

OTP 2005



A travelers report

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Introduction

Being the Traveler began for me early in 2005 when Hans-Ove Görtz wrote me an email in which he told me I was nominated. After having to turn down the election in 2003 due to an operation on my back I was more than happy to accept the nomination. Even more so because I had just gone through a divorce with all the bad emotions that go along. When I received the message that I was elected to be The Traveler I was so happy I could have jumped a hole in my ceiling 😊.

Linda Swart was one of the first to congratulate me and she offered me her '95 Concours Silky. Of course I accepted that offer. Not only would she offer me her bike, she also offered to coordinate the whole trip in the USA. What more could one wish for? Of course I accepted that offer as well. All I had to do now was find a cheap airfare, after all I ride a Connie (GTR) so I have to be frugal.

It took a while, but then I found the cheapest way to fly to LAX and honestly..., the airfare got me scared. It was over \$1100, but still it was the cheapest way to get there at the time.

Linda obviously wasn't sitting in her chair leaning backwards, because soon I received an email with all kinds of questions like what I really wanted to see when I was over in the USA. Now I have seen and heard of some of the highlights of the US, but I had no idea where to look for those top-tourist-attractions. It could have been on a possible route, but then again it also could be that my wishes would take me all over the land. So I wrote Linda back to surprise me with an attractive route.

I don't know how much time Linda invested in making this trip a once in a lifetime experience for me that I will not easily forget, but soon I received a first rough plan. Later to be followed by more detailed ones. So I bought a map of the USA and tried to figure out how the trip would go. Well that was easier said than done, because some of the places were either not on the map I bought, or I had really no idea where to look for them on the map. So when the day came that I was about to leave I had no picture in my mind where the route would take me, other than from LA, CA to Hyder AK, to Centralia WA and on to Denver CO. These were also about the only places I could find on the map 😊

In order to get all prepared I took some extra vacation time and was very happy with my boss. At last it all depended on him, would he give the extra days? Well since he is a biker as well he did, but only under the promise that I would write a report on this trip. If that was all..... He also asked me whether or not I would be doing Route 66. He was not the only one, because lots of people over here asked me the same question. Seems to me that that is the only destination bikers in the Netherlands have knowledge of. Funny because once on the road in the States many people asked us whether we were going to Sturgis.

So my trip began on Thursday, July 14th.

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Thursday, July 14th; the first day.

The day of departure finally came. I got up at 4:40 AM local time which compares to 07/13/05 7:40 PM PST. Got my stuff together and checked one last time whether or not everything was there. Since I couldn't think of anything missing, I packed it all together, had a light breakfast and took off. Fetched my younger sister, who would take my car back from the airport at 5:30 AM and at 6:30 AM we were at Schiphol Airport. My sister took a photo of me to show later how much stuff I got with me. Well I guess it wasn't that bad, since neither customs or Continental complained about the weight of my luggage. Expected time of departure was 9:20 AM so I had some hours to kill. I don't like shopping that much, so I just had some coffee and got me the newest John Grisham book in the Dutch language, *The Broker*.



The airplane left a little later. It was a long flight with almost no comfort. Seems to me that Continental had built some extra rows of chair in the airplane in order to keep more people in it. There was almost no room for my legs. I could sleep a little, but not that much, because of the lack of space. We arrived at Newark International Airport at 11:50 AM EST. Left that airport at 3 PM for the last leg to LAX. Another flight with little comfort that would last approximately 5 hours. The airplane landed at LAX at 4 PM PST, so the flight was a lot shorter than expected. However, all in all I had been "on the road" for almost a day.



There was no Linda at the luggage gate. No one else there with the yellow sign saying COG, so I just hoped someone would show up after I found my bags. Well actually, Linda found me before I found my luggage, so everything went smooth. She told me that traffic was jammed so that would possibly give me some time to catch up on my sleep. Well, I was so excited that this trip had begun and wanted to see all I could from LA that I didn't sleep at all.

We went to Linda's friend Lisa Stephens. She would be accompanying us on our big trip through the western states as well and had opened her house to us for my first night at US soil. We had a homemade dinner, talked a lot about all kinds of things and around 22:40 PM we all went to bed. I first had send a text message to my daughters and ex-wife to tell them I arrived safely and was

going to bed, while they were about ready to get up. Strange idea. A long first day, but the trip has officially begun!!

Friday, July 15th; the second day.

This was supposed to be a relaxing day, so I could adjust a little to pacific time. Well I got up at 4:40 AM, heard something in the kitchen and found Lisa up and about to go to work. We had a little talk about all kinds of things and then she went off. I got back to bed again, but didn't sleep anymore.



When Linda was awake as well we sat at the table, had some cereal breakfast and talked about the trip and about the first few days of it. Today would be a guided tour through LA and the valleys.

Linda told me that the freeways were less jammed than the night before, but for dutch standards there was still an awful lot of traffic on them. Linda took me to the Hollywood sign, so I could take a photoproof of my presence in LA for my girls back home. We also exchanged the Camelbak gift Lisa and Linda had bought me for a bigger (100 oz.) one. For the rest of the day we just rode around through the valleys and Linda told me a lot about different things. At the end we were just in time for the welcome dinner that Linda and Lisa had arranged on my behalf.

It was in a Mexican restaurant, something I never ate before. So the expert on this food, Linda's daughter Jamie ordered a surprise dinner for me which actually tasted very nice. I also helped Harry Martin finishing his plate. Beside Lisa and Linda there were Linda's daughter Jamie and her boyfriend Chad and COG members Harry Martin and Craig Bradford, who came all the way from Tucson, AZ. I felt honored that someone would travel over 600 miles just to attend a welcome dinner. Off course Greg found a good excuse to do so: It was just too hot in Arizona to stay there. In California it was to my measurements hot as well, but in his opinion it was a lot cooler ☺.



That night I slept at Harry Martin's place and was able to send the picture of the Hollywood sign to my girls. Each time I think of them I kind of miss them, but at the same time I don't miss them that much at all, because of the adventure ahead.

Saturday, July 16th, the third day.

If I had learned one thing in the past day, it was that many Americans are early risers. I tried to adjust to that and was awake at 5 AM. Had the bed almost done when Harry walked into the room. We had a cup of coffee and then went out to see his '86 Connie. You don't see them like that where I live. Our weather makes that impossible I guess. Linda was supposed to be at Harry's place between 7 and 7:30 to pick me up for a surprise. She showed up in time and I had no idea about what this surprise was going to be, but she did mention



something about an airport....????

We met Chuck Holloway, a friend of Linda's, at Whitfield Airport. He would also be riding with us on our big trip. He was willing to take us up in his airplane to see the Valleys from above. We also flew over Tehachapi and parts of the Mojave Desert. The original plan was to fly over the beaches as well, but there was too much fog rolling in from the ocean. We had breakfast at a different airport and then headed back to the base of Chuck. This most certainly was a huge surprise to me and I guess I never properly said thank you to Chuck, for which I apologize. Chuck, if you read this now: A real big THANK YOU to you. I enjoyed the flight very much!



After the flight we went for part 2 for the guided tour of LA. This time Linda took me on the 2nd part of Mulholland Drive which was a very scenic route and she also took me to a bike shop in Ventura. I wanted to see at least one well fitted bike shop while I was in the USA and the one in Ventura was a good choice. I bought a bandana and a tank bag. We just cruised along and I enjoyed it all very much.

Later we went to Linda's place, which was quite a drive. I learned she lives about 150 miles north from Thousand Oaks, for comparison that is like two friends one in the most north of the Netherlands and one almost in the south of my country. I learned that 150 miles is 'nothing' in the USA. At Linda's I met her partner Pete with whom I had spoken on the phone the night before. It was as if I met someone I already knew for a long time. That was the case with almost everyone I met. I think I have to readjust the ideas many Europeans have about Americans. Americans are friendlier than we generally think. Now I also have to admit that most of the images, ideas we have about Americans are built or fed if you want by the media and you know what that means, don't you? Pete was born in Germany, so we talked a lot about Europe and then the Netherlands and Germany in particular. Though neighbour countries, the two countries also have each their own cultural aspects and their own history. Sometimes they touch each other in history. Very recently you could think of World War 2, but if we go back in history a lot longer there are also lots of incidents where the two countries interacted with each other, only at those times both the countries weren't near the countries they are today.

Funny actually. While talking to Pete I remembered my grand father talking about his younger days in the early 1900's. He lived in the north of the Netherlands and at one time in his life he went to Hamburg in the north of Germany. He always told me he could talk his own regional language over there and people would understand him. I also remember my father telling me that when I was just a little kid he worked in the north of the country at a city hall. They had guests from a part in the north of Germany called Ost-Friesland. My dad is born and raised in Friesland and since he didn't always know how to say things in German, he talked Fries with these people. The mayor didn't like the idea at first, but as he noticed his guests were more at ease in Fries he went along with it. These anecdotes merely show that a country border is just a virtual line drawn on a map, but it doesn't say a thing about the people in the country. They might have been of 'one nation' which is now divided into two. I think, at least when I look at the map of the US, the same goes for the native people of the US and Canada. It is almost impossible that they have lived within the borders of the states that are on the map now, so there we have another thing in common between the US and Europe, beside the fact that in both parts of the world live people that really love to ride a bike that is the same but goes by different names.

It was midnight before I went to bed, so another long day, but also again a day with lots of impressions and lots of fun.

Sunday, July 17th the fourth day.

ODO reads: 102104

Against my own expectation I was awake early again at 5:30 AM. It must have been the excitement of "finally" going on the road by bike ☺. We followed road# 58 & 41 until Atascadero. It was a scenic route, followed by desert. At one time I saw a salt lake (Soda Lake), but because of the heat I didn't bother to take a photo of it. Maybe that later this trip I'll see another salt lake and it might just be so that by then I have

gotten used to this heat. The place where we had lunch in Atascadero was air conditioned, so lunch took us over an hour to finish ☺.

The original plan was to meet Eric 'Tex' Williamson, but he had left a voicemail on Linda's cell in which he described an accident in such a way that Linda was not directly worried. Some plastic and ego damage was all I could make of it. So instead of going to the Williamsons with three bikes, it was just the two of us. We headed to the Pacific Coast Highway and followed it up north all the way to Salinas.

