



JACKSON HOLE

Big Ride 2014

By Mark 'Buck' King

PROLOG

It seems impossible to fathom that this Big Ride was the **fifteenth** time we have hit the road on an annual quest for adventure on two wheels. Time has a way of moving so quickly that it catches us unaware of just how many years have passed. In the early days we were proud of ourselves for riding 500 miles in one day. Now we are all accomplished Iron Butt members who don't bat an eye at a 1,000 mile day. Even though physically we have more aches and pains, we have learned to ride longer by learning how to make the ride easier. Bigger touring bikes with back rests, cruise control, and multiple foot and leg positions are a big part of increasing our endurance.

Clearly we cannot keep doing Big Rides forever. There will come an end to this, for some of us sooner than others. But that only makes each ride from this point forward even more precious. Most of us know that there are more miles behind us than lie before. So every mile counts more now. Now it is important to check the things off our bucket lists that we have always wanted to do. That's why this year we decided to do the Big Ride just a little differently.

Instead of a ten day ride with every night in a different place, this year we decided on a destination ride where we could stay for a few days and do things out of one location as a hub. The best place we could come up with was Jackson Hole, Wyoming. With the Tetons, Yellowstone, and the Beartooth Highway close by it was a natural choice. We also built in a day to go fly fishing on the Snake River. Fly fishing



was on that long list of things that we all wanted to do, but to this point in our lives had never made time for.

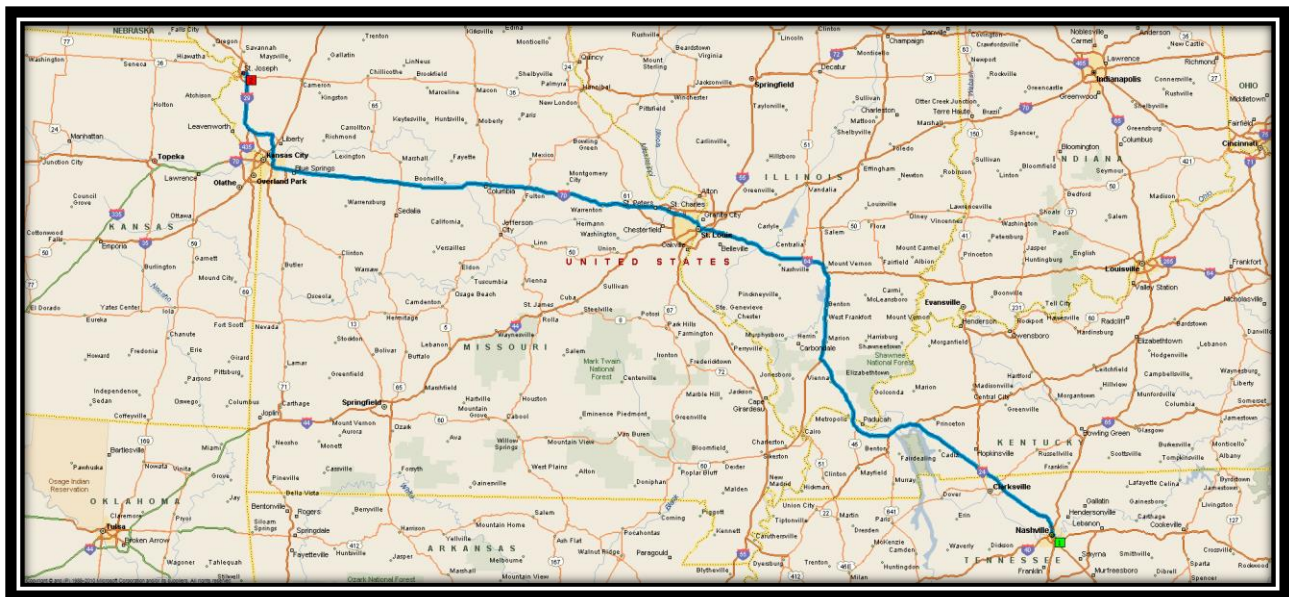
Initially we were planning on seven riders, but three succumbed to the pressures of life and responsibilities. Obviously, they need to reassess their priorities. So this year the Big Ride would be four riders: Buck, Stinky, Smokey, and Road Dog.

I hope you enjoy this account of another spectacular Big Ride.

FRIDAY, JULY 11, 2014

Nashville to St. Joseph, MO

614 Miles



At 8:00 am we were all scheduled to meet on the north side of Nashville where I-24 crosses Old Hickory Boulevard. I think we were all so anxious to get out of town that we were all there and ready to take off by 7:30.

