

# Utah-Arizona-Nevada 2011

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More trip reports at [Washburnemarine.com](http://Washburnemarine.com)

In June, 2011, my wife and I drove our Tacoma from Port Angeles, WA to southern Utah, carrying the XT250 in the back. We unloaded the motorcycle in Cedar City, and my wife went on to Flagstaff for a weaving workshop. We would meet up again in Boulder City, Nevada, a week later. My route is shown below, in black for highway and light gray for dirt.



I went east from Cedar City, climbing to over 8000 feet, where the record snow pack was still largely intact. I'd planned to cut north across Cedar Breaks National Monument, but the road was still closed to snow. As on previous trips, the XT did not like the high elevation for highway travel, and missed and lost power at anything more than half throttle or higher RPMs. I just had to take it easy on the climbs, doing most of this section at 35 or so, but the traffic was light and the scenery worth the slower speeds.



I went down the other side and took the highway north toward Bryce Canyon. At that point I did have trouble with traffic wanting to pass me (speed limit 65), since with my load and the strong wind I couldn't go much faster than 50.

The picture shows the XT with its full load, carried mostly in recycled bicycle bags. At the back is my spare gas tank which holds a little over a gallon, giving

me an extra 80 miles or so on top of the 150 mile range of the tank (I only used it once on this trip). Ahead of that is my plastic tool box attached to the rear rack, which holds some of my tools, tire pump, snacks, and other things to be accessed easily. Below that on the left is an elongated pannier holding my tent, spare tube, extra oil, chain lube, etc. On the other side is a standard bicycle pannier containing stove fuel, water filter, rain gear, and other odds and ends. On top behind my seat is a large waterproof bag containing sleeping bag, clothes bag, sleeping pad, cook set, and stove. On top is a day pack stuffed with a fleece jacket and vest, with the map case clipped to it. Just ahead of my seat on either side of the tank is a small pannier containing hydration system and extra water (I could carry about three gallons there but usually less). On top of the tank is a small bag containing camera, binoculars, GPS, etc. Finally, the heavier tools are stored in a plastic pipe tube mounted ahead of the engine skid plate. The entire load probably weighs about 80 pounds.

Near Bryce Canyon National Park, I found a side road and small valley where I was able to get out of the wind for a break. It was such a pleasant spot that I decided to camp there, so I unloaded and hid half of my gear and went to Bryce Canyon to see the sights and get some more water. As I expected, the campgrounds in the park were full, so my plan to hide out was a good one. I stopped at Inspiration Point, but forgot to take a picture,

and went back to my campsite for the rest of the afternoon.



The next morning was windless, and I went on toward Escalante. This was riding as it should be, with little traffic so that I could be content putting along at 50. About half way between Henrieville and Escalante I stopped at an overlook with a view up to the Table Cliffs Plateau, in the background at left. There are roads up there and it looked like a great place to camp with a panoramic view over everything, so I kept that in mind for a destination after my next one.

I was now headed for the southern shoulder of Boulder Mountain and the Hells Backbone loop. Originally I'd wanted to traverse the whole mountain plateau (up to twelve thousand feet) from north to south, but the record snow pack this year closed all the roads over nine thousand feet.

The Hells Backbone loop was a good gravel road and with my new Kenda 270 knobby tires, aired down to 18 psi in front and 20 rear, traction was as good as to be expected. I still lacked confidence riding on round gravel, but gradually learned to trust the tires and stand up whenever it seemed deeper.



I stopped at Posey Lake Campground, but it was very windy so I went on around the loop to Blue Spruce Campground, which was located in a timbered draw so there was much less wind. It was a very pleasant spot with a stream running full from the snow pack above. My neighbors were three commercial pilots together with a father-in-law who were having their annual gathering to tour around southern Utah. They generously invited me to share their fire and copious quantities of wine, and we spent a very pleasant evening together.



In the morning I continued on the Hells Backbone road, winding around the edges of Box-Death Hollow Wilderness. There were several “trailheads” down into it, but with warnings that there are no trails down there. No surprise, considering the rugged steep terrain down in those canyons.