Though there were some clouds coming in, the ride was very nice. We saw some elephant seals and lots of beautiful scenery and also a strange accident. The good thing for us was that this accident meant that we could pass a lot of slow cars at once. The fun part of PCH is that this leg we rode is really following the coastline.



That means there had to be built several bridges and if you looked more at what men had to do to make PCH a fact, the more you saw of the scenery and the more impressed you became. At Salinas we left PCH and passed the Lacuna Seca circuit where just a few weeks ago the Moto-GP was held. We headed over to the US 101 and followed this one u north to Morgan Hill to meet Tex and Cherie. We arrived there at approximately 6:45 PM.

Before we went to an all American Restaurant to meet COG-gers Spencer Farrow and Brock Delp, we first had a drink at the Williamson's residence. My butt felt sore, despite the fact that I had worn padded underwear. And this was only the beginning of a longer trip, on which I was supposed to drive more miles a day for more days than we had done today. I felt worried and sorry for my butt.

In the restaurant Spencer heard of my concerns at directly offered me to use his Russell Day Long saddle. We're about the same length and height, maybe not exactly the same weight, but in this case that probably wasn't the most important. After dinner Cherie went home together with her daughter, her friends and her son and Tex took us (Linda and I) over to Spencer's place to get the Russell. After that we went to his home and fitted the Russell on Silky. It fitted very well, but how about the old saddle? We found a way to strap that tight to the Russell and the bike and decided to try it that way tomorrow. We talked about bikes and all kind of other stuff before we went to bed.

Monday, July 18th the fifth day.

ODO reads: 102456

I was awake at 6, but stayed in bed until I heard more noises coming from downstairs. So I got out of bed by 6:30 AM. We had some breakfast and then left Tex and Cherie at about 8.20. Tex was kind enough to lend Linda his saddlebags,

they combined very well with the top saddlebag she already owned. She would order a new set with Chad Olsen and have them shipped to Tex' place.



We headed for the US-101 and after that the US-25. After that we headed for the US-198 and the US-101 until Paso Robles. Just before we arrived at Paso Robles the temperatures went up that high, that we decided to stay there for lunch. When we parked the bikes there were special places for motorcycles in the parking lot. I had never seen that in that particular way in Europe, so I made a picture of it. The place

where we had lunch was nicely air conditioned so we stayed there for a bit longer than we needed to in order to have lunch, but the time came that we did have to leave.

We followed the US-46. It was busy on the road, because another road was closed, so everything had to pass over the US-46. It seemed like the middle of nowhere that we took a break. It was in fact at the junction with the US-33 near a gas station where there was some shade available. We bought some ice to cool ourselves down and also to cool the drinks in the cooler bag on Silky. After that we continued east to get to the I-5. After that again to the US-58 to Bakersfield where we visited a Wal-Mart. My first visit to this shop. Never had seen a shop this big before. I had heard of these kind of shops, but that was all. I was very much impressed. They had so many different things they sell, that I almost got the idea that you can get practically anything you need over there. The only reason why I didn't believe that completely is because we were looking for liquid crystal neck coolers and they didn't have them. We then followed the US-58 further east. Linda pointed out to me the "Tehachapi-Loop". Trains drive in circles here in order to get over the pass. We arrived at Linda's place AROUND 6:30 pm. Happily for us there were some shades and the temps had went down.

In the mail was a package from Chad and Judy Olson containing a complementary T-shirt for the OTP-Traveler. They misspelled my first name, but since that happens to me all of the time I had gotten used to that. Hopefully I'll be able to send them a thank you note by email.

Tomorrow the bikes will go to the bikeshop. The Metzlers ME880 on Silky still look very good, but better safe than sorry. The ODO reads 102752, so we did about 648 miles in two days. Not bad as an appetizer for the big trip that will start the day after tomorrow. This day I had no sore butt like yesterday. It must have been either the fact that I am getting used to riding these kind of distances or the Russell, I guess it will be mostly the latter and partly the first as well.

Tuesday, July 19th the sixth day.

ODO reads: 102752

Final day before the big trip, so time to get the bikes to the bikeshop in order to get them on new rubber and have the oil changed. Linda's neighbor is willing to pick us up at the bikeshop and even invited us to dinner with his group of the Democrats Club. All kinds of questions, like what I do for a living, how do I see the Americans, has this image changed since my arrival, and so on. Until one of the ladies says that it is a pity that a certain person isn't in town, because then he or she could have written a nice article about Linda and I taking this trip. Before either of us notice it, she is already on the phone with the local newspaper and the phone is handed to Linda to make an appointment. So at 1 PM we now have an appointment. The rest of the morning is a easy day, a day of resting and packing.

Around 1 PM we were present at the office of the Tehachapi News. A nice lady interviewed us after she first thanked me for the help the Netherlands had given during the independence war of the Americans against the British. I told her that everything had more than been paid back if we take in consideration the things the US did for the Netherlands during and after the 2nd world war, so we called it even. I don't have that much confidence in editors, since in the past I have been interviewed several times and didn't recognize myself in the article that was published. Hopefully this lady knows her job better than that.



Once home again I had a chance to check on my email and to send some out as well. For the rest of the time it was still laid back time killing and a little preparation for the day of tomorrow, while waiting for the bike shop to call they are ready with the bikes.

After we got the bikes back from the bike shop we went for a little ride into the Golden Hills to see the most beautiful sunset I have ever seen. It was really a pity that I didn't bring my camera ☹. We returned home at about 9:30 PM and had dinner approximately an hour later. The plan is that we'll be at a certain junction in the Mojave desert at 6 AM. Like I said, that is the PLAN.

We sat in the front yard and talked a little, than I dozed off. Linda woke me up and I started to reorganise things in the saddlebags. At about 12:30 AM I called the mother of my ex-wife to wish her a happy birthday. I then reorganised my tankbag and stowed away the last things into my duffel bag. Then I went finally to bed, in less than 5 hours we'll be leaving for THE big trip. I am excited!!!

Wednesday, July 20th the seventh day.

ODO reads: 102791

I was awake early enough, already at 4:20 AM. We didn't leave her place until 6:30 AM though. Yes it was partly because of my own speed, but also partly because of Linda's body clockwork.



Anyhow we teamed up with Chuck Holloway and Lisa Stephens at some junction in the Mojave desert at about 7 AM, so only one hour too late ☺. Near the end of the hottest part of the desert we stopped at a restaurant for breakfast at 8:15 AM. After that we went to Lone Pines to visit the Alabama Hills with in the background the highest peak of the USA: Mount Whitney. Lisa has climbed that mountain several times and she also

told me that there is a yearly run from the lowest place in the US (Bad Water in Death Valley) to the highest place (the peak of Mount Whitney), but that she had no idea how it exactly was routed. The Alabama Hills had been many times the background for western movies in the past same goes for the house where Linda has lived in. At least that is what I was told, but next time I see a western and still remember the Alabama hills I will pay some extra attention to it ☺.

We went on again, heading for Mammoth and the Mammoth Lakes. I tried to make a picture from the others while they are riding their bikes, that didn't succeed to well. I will have to try that later once more when there is less traffic coming from the other side. At Mammoth we held for a lunch break at a Mc Donald restaurant. The lady serving us spoke English with a strong Spanish accent I speak English with a strong European accent, so we didn't quite understand each other that perfectly. Happily Linda and Lisa were there to help me. We went up the mountain to see some of the lakes and there was a beautiful scenery. Took some pictures and also didn't take pictures that might have



been really beautiful just because of the fact that we would need up to four times as much time to get where we needed to be by nightfall. The views were really magnificent, specially the last one that was called the Minarets. That one was/is hard to defeat I am afraid. When we went downhill again the heat caught up on us, so we decided to reserve some time for a power nap at June Lake. After that we went on to Tioga pass to enter Yosemite National Park.

Beautiful scenery all around that kept me in shock and awe for a long time. Could it become even better or would this first day be the highlight of this trip? While moving on I also found some kind of a rhythm in the twisties, even took #1 position for a while, but then we came to a point that it was no longer just one road that could be followed, so Lisa took over from me and lead us to the Yosemite Bug Youth Hostel.

We arrived there at approximately 8 PM and were welcomed there by Jonathan Jensen who would be our tour guide the next day. He already had been waiting there since 4:30 PM so he knew which beer tasted

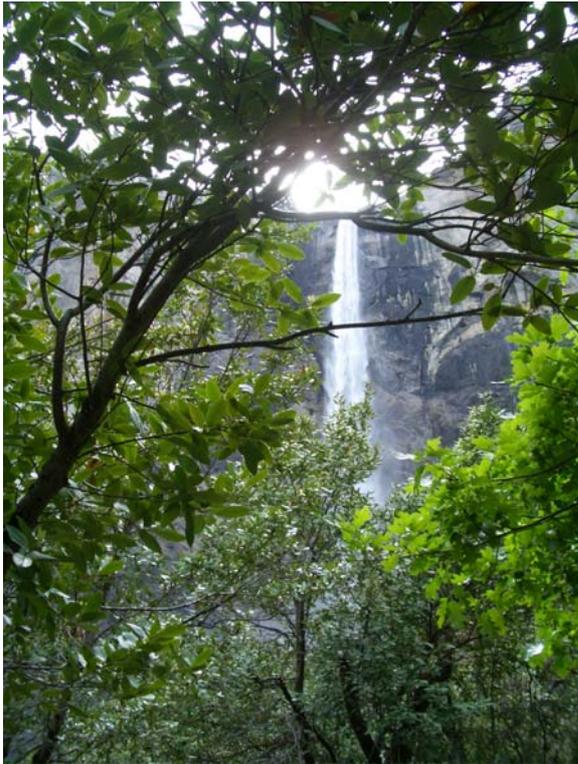
good and which one was less in taste. We followed his advice and had some soda's and beers along with something to eat out on the deck, before we went to the cabin for a good night of rest.



Thursday, July 21st the eighth day.