When Stinky pulled into the parking lot he told how close he came to missing the ride. Seems the day before he totaled his truck in a wreck that did a lot of vehicle damage but luckily no one was seriously hurt. Although Stinky had some bruises where his airbag hit him, he was able to ride so off we went.

There would be no glamour today as we pounded the slab to St. Joe. We have been west this direction so many times we know all the bumps in the road by heart.

Going through St. Louis, there is a new loop that takes you from I-64 to I-70 in East St. Louis before you cross the river and pass the Gateway Arch. Now headed west you pass the Gateway Arch on your left



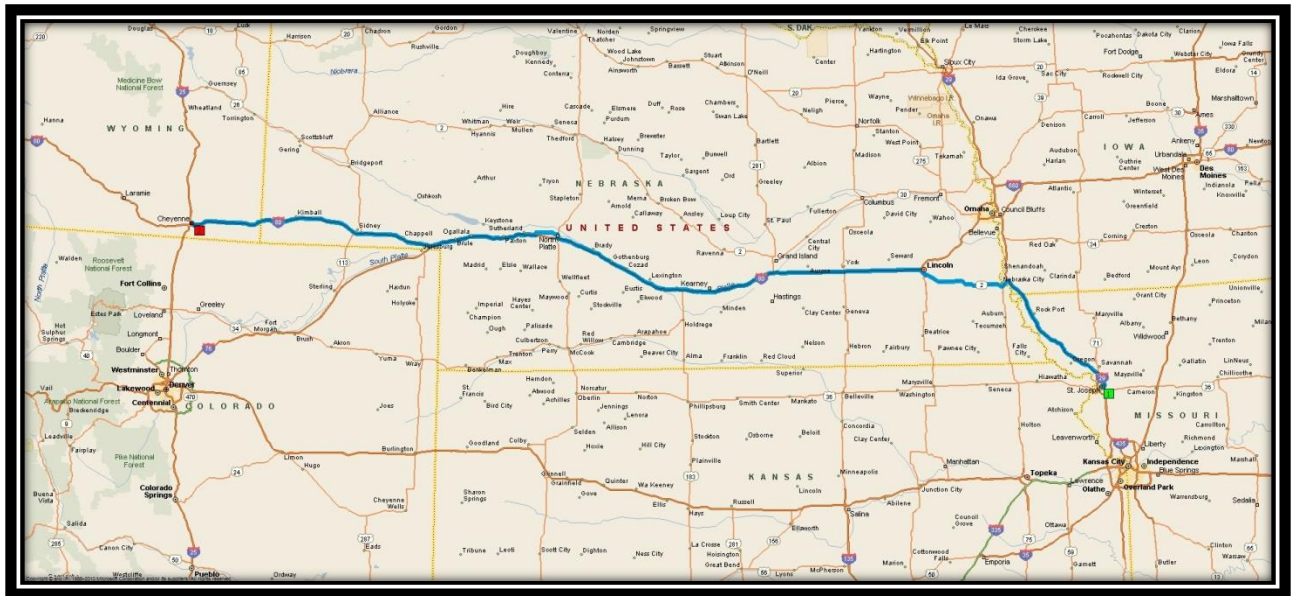
from much farther away. This seems to have helped the congestion we almost always encountered at the Arch.

In spite of hitting Kansas City near afternoon rush hour on Friday, we zipped around the long north loop to I-29 in smart fashion.

We spent the night at the Days Inn on Frederick Avenue in St. Joseph. Nothing fancy, but it is a comfortable place that we have stayed at many times in the past.

Bandana's BBQ is a short walk across the street and makes a perfect place to dine without getting out on the bikes again.

SATURDAY, JULY 12, 2014
St. Joseph, MO to Cheyenne, WY
589 Miles



Leaving St. Joseph on I-29 is a relatively straight 85 mile shot northwest to Nebraska City. While the interstate is straight the Missouri River twists and turns on your left often giving up glimpses of itself and its swollen banks due to the recent storms that hit the Midwest.

At Nebraska City we turned off of I-29 onto NE2 and rode the 55 or so miles right into Lincoln, NE. We took advantage of this to stop at the Highway Diner, one of our favorite road diners, for a pancake brunch.

Not far from the Highway Diner NE2 takes you to I-80 for the approximate 400 mile trek across Nebraska. Corn, corn, and more corn is about the only way to describe Nebraska. I'll never look at another box of Corn Flakes the same again.



