

British Columbia, July 2007

This tour was primarily a lesson from the school of hard knocks. While it was overall a very positive 1,000-mile trip, I learned several important things about my limitations and the value of good equipment.



Bike with new front pannier rack and old bike panniers on it.

My primary agenda was to retrace the route of previous BC mountain bicycle trips that I'd made in 1993 and 1995, mainly because the country traveled through had been so enjoyable.

Starting from Port Angeles, I met my friend Fred and his BMW GS650 north of Burlington, and he took me on back roads on the way north to the Canadian border at Sumas, where we parted ways. I continued northeast to cross the Fraser at Agassiz and then west a little along Highway 7 to Harrison Mills. There I turned off the pavement to take a road I had ridden in 1993 north along Harrison Lake, the Lillooet River and Lake to the junction with Highway 99 near Pemberton.

This rocky and partially 4WD road had taken me three days on the bicycle, but on the motorcycle I did it in one overnight.

It was also much more daunting on the motorcycle. On the northern half of the lake, the road turns to 4WD, and apparently had become worse over the years, since I saw two passenger cars in 93 that finished the whole thing, and certainly never could have in 2007. There were several very steep hills that were covered with large, loose rocks. One was so steep that I was unable to keep up the momentum without either losing my steering direction with the front tire, or traction with the rear. Finally I decided to unload most everything, carry it to the top, and try again. It was still too much for me, traction-wise.

So now I learned an important technique – power-walking the bike uphill. Or more accurately, power-trotting. Since I had reduced the size of the rear sprocket to get more speed on the highway, my first gear was now too “tall” for me to keep up walking alongside. So I learned to work in just the right amount of clutch and throttle to allow me to trot along, largely pulled uphill by the handlebars. I could only manage a hundred feet or so of this before gasping to a halt, simultaneously killing the engine so that I could use the rear wheel as a brake, knowing from previous experience that the front brake does nothing to keep you from sliding backward down a steep hill. After several sessions, I made the top, feeling much wiser.

As I rested and started reloading the bags, along came a KLR650. Having no camping gear load and probably more skills, he'd made the hill easily. This was Angus, from North Vancouver, an ex-bicycle tourer like myself, that had made the same transition to a motorcycle due to aging (though quite a bit younger). He was going all the way to Williams Lake that day to meet up with a friend who had the camping gear. We were very much of the same mindset – using whatever it takes to continue our adventures. Comparing our bikes, Angus thought mine was certainly the best out here, where power makes little difference and weight is a huge liability. But the

KLR won out on the highway for competing with fast Vancouver traffic. Eventually, Angus went on ahead while I continued reloading my gear.



One of the First Nations cemeteries, with momentos laid on the grave, including hat and cigarette.

The road was easier now, and eventually I came down to the logging camp at the north end of Harrison Lake and the road got better still. I continued up the Lillooet River for another twenty miles, stopping to photograph First Nations cemeteries along the way.

Close to the point where the river drains from Lillooet Lake, I came to a barricade manned by two young guys from the local First Nations band. The road was closed due to being overflowed by the lake which had risen due to snow melt (apparently this happens most years around July). They said I could continue at my own risk, there were about a half dozen flooded sections, and the first was worst - about knee-deep and 200 meters long.



One of the long water gaps I crossed. This one started around the corner and had waves coming in off the lake! Actually shallower than previous ones, but still enough to stall the engine.

There had been two other motorcycles ahead of me, including Angus, and they'd made it ok. They pointed out that my front and rear panniers would definitely be submerged, and one of the guys offered to put on his hip waders and carry my panniers the 200 meters to the other side of the first gap. I thought that was really over the top! While tempted to accept, a 4WD pickup of locals came along at that moment and agreed to take my bags across and leave them on the other side.

Now came the moment of truth. In I went, water flying, staying where I thought the crown of the road was. It went great for the first 150 meters, then the engine died. Fortunately, it was at a shallower place so that when I put my boot down toe first, my foot stayed dry (good boots!). The engine would run at an idle, but died if accelerated. I sat there for almost a minute, and then it seemed to recover, and I powered out to dry road again.