ODO reads: 103190

This morning I slept in until 6 AM. Lisa was awake as well and she made Linda, Chuck and I a cup of coffee. A good way to get awake. The plan for today is to go back to the Yosemite Valley and see some falls and then to go over some 'backroads', which almost compares to main roads in the Netherlands, to Phil Kottle's place in Santa Rosa. Along the road we will be accompanied by some guys from Sacramento. At least that is the plan.



We left the Yosemite Bug at 9:45 AM. The first stop was the Bridal Veil Falls. I can see why it is called that way. We went there and took some pictures. Most of them of course are like the typical tourist pictures, but I managed to squeeze one in that is not so common. We then went on to the Yosemite Falls, but since it had been dry for a while, there wasn't that much water in it. In fact there was so little water in it, that there were almost no falls to admire! So we left Yosemite again following a very scenic route through the Gold Country and the Wine Country, heading for Cool.

Somehow we keep running late, so after Jonathan had made some calls with the guys we were supposed to meet at Cool, it was decided that we would meet along the road. After a while we see two Connies

heading the opposite direction. They stop along the way and so is our group. The two Connies belong to the guys from Sacramento, Ken and Tony. We all shake hands and ride together and about 25 miles later it is time for a lunch break. I decide to have a burger, but afterwards I decide that that was the first and the last time I have a lunch like that. This way of lunching is way to heavy for my European stomach that is used to bread and bread. During lunch Ken and Tony present me an envelope with money. Their donation to the "T(h)anks for the memories"-funds. Well with the money inside I can buy myself several tanks of gas. Shortly after lunch Ken is leaving us, but we'll be seeing more of him at the National. Tony stays with us until Fairfield.



At one time, near Fairfield, Jonathan takes us over a road levee, something we call a dike. Very nice gesture of him that made me a little homesick though.

Shortly after Tony had left us, Lisa picked up a piece of scrap metal with her rear tire. Not the best thing to do, but also one of these things you can't do that much about. Happily she has a plug set that came with her BMW. The manual is in English and in German. I can read both and soon come to the conclusion that the translation isn't that good as I thought it would be. Nevertheless we manage with good teamwork to plug her rear tire and we are on our way again. Somehow it made me feel good that I could really contribute to this action, because normally I am technically challenged and have a fear for doing things to the bike. In this case I just

did it. The advised speed for a plugged tire by BMW is 37.5 mph, but we manage with a speed between 45 and 60 mph.

When we reached Santa Rosa, much later than we had planned, we met Phil and followed him to a Mexican restaurant. They had good food at that place, but somehow it was a shame that they couldn't find the volumeknob on the Mariache band. The volume of that band made it harder to understand each other. After a good meal, we split up. Linda, Lisa and Chuck went to a motel and I followed Phil to his house, where I would spend the night. Phil made a warning sign stating: Kleefstra warning, 6'6", because the doorway was supposed to be of the same height as I am. In fact I fitted underneath perfectly and once in Europe again I did some maths, I'm not 6'6" but only 6'4.8" That is why I had some space left.

I got a chance to check on my email and tried to send a message to the list, but since I had forget to sign in to the list with the gmail address I am using, the message was refused. No worries though, the message made it to the list anyway with the help of Ted Adcock. During and after that Phil and I had a chance to talk about all kinds of things before we hit the sack.

Friday, July 22nd the ninth day.

ODO reads: 103489

Again I was awake at 5 AM, seems to become a habit of mine. I took a shower at Phil's place, which was heaven for me. Once I was dressed I found Phil at his table looking for a shop that was willing to change Lisa's rear tire. He found one and left Lisa some directions on how to get there. After they had brought the bike to the shop, they came over to Phil's place as well for a homemade breakfast. After the



breakfast the others of our group had a chance to catch up on their email and then we left Phil's place around 11 AM. Chuck and I went to the motel to get things started with the Camelbaks and the cooler bag on Silky and when Linda and Lisa arrived all we had to do was getting the bags on to their bikes and off we went.

The route was simple.

All the way north we would be following the US-101 with a little detour over the Avenue of the Giants and after Crescent City we would leave the 101 and follow the US-199 to Grants Pass, OR.



The Avenue of the Giants was very impressive. I had heard of trees this big, I even had seen some pictures of the redwoods, but the real thing is way more impressive than a picture. Seen in that light the song "If" from Bread gets a whole new meaning. In the song they sing: "If a picture paints a thousand words...", well I would need over a thousand words now to tell you how impressive the redwoods were to me, so just take my word for it ☺. We went to a drive-thru tree and had a picture made. It was only the lower part of the tree that was left there and that was already huge. The tree was also completely hollow and that made a nice picture as well. Beside that the redwoods were very impressive, the road was very scenic as well.

We had dinner at Crescent City, where we ate Prime Rib. It was supposed to be a very good piece of meat, but the cook obviously had messed it up a little. Nevertheless we had our stomachs filled again and were ready for the last part of today's ride, the last leg to Grants Pass. We arrived there at 10:50 PM at the Super8 motel. Happily Linda and Lisa were clever enough to call ahead to them to say that we would be arriving late, so the room was still available to us.

Saturday, July 23rd the tenth day.

ODO reads: 103879

Somehow, almost as if to make up for those days that we had a late start, we all got up at 4 AM. When I say all of us, I mean all of us, without mentioning names as you see. We started getting our stuff together calmly and were ready for the road a little before 6 AM. We went on our way to Crater Lake. It should be something special according to Linda and Lisa and it most certainly was. Long time ago, volcano's had formed the landscape to what it is today.

Several thousand years ago one big mountain collapsed and thus Crater Lake was formed. Within the lake is now a island (Magic Island), which in fact is a young volcano that is growing bigger over the years. Crater Lake was a special experience. The colours of the water are not seen as well in the pictures I made as in reality. It was incredible. We spend some time there before



we went on again and while moving on I stopped a few times to make a picture of the land. It amazes me how big the country is. Each day has given me the impression of wide views without an end. Incomparable to the roads back home in Europe.



We headed in the direction of Bend where we took a break and a powernap in a park. After that we went on in the direction of John Day, OR. I noticed that I was paying too much attention to how the others went through the curves and once we were in Mitchell, about 70 miles ahead of John Day, I asked for a little head start, so there would be nobody riding in front of me to whom I could pay too much attention.

These last 70 miles almost went by the book. I found my own rhythm and was very happy with myself. My curve speed was growing as was my balance and the confidence in my own ability to ride the curves. It took the others almost 60 miles to catch up with me again. I thought they had given me a head start of about 15 minutes, but in fact it had been only a few minutes so they said. Of course that contributed to the grin on my face as well and that smile will probably last for a while.

After a shower we were ready to go out for dinner. Not just the four of us, but also: Carl and Ronda Mettler, David Morrow, Gene Kinzell and Paul Baryla. The last three of them will ride along with us to British Columbia for the next few days. We got back at the hotel around 10 PM. There was Jim Schroeder waiting for us. Jim is Californian as well and was supposed to leave together with us, but he couldn't make it by Wednesday. So our core-group' now expands to five.



In the parking lot there were many strong stories told as well as some jokes. Linda and Lisa also found a way to amuse the assembled gentlemen by posing on Gene Kinzell's bike. But as to all good things that find an end sooner or later, this evening found it's end as well, since the plan is to leave early.

Sunday, July 24th the eleventh day.

ODO reads: 104267

The alarm went off at 5 AM and soon everybody in our room was awake. At 6:30 AM we left the hotel to gas up and to check the tire pressure. I really needed some air in both the tires, but after that was added we were completely ready for the Northern Exposure part 1.

First of all we left town in an eastern direction. Then at a junction we turned left for a beautiful scenic road. After a while we came to a stop and turned around. It turned out that we only took that piece of road because it was so nice to ride.

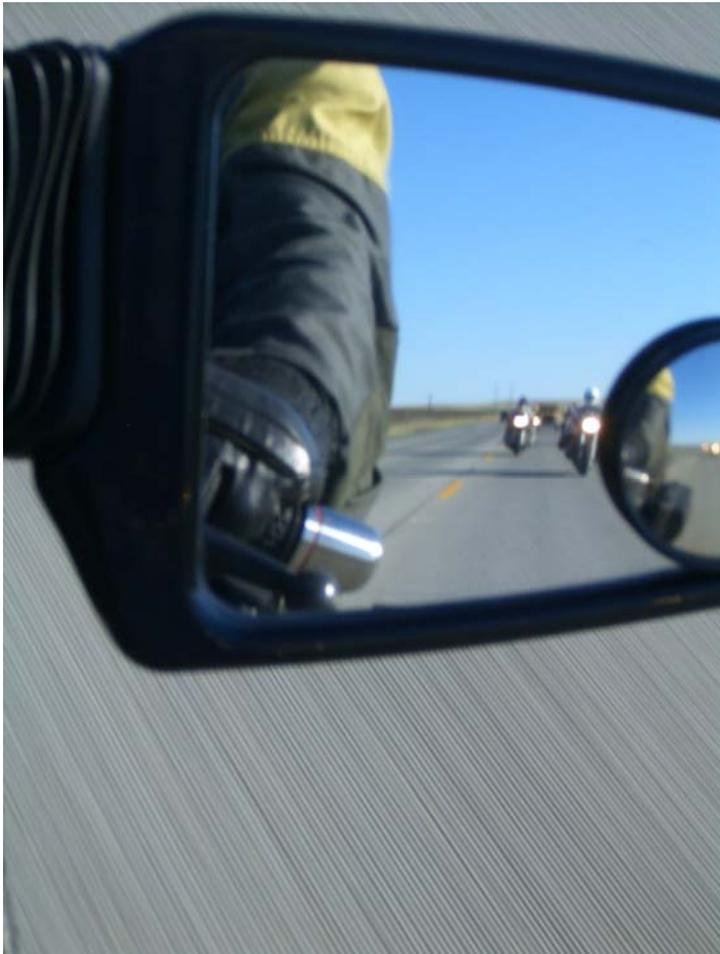


We went on and then in the middle of nowhere it seemed had a stop at a railway museum. There was a little track with a train on it. You could ride it, but then only when there were enough people on it. That would probably have meant that we had to wait too long, so we went on again. Nice roads, that lead us to the town Enterprise where we had lunch.