Crossing the border into Wyoming is exciting because after two days of pounding the slab were now feeling like we had made it to the West.

In Cheyenne we checked into a Quality Inn, but the only room they had for us was a family suite. We learned that that meant there were two 'grown-up' beds and bunk beds in the room. A different experience for us, but what the heck; everyone had a place to sleep. Besides there was an Outback Steakhouse right across the parking lot.

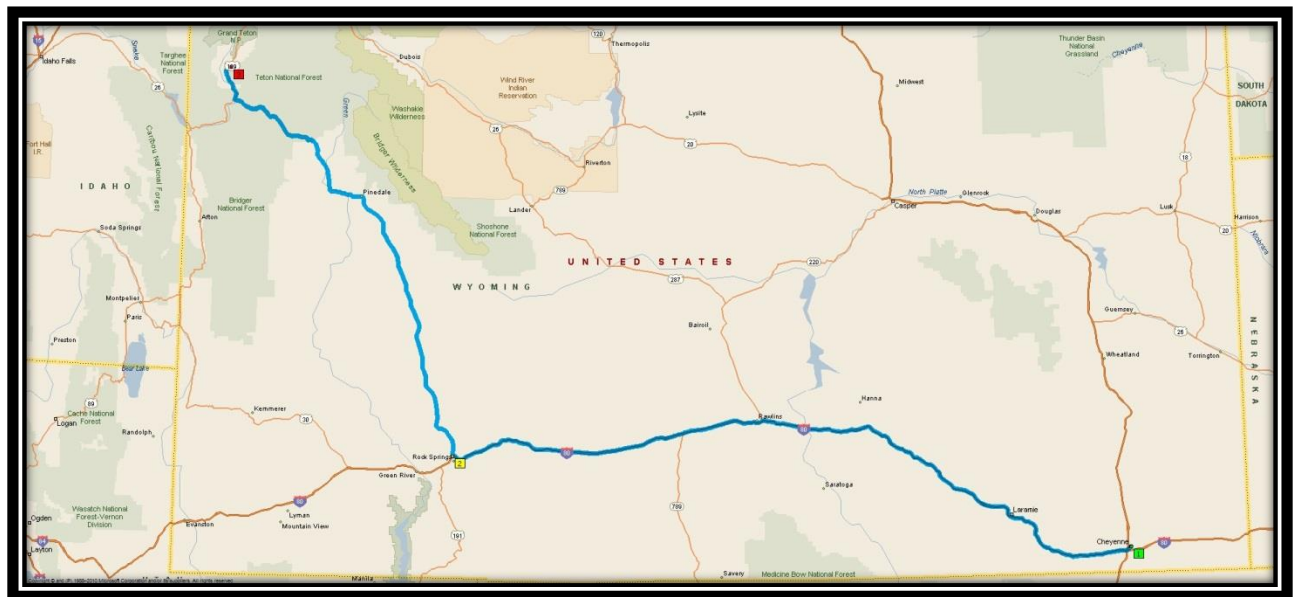
There was some wheeling and dealing about who got the big beds. Road Dog and I won that round and Stinky agreed to the top bunk which left Smokey to the bottom.

It was actually nice for all four of us to be in the same room for some conversation before bedtime. It seems like we all share some stereotypical relatives as we talked that night. Tired from the long day on the bikes we turned the lights off fairly early. I'm not sure if it really happened or if I dreamed it, but I was pretty sure sometime in the night Stinky fell out of the top bunk.

SUNDAY, JULY 13, 2014

Cheyenne, WY to Jackson Hole, WY

432 Miles



It was much cooler (in the 50s) as we started out of Cheyenne. We were all excited about the day even though it started with 250 more miles on the interstate before we turned north on US191 headed for Jackson Hole.

We had lunch at the Wrangler Diner in Pinedale, WY. Judging by the number of pickup trucks in the parking lot this was the best place in town to eat. Not far passed Pinedale US191 joins US189 and they take you the roughly 60 miles on into Jackson.



We checked into the Kudar Motel in Jackson. We have stayed there before and wouldn't stay anywhere else in Jackson. The 80 year old motel is on North Cache Street just a couple of blocks from the square with the Antler Arches in each corner. The Kudar Motel, then named Kudar's Log Cabin Lodge when the family opened it in 1934, now consists of 17 freestanding cabins, many of which were built in the 1930s, and a motel building with 14 rooms. Some of the furniture in the cabins was also made by hand in the 30s. Fifteen of the cabins are designated as historic by the Teton County Historic Preservation Board, as is the neon sign. The motel is said to be one of the first lodging businesses built to cater to an increasing number of automobile tourists in the 1930s and '40s. The property it is on was purchased by the family for \$1,500. That's right, fifteen hundred dollars; I didn't forget any zeroes.

