all day...or...head south and punch through it.

If I get in rain then get out what gets wet usually dries in the breeze.  Getting wet and stopping that way guarantees the riding duds are wet in the morning.

South it is.

Sioux Falls- where I have several customers and co-workers probably getting ready for a cookout and horseshoes.  Do they do horseshoes in the Midwest?  I'll have to ask.

Sioux City...

The low cloud cover is interrupted occasionally by my helmet.  The KLR's 36" seat height ensures I sit higher than all cars and most SUV's.  It also puts me in the path of side winds not unlike riding a billboard.

Omaha.  Gotta head west for a while and circle the city to see it from all angles.  A couple of signs with Warren Buffett hawking a college, hotel, or hair gel litter the landscape.  When you mention Omaha in casual conversation either Wild Kingdom or Berkshire Hathaway is sure to be the topic followed.

South Dakota, Iowa, Nebraska, Missouri in just a few hours.

Rain.  Spitting but expected I push on until it becomes too strong.

I stop at a gas station to fuel up and use the phone to call my friend Blake Hodges in KC.  I wanted to stop in, say hi, and see Megan his wife, Oliver his son (haven't seen him in three years), and his daughter Charlotte whom I have never seen.  The plan was to push on into the heart of Missouri to camp later.  Phone call made but line for fuel and I headed south.

Heavy rain and the Australian gal in the GPS sent me west of St  Joseph where no fuel stops exist like on the interstate east side. Just in town an accident meant I had to stop riding for 15 minutes.

When riding, I can find a speed that sends most of the rain up and over me but stopped, even with my rain gear on, I quickly become saturated.  Luckily the temp is warm so I just get very wet.

 By the time I rejoined I29 it was getting dangerous.  I stopped at a truck stop, fueled up under the cover then moved the bike over to a diesel bay that was out of service.

Asking the attendant if it was OK to sit this out for a while was greeted and answered with a "take a load off" "truckers lounge in the back".  I wandered through the American flag stickers, racks of various novelty sweatshirts, CB radio paraphernalia, mini doses of toothpaste, shaving cream, and anti-perspirant, and a rack of dusty sunglasses to find a large screen TV and three similar sized truck drivers leaning into an episode of CSI Miami.  No one spoke or glanced up but leaned around me as I walked by to drop my soaking gloves, coat, and helmet on a bent wood cafe table.

The storm outside was almost as loud as the TV and the muffled sound of the wind's effect on the roof was met with the occasional glance up to the ceiling with a raised eyebrow.  Still no one spoke...until the power flickered off- then on- then off..off.

A choreographed string of swear words came in waves from all three truckers.  I'm not sure if CSI Miami is still in production but by the reaction of these burly men, it was the last episode.  Ever.

The small smoky room was dimly lit by the emergency exit sign and the conversation turned to speculation about the ending.

Wyatt was a slight man with very thick glasses and a Midwest accent.  He brushed off the importance of the show but kept offering potential scenarios for ending.

K.W.'s "body by Hardees" physique melted into the sole recliner with his cleanest pair of cut-off sweat pant shorts, black socks, nameless white tennis shoes, and- with my hand on my heart- a Partridge Family tee shirt. K.W. is not his real name but he mentioned more than a few times that his Kenilworth was THE truck for the Rocky Mountains.  Or flat lands.  Or flatbeds, hogwagons, or boxes.

The other fellow, whom I will call "the mute" only said one word..."Horatio"  Then only when Wyatt and K.W. were trying to remember the red-headed guy's name on CSI to no avail.  The Mute lit one cigarette with the one he was finishing and slept between drags.

Suddenly Wyatt said "you either walked from the highway or rode on a motor cickle"  The three men seemed to just then notice that I was in the room.  K.W. asked where I was from and where I was going which turned into a conversation about the attributes of the roads I had traveled.  They had hauled on them all and knew just where each deer, elk, and moose were hiding.  At least those that they hadn't already hit.

The attendant wandered back with her flashlight a couple of times.  Maybe to check if we were still there...I don't know.

About an hour after the lights went out, they flickered...on...off.  Off.

