

WILD CANADA WEST TOUR

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After almost 3 years in the planning, a Harley Davidson sat waiting for me in Vancouver. I arrived in Canada to a beautiful sunny day and as I fly over the Rockies on the flight path to Vancouver airport, I saw for the first time the snow covered mountains that would be my home for the next 2 weeks. This was the chance to fulfil a lifetime dream to ride through the beautiful Rocky Mountains on a Harley Davidson.

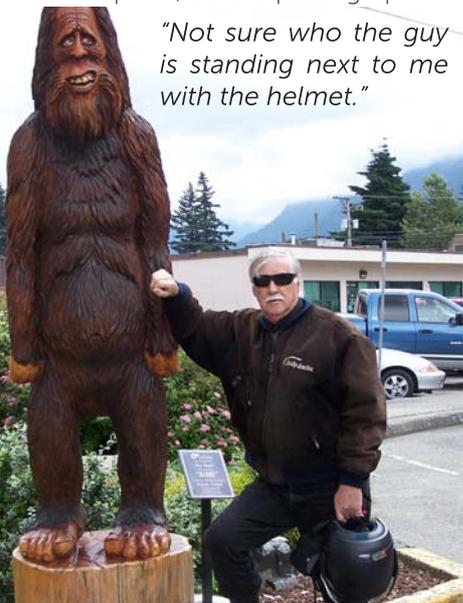
It is amazing how much information is available on the internet nowadays and I had organised this trip entirely from my home office and with great help from David Graham the tour organiser from "Wild Canada West Motorcycle Tours"

Everything was organised for the trip, the Harley Road King (the same as mine in Australia) the accommodation, along with breakfasts and an itinerary for the whole trip was laid out for me and all I had to do was stick to the schedule! That sounds easy enough I thought, but became a bit concerned when reading the distances that needed to be covered each day, with the first day being Vancouver to Kamloops, a ride of some 440 kilometres. Wow!

There is a great WWW. service called Google Earth, and I spent a lot of time at home doing a virtual Harley ride and you can actually follow the designated roads as if you were there, stopping at any time to take in the countryside and the lay of the land. I had decided to do this trip on my own, this was the best preparation, as I could recognise many parts of the tour as I went along the highways and byways.

Vancouver is a fantastic city, the people are great and the bus services are incredibly cheap. They run every 10 minutes or so and the drivers are very helpful. I had 3 days to explore, before picking up the Harley.

"Not sure who the guy is standing next to me with the helmet."



It was ready and waiting at Cycle BC rentals and so after checking my packs I was on my way along the Trans Canada Highway No:1. This road goes the entire distance from East to West of Canada and my first stop was 'Hope' a pretty little town and a good rest stop for a coffee.

Two choices from here and I chose the longer route as it took me to "Hells Gate Canyon". I chickened out on the option to ride the cable car over the canyon, where 2 million gallons of water pass through the canyon every MINUTE. This was first discovered in 1808 by Simon Fraser in a CANOE. Must have been a very brave man!

He was looking for an alternative fur trading route to the Pacific Ocean and in his journal he quoted the following "...we had to travel where no human being should ever venture for surely we have encountered the gates of hell..."



As you travel through Canada you cannot help but be astounded as to where the forefathers built their railways. The Rocky Mountains were the greatest challenge to man's ingenuity and it is on display everywhere you go.

On to Kamloops and a very weary biker hits the sack early at the Ramada Inn.

Next day 370 KMS to Mount Robson - the highest mountain in the Rockies. Unfortunately I was like a drowned rat on arrival after 250 KMS of rain and cold, "Ahhh, the fun of riding a motorcycle".

A tragic event had happened before my arrival at the Mountain River B&B at Mount Robson. We need to go back to a week or so to a period just before my arrival in Canada. There was an unfortunate incident involving the death of an elderly woman, having been killed and partly eaten by a black bear. The lady was a tribal Elder of the area and there had been some events occurring, whereby 4 black bears were lurking around her home prior to her death. The rangers wanted to set cages and remove them to another area, but she declined the offer. When she was reported missing, the rangers found the unfortunate lady in the forest having been dragged there from her cabin. They then hunted the 4 bears and killed them all to find out which one killed her! Go figure! This was the first incident of this nature in many years, and yet, in the same week a man was mauled by a Grizzly bear in another town.

Back to my arrival at the B&B and after checking in, my hosts gave me the news that a black bear was wandering around the B& B and so I should not be wandering off too far. Half an hour later the two little Jack Russell's were going crazy at the door and I was asked if I wanted to come and see the bear as he wandered around my Harley in the Car park!!