After lunch we followed more scenic roads that went along some canyons, near Hells Canyon. Nature was magnificent, it made me feel so very humble and small.



Then we had to go down the hills again. I drove like an old newspaper and the reason for it was that I was running low on air in my front tire. There was only about 8 psi left in it because of a leaking stem valve. I didn't tell anyone that that was the reason, because at the time I didn't even realize that was the problem. I kept wondering why I drove so badly where I had so much fun the day before. At the gas station after the downhill the others pointed at my front tire and we found the reason why. We gassed up there and then, while others tried to fix the leaking stem valve I just sat down beside the road and let the tears go. Tears of emotions about the greatness of Mother Nature mixed with the emotions of driving with so little air. It took us a ride to Lewiston, ID to get the problem fixed, but then we could go on again.



The last leg of today was leading us to Grangeville ID., where we arrived around 7 PM. There we found pretty quick the motel for that night and met Sherri Pelican. She couldn't make it yesterday to John Day but would also be joining us for the Northern Exposure ride. A while later Gene Holloway pulled in as well. He had made it to Grangeville in two long days from Southern California. Chuck, Jim and Gene were celebrating there reunion and Lisa, Linda, Gene K. and I went over to a Mexican restaurant to have dinner. It was quite a walk, but the food was good. Shortly after 10 PM our room went to bed.

Monday, July 25th the twelfth day.

ODO reads: 104658

We got up at 5 AM again. I am getting used to it now to get up this early ☺. Things in our room are pretty well organised. Lisa and I are both out first and will start with making coffee, doing the Camelbaks and start packing our own stuff together. By 6 AM I was on the phone calling 'home' to my daughters. Not the best idea maybe, since each time I talk to them my mind is distracted from the roads, but then after a while on the road I gain my concentration back again. Might have been a better idea

to call them at night, but then I have to wait until midnight, because of the differences in time zones, also not the best idea.



We were on the road by 8:30 AM. Today was Lolo pass day. Linda had sent me the itinerary and behind Lolo pass she had written something like: "yihhaa". After having been on that road I understand why. The road goes on and on with nice curves along a river. Never a curve that is much tighter, never a dangerous moment. Just go with the flow and have fun. It really

rocks! Only one of us got a performance award for sharing his skills with other users of the road. We had some stops to share the excitement and also to wait for our awarded group member. After about 80 miles of fun, there was the end to this as well. We gassed up at Lolo and went on to Missoula for lunch. I stayed outside to finish my report of the day before and to write some more. At the end of the lunch break I had written something I called 'my little song'. I shared the fact that I had written it with Linda and Lisa, but wasn't yet ready to let them read it.

We mostly drove on the US-12, also known as the Lewis and Clark trail. It refers to their expedition to discover the west. I have read the book Sacajawea by Anne Lee Waldo which is all about this expedition from the perspective of a Indian woman. Driving here gives a completely new meaning to this book. Where we drive through in just one day, might have taken them several weeks to get through. I definitely will re-read the book once I get home again, only because I now have seen so many parts of the land it describes.

Scenery was impressive again, but not as impressive as yesterday. I believe they call this the Rolling Hills country and I can see why. Along the way we had some rain, but not that much. I also needed a power nap along the way. We came through Swan Valley which reminded me very much of Grundlsee in Austria where I go almost every year for the vacation.

Arrived at the Motel6 in Kalispell at 5 PM, we did our laundry and waited for it to be ready, but then went off to get some dinner in a pizzeria across the street. After finishing desserts I ask the waiter to bring me another pizza to take back home. Before we even got to the motel again, it was finished. I was so hungry that night.

When returning from dinner we saw two bikes standing next to each other like mother and daughter. It were the bikes of Gene H. and Jim. Both black, both double head lights, but one big and one small. So here is the picture of that.



Shortly after dinner we went to bed after we had sorted out the laundry. It was again 10 PM, but this time we were on MST instead of PST, so actually for us it felt like 9 PM. Nevertheless we had no problem at all to go to bed this early, especially since the plan for tomorrow is to leave at 7 AM. To some of us that means that we have to get up a 5 AM.

Tuesday, July 26th the thirteenth day.

ODO reads: 104976

Up at 5 AM again, but this time after a bad night of sleep. Our team worked great however and therefore I could take it easy a little. Had some yogurt for breakfast in the hope that would make me feel better, but even that combined with coffee didn't make me feel better. The group has expanded once more, since JR from Chicago has arrived.

We went to Glacier-Waterton National Park. What can I say other than that you should have seen it for yourself. It was beautiful. Lake McDonald at the west entrance of the park, the road to the sun, the falls, the pass, all of it in one word: AMAZING. Around 9 AM, just outside the park on the east side we had breakfast.

After that it was only a few miles to the Canadian border. We were handled as a group, so passing the border went quick, but I did get a stamp in my passport.



On our way to Golden we passed Frank Slide. Like there had been a giant playing with huge rocks and then when (s)he was tired of playing with them, threw them around and smashed the nearest mountain as well. The roads were beautiful to ride on and time passed quickly. Around 6 PM the bad night caught up with me, I really needed a powernap. Paul Baryla had stayed with Lisa and I and asked me whether or not I could postpone the power nap for another 5 minutes, because by then we would be at a viewpoint with amazing views. I could and was happy I did, because now Paul and Lisa would have something nice to look at instead of a parking lot.

Paul told us during this break that underneath Frank Slide the whole town of Frank is buried. It was an mining accident back in 1907 caused by bad engineering. He also told us that the area we were viewing was the recreation area for the people of Calgary. After a little break I could go on again and we arrived at Golden around 7:30 PM. We just brought the luggage to our room and then went to the Jacuzzi. The jet streams on the back really felt good, but I think I would have enjoined a real sauna even better. While we were in the Jacuzzi, Gene K. and Linda arrived at the motel. They had done a tire change on Linda's bike. Her rear tire was completely gone AND it was the wrong tire as well. At the bike shop in Tehachapi they had told her that the size of the tire before this one was wrong, turned out to be the right size and that the shop didn't really know what they were talking about.

The whole group went to dinner and had some fun. I took back a piece of cheesecake for breakfast. We went to bed around midnight.

Wednesday, July 27th the fourteenth day.

ODO reads: 105407

Though the alarm rang at 5 AM, I didn't get out until 5:40. Just felt like sleeping in a little. After that I checked the ODO-meter to keep track of the mileage. Also checked Lisa's and we have a persistent difference between the two meters. Her ODO-meter is much more optimistic about the miles we did. I believe hers first though, since I know that a different tire size can make that much difference in how well the ODO-meter behaves.

We said goodbye to Gene Kinzell and Paul Baryla as we left the Motel for today's leg of the ride. They went home for now, though we will see Gene again at the National in Centralia, WA. The group now exists of 9 people, Dave Morrow and Sherri Pellican, Gene and Chuck Holloway, J.R. Andrews, Jim Schroeder, Linda, Lisa and yours truly. After we left Golden, BC the plan was to visit two National Parks, Banff National Park and the Columbian Ice fields in Jasper National Park. Just after we had left we saw some mountain goats along the road. Then, while heading for the NP's we had a beautiful view at the mountain tops. At the entrance of the park we waited a while until we were all there and than made up the plan for that day and also arranged where we would meet etcetera.



In the Park we stopped as a group at one of the many glaciers we saw for a picture, after that we were still together at one of the visitor centres, but then the group fell apart. Not always by choice. Some were more lucky than others in passing cars on the road, others we more lucky and spotted bears, where again others just enjoined the scenery in a different way. I didn't see the bear, was quite lucky in passing cars, enjoined the scenery very much and was held up at one time by some mountain sheep that blocked the road. We all met again in Jasper at a gas station where we also had lunch, or at least those of us that had lunch at all. Some were already saving some room for the BBQ this evening ☺.

The roads were not just scenic, but very scenic. We saw some more wildlife on our way from Jasper to Prince George, but I can't tell what kind of animal it has been since I saw only bits and pieces. The animals were wise enough to stay away from the road itself, but sometimes stood in the ditches. By the time I saw them I was already passing them, which didn't give me the time to determine what species it had been, but I have been told it were either elks or caribous. The roads we were driving were again in good condition not to say in excellent condition. Given al the warnings I received while still at home, it almost seems as if all the roads I have been travelling on are either prepared according to European (Dutch) standards or the warnings have been given from some experiences that blocked the openness of the minds of those that gave me the warnings or my tour guides have chosen the best roads possible or I have just been lucky enough to travel these kinds of roads. We arrived in Prince George around 5 PM MST. At the Esther's Inn in PG there was a free room for me. It was so big I could easily share it with my two Guardian Angels for this trip and so we did. Around 6:30 PM Cheryl Owen was there with her truck to give us a lift to her house for the BBQ.

There were many new faces and many new names to remember at the BBQ and though that was fun, it also was kind of scary. I have gotten used to the group we were travelling with and I am not always the one that makes the first contact, especially not when there is still that barriers to take of the differences in languages. Though I have been thinking and talking in the English language now for two weeks, I still don't trust my skills that much. I know that Linda and Lisa have gotten used to my broken English or the funny accent as people now call it, but others are not, are just not yet. All in all I had a great time at the BBQ. The food was good, the drinks were well cooled, the company was big fun and there was more....



David Owen had something for me as being the OTP Traveler. He gave me a cap and a T-shirt, both from Kawasaki USA. I will wear them with pride. Beside that Dave also gave me an envelope with money for my very first Canadian "T(h)anks for the Memories". Looking back on the trip I can say that I have plenty of good memories to this trip.