We got up and lit our way back to the front of the truck stop with our cell phones.  A few other travelers had taken refuge in the store, now lit with a florescent camp lantern, and stood with their hands in their pockets lamenting about a particular storm they had experienced with long periods of silence, and staring out at the sheets of rain only illuminated by the headlights of the next truck to join the marooned.

K.W noticed the stash of leftover fireworks- South Carolina grade- shelved next to the door with a "sale" sign hanging above.  "Ladies and gentlemen, I think it's time for a show".

Without prompt, each of us started going through our wallets for enough money to purchase the entire lot and a couple of Bic lighters.  The chain smoking late night attendant barked "keep 'em away from the pumps boys".

I watched from a distance as "The Mute" lit the first few from the protection of the awning until one went off under it then an umbrella was employed to move the launch site a little farther away from Miami to the remote Cape Kennedy in the middle of the dirt (now mud) parking lot.  A fireworks stand across the interstate thought this was a challenge and began going through their stock turn by turn.

Each barrage was met with applause and hoots as our team didn't hesitate to light two or three of the big box multi shot $45 retail ($20 sale) units at a time.

The explosives ran out just as the rain bled to a trickle.  I called Blake to see if his offer to spend the night was still good as I really didn't want to camp on the cafe bench in the truckers lounge.  Blake said he would leave the garage door open and to "bring it on"

Ten miles into a forty mile trek from St. Joseph to Kansas City the rain came back with a vengeance.  I was already wet and well committed to the ride so I pressed on into the most tense leg of my entire trip so far.  I don't usually ride at night.  Certainly when it's raining.  Certainly not on a night where drivers might be coming from a party.  I broke all of my rules at one time as I navigated the ramps, cloverleafs, and by-passes at highway speeds in a downpour trying to avoid the super slick painted lines on the road.  The Australian lady in my GPS seemed a little more serious now as she guided me through the woven roads of Kansas City to the port of calm at Blake and Megan’s home.

At midnight I pulled into Blake’s garage with the help of Blake and his flashlight on the curb out front.  The human body is inherently waterproof so I had that going for me.

Changing quickly into dry civies Blake and I sat in the living room and spent some time catching up.  I soon retired to the fresh sheets and pallet Blake and Megan had set up in their basement.  Some log like sleeping will happen tonight.

Goodnight kids.  Couple of more days baby.  Love you.

**Monday July 5 Kansas City Kansas to Mount Vernon Illinois**

**Monday July 5 Kansas City Kansas to Mount Vernon Illinois**

I lay in bed for a moment this morning remembering spreading out my wet duds around the industrial strength de-humidifier running at full tilt to counter the effects of a water-in-the-basement issue Blake and Megan dealt with the previous week.

Megan came down the hall with the newest Hodges family member Charlotte.  Megan was pregnant with Charlotte when I last saw her in Chicago three years ago.  Charlotte was bright eyed and slightly shy.  When she sat down to her bowl of cereal their beagle Isabel sat at attention sure to score a dropped or directed Cheerio.  Blake returned from a run to the store for fresh coffee and eggs- fodder for a eye opening ride this morning.  We talked for some time before Oliver shuffled out to see who the new voice belonged to.  He is a micro version of his grandpa Tom.

Blake’s sister Abby and her then fiancé were quick to meet me in their neighborhood in Manhattan when I was there on business a couple of years back.  Clay and Lydia are amazing hosts and cooks and now I"m taking advantage of another Hodges residence for the second time in a month.  I'll have to hunt down their sister Lizzy and her husband-to- be soon for balance.  They get it honestly from their folks, Tom and Gail.  I think I'll call it "Hodgepitality".  Ha Ha..I just snorted a little iced tea as I said that out loud.

I packed the bike as Oliver and Charlotte pushed all of the buttons and asked questions and compared the similar parts on my bike with theirs.  I poked the coordinates into my GPS and hefted on my now dry riding gear.  I bid my goodbyes with the always open invitation to join us in Western North Carolina for some country fun.  Rolling out of the drive into the beautiful neighborhood I couldn't help but recognize all of these homes as the cover page houses from the 1960's "100 Beautiful House Plans" magazine.  You remember.  The really cool ones that might have a turret or multiple angle foyer, or a slate courtyard.  Usually in color on the front of the magazine in the line at the grocery.