The family has some aggressive plans to replace the motel with a three story 94,000 square foot hotel with 151 rooms, a courtyard and a pond. I guess that's what they call progress. It seems a shame to see so many places like this around the county meeting similar fates.



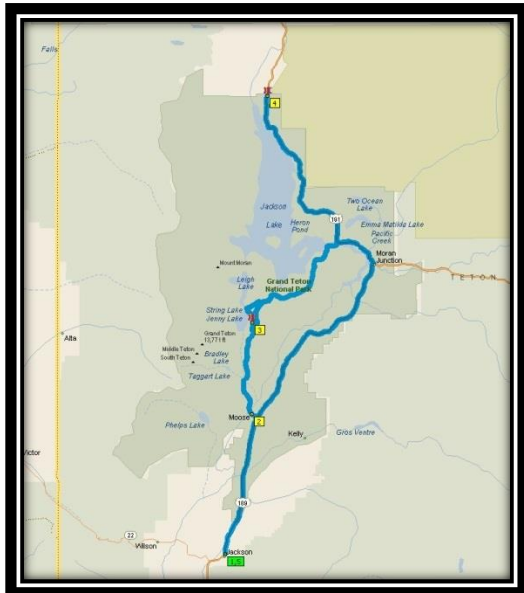
So far, it remains this quaint and charming little place; an anomaly in the middle of a bustling tourist town.



MONDAY, JULY 14, 2014

Jackson Hole

110 Mile Loop



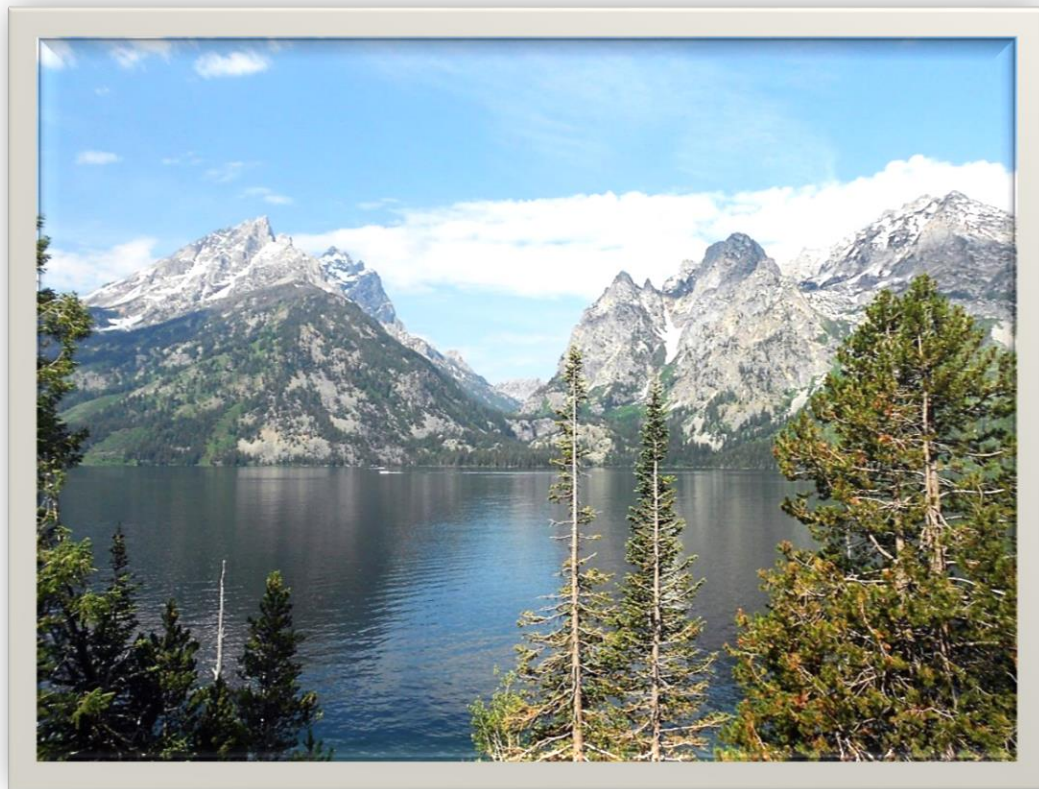
Now that we were in Jackson and settled into our little Kudar cabins, we were looking forward to a few days to kick back and enjoy some short rides and the fabulous scenery of the area.