After the BBQ I walked back to the Esther's Inn together with Bruce Vilders. We exchanged some experiences that we both professionally have. It turned out that we are both in the same line of work, education and in particular to those that don't have that many chances in life. We compared the two systems and figured out that there were many comparisons, but also some differences and that these might do well as it is, but that there is always the need to stay focused on how to improve the system. Once back in the parking lot we witnessed a stupid accident. A young lady was driving a Hummer around with a trailer behind it. She took the curve to short and smacked with the trailer two parked cars into each other. We said to her that she might better check on the possible damage on the cars, but she said she had checked and that there was no damage done and drove off. When we checked the two cars we could easily see that there was at least some damage, so we went over to the reception to report the accident as well as the license plate of the Hummer. I don't know exactly how it all ended, but I understood that the lady was caught while trying to escape. Well this kind of people also exists in Europe unfortunately so it isn't special to Canada or America. It is just a shame that they still exist and don't care that much about other people's property ☹.

Thursday, July 28th the fifteenth day.

ODO reads: 105834

The day my mother is having her birthday. Before anything else I wanted to try to give her a call, before I got on the road anyway, because then it would have to wait until later that day with the very big chance that my mother already turned in for the night again, since she is 8 hours ahead of us. She sure was happily surprised that I called, but since there also were a lot of relatives, she kept it short on the phone. Or might it have been that she was worrying about the costs of that particular call?

At 7:30 AM we went for a breakfast in the motel and got prepared afterwards. We assembled in front of the house, better said in the street of, where the Owens live. About 40 bikes along one side of the street with women and men doing their final preparations (putting on the rain suits). We left Prince George at about 9 AM for a first short leg and reassembled at a gas station. Most of us were glad with this short stop, since it gave us all to take the rain suits off again. From there we went on



again. At one time Chuck was having some troubles with his fuel pump, but we managed to get it working again. A little down the road someone already had ordered a replacement pump as a back-up. All we had to do, was pick it up and pay for it. On we went again. On to the lunch stop in Smithers and on to the junction of highways 16 and 37. There is the famous sign we already saw in some pictures of the Northern Exposure and of course we took some pictures as well ☺.

Along highway 37 there were so many places I would have loved to stop to take a picture, but there just wasn't enough time to do so. Lisa and I already were the last to arrive at Hyder, AK. as it was and that was even with the high speed that we did for a while after having been passed by two other participants to the Northern Exposure.

After highway 37 we had to turn left to highway 37A; the Glacier Highway. Well the name was just about right for that road. There were many glaciers to see and Bear Glacier was one of the most beautiful glaciers I've ever seen. The colours, the shapes, the constantly changing being of it. In one sentence: Mother Nature did a excellent job in showing us what she is capable of. We already had reduced speed by then because of the beauty of the landscapes, but at Bear Glacier we just had to stop and take several pictures.



The last 40 kilometres, about 25 miles, to Hyder were ridden in a very slow pace. There were so many beautiful falls at each side of the road and with the clouds hanging

as low as they did, it was as the falls didn't come from the top of the mountains, but directly from the clouds, as if they were crying. When Lisa and I came to the border between Canada and Alaska, Linda was already waiting for us. She told us where we could find the hotel and that the road there was just a dirt road, as it is in the whole of Hyder. After checking in, we walked over to another motel for dinner. A buffet or what was left of it, since we were so very late, but it tasted very well.

I also had a chance to check on my email there and that was something I'd better not done. There were some mails from my daughters saying they were missing me and that made me feel bad and also a little bit homesick. All at once it didn't feel good to stay at that place and have fun. I wanted to be alone for a while, so I gave Lisa my vest and ran the two miles back to our hotel. That felt good, the emotions were worked out by the time I got there. Sat on the deck for a while and then went to bed.

Friday, July 29th the sixteenth day.

ODO reads: 106278

We got up between 6 and 6:30 AM to go on a little bear expedition. Just outside of Hyder they have made a large walkway above the ground and along the river, so people can see bears go fishing in the river. At first all we got to see were the



salmons swimming upstream and some beautiful ponds on the other side. Just as we were about to leave again there came this young grizzly bear. I took some pictures of it and loved it. So close and still safe. The bear was trying to catch a fish, but didn't succeed. Finally (s)he went away again. By that time I had taken about 25 pictures of it.

Once back in Hyder we went for breakfast and after that we got ready for today's trip to Port Edward. We left at 11:30 AM and our first stop was again the Bear Glacier, where Dave Owen told us we had to make some time, because of the women's picture near the sign Bruce Vilders wanted to make for his article about women riders. That wouldn't have been that much of a trouble if I didn't want to take pictures along the road, but since I had seen so many beautiful ponds along highway 37 the day before I wanted to take pictures. There was only one thing I could do and that was going as fast as I could to the first pond and follow the group again as they were passing me again. So I did. The road was going more down than up and had some nice long stretches where Silky could come to speed and so it happened that I not only did triple digits, but also found out that Silky's top was somewhere around the 132 mph. Once at the ponds in the "lowlands" I switched to a much slower speed to find back those ponds. I took several pictures and when our group



from California passed again I stopped taking pictures and hooked up with them. We weren't the last to arrive, so we were easily in time ☺.

After the photo shoot break we went on to Port Edwards where we arrived around 5 PM. The place where we were staying was a combination of a museum and a hotel. It was situated in a former cannery and after a while there we got a guided tour throughout the plant. It was very interesting. Not only did one lady tell us a lot about



how the process went, but another lady presented us in a play the views of different women that had something to do with the cannery, like the wife of the owner, the daughter of a Chinese cook and an Indian woman who worked at the cannery. I saw many similarities to how certain developments had happened in labour societies back in the early years of the twentieth century in the Netherlands.

After the tour we went for dinner, again a buffet and again it tasted very well. Compliments to the chef. I had a little fear that there would only be fish on the menu, but happily there was something else as well. After the dinner there was some



"free" time in which I went out on the deck to have a smoke and enjoy the view. Of course there were like minded people and we soon we talking about all kinds of things and about how I had experienced this trip thus far. Then we heard music coming from inside and went in. There was this little band (keyboard and guitar) that made the music and it sounded good enough to me to stay inside and listen for a while. Bruce started to dance and tried to make me

do the same. I told him I would rather be playing than dancing. So..., before I knew it I was playing the guitar. I tried to play a song of Jim Groce. I could remember the music, but not the words and the keyboard player didn't know them either, so we decided to do a blues: Kansas City. It sounded all right I guess, but I think the real guitar player did a much better job on the guitar than I did. Not long after that I went to bed to enjoy the music from there, because I knew I had to rise early next morning.

Saturday, July 30th the seventeenth day.

ODO reads: 106571

Lisa and I got up around 4:30 AM and really tried not to wake Linda. Lisa was leaving us for a few days to visit relatives. We will meet again on the Monday at the National. I helped her with getting the luggage to the bike. Once she had gone I went back to bed again to get me some more sleep. By the time Linda and I got up it was 7:15 AM and by 8:30 AM we were ready to hit the roads again. Though it was raining almost from the start I decided not to wear my rain suit, so I could test whether or not my leathers were waterproof.



The rain didn't affect my riding in a negative way. It was rather the other way around. The rain made me feel like at home. I had good confidence at the tires and in my own skills so it wasn't that much of a trouble to go speeding a little and have some fun on the road. Dave even thought I was actually enjoying the rain and asked me whether I had webbed toes. At first I didn't understand what he

meant, but then the quarter fell. Dave had thought about a nickname and baptised me with that name. From now on I shall be known within COG as Marc "The Duckman" Kleefstra and I will wear the name with pride.

Along the way at a gas station, Cheryl, Dave, Linda and I also gave some entertainment to people who were there to gas up. First it was Dave who needed help getting his rain covers over his boots. Then it was Linda. She had very special rain covers for her boots, more an extra pair of rain boots than real covers. We had fun and the people in the gas station just wondered whether or not we were (in)sane or what. First of all the weather and bikes didn't mixed in their opinion, but then this show we put up for them ☺.....

Though I had loads of fun this day, I also missed one of my Guardian Angels. I also knew that tomorrows ride would bring me closer to the moment we would meet again.

Once at the Owens place I set the alarm for 5:30 AM. We will be facing another long day tomorrow that is supposed to be much dryer and warmer again. I will just wait and see.

Sunday, July 31st the eighteenth day.

ODO reads: 107018

I didn't get up until 6 AM, but had been awake since 4:30 AM. Yesterday I already packed most of my stuff together, so I was ready to rock and roll in a very short time. With another day of fun ahead getting up isn't that hard to do. We rolled out at 8:30 AM. Plan is to go south, looking for some sunshine ☺

We had brunch at Williams Lake in an open air fast food kind of place at 11:30 AM. By that time we had lost Cheryl and Dave, but they knew the way, so we weren't worried. We hoped that we would meet somewhere along the way again, but if that wasn't going to happen, we still would find a way to get to Gene Kinzell's place.



Our second tank stop was at Cache Creek. Some of the group went along on highway 1 from there, the rest stayed on highway 97. We are riding through a landscape that reminds me of the deserts I have seen in California. The heat was acting up as well and together with the low speed we had to maintain because of the traffic, it made me doze off. Riding alone for a while helped me to stay focused as did washing my eyes out at the next tank stop.

Around 5:30 PM we arrived at Gene's place and we were welcomed by Dave Owen. Linda, Gene Holloway and I all needed an oil change. I paid extra good attention, so I will be able to do that myself next time my bike needs an oil change. Gene's wife served cold drinks on the deck and it was nice to sit there in a chair instead of on a bike's saddle for a while. As always all good things had to come to an end and we left Gene's place again to spend the night at the house of Cheryl's sister in Kelowna.



It was a beautiful house and the view from the deck over the lake was magnificent. There was also very good food for us to eat as well as cold drinks again. She had opened her house to 9 people from whom she only knew 2. Something I don't see happening that quick in the EU, but of course I might be wrong. All nine of us found a place to spend the night in or around the house. Some of the group decided to sleep outside on the lawn. I spend the night on a mattress in the living room. I turned in around midnight. I did set the alarm for 4 AM, but I guess I will never hear it.



Monday, August 1st the nineteenth day.

