

01 Sep 10

It's My Rig-My Definitions!

by Jim Richardson

Last night while I was playing on the computer, my wife asked what I had planned for Sunday. I told her I was getting



on my sidecar rig and going on a motorcycle "expedition" and wasn't sure when I would be home. Then I started thinking does a trip to the Moose Lodge across town for breakfast really meet the criteria of an "expedition"? I recall in history class many famous people took "expeditions" and that is why we know about them. According to my Websters Seventh Edition an "expedition" is a journey or excursion undertaken for a specific purpose". Presto, my trip is an expedition. If Columbus had said before his famous trips that he was "just going boat riding" and when asked where he went when he got home had said "I'm not sure" would we know about him today? How you say things really has an effect about how you are perceived. By saying I was going on an expedition I had a right to stay as long as I want, spend as much as I could afford, and tell a great story when I got home. I plan to take a lot more expeditions on my rig. Life is good in sidecar country. -Jim

A Great Bowl of Chili!



by Gary Shanafelt

I know, I know! I can hear the chorus now, "Shanafelt, you have truly lost it! A foo-foo coffee

house? I don't think so." Well, for a great bowl of chili saddle on up to the Tuscan's Coffee House, 6605 George Washington Hwy, Yorktown, VA 23692. They don't serve their delicious chili (in a bread *boule*) every day so you are going to have to call ahead (757-872-7702) to find out when it will be on the menu. If you are willing to grovel with the owners a bit and give them a couple days notice, they will make up a batch for you. Besides, it will be great to see a bike other than mine parked out front.

Tech Tip

by Gary Shanafelt

Unless you are at least as old as some of our founding club members you probably haven't used lye (sodium hydroxide) to clean the rust off old parts and tools. Unfortunately, a little over three years ago the tree-huggers forced our favorite rust remover off the shelves. I guess the fact that some meth-heads were using it to make crystal meth didn't help. I immediately moved my remaining can of Red Devil into the lock-box where I keep my important stuff but I have sense found a suitable replacement. Roebic Crystal Drain Cleaner will work just fine. (*Do I really have to tell you to wear eye protection?*) Dissolve about a half cup of Roebic in a gallon of water then immerse your rusty railroad spike in the solution for a couple or three days. Occasionally put on your wife's rubber gloves and scrub the rusty item with coarse steel wool or a wire brush and re-immerser. Rinse the now shiny item in water, dry completely, and coat with something protective. Dispose of the lye-water in an environmentally responsible manner. For instance, my neighbor is retired Navy, avid gardener, and an adamant redskins fan. He now has the Cowboy Star engraved in his front lawn.



FRESH HALIBUT (part three)

THE ALASKA TOUR, and the Run "Back Down"

by Dan Franken



Our choice to take a ferry from Juneau to Skagway was influenced by a husband and wife

that we'd met days earlier during the inward passage. Originally from the US mid-west, they had lived in Tok, Alaska for years. They insisted that setting out from Skagway (as opposed to Haines) offered the most scenic route up north into the mainland. (Their well-meaning recommendation overlooked the fact that Skagway is now booming only for its rugged night life, faux western store fronts, and little shops selling stuff - it's a tourist place.) Oh well, one good night at the Red Onion, a fitful rest at a hotel loaded with tour buses, and the next morning we are off - recharged and ready to ride again! There is a light drizzle...I'm thinking, for any future ferry trips, I will choose Haines from which to set ashore and head north to Alaska. I have a headache.

When one remarks on the magnificence of Alaska, it especially includes the northwest territories of Canada.

Wow! Words cannot describe the expanse and scope of natural beauty, waterways, forests, and mountain ranges. It's equally impossible to capture in any photo, as the overall context is too vast. So, seeing it is the best way, and that is what we set out to do from the best seat possible: atop our motors. Heading out of town, the road north of



Skagway gives you some immediate impressions; this is different! Different than any road one has experienced back home, rugged, vast, and ringing with the history - history of the incredible effort it took to simply conquer passage in such a rough and beautiful place. Our route takes us up highway 2, along a famous railroad 1800s during the Klondike Gold Rush. (The railroad has long stretches of nearly 4 degrees slope, very tight turns, and incredible wood structures supporting its crossings - one can only imagine what living here and working on this railroad must have been like).