After reaching the highway again I rode back into Escalante and went to the federal information center to find out about my next destination, the Table Cliffs Plateau. I found out that there was a good road up and over on the way to Widsoe in the next valley, but that the road shown along the ridge was likely to be steep, rough, rocky, and probably snowy. So I decided that instead I’d climb to the ridge, descend to Widsoe, and go south along the valley and back up to Pine Lake Campground, where I could find out about getting to the escarpment edge of the plateau, or at least camp there.



The road going up was a bit gravelly for my liking, but I made the saddle with no problem. At the right was a fork going to Griffin Top, which I had read was not passable due to snow, but I decided to take a look in hope for some good views. This turned out to be an easy road which climbed steadily with great panoramas to both east and west. On the way up I passed what seemed to be a commercial tour of three large ATVs accompanied by a jeep, coming down. Going on I pushed through three snow drifts following their tire tracks with no problem and eventually arrived at the large meadow which I assume is Griffin Top. Snow was still thick and the

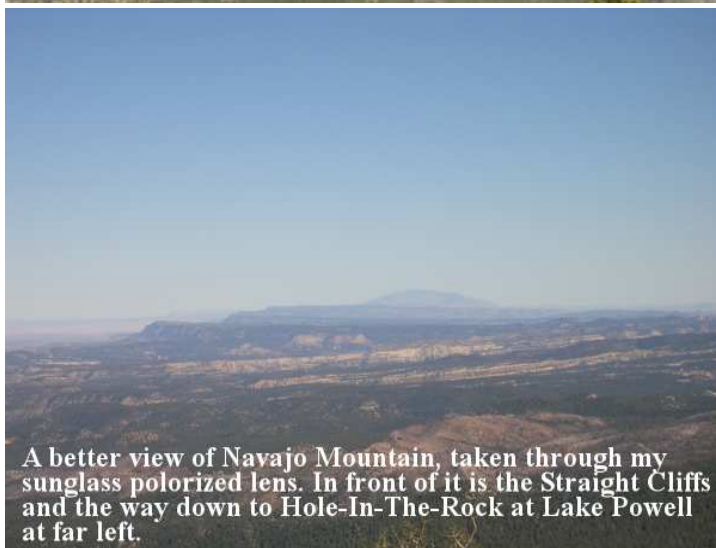
bare road was getting muddy, so this seemed a good place to turn around. I went back down to about 8,500 feet where the road followed the east edge of the ridge with fantastic views. The road was wide and there was



**Camp at 8,500 along the road to Griffin Top**

a large snowdrift for a water source. Being late afternoon, it was unlikely there would be any more traffic, so I decided to camp right there.

The view was spectacular, and I spent a good part of the evening scanning it with my binoculars from my chair, accompanied by scotch mixed with slush from my snow bank. Below is an imperfect panorama. The Henry Mountains are at the left in the distance. At the far right is Navajo Mountain just over the border into Arizona. To the right of that I could just make out Ship Rock in the far distance.



**A better view of Navajo Mountain, taken through my sunglass polarized lens. In front of it is the Straight Cliffs and the way down to Hole-In-The-Rock at Lake Powell at far left.**

That night the stars were the brightest and clearest I've ever seen. Through my mesh tent the two clouds of the Milky Way were right overhead. Turning my head to the right on my pillow I could see Utah a hundred miles to the east, and the only lights being those of little Escalante at the center.



The sun woke me up early as it came over the eastern horizon. After finishing breakfast and starting to pack up, two ATVs came along. Don is from Parowan, about 100 miles east, and Richard is from Cedar City. They were camping too, and had stayed down lower because they thought it would be cold up here (it wasn't). Don had a big piece of duct tape across his face because he'd sunburned his nose. Richard thought that was really funny. Since ATV's aren't legal on highways, Don had worked out a back roads route from his house in Parowan. He said the ATV's got about 100 miles from their five-gallon tanks and they each carried another five gallons in reserve, giving them about the same range as me (but with more than three times as much gas). Don and Richard both had lots of dirt bike experience but

thought that ATVs were a much easier way to travel on these roads. But we all agreed that a highway capable dual-sport bike like mine was certainly the way to see it all.