ODO reads: 107452

Well I guessed right. I didn't get up until 5:30 AM, but as I am getting used to pack the bike every morning, it all went real quick. We are about to meet Gene Kinzell and Noel Mulloy at a parking lot in Kelowna and then will ride a distance of about 500 miles to get to Centralia, WA. We rolled out at 6:15 AM and left Kelowna a little after 6:30. The plan was to follow the 97 all the way into the USA, but to my big surprise we took highway 3 in Osoyoos. For a while I thought that we just went into town to have breakfast or so, but we went by all the possible places for that and left Osoyoos again to get onto a beautiful twisty road up a hill. Once up there I asked Gene what



was the matter. He told me that I couldn't leave BC without having been on this road, because it was the best road they had ☺ We went up Anarchist Hill just for that and then went back to town to have breakfast at Smitty's. After breakfast we went on again and at 9:45 AM we crossed the US border. We got lectured by the man working there, because we all teamed up again.

We were in the USA again and that meant that the speed was given in miles again, so no more need to calculate anymore. Our first US gas stop was at 10:50 AM in Omak. Shortly after that we took the US 20 west and crossed some beautiful country again. It is almost as if, compared to the Netherlands, the US is having too much beautiful countryside that is great to ride by bike and that we have too little of that.

Along the road the 'big' group split up in smaller groups, but that was never a problem since we all knew where to go and how to get there. That is the easy part of riding in the USA. All roads are numbered, so you only have to memorize the numbers and the direction in which you travel. In the EU most roads have numbers, but on the signs at the junctions you hardly ever will find these numbers back. So you have to memorize the places you'll be passing instead of the numbers and that is a lot harder to do. Along the way there were also some road works going on and from time to time we met at another road work. We also stopped at Lake Diablo. This lake also had that strange coloured water, almost neon like.



I arrived in Centralia around 6:20 PM, but before that I had lost Linda and Cheryl on the I-5 in Seattle. After having had some fun on that road I saw Gene and Noel ahead of me and teamed up with them, but as they went on to the National I stayed at a tank station waiting for the others. They never saw me as they got off of the interstate so I followed them to the King Oscar. I pulled in the parking lot shortly after them. One of the first to greet me was Rick Hall. He knew me from last year when he was over in Europe.

Many people wanted to shake hands with "The Traveler" and all of them were very friendly and interested in how I did so far, but I am really glad I didn't have to take the test in which they showed me pictures and asked me the names, because there were so many new names that I forgot most of them almost instantly ☺. Beside all the new names there were also some familiar faces. People I have ridden with along the road or where I had stayed.

At the National I had a special room. It was a luxury room, but it also meant that I would be away from Linda and Lisa. Yes, Lisa had made it to the National as well and I must say I was happy to see her again. The past few days had been different without her tailing me or guiding me. After having had a shower I checked with them what the plan was for the rest of the evening. We were to go to the socializing meeting downtown.

There were a whole lot more people over there, but while entering the room we saw Tex and Cherie and sat with them. We had a little something to eat and something to drink and then, after the socializing party was over, headed back to the King Oscar so we could register for the National. We then sat outside to tell stories and



lies. I showed Lisa and Linda some of the pictures I had made and promised them I would send them a CD with all of the pictures on it. Linda also introduced me to Don Simone and told me I should ride with him one of these days. Don invited me to ride with him the next day when he and Doug Swenson would do an extended "Astoria Loop". I agreed and went on telling lies and stories.

At one time I realized I would have to get up within 5 hours to be in time for my appointment with Don and Doug, so I went to bed.

Tuesday, August 2nd the twentieth day.

ODO reads: 107923

Awake and out of bed at 5:30 AM. Light breakfast and NO packing today. Ready to hit the road by 7 AM. We are facing approximately 250 miles going to the coast and heading south to the Columbia River, crossing the bridge and following the coast until Seaside and then go east again and after a while north again to Centralia.

When we arrived at the coast the fog was rolling in from the sea. Because Don wanted to give me the opportunity to see the coast while we were riding, we hanged out here for a while. That gave me the opportunity to shoot some pictures and it gave us also the opportunity to get better acquainted, as far as that is possible in such a short time.



Our second stop was near the Columbia River with a good view to the bridge that crosses it. When we passed it I noticed that the bridge is over 2½ miles of length! We took an easy ride and stopped again in Seaside, where we also wanted to have something to eat. While looking for a place to eat we came to the coast and circled around a statue of Lewis and Clark. Of course I took a picture of that to show my parents at home. Doug and I also went to the beach to take a good breath of salted sea air and to take a picture of these clouds hanging around a rock in the ocean.



After lunch we went on again and went east. Some nice roads, but also some roads with heavy damage. Nevertheless roads that were fun to ride. Very scenic, lots of beautiful nature, but because of the lack of sleep last night I also got very tired. I asked and got a povernap. After that we went on again only to find out that the road we planned to follow was blocked because of an accident with some log trucks. So following the advice of a local resident we took another road and found our way north. We were supposed to travel only the last 5 miles or so on the freeway, but we travelled the last 30 miles or so on it. Not that I did mind that, because I was tired again.

Today's ride made me insecure about what I would do tomorrow. Another ride somewhere or a day of rest? I will see how things go later this evening. Haven't seen Lisa and Linda all day and that feels strange. My guardian angels are not around me. I was happy when they arrived at the King Oscar at around 8 PM. I have ridden a little over 6000 miles now, which equals almost 10,000 kilometres. I know lots of people back home that don't ride that many kilometres in a year and I did it in two weeks. Normally this amount would take some more time to cover ☺.

At 8:30 PM we went out to dinner with a group of 8; Dave Owen, Jim Pavlis, Jerry Layman, Tex and Cherie Williams, Linda, Lisa and I, to a Mexican Restaurant. We had a great time there. Every one was in a good mood. I had Fejitas con Pollo por dos. Something with chicken and supposedly for two people. I ate it all by myself. When we got out the restaurant we noticed that they had closed an hour earlier. They were nevertheless friendly enough to grant us all the time we needed. By the time we got back to the motel it was almost 11 PM. We made some plans and arrangements for the next day and turned in.

Wednesday, August 3rd the twenty-first day.

ODO reads: 108187

My alarm went off at 7 AM, but I didn't get out of bed until 8:30. I went to the office and had a slice of bread and a banana as breakfast. Between 8 and 8:30 'our group' will leave to go to the east side of Mount St Helens, that is if the Holloway brothers and Jim Schroeder will be there in time. Chuck and Gene Holloway made it in time all right. Jim will be following later. They have found a room at the King Oscar as well, so now our group is almost complete again.



We left the hotel around 9 AM and had breakfast at Randel. Around 12:30 PM we were all at the top of Mount St Helens. I was the last to arrive. On my way up I made many stops. It is hard to capture the emotions one feels in pictures while travelling there, but I wanted to try it anyway. It is almost unbelievable that 25 years after the eruption it still can make such an impression on people. This is partly

because only half of the area was cleared of the logs that were scattered around and was replanted. The other half was left to Mother Nature and she is doing her utmost best to do a good job as well. It is very impressive to see. Also the "Artwork" she squeezes in is beautiful if you see it.

After having visited the east side of the mountain, Linda, Lisa and I went to a visitors centre on the west entrance and saw an Imax movie. We then learned that not only the plants, trees and animals are coming back and growing again, but even within the crater of Mount St. Helens is a new volcano growing. Scientists have calculated that it will take about two centuries before Mount Saint Helens has reached her original height and size again. That is, if there isn't going to be an eruption before that. Pretty amazing to see and hear what Mother Nature is capable of.





Looking back I can honestly say that this was the day that made the biggest impression on me. The forces of Mother Nature are immense, I already knew that and sadly enough she demonstrates it often enough in populated areas where we'd rather not see them demonstrated, but beside all these destructive powers, Mother Nature also has constructive and positive powers and she showed these to us at Mount Saint Helens as well. Too sad that so many people don't see it and honour them.

This morning I had the opportunity to meet Gary and Patricia Murphy for the very first time. "Knowing" someone by email gives a certain impression of the person, but meeting that same person in real life can go either way. With Patricia

and Gary it went the positive way. After dinner I had more time to talk to them and also a long time with Patricia alone. We talked about the trip I had made and about the impressions it had made on me, about the Nature I had seen and what that had done to do me.

Thursday, August 4th the twenty-second day.

ODO reads: 108425



Today was a day I really slept in. It was 9:15 when I finally got out of bed. It wasn't that much of a problem because yesterday we already kind of decided that today would be a day with very little riding. The riding we did today was with a group of five: Tex and Cherie, Linda, Lisa and I. We went over some back roads to Morton for breakfast and then back to the King Oscar for the rest of the day. On our way back we passed again this strange place where people show there weird

sense of humour. I saw it already yesterday and now that we were to pass it again I wanted to take a picture of it. Off course I couldn't find it back. Happily enough for me, Tex knew exactly where I was talking about and he made the picture for me. Big thank you to him for that. We gassed up at the tank station near the motel and then I went over to the Safeway to do some shopping.



When I arrived back at the motel I had to decided whether or not I would wash the bike. I decided to clean her only a very little bit, so that not all the collected experience was gone. After that I washed and dressed myself and got ready for the photo shoot and the banquet.

The banquet was in the same hotel where the socializing had taken place. We had a BBQ and it tasted good, but it seemed to me that there were many more people there than at the actual National. Maybe it was just the fact that now everyone was around and at the King Oscar you only saw parts of the group because others were out riding, dining or in another hotel.

We sat at a table outside, but had to find a place inside because of the door prizes that were donated and the talk of dr. Greg Frazier about his long distance travelling. Also the people of ROK got a chance to say something to the COG-lective. The location of next years National was announced and than Bob Ward introduced me. I had written down something, but didn't feel like reading that. I tried to keep it short, but soon I found myself talking for a much longer time than I had planned ahead. It seemed to me I gave a full report on this trip to the assembled COG members. At the



end of it I introduced Linda and Lisa as my Guardian Angels and gave them a little present, a candle with a scent that goes by the name: "A New Beginning". It will be a whole new start for me once I head back to Europe. The downside to this trip is that it has made me addicted to riding in America, so I really want to come back as soon as possible. I had said so often during this trip: "I'll be back!!" and that were also

the last words of my speech and they came from my heart.

I walked back to the motel so I could get in balance with my emotions again and around midnight I heard that we (Don, Linda and I) would be leaving around 6 AM, so I quickly tried to pack my stuff together and then went back for telling lies near the bikes. If need be I will receive a wake up call from one of my Guardian Angels.

