

e-Postcard from Atlantic City, Wyoming

7/17/2004

I'm sitting on the porch outside my log cabin, waiting for the sun to lower enough so I can see the screen on the laptop. Tonight we're staying in Atlantic City, Wyoming, an old gold mining town just a few miles up the road from the site of the first gold strike in this part of the world back in 1867.

We had dinner at the local restaurant/saloon that's been in business since a few months after that discovery. These days, the ranchers drive for the better part of an hour to come have a few beers with their friends, everyone dressed in tight fitting, freshly pressed Wranglers and a crisp western shirt. The locals from a few miles around come in on their ATVs, the fathers and sons on one and the mother's and daughters on another. On most, the adolescents are driving under the watchful eye of a parent, who is a quick kidney punch away on the back of the seat.

As the sun sets, I can still hear the sounds of children playing around the little village of no more than 100 souls. As the small stream that bisects the town gurgles, the rabbits venture out of hiding to graze on the grass lining the road.

The tiny wood planked church stands proudly on the hill, its bell ready for tomorrow's call to worship, looking exactly the same today as in the vintage photo of the town that sat next to our table at dinner.

The rolling green hills march off into the distance, paralleling the Continental Divide, and pointing the way for tomorrow's ride toward Mexico, still over a thousand miles away. The concept of being on the Mexican border seems impossible now, here in the high plains of the great northwest, hard against the spine of the mountain ranges that stretch from the northernmost reaches of Canada deep into Mexico.

This is a place where the heartbeat of the true America is still strong, where the fundamentals of life, honesty and integrity still reign supreme. This is a place where the morning rush hour consists of honest to God cowboys driving their herd down the road from one pasture to the next. This is a place of Big Sky, snow capped mountains, high mountain meadows quilted with wildflowers, clear mountain streams, rushing white water rivers, endless unpaved roads, and millions upon millions of square miles of open range and forests.

This seems to be the year of discovery for us, for deflating the balloons of preconception and learning that what we thought must absolutely be so, just isn't. As we've traveled the world we've learned that many things we had been indoctrinated to believe would certainly be true, such as the Left's maxim of "everyone else in the world hates America" and the Right's call of "Syria is the epicenter of all evil," turned out to be false.

Along those lines, let me drive a stake through the heart of another mantra that has been repeated and hyped so many times that just about every person living in America believes it to be true: contrary to what you've been told, there is no shortage of wilderness, untouched forests, National Parks, National Forests, State Forests and otherwise unspoiled, untouched, un-crowded lands in the United States. Just as we discovered riding from Seattle to San Diego down the Cascade, Sierra and San Bernardino mountains last year, there are no bulldozers and oil drilling rigs idling outside the gates of the countless millions of square miles of protected lands that we have ridden through in the last four days.

So the next time you receive an emergency email or snail mail from some environmental organization proclaiming that the last acre of wilderness in America is about to be turned over to heartless, exploitive corporations, toss it in the trash. They are just tugging at your heartstrings to get your dollar, of which typically a dime or less will actually go towards anything remotely environmental, the rest chewed up by executive salaries and paying for ever more email and direct mail solicitation.

On our ride I've seen porcupines, deer and mountain lion. And that was within the first 45 minutes of riding the unpaved roads that make up the vast majority of our route. Since then we've seen countless examples of every type of wildlife indigenous to this region. Contrary to what you've been told, contrary to the urban legends of popular belief and contrary to the chant of the media, there is no shortage of wildlife and wilderness. You just have to get off the couch, away from the junk mail, and get out here and see it for yourself.

Be well,
Doug

PS – A brief ride report and some photos of our trip so far follow.

Ride Report

Number of bikes: 3

Type: BMW R1150GS Adventure, Suzuki DRZ400 (one electric start dirt model, one street model)

Route: Canada to Mexico down the Continental Divide

Length: estimated 2,300 miles, 80-85% unpaved

Time: 16 days total, 10 days for the Continental Divide Ride

To date days: eight since leaving home, four days from the Canadian border

To date miles: 3,033 since leaving home, 1,075 from Canadian border

To date drops, low sides, high sides, other crashes: 0

To date contusions, lacerations, impalements, fractures: 0

Pucker moments: usually about two per day

Requirements for this ride:

1. Dirt experience & capability (high intermediate and above to ride all sections)
2. 150+ mile gas range
3. Modified or aftermarket suspension components
4. Waterproof luggage
5. Reasonable mechanical/maintenance skills
6. Ability to ride 250-350 miles per day, primarily unpaved
7. Ability to ride 6-10 hours per day
8. Ability to stand on the pegs for 60-80% of the riding time (if you don't know why you would do this, see item #1)
9. Good navigational skills, GPS and the skills to use it highly recommended
10. A desire to see portions of American that far less than 1% of the population have seen

For GPS routes, waypoints and tracks of this ride visit www.hackneys.com/travel

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And so it begins. At the U.S. / Canadian border. We're headed 2,300 miles to Mexico down the Continental Divide via as many non-paved roads and trails as possible. L to R, Douglas Hackney, Bob Mueller and Brent Ross.



Alpine lake, northwest Montana. Note the clarity of the water.

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Bob Mueller and our GS along the spine of the Continental Divide. Western Montana.



Mission control. I'm responsible for navigation, so I'm following the routes on the GPS and monitoring the detail map, all the while trying not to ride off a cliff. I haven't listened to the iPod since leaving the Canadian border, but it's still working fine, which is incredible considering the extremely rough roads and trails we've been on. The Valentine One radar detector is handy when we're coming into small towns and doing short stretches on rural paved roads.

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Brent Ross and Bob Mueller riding toward the Continental Divide. Montana.



Brent Ross and Bob Mueller in a morning commute traffic jam. Near Lima, Montana.

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Wildflowers along the road. Southwest Montana.



Somebody needs to explain to me how we rode east into Idaho from Montana. I was looking at a map at the time and it still seemed counter-intuitive.



Doug Hackney riding an abandoned rail trestle. Northeast Idaho. Photo by Brent Ross.



Brent Ross riding into an abandoned train tunnel. Northeast Idaho.

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Typical trailside scene. Based on what I saw of the state, most of Idaho is at least this beautiful.



Brent Ross along a very primitive unused road in the high plateau. Northern Wyoming.

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Brent Ross along a rock trail.



Our favorite sign.