I loaded up again, and after thanking the guy who having donned his hip waders and slogged all the way over to check on me, took off for the next gap. Same thing – after about twenty seconds of flying water, the engine lost power again. Once more I nursed it at an idle for the better part of a minute before it recovered enough pull me out of there. This happened at almost every gap, though the others were shallower but sometimes longer. I think it had to do with water getting into the air intake and affecting the main jet in the carb, but not the idle for some reason. It ran fine for the rest of the trip.

Back on dry road, I continued on toward the junction with Highway 99. About a mile short of it, I encountered soft dust and sand along the side of the road, which looked solid due to having been graded flat, but was actually very soft. I gyrated wildly as I slowed, but finally went down. One foot ended up caught under the rear pannier with the weight of the bike on top, and it took some doing to get it out. Now I was thankful for my high boots, and no harm was done. Likewise to the pannier or its mount. After getting the bike stood up, I saw that there was a big abrasion on the knee of my riding pants over the pads. My knee was fine, so I was also grateful for the body armor there.



Canyon on the upper Tyaughton Lake road. Black and white is due to wrong camera setting.

At the highway I detoured west to Pemberton to fill the tank, then back east again and continuing up the highway over the pass toward Lillooet, camping a few miles short of it. In Lillooet I filled up again and headed up to Carpenter Lake, and ran down the length of it (now mostly paved) to Gold Bridge to top off the tank again, since I thought I might need all of it and my three liter bottles getting to China Head.

Then started climbing north up Tyaughton Lake Road. This good gravel road wound higher and higher, passing through a spectacular canyon before joining up with the Mud Creek Road. It climbed higher still, gradually deteriorating into double-track, and finally rocky, bumpy high-clearance route before arriving at Mud Lake Recreation Site. In spite of its name, this is a beautiful primitive campground in a meadow by a clear winding lake. I had left my truck here back in 1995 to start a mountain bicycle trip north into the Gang Ranch country. I planned to cover some of the same route, but then head more east to Poison Mountain and China Head.



Mud Lake Recreation Site.

I recalled from 95 that there had been a very steep ascent out of the meadow, then a mile or so along a ridge, and then a very steep descent to another lake. I'd been able to push my laden bicycle over it, so I thought I should be able to do it with the TW. Wisely, I decided to unload, set up camp, and take only what I'd need for a few hours' of reconnaissance, and continue the next day with my gear if it seemed ok.

The climb up was daunting, but I made it. Going down the other side was even steeper. I came to one yet steeper stretch that was deeply eroded on one side. As I rode down slowly, the front wheel skidded and down went the bike. I hopped off, and the bike slid down partly into the ditch. I shut off the engine and tried to raise

it, but as it lay it was too heavy. So I had to slide the rear end downhill to get it across the slope, and was finally able to stand up again. I tried to walk it down the rest of the pitch, but it slid out and went down again.



Where I dumped the bike twice. This is steeper than it looks here – the sides of the ditch were too steep to stand on. Doubting that I'd get back up, I managed a detour through the forest to the right.

“I have no business being here”, I mumbled to myself. If I went on there was too likely a chance to break something on either the bike or myself. This sort of thing was easier and safer on a bicycle. I now knew that I could *not* count on handling any 4WD mountain road I saw on the map.