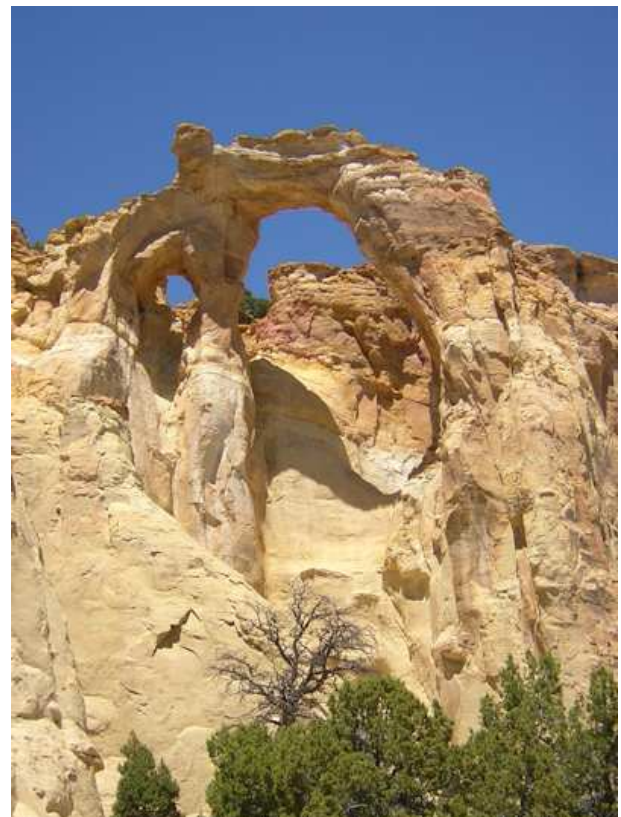
We admired the view, and I was surprised to find out that they had no idea what they were looking at, so I pointed out the peaks. Richard said, "Next time we plan a trip we'll call you." We agreed that we could spend a life time exploring what we could see from up here, and never get to it all.



I rode down to the highway at Widsoe and then south to Bryce Canyon Junction to get gas. From there I re-traced my route east again toward Escalante, but turned off at Cannonville heading for Kodachrome Basin State Park, known for its colorful rock and spires. Though it was early afternoon, the campground

was already full, so I was glad not to have planned on staying here.

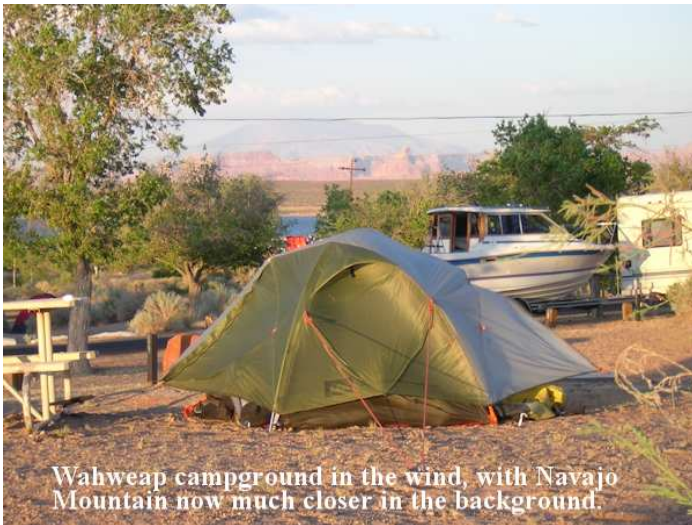
My next route was the unpaved Cottonwood Canyon road, which would take me south to connect to Highway 89 near the Arizona border. It is a good road, with a little sand though not deep, and a few steep grades where it climbs onto benches. A few miles after leaving the pavement at Kodachrome Basin I came to Grosvenor Arch. There were quite a few people here picnicking and



viewing the arch.



The rest of the Cottonwood Road was pretty in places and somewhat monotonous for the rest. I looked at several places to camp, but nothing very attractive due to little shade and sand. After thirty miles I reached the highway, pretty tired, and the wind was howling from the west. From here I'd planned to go west a bit and then down the unpaved House Rock Road into Arizona, but I had enough dirt for the day, so I went east and downwind toward Lake Powell and Page, planning on one of the park service campgrounds along the lake, settling on the huge campground at Wahweap.