About seventy-five miles north, and we come upon the Canadian customs screening checkpoint. We break out our passports. Very professional personnel doing the screening, a relaxed manner, but one soon senses - they are *good...*"where are you from...where are you going...how long will you be traveling in Canada...do you have any firearms in your possession?" (Same routine at each customs stop.) Whew, what a difference from the last trip Craig and I took to Canada, c.1970. Guess we now look too old to be any trouble.

Almost to signal that we are now in the Yukon territory, the landscape opens up to an incredible series of lakes, mountains, rivers and forests that are breathtaking in their beauty. We have finally



driven through the morning's routine rain storm, the sun is climbing, and it is getting warmer. We stop for a rest & warm up, some photos, and just some time to take it all in. Ahead north, lay Carcross, Tagish, and Whitehorse which will be our stop for fuel and food. Soon we experience what will be with us in the days ahead - summertime road construction. Frequent stops, some short, many longer. (I am not a civil

engineer, but the process appears as though they simply tear up the asphalt, re-gravel/rebuild the roadbeds, then recover it (or major sections of the roads), during three frenetic summer months.) Some cautions. Watch out for the huge trucks that you'll meet along the way - they spray a gravel storm as they pass. Steer towards your side of the road to give them berth (but not so far as to get into the really muddy stuff at 65mph)...go too slow and you'll have a monster truck filling up your rearview mirror...go too fast, and you are certain to "lose it" in a rut or dip in the road. Know how most "bump ahead" hazards are announced by signage on most of our stateside roads? Don't rely on these up here. My first encounter with a very large unannounced/unseen bump resulted in some flight time, and a quick lesson learned is to really scan and look out for road irregularities - both on gravel, and hard surfaced roads.

More travel stuff. While planning for this trip, we had read/heard that the road repair crews would organize traffic such that motorcycles would be positioned ahead of a stopped group of vehicles. This "convoy stacking" is supposed to allow good visibility for the cyclists, enhance safety, etc. Our experience was otherwise, and the policy varied from "everyone for themselves," to "cyclists last," to "cyclists first" - and it varied within province, and through Alaska as well. (One story, from a young lady wielding a STOP sign: "previously we had cycles go first, but there was an accident where a trucker ran over a cycle 'cause he couldn't see it in the dust...now we put cycles in back.") Where did we like to be during a convoy of one-way traffic? Way back, beyond the dust, rocks, and commotion - and able to control our speed as well. Also, most of us are accustomed to US stateside roads with steel guardrails, or brick/stone fences alongside the mountain curves. right? Not many guardrails up north. On many mountain curves, if you leave the road, you're going down - on what could be a long way.

Whitehorse is a big city, capital of the Yukon province, and according to a local resident, almost 85% of Yukon's population live in there. Large and modern in many respects, it is also

rugged and replete with characteristics of the greater northwest. It is the last large town before Alaska, still two days ride ahead. Lunch, warm up, then fuel the machines. (Incidentally, octane ratings available were all over the place. Some stations had several choices, many none. Frequently, the machines got fed 86 RON, and didn't whimper about it. Our mileage was good, and the fuel was mostly ethanol-free.) So now, for our first fill-up in the Yukon, as we endeavor to run our credit cards through the pump, we hear, "gentlemen, I'm sorry, but my computer is not connecting with the modem...you will only be able to pay cash," from the gas station clerk. "Oh, Ok" we say, and he gladly takes our greenbacks for Canadian dollars, at an exchange rate favorable to his bottom line. Our first encounter with fuel, credit, and card security problems. More on that later.