After a hearty breakfast at Bubba's Restaurant we headed for the Tetons and Jenny Lake. Plans then included a run up to Old Faithful and lunch at the Old Faithful Inn before returning to Jackson.

We went into the Grand Tetons National Park at the Moose Visitors Center on the south end of the park. Several of us entered the park with Senior Passes; names will be withheld to protect the innocent.

Here are a few pictures of us as we enjoyed the Tetons:





After we left Jenny Lake and started for Yellowstone and Old Faithful we noticed the sky turning ominously dark in the direction we were heading. After a few miles of pondering the likelihood of entering a storm, we pulled over at a parking area along the park road for a discussion on the relative



merits of continuing or returning to Jackson. In the middle of our conversation lightning began to strike in the distance so we pointed the bikes back toward Jackson and made a run for the Kudar.

Turns out it was a good decision because in talking later that evening with some other bikers at the Kudar we learned that many were caught in torrential showers and some even experienced some hail.



We were back in Jackson for a late lunch at a pizza place. The sun was out here as we returned to town, but the dark clouds could still be seen in the distance to the north.

At our ages we have learned to appreciate the luxury of an afternoon nap and that certainly is a preferred alternative to riding through a hail storm!

The skies actually cleared that afternoon around dinner time so we decided to walk a few blocks to the Snake River

Brewing

Company for a

meal. As we enjoyed our

dinner the skies darkened again and rain began to fall. We quickly finished and paid our check and started dashing between sidewalk awnings to get back to the Kudar. Remarkably we were able to get within a block of the motel without getting soaked. That's when the hail started and we froze in our tracks under the last awning before a block long open section back to the Kudar. As we watched the hail we noticed we were across the street from the Bunnery, a downtown Jackson restaurant specializing in baked goods. So we decided to dash across the street and wait out the storm while eating pie. It's what any of us would do, right?



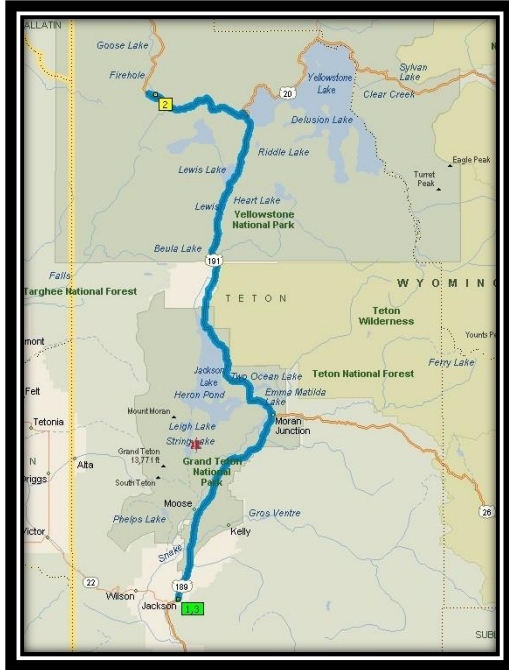
The storm passed and we made the last block back to our cabins. It is quite possible that some cigars were enjoyed that evening as we discussed the plans for the next day.



TUESDAY, JULY 15, 2014

Jackson Hole

200 Mile Loop



The plan for the day was to make another attempt at running up to the Old Faithful Inn for lunch.

We enjoyed the Bunnery so much the night before that we went back for breakfast to start the day.

We passed by most of the Grand Tetons as we headed straight for Yellowstone. The only thing that slowed us was a traffic jam on US89 as a herd of buffalo crossed the road. Not an unusual event here.

It is about a hundred miles to Old Faithful from Jackson. We made it there a little after 11. They have changed the traffic patterns around the Inn since we were here two years ago and it caught us by surprise and was a little confusing as we tried to find parking close to the Inn.

As we arrived we could see that an eruption was taking place as we parked so we decided to go on in and have

lunch then catch the next eruption in about 90 minutes. Old Faithful has been going off about every 90 minutes since it was first observed in 1870. The time between eruptions can vary from 35 to 120 minutes apart and the rangers there can predict it pretty well and post the expected time of the next eruption in the lobby of the Inn.