I've camped four times over the years along Lake Powell, and none of them have been good. It's always been windy and with the exception of Bullfrog, the campsites not very nice. Wahweap was no exception. My campsite was just a patch of gravelly sand with a decrepit picnic table. Fortunately my tent stakes held



and I put up an additional line and stake to hold it to windward. The clientele here is primarily big trucks and motor homes towing water ski and other go-fast party boats. In the morning there was a procession of ski boats already loaded occupants in swim gear being towed to the launching ramp, all averting their eyes when they passed me.



In the morning I went on to Page, with no wind and great views of the lake, Glen Canyon Dam, and the Navajo Generating Plant beyond. In Page I stopped at McDonalds for breakfast. This one is staffed entirely by Navajos, including a grandmother in a long pleated black skirt and McDonalds hat.

I sat at some long tables and a biker sat down nearby. He had all the biker fashion accessories including chained wallet, head scarf, chin beard, and a big tattoo of a Harley on his neck. He was not what I expected. Turns out he was driving a semi to Phoenix, lived in South Dakota, and rode whenever he could when home, which wasn't as often as he'd like. He was well-spoken in a quiet way, never substituted don't for doesn't, and listened as much as he talked. He told me about long-haul trucking, living in the unit behind the cab, and dealing with the price of fuel. I mentioned that I'd

heard there was an initiative to switch trucks to natural gas. He considered, and said that yes, they should do that. He was very interested in what I was doing, the merits of little bikes (his Harley gets between 30 and 40

mpg), traveling slow, and came out to look it over when we left. I wished I'd gotten him to pose for a photo by my bike. I don't understand the biker persona identity, but he was a really interesting and pleasant person.



Near Bitter Springs, looking west to the Colorado River in Marble Canyon and the Vermillion Cliffs beyond. The Kaibob Plateau in the distance.

So now I went south in the Navajo Reservation down to Bitter Springs, then back north again on 89A to cross the Colorado River at Marble Canyon. This is the point that the river starts to cut deeper and deeper as it flows into the Grand Canyon, and the bridge at Marble Canyon is the last "civilization" that river floaters will see on that trip for at least a week.



Just north along the river is Lee's Ferry, the launching point for all Grand Canyon raft trips. I detoured down there and was lucky to be in time to watch three commercial outfitters launching. One of them was a dory trip, with three dories carrying four or five and two rafts carrying all the gear. That looked like the way to go to me. The other two trips were motorized rafts – huge things loaded with literally tons of gear, with the occupants sitting on that or the tubes. In the back are outboard motors extending down through the raft, with a bracket allowing the motor to be lifted



while traversing shallows. One of the boatmen told me that these people would be out for six to eight days before being helicoptered out (at Phantom Ranch?) after which the rafts go on down to Lake Mead. I watched the customers being instructed on fitting their life jackets, and then they were off. I followed the rafts downstream to their first rapids to take a few pictures.

Back on the highway, I continued around the cliffs in perfect conditions – no wind and light traffic. Finally I reached the base of the Kaibob Plateau and started



the long climb to over 8,000 feet on my way to the North Rim of the Grand Canyon. I stopped for gas at Jacob Lake and then headed out along the huge plateau, with the North Rim still 40 miles away. The first fifteen miles were denuded by a huge fire some years before, but after that the rest of the way was in lush forest and meadows.

Eventually I came to the park entrance station, still seven miles from the rim village. It was early afternoon, so I asked if there was a chance of getting a campsite out there and she laughed. But she also advised me to ask about cancellations at the campground. I went ahead, thinking I would probably admire

the scenery and head back out to camp in the national forest somewhere.

I did ask, and they had a cancellation! It was in a group campsite, so they were offering it to three parties, of which I would be the first. Amazed at my luck, I found that the site was big enough to pitch my tent with plenty of privacy. Then I went off on a hike along the rim to the visitor center about a mile away.



Having been to both rims of the Grand Canyon, I have to say that the North Rim is by far the nicest – more spectacular views with lush forests in the foreground, a thousand feet higher, and much more low key development than the South Rim. I took a trail that skirts the rim heading for the visitor center and lodge about a mile away. In the distance is the south rim, so far away that with my binoculars I could barely make out the hotels there. As I walked along I

thought of Colin Fletcher and “The Man Who Walked Through Time”, an accounting of walking the length of the Grand Canyon at levels between the rims and the river. Looking at the terrain, it seemed impossible, but he did it.