Friday, August 5th the twenty-third day.

ODO reads: 108591

Never heard an alarm or a wake-up call, so I didn't get up until 6:45 AM. Ready to hit the road within the hour, but we didn't leave the motel until 8:40. By that time, Linda and I had tried to touch base with Rick Hall about me spending the night there next week. We didn't get to making arrangements though, due to the fact that he had not time for that right then? When I re-live the conversation, I came to the conclusion that this conversation was a dark spot on a well lit adventure and also one I would like to forget as soon as possible, but even though it didn't make it to

my notebook, I still remember it about a month later while writing this report ☺, it was together with my new addiction the only downside to this whole trip. The addiction I can do something about ("I'll be back!!"), this conversation I can't do something about.

In Yakima we had lunch in a Subway. Again a new experience for me. Before we reached that place, we had travelled about a 150 miles through beautiful landscapes,



had a little stop in Blackstone Valley where the rocks were very special and passed some other places that were so beautiful as well. At some points I wish I had a camera mount on the bike that would turn everywhere I looked and that would take a snapshot at the moment I blinked my eyes. I saw so many beautiful places this trip of which I didn't take a picture, like on today's ride.

Another 100 miles later we stopped near Othello for gas and also for a powernap. Don and I calculated that with the speed we maintained we could possibly make it to Grangeville instead of "only" to Lewiston. The difference is about 60 miles, which would save us tomorrow about an hour. When we proposed this to Linda, she agreed to this plan. So when we arrived around 5 PM in Lewiston we only stopped for an ice cream and then went on again. About an hour later, not counting the time we had to wait at road works, we arrived at Grangeville. After gassing up, we headed for the motel, which was easily found.

Linda received some bad news concerning the health of her father, but after making some phone calls the decision she and her family made was to stay on the road and in touch. In a way I was happy with this decision, but it also made me feel selfish.

On the road I realized that each turn of the wheels was taking me further away from new friends I have made and one in particular. This made me feel sad and once again I was wondering why I had to return to Europe. Now, sitting in my tent while my daughters are still asleep, I know, but while over the pond I often asked myself that question. I decided to try to give my daughters a call next morning, maybe that would make me homesick enough to forget about the sadness about leaving friends I felt today.

Saturday, August 6th the twenty-fourth day.

ODO reads: 108956

Last night I woke up a lot, so at 6 AM I just got out. I made some coffee for Linda and I, Don didn't want to have a cup. At 7 AM we left for breakfast and once back at the hotel we packed the bikes. At 8:40 AM we rolled out. About 30 miles later, while heading for Lolo pass for the 2nd time this trip Dave and Cheryl Owen caught up on us, together with two other COGgers that were heading north. In Lolo we had lunch together and afterwards our roads split up. They headed north, we headed south. Time for a last farewell? No way, just time for a goodbye.



Around 3 PM we left the lunchroom, gassed up and took highway 93 south. About 60 miles later I really fell asleep. It was time for a powernap. I was ever so glad that both Linda and Don didn't make a problem of it. The youngest one in the company needed the most of sleep. Finding a good spot to take the powernap was a bit difficult, but we found one near a fishing place. A bit off of the road with some trees and some shadow!

Short time after we restarted again, we ran into a thunderstorm. That cooled down the temps to below a 100 degrees Fahrenheit and that was much better to ride in. Only thing was that at one time there was also some rain falling down. Should I stop to put on my liner or will it end soon. I kept asking myself that same question and the answer was that it would end soon enough, but only after the rain had made me wet up until my bones. For a while it was freezing cold for me, though it still must have been about 65 degrees Fahrenheit. The first roadwork where we had to stop, I put on the liner and that made it more comfortable again. On the last stretch of highway 93 I made some pictures of Don and Linda riding their bikes and noticed a beautiful sunset in my mirrors. I just had to stop and take a picture. After the 93 we took the 28 (The Sacajawea Historic



Byway) and around 9 PM we arrived at a Super 8 motel in Idaho Falls. Linda had made some calls with a local COG member who made the reservations for us. Though we had hoped for a double room with at least to queen sized beds, we got only doubles. Possibly it was all that there was left, because of all those bikers heading over to Sturgis, but we didn't like the idea of having another sleepless night. The plan was that I took both bed spreads and folded them to some kind of bed on the ground. To tell the truth..... I had one of my best nights of sleep on that ground, but that wasn't after we had taken all the luggage to the room, locked the bikes properly and went to a restaurant to have dinner. Linda stayed in touch by phone with her sister so she would be updated on her father's situation. It wasn't too good, but apparently he had stabilized a little, so she could continue the trip.

Sunday, August 7th the twenty-fifth day.

ODO reads: 109406

The alarm woke me up this morning at 6 AM. I didn't want to leave my cozy hand made bed yet, but by 7 I was ready for breakfast and even had made some phone calls to Europe to let them know I was still doing OKAY. Don and we split up since we were heading in different directions from here.

In the breakfast room Linda and I met some other bikers. They were heading for Sturgis on two Harley's. We had a nice talk for a while and then split up. After breakfast I had a chance to check my email and answer some of it. Then it was back to the room to pack our stuff and check the route for today on the maps. Pretty easy over here, just memorize a few numbers and your done.

Around 9 AM we left the hotel. It was already pretty warm outside and we were facing another 400+ miles day, so we'd better move and so we did. The roads were nice and easy to find. While still in Idaho Falls we bought a bottle of coolant fluid, because we noticed for the 2nd day that Silky had leaked some. While riding she seems to have no problem what so ever though. Better take a good look at it while on the road today.

We had a lunch at a big gas station in Cokespring, bought there some ice and Gatorade as well and filled up the Camelbaks with ice and water. Then we headed on again. The landscapes are still amazing me. We ride through some very dry areas but still you see from time to time a farm and boy do they look small against when there is some beautiful scenery in the background.



Just before we got to the Little America resort we decided to take a rest stop there. In my eyes it seems a very strange for a resort like that. It seems to be a little town on its own in the middle of a desert like environment. We found ourselves a nice place to stop, near some shadow and some benches to sit or lay on. Before we really



knew it, there was this big greenish puddle under Silky. Obviously a coolant leak somewhere ☹️, all we had to do now is find the place where it came out. From a first observation we decided it was probably coming from the lower left side in the upper radiator part and the leaking was probably caused by a malfunctioning of the fan switch. I didn't want to risk anything and went to the front desk of the

resort to get some information on Kawasaki dealers nearby. We were lucky, only 40 miles east was a dealership and the resort had their own tow truck service. Since I didn't want to risk anything with Silky (in a few days when I leave, she still has to ride home through the desert) I went back to Linda and told her what I had found out and my decision to have Silky towed there. These 40 miles to Rock Springs were the less pleasant ones of the whole trip, though the air conditioning in the truck was nice compared to the temps outside.



At 6 PM we were at the dealership in Rock Springs, WY. Linda was in contact with Ted Adcock and he has given us some suggestion we could check out already to narrow down the problem. I will try to do that, while Linda is looking for a motel room in town. The dealership isn't located in the best part of town by the looks of it. We wonder if it is the best idea to leave Silky all by herself at the dealership...

When Linda comes back she tells me that she also had contacted Guy Young and that he told her it is okay to fill up the bike with fresh water and ride over to the motel. Water.... Ah, that is where that Camelbak is for if you don't drink it yourself. The bike is filled up pretty fast and we head over to the motel. On the way over the temp gauge stays very low, but as soon as we stop the fan again doesn't come on, we definitely need a new fan switch I guess, and again this greenish stuff appears underneath Silky, the poor thing.

We agreed to have contact with Guy when we were at the hotel and he told us the easiest way to locate the problem, since he didn't think it was the radiator itself but one of the hoses behind it. So we took off the side panels, rode around the parking lot and hoped that by then we would see where it came out. Hopes were up to high so again some more circles around the hotel over the parking lot. This time we were "lucky" enough to see where it came out and reported it back to Guy. He gave us some part numbers for the hoses and the fan switch and told us to take contact if we needed anything else the next morning. So we just left the side panels off of Silky, got us some dinner in a Village Inn restaurant where they had the worst service I have ever seen in a restaurant. Afterwards we had a little conversation with the other Guardian Angel, Lisa. She misses us as much as we miss her, but when there are no more vacation days left, one has to return to work ☹️ I really can't complain about that and I will not either.

Linda has made arrangements for lodging on Monday and Tuesday. This mishap breaks up our plans completely. A good thing that last Friday there was this slight change of plan forced upon us, because now we have some more room to play with. If all goes well tomorrow we still should be able to get to the airport in time on Wednesday morning. Off course my secret hope is that we don't make it in time to the airport, but I also know that I would still have to leave the country ☹️.

Monday, August 8th the twenty-sixth day.

ODO reads: 109658

This is going to be a day with several different challenges for us which would be:

- Will we get Silky up and running again
- Will we get to Fort Collins in a reasonable time without any further problem

To overcome the first challenge we have to undress Silky a little more that she already is. Pulling off the plastic Tupperware of a Concours is not new to me and I have no real fears that something might go wrong there. The worst that can happen at this stage is a tab that breaks off, but I have dealt with that before. No the Tupperware is not a real challenge, but once done with that the challenge begins for me. In my country we have an expression for how well skilled I am when it comes to the technique of a bike: I have two left hands. In other words I am very much technically impaired. But after having Silky stripped down we have contact once again with our guru Guy. He gives me very simple instructions and even I get the feeling I can get this job done now. Guy is very reassuring and very confident and

keeps telling me it is all part of the adventure. Though I agree on that I still feel very uncertain when I start the job.



Big bummer, I can't get my hands properly between the header pipes to get to the leaking hose, but with the help of the maintenance man of the hotel, a Harley rider himself, we get the leaking hose off of the bike. We have to search very hard for the little hole, because it is nothing more than a pin hole, but big enough to cause problems. While at it we decide to

change both radiator hoses, just to be sure. Linda goes to the NAPA store to get us some new hoses and a fan switch and I have a little break to stretch my back. I am not used to laying on the floor like that and my back is giving me a bit of a hard time, so the rest is welcome.