Next day, after a good breakfast, I am on my way to Banff, via Jasper and the Ice Fields Parkway, some 375 Kms for the day. This was a fantastic ride. I had many warnings from David, the tour organiser, to be careful on this section as it runs through the National park and the native animals are free to wander everywhere, this is great, except when a pile of stupid tourists decide to park all over the highway for a glimpse of the bears, moose etc.

Here is a photo of such an event as I came around the bend to be confronted by road chaos. Not content with just a photo, they run to the bear for a close up!!! Duhhh.



This road was a treat for bikers. There were long stretches of highway through some of the most beautiful scenery that you could imagine. I rode the highway up to the Columbian Glacier Ice Fields (Temperature was now reaching zero degrees) and I was lucky that I had all my wet weather and thermal gear with me, but it was worth all the discomfort to do this ride. Another warning from David was, if the sign says 60 KMS per hour then do just that... NO more! Being up at such elevation it does make your head spin a little and so I was very wary as I descended down from the Glacier towards the Saskatchewan river, speed signs 70 down to 60 and so on down to 40 at the last corner, this was a beautiful highway why the low speed? Then it hit me. As I travelled through a gap between two mountains a massive wind gust, blowing down from the icefield, hit me side on and I swear it moved the bike over about 6 inches.... Thanks for the clue David! 40kms was about right I reckon.

I arrived in beautiful Banff at around 5pm after a spectacular ride, and I was very pleased to rest up at the Lodge before dinner.



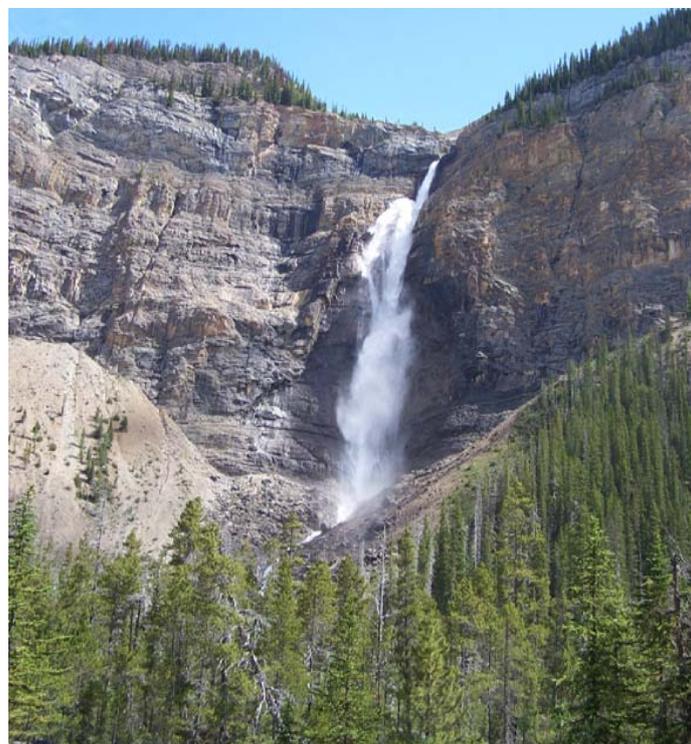
Next day, sunny skies in beautiful Banff saw me wandering around this very quaint town; I visited the famous Banff Springs Hotel, but did not stay (@ \$700 per night for a single) was a bit rich for me. The Bow river rapids just below the Hotel were really something to see.

The next day took me to Lake Louise; this has to be one of the most picturesque places on earth and one that has been on my wish list for many years. Another sunny day and luckily, I was there early to catch the beauty of the lake before the tourists jammed the place up by 9am.





Banff to Revelstoke - 330 kms today winding through the Kicking Horse Pass and crossing the Continental Divide 3 times between Lake Louise and Field. A detour to Takkakwa Falls was well worth the extra ride. This road was very windy and narrow and had some incredible switchbacks, seeing the buses having to go forward – reverse up a switchback then forward again several times as the road was literally carved out of the mountainside (great on a motorcycle though) and the falls were spectacular at the end.



On to Revelstoke, over Rogers Pass, always on your toes watching for the wild animals and the semi trailers which can hold you up a bit as it is a very steep and winding road. Loved every bit of this one, then on through "Golden" to Revelstoke. A railway museum here gives some idea on the magnificent history of the Canadian railway system. I had a good chat with a retired engine driver there, telling me all about his adventures over the years.