A few hours later I returned to my campsite to find the other two parties had arrived. There was a young French-Canadian couple from Montreal, who had rented a car in Las Vegas to come here. They were second on the waiting list to hike down to the river and camp two nights at Cottonwood Creek. During the second day they would hike eight miles down the river to Phantom Ranch and back. Apparently you can buy a beer there, but because it comes down by mule from the South Rim it will cost you dearly.

The third part of our group was a family of Sikhs from Indiana. Aside from their dress (turbans for the father and teenage son and brocaded dresses for the wife and girls), they seemed totally Americanized. The father, in cut off jeans and tee shirt, observed, “Here we have the west (pointing to me) and here we have the east (the Montreal couple) and I from Indiana am the glue in the middle!” They have six children – two teenagers, two pre-teen girls, a toddler, and a pre-toddler. They were on a frenetic road trip of national parks and other destinations (“I have to be in Dallas for a meeting in four days!”) Two days before they had been in Yellowstone in pouring rain, and were still drying their tent (all eight of them slept in one big one). The next day they were driving around to the South Rim (over 200 miles) and then on to Phoenix for the night! In the meanwhile he herded the family out for hikes, and I had seen them earlier by the visitor center going out to a precipitous overlook, the pre-teen girls clutching each other apprehensively, while the father spurred them on. While I sat with the father and the Canadians at the fire at 9 pm, the mother arrived with a big box of pizza from the lodge for their dinner. When I got up in the morning they were already packed and stuffing things into the U-Haul trailer behind their van, and soon were gone.



**Forest Service road on the Kaibob Plateau**

to my campsite.

I got myself together while the Canadians went off to the backcountry office to see about their permit. They hadn't returned when I left, so apparently they got the permit. My next destinations were overlooks into the canyon farther downriver, and in Kaibob National Forest. To get there I took the highway back out of the park and then turned left onto a series of gravel forest roads. The gravel was a bit deep for my liking so even with my tires aired back down I kept the speed down to 25 or so. Putting along at that speed, I soon realized how huge the Kaibob Plateau really is. It took me most of the day getting to North Timp overlook (which was anti-climactic after the North Rim) and then on

Indian Hollow Campground is just four sites with a vault toilet, some trees, and no water (fortunately I had enough). Its best asset is that a short hike brings you to the edge of the Grand Canyon. A trail went down from there into the park and eventually to the Colorado.



Near Indian Hollow Campground

The final morning I was up at dawn, knowing that I had a long way to go to Boulder City, Nevada. I had no idea how far, nor that my nearly constant companion – wind -- would make its final effort. A park employee at the North Rim had told me not to try cutting across on dirt roads to join the I-15 corridor at Mesquite (they carry extra tires and often need them), and to just bite the bullet and take the long highway back up into Utah to St. George. It took me over an hour to follow the forest roads to the pavement near Jacob Lake, aired up my tires a final time for the highway, and had easy still wind-less cruising down a long slope to Fredonia.



Pipe Springs National Monument

Going west I stopped at Pipe Springs National Monument, probably the only monument dedicated primarily to polygamy. In the early days after Utah gained statehood and polygamy was outlawed, Pipe Springs was used to hide junior wives from communities to the north. Most of the story is about the various industries these women ran (cheese-making and produce-growing among others), and how the wives were hidden whenever the marshals came to investigate.

From there it was a long run across flat plains through rising wind through Colorado City (of more recent polygamist fame), Hurricane, and into St. George. I



In Lake Mead National Recreation Area



Finally, the lake

managed to find side roads for some of the way south along I-15, but for about twenty miles there was no choice but to use it. The traffic was going about 20 mph faster than I was and since by now the wind was up to full force, controlling the bike when a semi passed me was a challenge. But I kept on through the Virgin River gorge and eventually got off the Interstate for good to take side roads down toward Lake Mead. Not that I saw much of the lake. Though in the National Recreation Area, these roads meandered over small and deserted mountain ranges, good road with the only traffic being towed boats coming from the lake's marinas. Without the wind it would have been pleasant. I made it into Boulder City at about six pm, after about twelve hours of riding and who knows how many miles. The entire trip was about a thousand miles total.