We are off, this afternoon's segment a westbound leg out of Whitehorse, on highway 1, headed for Haines Junction. (Trip note. At this point, one could also choose to stay on hwy 2, taking a more northerly route - also longer, arguably more scenic and rugged. The hwy 2 route takes you through Carmacks, Dawson City, a town called Chicken, and others, in what must be a great ride as well. Both routes will get one to Tok - a major nexus for further points in any Alaska trip. Perhaps route 2, next time.) We had Haines Junction and the Kluane Range in our sights, and so we headed west. Actually, at this point, I was thinking "just where will we camp tonight?" I really wanted to experience camping in a provincial park. Meanwhile, I think my riding buddy, Craig, was thinking "I wonder how long this knobby will last...?" After about 150 miles of beautiful riding along a river valley, we are approaching Haines Junction. Then about 10km east of town, we see a provincial park entrance sign, but it has another sign hung on it which said, "BEAR IN AREA." Crap! Beautiful park, lots of trailers/campers, etc, but only one tent. After looking, we find the ranger. After a bit of philosophical discussion as to the pros and cons of tenting when "they're only three year old grizzly cubs" in our midst, I pointedly asked the blond ranger whether or not *she* would stay here in a tent. With a perfect Fargo inflection, she



replied "oh, no," upon which Craig and I thanked

her for her help, and off we sped - glancing back for bears in the rear view mirror.

Haines Junction was perfect. Groceries, fuel, refreshments, and several good places to eat. A chance rendezvous with a UK couple (who rode a big KTM) and whom we'd met on the ferry, resulted in us all dining out. Our campground, a private camp right on the edge of town. To the lady at the front desk, I inquire, "do you have any problems with bears here?" She said, "sir, I have been working here for twenty-five years, and we never have any problems with bears. If any bears come around, we shoot them." (The public park vs. private business distinction could not have been more clear.)

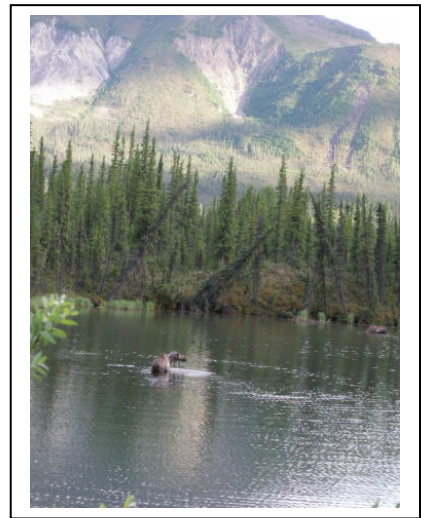
Off the next heading northwest, along the Kluane range - the Kluane Wilderness. Incredible.



Now we are into lands where it's an even longer distance between towns, fuel, and facilities, etc. Now the vastness of this place really grabs ones senses. After more than a hundred miles of decent roads, we hit construction zones - some, for a few miles, others up to perhaps fifty miles in length. The weather is good, for now. We make time, and soon we hit US Customs near Port Alcan...a late lunch, fuel, etc. The *machines* are really performing well. We are feeling the effects of rough road riding, but we are only several hours from Tok at this point. The next leg presents even more road construction than we bargained for, as it was nearly all under construction/rework. Since there are few roads in Alaska, we are now on a line of communication where nearly everyone is going from or to Alaska. Seen on this passage: Immense trucks, larger than any I'd ever seen...some with two and three trailers...RVs galore, all types of motorcycles, four wheel

drive pickups - ubiquitous, many outfitted with aux fuel tanks. Whenever I felt challenged operating the GS in the gravel and mud, I said thanks for not being on anything else. In truth, you could ride practically any machine of your choosing "up there," it's just how much you want to endure, and what safety margin you seek. We pull into Tok late that afternoon, find a private campground on the edge of town - busy, but a great spot, with good facilities. Groceries and essentials all within several miles. After a creative meal cooked on hot wood coals, we stay up reflecting on the day, the ride, and the environment we're savoring. A glass or two of wine later, I glance at my watch...it is still quite light, and it's 0230.

