

British Columbia July 2006

This was my first major trip on my TW200, my first motorcycle, which I'd bought in April, 2006.

I went north to the border from Port Angeles via Port Townsend, ferry to Whidbey Island, Deception Pass, Bow, Edison, and east to Hiway 9, and thence north to the border at Sumas. From here I was following a bicycle route I'd taken years before, taking back roads that parallel the US border going east. But from Rosedale there was no alternative but to get on to Hiway 1. (Actually there was - cross the Fraser at Agaziz and take Hiway 9). This was the Friday of the Canada Day weekend and all of Vancouver was racing east with motorhomes, boats, and campers heading for the mountains and lakes. Hiway 1, the Trans-Canada, was packed with them along with 18-wheelers, all exceeding the speed limit and trying to get around the primary bottleneck, which was me. It was the most unpleasant freeway driving yet in my short motorcycle career.

After camping near Hope (got the very last campsite), I continued Saturday morning into Hope and north up the Fraser Canyon on a beautiful sunny morning. There was very little traffic - everyone must have gotten to where they wanted to be for the weekend. So I putted along at 45, pulling over onto the usually wide shoulder when needed for the occasional overtaking traffic. By mid-day I was in Boston Bar, where I crossed the river to take an unpaved road on up the river to Lytton on the opposite side from the highway.



Left: along the west side of the Fraser. Right: the point where the two railroads switch sides of the river above Boston Bar.

After one turn where I had to ask directions, the road became two grassy tracks, mainly a powerline maintenance road, and I saw no one. Then I came to a small stream crossing with no bridge. The flow was slight but the climb out was a bit steep. Unfortunately, I hadn't learned about the need to lean forward on climbs yet, and my front wheel decided to take a different route - up a steep bank at the edge of the road. My second lesson was about how little good the front brake does while rolling backward, but since my feet were busy looking for footing, that was all I had. In a flash I was back down in the stream, and the bike went down in it as I hopped off. Fortunately no harm done. Not much even got wet. I had to unload all of my gear in order to get the bike upright and ride it up to more level ground to reload.



The Lytton reaction ferry

Finally I came to the Lytton Ferry crossing, where I could go back to the east side of the Fraser to get back on the highway. These and five other ferries on the river are operated by the provincial department of transportation, are free, and take two cars or one truck at a time. They go back and forth more or less on demand during their posted hours of operation. They have no power, and are driven across the substantial current by cranking in cables to angle the two pontoons of the ferry across the current, and it moves across towed downstream from a pulley on a cable across the river. Consequently they're called reaction ferries.

I continued up the highway to Lilouet, where I gassed up and then climbed the highway to Pavilion. Now I was following another old bicycle route, remembering how the climb above the river had taken me all afternoon then, and how I'd stopped to make dinner along the BC Rail tracks, just as a down-bound freight came by, before hiding off in the sagebrush for the night. No so now - I made Pavilion in an hour, and took off on the gravel road that continues climbing over the mountain to Kelly Lake. This was the same road where on yet another bicycle trip, the woman who owned the B&B where I stayed in Kelly Lake in the morning ordered her hired hand to drive me to the top of the mountain. "I don't want Randy to have a heart attack."

Now I cruised up without raising a sweat, stopping to overlook the canyon and the rail tracks winding up below. In the cool of the forest at the summit I took a small spur off the road which led to an electronics site perched on a ridge top in a field of pine groves, grassy meadows, and lupine flowers. The sunset was spectacular.



In the morning I descended the grade where I had previously been spared from cardiac arrest, got back on the pavement and went into Clinton for breakfast and a tank of gas. Then back to Kelly Lake again to catch the gravel road continuing north along the east side of the Fraser.

This stayed in high country - meadows and pines, with huge granite peaks above to the east. I pulled off into a field for a break. Where I intended to stop, I put my left foot down, and found nothing. There was a dip. By the time I'd reached down far enough, I'd overbalanced the bike and, for the second time, down she went. Yet another lesson from the school of hard knocks.



The Big Bar ferry.

Unloading and recovering from that, I continued on to where the road descended to the Big Bar Ferry. This is another reaction ferry on the way to nowhere. The uniformed operator came out of his house to run me across, and said the only traffic today had been some other dual sport motorcycles. Once across, I started the steep dusty ascent that accounts for why so few vehicles use Big Bar. Some of the turns were so steep that you'd probably need 4WD to get up them, though I had no problem. With the temperature in the 90's at the bottom, I was concerned about the intense heat radiating off my engine, so I stopped several times during the several thousand foot gain to let it cool down.

At the top was a bench of shady ponderosas where I had lunch and took a nap. Here there was a choice. I could continue climbing toward China Head and Poison Mountain, which I really wanted to do, but didn't think I had enough gas. The second was the road going south to Lillouet along the west side of the Fraser canyon, another gravel and dirt road that itself was 90 kilometers, so I thought I'd better take it. It climbed, dipped, and winded, with lots of rough rocky sections that had me down in second gear or even first.



Along the Fraser going south toward Lillouet, with the river out of sight at the steep bottom of the canyon. The BC Rail grade climbing toward Kelly Lake is visible at far right across the river two-thirds of the way up. My previous night's campsite was on the ridge top above the railway.

Finally I came to a side spur in the early evening which led up into an old clearcut, and I camped with a nice view of the BC Rail trains climbing up the opposite side of the canyon. In the morning I continued to Lillouet, dropping down long switchbacks before reaching pavement again, at which point I had to switch to reserve for the last few miles to a gas station, so it was a good thing I didn't try for Poison Mountain.

After lunch in Lillouet I took the highway southwest toward Pemberton and Whistler on the way to catch the Vancouver Island ferry at Horseshoe Bay. This road winds through the mountains, with fairly light traffic. As I putted along, four KLR650 cycles blew by me at nearly twice my speed, also loaded with camping gear. I stopped in Whistler for coffee, and then continued to Horseshoe Bay, pursued by the stampede of Vancouver citizens returning to the city on Sunday afternoon.

With some relief I turned off to the Vancouver Island ferry, and rolled down to the motorcycle lane, right behind the four KLR's, who were surprised to see me after passing me crawling along. Maybe they'd stopped for a long lunch. They were part of BCDualSport, experienced backcountry riders, who had been camped and riding on their annual "Dead Zone" event north of Lillouet near where I'd gone through, and now they were returning home to various parts of Vancouver Island.

We rolled together on to the huge ferry and were herded into a dense pack of more than twenty bikes backed in near the bow on the upper deck. I backed in next to the towering KLR's, my TW a burro next to race horses. The ferry people wanted us to wedge wheel blocks under the engines to keep the bikes from falling over in the event of rough seas or a hard landing. The one I found didn't come close to filling the gap. "He needs a KLR block!" exclaimed my neighbor, and found a big one that did nicely.

They smirked at my squirry bike, and my admissions that I was such a motorcycle newby. "Have you changed a flat yet? You better learn!" Two hours later we docked in Nanaimo and, at the signal, all of us started up, including a couple of Harley's, making such an intimidating racket that I couldn't tell whether my little puffer was running. At another signal we all shot off the ferry, and went our respective ways home. For me, it was down Hiway 19 to Victoria, and on to the Coho ferry which took me home to Port Angeles.