Revelstoke to Ainsworth Hot Springs; a short ride today of 220 KMS but this was the one I was waiting for!

Another sunny day and a fantastic ride to Shelter Bay, catching the Ferry (motorcycles go to the front of the queue - thank you for that) and this spot reminded me of our own Eildon, no houseboats though and the lake was about 100kms long, then on to Naksup where the Canadians have a year round playground with every sport for every season. Boating, fishing, skiing you name it, it's here.

On to New Denver and then I turn off to wind up the road to the Monashee Glacier. From here I rode down the most spectacular road I have ever ridden; known in Canada as the best 60kms of motorcycling, I was in total agreement as I followed the beautiful river and snow capped mountains to Kaslo and Nelson. This is what all the planning was about and I loved every bit of it as I rolled on to Ainsworth Hot Springs where a very contented bike rider relaxed in the Hot Springs to rest the weary bones. Funny that you don't feel the aches and pains on a ride like that until you stop!





Next day: Ainsworth to Kelowna - 375 kms and through the city of Nelson, Castlegar, Grand Forks (close to the USA border), and lunch at Greenwood an interesting town where Copper mining was king in earlier times.

This is another great riding road. On to Rock Creek and then Kelowna via Beaverdell. Kelowna is a big city, sitting on another very pretty lake and is another venue for all sports. From here it is only an hour to the winter ski fields and the lake is the summer water ski playground.



Kelowna to Whistler: 415 kms and this is to be a long and hard ride. With a mild day of 28 degrees expected I set off over the floating bridge and through the urban sprawl of Kelowna and I was soon on top of the mountain riding through the Thompson Plateau in freezing conditions at the snow fields. It is hard to judge what to wear on days like this with such dramatic temperature changes. There were many stops along the way to change the riding gear as the weather closes in when you are suddenly up so high, a nice highway though, and then on through the Nicola valley to Lytton.

I stopped here for lunch and while talking to the lady in the store I enquired as to the conditions for the next section - Highway 12 to Lillooet. "Well!"... she said. "You just need to be careful of the avalanches, the rock slides, cattle grazing on the road sides, the steep roads with very sharp turns, and the long drop to the rivers below, if you mis-judge the corners Oh! And don't forget there are a lot of wild animals on this road so be careful where you pull up!!!!" Thanks for all that!

I did not feel really confident as I mounted the Harley for the next section; I felt a new vibration on the bike as I headed off but soon discovered it was my knees knocking! She was correct in every way. But I found it was easy to locate where the rock slides were most likely to be, as the holes in the bitumen from falling rocks were easy to spot. I only had to dodge one rock slide and I picked it early by the skid mark on the road from the poor buggie that went in front of me. On to Lillooet the area where the lady was killed by the black bear, didn't see any though! I had a quick lunch as I knew that I had a

long hard ride in front of me, as I set off for Whistler on highway 99 another magnificent road for bikers.

Wow! The mountains are incredible here, not really many places to stop for photos as the road is only 2 lanes for most of the way but the sheer drops to the rivers and the beautiful lakes and forests are breathtaking. This is a great place to ride a motorcycle and I enjoyed every minute of it and within a few hours I went from high elevation to sea level in the Pemberton Valley and then arrived at Whistler Village, home of the 2010 Winter Olympics.

Two days here and it is a wonderful place to stay and see how the other half lives. The facilities for skiers and mountain bikers are fantastic. In the summer the ski lifts are used to move the mountain bikes and their riders up to the summit. A day pass is only \$95 and I think that is good value.



My last day on the road and I set off in light rain for the 160 kms trip back to Vancouver on the Sea to Sky Highway through Squamish. I did not expect what was coming up! The light rain got a little heavier -and heavier. I stopped and put on all the wet weather gear, getting cold now and the rain was unbelievable. This turned out a very hard ride, I did not get to see any of the beautiful scenery along this coastline as I battled the fog, rain and very high winds along the way, it got so bad that I missed my turnoff to Vancouver and I was 27kms past before being able to get off the freeway and turn back. Quite an experience but arrived at the hotel safely but absolutely soaked.

To sum up.... This was an amazing trip. David and his crew from "Wild Canada West Tours" organised everything. The accommodation was great and the itinerary was well worked out. The Harley was in top condition and luckily I returned it almost the same, although not quite as clean after 3000 kilometres over the 10 days.

Would I do it again? You betcha!!!!