The preceding, somewhat lengthy summary of our first day into Alaska is typical of what our travels were like for the days ahead. We would go three-four



hundred miles each day, and stayed mostly at campgrounds, except for one night in Anchorage, and one night in a hotel in Homer, on the Kenai Peninsula. During the next week, we traveled to Fairbanks (hwy 2), then on to Anchorage via the Denali National Park Range, past Mt. McKinley (in the clouds, never seen, better go back to see it), then days later down the Kenai peninsula via route 1, through some incredible geography and scenery. Failing to find a good campground in Homer (the world's Halibut capital), we settled for a small but certainly overpriced hotel right across the street from Dugan's pub. That night was too much like Skagway, as I recall...the next morning as we

securing our gear on thebikes, I turned to



Craig, and said, " I am ready to head back." He said, "me too, let's head for Tok today, via highway 1 out of Anchorage." "Good, it's agreed," I said. 550 miles later, after traveling through what was probably the prettiest scenery of our entire trip thus far, we hit our favorite campground about 8 pm at Tok. (And from here on, we put the hammer down a bit, as we were headed *home*.)

We departed Tok that next day, midmorning, with good weather. By noon, we were in rain, hail, and on gravel highway. We motor, no matter the weather. Between Haines Junction and Whitehorse, it is so cold that my GS's normal 4-5 bar temp gauge reading stays on 3. Another observation: the GS hand guards do not protect against hail stones, whose trajectory is too vertical to deal with. I didn't write the miles down, but roughly recall: Tok to Whitehorse, YT, ~ 550; Whitehorse, YT, to Ft. Nelson, BC, ~625; Ft Nelson, BC, to Edmondton, AB, at least 650; and finally from Edmondton, AB, to Missoula for our last day riding together, at least 650 miles. (Gee, it was like years before, where we were on our 750 Hondas, it was 1970 all over again!) The run back down was tiring, exciting, and quite a hoot, with the weather improving all the way. We found the worst campground in the world at Ft Nelson, an experience I like to blame on Craig, since he picked the spot. Seriously, avoid Ft Nelson if at all possible - it's a roughneck place, whose population swells or contracts depending on the energy/business. Dirty, expensive, and not welcoming. It was in Ft Nelson where Craig had credit card fraud (excess charges - quickly detected by his bank, but we found out hundreds of miles later on down the road), and we both later experienced a similar hit job on our cards in Grand Prairie, AB. Never hand your card to a clerk, always get a receipt...too long of a story for here, suffice it to say there are many credit card schemes in operation out there.

About 09:30, and we arrive at a nice Best Western in Missoula, after a very long day, cold evening driving in



mountains, and dark, and deer dangerous. We have safely completed what is certainly an experience of a lifetime. The next morning, we visit the BMW shop - I am having a new Metzler installed on the GS1150's rear wheel. (Many days earlier, Craig had changed out his OEM knobbys back in Fairbanks). With a drive to Virginia still ahead, I decided not to push it with the older tire. After a coffee break, we part ways - he's headed for Lolo pass and his route back to Moscow, Idaho. I'm headed for Billings, where there is a campground I like. We part, saying, "see you next trip."

I arrive in Virginia five days later, with 13,000 additional miles on the venerable GS. (What a great machine.)

Reflections: What would I do next time (or not do):

- Would take the ferry, up or down, either way, again - it is worth it. Probably, go up via Canada, on the roads, ride ferry back down next time, go home on US roads.
- Spend more time in one place in Alaska or the northwest territories, get a "base camp" from which to make daily journeys. Go hiking.
- Take less clothes. Less is more applies.
- Skip a Juneau stay, merely change ferries there, and either board or exit the ferry at Haines.
- Take the time to take more photos...I passed up some great shots just to make miles.
- Don't stay in the town of Ft Nelson.
- Exchange some US for Canadian dollars, or buy Canadian travelers checks in advance.
- Stay in Anchorage a day longer, or make sure I see Mt McKinley, or both.

Hope this is useful for anyone planning such a trip.

Sincerely, Dan