Quickly rolling through mostly abandoned streets (everyone off for the holiday?) I hit I35 east toward Jefferson City choosing to abandon the faster, busier east west interstate for this slower option with the possibility of some authentic Kansas City BBQ.

Many miles with a windless, rainless, but hot day behind me and I'm rolling through St. Louis (gotta get that arch shot) and on to Mount Vernon where I'm within a long day shot of home.

Thanks again Blake and Megan.  Oliver and Charlotte, come see me anytime.  Bring your beagle too!

Night Eli and Emily Rose.  See you soon.  Cathy, tomorrow is not soon enough.

PS.  Those of you that saw the "Mexico 23 miles" sign on my facebook profile...just kidding.  That's Mexico Missouri.  I'm crazy but...well we'll leave that alone.

**Tuesday July 6 West of Mt Vernon Ill to Home Sweet Home**

I may have mentioned that I don't usually have a large breakfast before riding.  It makes me too sluggish.  Usually a couple of granola bars or maybe a small bowl of oatmeal is enough to soak up a little coffee and get me moving.  Oh..speaking of moving.  There's another reason greasy breakfasts are not on my list.

This morning, however, the budget/free wi-fi/free breakfast roadside motel placed the free breakfast part really close to the checkout counter and I was caught in a moment of weakness by the smell of sausage gravy.  Hmmm.  Waffles.  Sausage patties too!  Black coffee and orange juice.

Another big difference in the US and Canada are the number of rest areas on our highways.  I personally inspected each one between Mt Vernon and Louisville Kentucky.

It heated up quickly this morning.  I had all of the vents in my jacket opened and even unzipped to midpoint.  The Olympia AST was at it's limit for comfort at 90 degrees.  Stopped in traffic at a construction zone I quickly started planning an alternative route that would allow me to continue moving.

I had also lost my summer riding gloves last night.  After looking for quite some time I pulled out my waterproof winter ones and cut my losses.  They were removed after lunch resulting in brown hands to match my brown face.  Even with sunscreen.

Having home in the crosshairs is quite a motivator.  I can be home tonight therefore I should be home tonight.  575 miles isn't the longest day I've done but certainly the longest in this heat.  I've been consuming water at every stop, which sometimes forces the next stop, but a must do.

Illinois, Indiana, Kentucky, Tennessee, NC...

Louisville-Lexington-Berea-Morristown-Bean Station-Greenville-Home...Home

As soon as I left Greenville Tennessee and started down the mountains to the river the temperature dropped 10-15 degrees.  Ahh.  The reason we live here.

Lush green-twisty roads-burbling creeks.  Home.

I took advantage of the twisties.  Even with the full load, the bike was packed evenly and handled them well.  Big smile.

A new calm came over me as I turned onto Jupiter road.  2.5 miles and three turns from home.  Nearly five weeks on the road and everything has changed.  I noticed our hay field mowed.  New mulch.  New plants have emerged and the late spring stuff has died back.

My yard was full of family.  My sister Helen and her daughters Peyton and Patterson live a little farther down our driveway and were there.

Mom, Dad, and of course my wife Cathy and son Eli were there.

Emily was camping with friends just a mile off of the road I had traversed just a half hour ago.  She thought I was coming in tomorrow.

Seeing my family there in the yard changed my perspective on this trip.  The arctic circle suddenly became the half-way point.  Not the destination.  This was the destination.  Here is where the real gold is.  Here is where I want to be.

As I write this Wednesday morning.  The mule still sits in the garage fully loaded.  I'm very tired and very sore and don't want the chore of pulling everything off her.  She did good.

I'll follow up this last day entry with an epilogue and a couple of entries detailing what I would do differently, what I would do the same and a promised gear review of both bike stuff and camping/traveling stuff.

Hi kids.  Good to see you sweetie.  Gimme a big hug and kiss.

There's my heart.  This must be home.