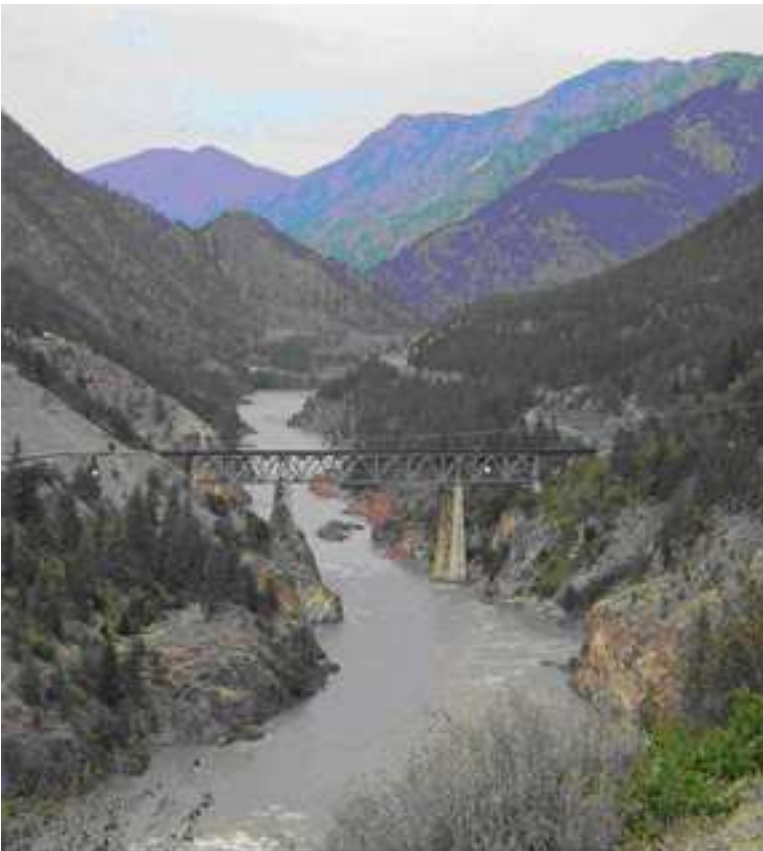
Once I got the bike down to a more level spot, my plans for going on toward Poison Mountain were cancelled and the new agenda was how to get back up. The section where I had dropped the bike twice was clearly too steep to power-walk it back up. In fact the lower part of it was too steep for me to stand without sliding down! Fortunately, the woods above the road were open stands of trees over grass, so I found a route that I could use to get to the road above the steepest pitch. I wasn't happy about making my own off-road track, but there wasn't any choice. Fortunately the grass gave good traction and the wheel didn't spin or dig in, so I don't think I left much lasting evidence of my passing.

At one point in this detour I cut close to a tree and caught the blunt end of a one-inch branch on the shoulder of my coat, and it broke off with a loud snap. Once again I was very thankful for body armor, as my heavy shoulder pads took the end of the branch and saved me from a nasty hole in my shoulder.

The rest of the climb went well, doing several power-walking sessions, stopping to recover my breath in between. I did the descent very carefully and made it back to the campsite without another spill.



The only downside of this beautiful spot was the myriad mosquitoes, which the breeze off the lake kept at bay for the moment, but it would surely die off in the evening, leaving me to spend it in my tent. So I packed up and headed out to find a spot on a side road high on a ridge where I'd have a territorial view and hopefully fewer bugs. I eventually found one along a deactivated road – great view but still plenty of bugs.



BC Rail bridge across the Fraser near Lillooet.

In the morning I descended back to Carpenter Lake via the Marshall Lake Road and back to Lillooet. Before refilling my tank I dumped in two of my three one-liter fuel bottles, as I wouldn't need the range anymore (I would have needed them if I'd made it to China Head). Then I crossed the Fraser and climbed up the east side on Highway 99/12 toward Pavilion, stopping for a nap and some chain adjustment/lube alongside the railway.



Instead of continuing on the highway to Cache Creek, I took one final detour – the Hat Creek Road. This is about 25 miles of good gravel through ranch country and then easy double-track through very nice forest below spectacular cliffs, joining Highway 1 below Cache Creek.

From there I continued down Highway 1, camping for the night in the Thompson River canyon. The last day, 260 miles all the way to Port Angeles, was rainy all day, but my mesh gear with raincoat and pants worn under it kept me comfortably dry.

Total distance – about 1,000 miles in five days.