Linda arrives with the parts, she had to go to an Autozone as well, since NAPA didn't have all the parts in store. Good thing Guy gave her those part numbers as well. It takes me almost about an hour to get the first hose back and "only" 20 minutes to get the second hose back. All that is left to do now is replacing the fan switch, but we discover we don't have the right wrench for that. Again the maintenance man comes to the rescue and then all goes very quickly. About an hour later in which I took another back stretching rest Silky is ready for a test ride. The hoses hold up real fine, no leaking, but we do have a problem, there is also no fan coming up? After some checking and re checking we discover the contacts were not snug tight. After that is fixed and we take another test ride, the fan comes on perfectly, but what is that smell?? One of the overflow hose melted a hole in it. We just bandage it well with tape and reroute it so it doesn't touch anything that gets hot and we get Silky dressed again. Around 1:40 PM Silky is ready to rock and roll and Linda and I are some happy campers again. We pack our



stuff and leave the hotel to have some breakfast ☺

We left Rock Springs at about 3 PM, but after having done only 36 miles over a boring interstate with a dull rhythm we both need some sleep. We took a nap that was a bit longer than usual and then went on again. We headed on for Laramie and from there to Fort Collins.

We crossed the Continental Divide today and it was funny, but this time the weather stayed okay. I remember from when we were heading north from Missoula to Kallispell that this man along side the road told us that the Continental Divide had it's own weather. Well this time it worked with us and gave us almost the same weather conditions on the Divide as they were outside of it. Perfect riding weather. While entering the state of Colorado the first things I notice that is differently, is the color of the rock formations and the formations them self. It seemed to my that Wyoming was more of a flattened country with only distant mountains and almost no single rock formations, off course that could have been a choice of the road constructors not to let us pass these formations. Colorado on the other side surprised me with beautiful rock formations with amazing bright colours. What I did see in Wyoming along the interstate were all these poles on the slopes of the mountains. I didn't realize what they were until we reached a place where there were trees planted on the slopes with a sign that said that those trees were there as a living snow wall. Then the poles made sense to me. Also just outside Laramie we saw again a nice sunset. It seems to me that over here the sunsets are nicer to see that in my home country because there is less at the horizons to block the beauty of it.



We made it to Rock Springs around 8:30 PM and arrived safely at the house of Linda's son Jason and his wife Gretchen. We had some Thai food, the very first on this trip. Talked a lot of all kind of things, did our laundry and by midnight we all went to bed. The laundry was finished by then, but we haven't sorted it out yet. Will do so tomorrow before we leave for a last full day on the road.

I feel kind of sad that this great adventure is coming to an end any day now. I feel I haven't seen enough of the country yet, that I haven't talked enough with people, that I still have missed some great pictures, that.....

Tuesday, August 9th the twenty-seventh day.

ODO reads: 109935

After a good night of sleep I woke up at 6 AM. I went as quietly as I could outside so I could enjoy the neighbourhood waking up, but it also gave me a chance to be alone. Since I realized that this is going to be last full day in the USA I needed to be alone for a while. I relived the good times that I had thus far and looked back at all the nice people I have met. Reflections that made me happy and sad at the same time. How big is the chance that I will ever come back here? Normally the chances to that would be very slim, because there is a lot of money involved to make such a trip. This time I have been so lucky that the COG-lective had raised so much money that it could cover almost all of my expenses, but if I want to return here once more I will either have to raise the money myself or be very lucky in a lottery. I don't like the thought that this could be my very last full day in the US, not just for this trip but forever. I have been saying all the time throughout this trip if there was something we didn't make to see that that was just another reason to come back once more and I realize now that that is exactly what I want to do.

A big part of the morning just passes when we pack our stuff together and are talking with Jason. Gretchen had to leave for work. The plan was to leave early enough so we could go see Rocky Mountain National Park, but as time passes I realize that just isn't going to happen. I am okay with that though. I have seen so many beautiful things already, that how ever beautiful the RM NP may be, it would be almost just another beautiful place to me. Besides I am not blind and can see how much Linda enjoys spending time with her son.

We are ready to leave, but then Silky is acting up. She doesn't respond to the ignition key at all. We played around with the several switches that are involved, checked the fuses. Just as we are ready to check the battery, Silky cooperates again and responds to the ignition key again. Maybe this was just her way to say that she has had a good time with me?

We backtracked on highway 14 to Poudre River Canyon. Beautiful scenery again. Not too much water in the river, but enough for several rafters to enjoy a day at the river. The roads in the Canyon are too nice to make stops to take pictures, but I did take some.

After that we took the Colorado 27 to Stove



Prairie which was also a beautiful road.

When we arrive in Loveland around 2 PM we have to wait at a signal and there is a car behind us blowing his horn. Turns out to be Jason and we decide to have lunch together. While in Loveland I wanted to stop by a BMW dealership to check out some riding gear. I bought a new jacket that had more and better placed ventilation.

We did go to the Rocky Mountain National Park, but when we were at the entrance the mountain tops were invisible to us, because there were all clouds around them. We decide that this is also another good reason for me to come back once again and go of to have a cup of coffee at the Stanley Hotel. It is a famous hotel, because it has history all by itself (though I never found out what that history was), but also because it was the inspiration to the book, movie and TV-series "The Shining". While walking through the hotel I saw some places that reminded me of scenes from the movie, though that wasn't recorded at the actual Stanley Hotel.

We went on again and passed the playgrounds of COG member Rick Hall. He sure has some nice roads in his back yard. Linda suggested we would ride by his place to say hello before we went to Thornton, but I liked to go on. The day was nearing its end and with that some melancholic emotions came over me. We arrived in Thornton at about 8PM and found the house of Linda's cousin Ryan quite easily. Together with him and his girlfriend we went to an Outback Restaurant. A steakhouse in an Australian style. We were accompanied by Ryan's sister and their father. The steaks tasted really very good.

Afterwards we kept on talking in the parking lot. We didn't leave it until shortly after midnight, but according to the temperature it could have been early in the evening as well. It was a nice temperature. My last night in the USA started at 1 AM when I went to bed.

Wednesday, August 10th the twenty-eighth day.

ODO reads: 110119,5

I got up at 6 AM and started packing. Most probably customs will search at least my big duffel bag with the helmet in it, like they did when I came in to the country. I can only hope they will repack it all nicely and carefully. When I was about ready to go I sat in a chair and tears came to my eyes. It wouldn't be the last this day. I really have a problem saying goodbye and am much more emotional to it than I realized myself.



Ryan took us to the airport so there were no more miles added to this trip on a bike, at least not for me. I have done 8015.1 miles which equals to 12,824.46 kilometres. Not bad at all ☺. I have enjoyed every inch of this trip except for the last steps I had to take to get on the plane. It was very emotional to say goodbye. I leave behind so many friends at least so I feel it and I

really would much rather stay, but alas there is nothing I can do about it now. I have to return home and so my long flight home starts. We were airborne at 11 AM MST and arrived at Newark International Airport at 4:30 PM EST. I have to wait until 6:45 PM before the last flight home starts. I remember I just walked around like a zombie, having very mixed emotions about going back to Europe.

Shortly after the flight starts I see a sunset while I am above the clouds above Bangor, Maine. Real strange to see, because there is no horizon this time, only a big depth. Once the sun is set it quickly gets darker outside as we are flying towards the part of the world where the night is already half way passed.



Thursday, August 11th the twenty-ninth day.

Arrived safely at Schiphol Airport Amsterdam at 8:20 AM local time which is GMT+1. I had to wait a while before I could get to my bags, but then was again somewhere where everybody speaks the same language as I do. It is so strange. I have been talking and thinking in English for 4 weeks and now it feels strange to talk Dutch again. One of the first things I do is sending my Guardian Angels a text message that will have to travel almost all around the world to reach them saying: "Duckman sadly announces: I've landed at Schiphol. I'll be back!!!"

I take a train to the first city in the polder. My youngest sister is working there and will bring me home by car from there. I am on my way home, on my home to a new adventure?



Some last words and thoughts.

This trip couldn't have been made without the contributions of many anonymous people within the *Concours Owners Group* and the *GTR Club Europe* communities. It is impossible for me to thank all of you personally, since you are anonymous to me, but be sure I am ever so grateful for having had the chance to make this trip. It truly has been an once in a lifetime experience.

Though I can't thank most of the people who made this possible, there are some very special people I want and do need to thank. These people had made this trip extra special, because of the effort they have put into it. They were there all of the time, well almost all of the time, making sure I was okay. Two very special ladies that earned the title of "Guardian Angels": *Linda Swart* and *Lisa Stephens*. Ladies I humbly bow my head for the two of you. (and those who have seen both my Guardian Angels and me will realize how deep I have to bow then ☺)

Also all that have spend time with me on the road I would like to thank you all for the camaraderie you gave me. I need to thank the Rally hosts Dave and Cheryl Owen (Northern Exposure) and Bob Ward (Cog National) for the effort they gave to put on these fantastic events. I wish I could be there in the years to come as well.

About 20 years ago, I was still studying to become a teacher, my dream was to leave the Netherlands and live abroad in some place where I could have a teaching job. At that time I (already) thought the Netherlands were too small for me, but.... I met this very nice girl, she became my wife and later my ex. She really didn't want to go outside the country. She has relatives in Austria, only about 600 miles from here, who she hardly ever sees. She didn't want to have that kind of relation with her family. So we stayed in the Netherlands.

After making this trip all those feelings of 20 years ago came back to me. What I said during the trip is that I wanted to come back and that was very sincere, but also I meant it mostly as in on another vacation. Now with all these feelings coming back, I decided to think more about emigrating to the USA. The more I thought about it, the more positive sides I saw, but also the more negative sides I saw to this decision. After having thought about for over a month I decided to give it a try. I am now in the very first stage of it and maybe I will never make it all the way through. If not the USA will be my #1 country to spend another vacation, if I will make it through all the way, you'll be seeing a lot more of me in the future.

Marc "The Duckman" Kleefstra.
September 2005.