We were expecting an eruption about 1:00 but it was actually about 15 minutes later than projected. As always it was worth the wait to see the steam and hot water shoot about a hundred feet into the air.



As we returned to the bikes clouds had begun to form with the expectation of afternoon thunderstorms which had been the pattern the last few days. As we headed back to Jackson we had a few rain drops come down but nothing that required us to stop and put on rain gear.

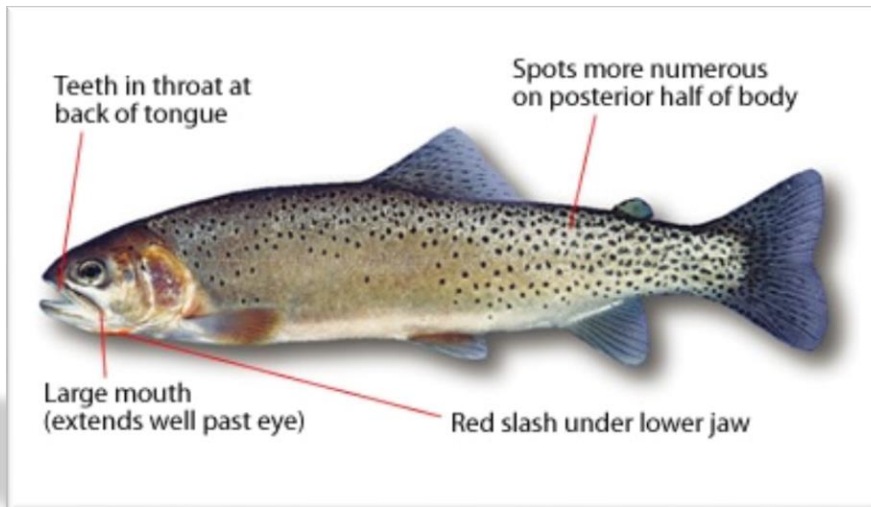


That evening we went to the Million Dollar Cowboy Bar Steakhouse which is downstairs from the bar. Man, they know how to do steaks, but bring your wallet because the steaks are pricey. I guess that goes with the Million Dollar name.

A good cigar after a big steak helps the digestion; doesn't it?



WEDNESDAY, JULY 16, 2014
Jackson Hole
Fly Fishing Day



We were pretty excited about trying our hands at fly fishing today. Our guides were picking us up at the Kudar at 7:30 and it was pretty chilly that morning, somewhere in the mid 40s.

Since there were four of us we had two guides and two boats. We had booked a half day trip.

The guides picked us up with the boats in tow and we

headed for the Snake River. Primarily we would be fishing for Cutthroat Trout, but as our guide said we would catch anything that was biting. This was a catch and release trip down the Snake River.



With the exception of Smokey none of us had ever fly fished before. And Smokey had only had a small bit of experience with his brother-in-law, Robert. But our guides were very good in giving us some instruction especially tailored for beginners.

Ron and I both caught five fish, Smokey caught two and Road Dog had a lot of fun. The experience was great and at least a couple of us were left wanting more of this. We had to remind Stinky this was catch and release because, as you can see in the picture, he just about swallowed one of his whole.



After fishing the guides took us back to the Kudar and we went back to the Million Dollar Cowboy Bar for a burger at the Bar's Grill for lunch. The grill is a much more moderately priced venue than is the steakhouse below the bar.

You know what they say, "Reality Bites." We had to wash clothes today so we wouldn't stink quite as bad the rest of the trip. So an afternoon of napping, washing, napping and more washing was the pattern we settled into.



Since it was our last evening for dinner in Jackson we wanted to do something different and memorable for dinner. We opted for a trip to Nani's Ristorante & Bar, an Italian eatery a couple of blocks from most of the tourist traffic.

In my opinion this was the best meal we had during our stay in Jackson. The food was delicious and our server, Sarah, was great. Because it was off the beaten tourist track, it wasn't crowded and many of the customers there looked like locals to us. There is just something about Italian food that makes you feel comfortable and at home. If you are ever in Jackson Hole we recommend this restaurant highly.

It was a beautiful evening and we enjoyed sitting outside the cabins at the Kudar and talking about the day. Quite a few other bikers were at the Kudar and the evenings usually included catching up with them and what they had been doing that day. To our left were some folks from Minnesota who rode Goldwings and there were some Harley riders to the right from Mississippi. Across the way we talked to a couple from Quebec City, Canada who had ridden down on a BMW K1600GTL.

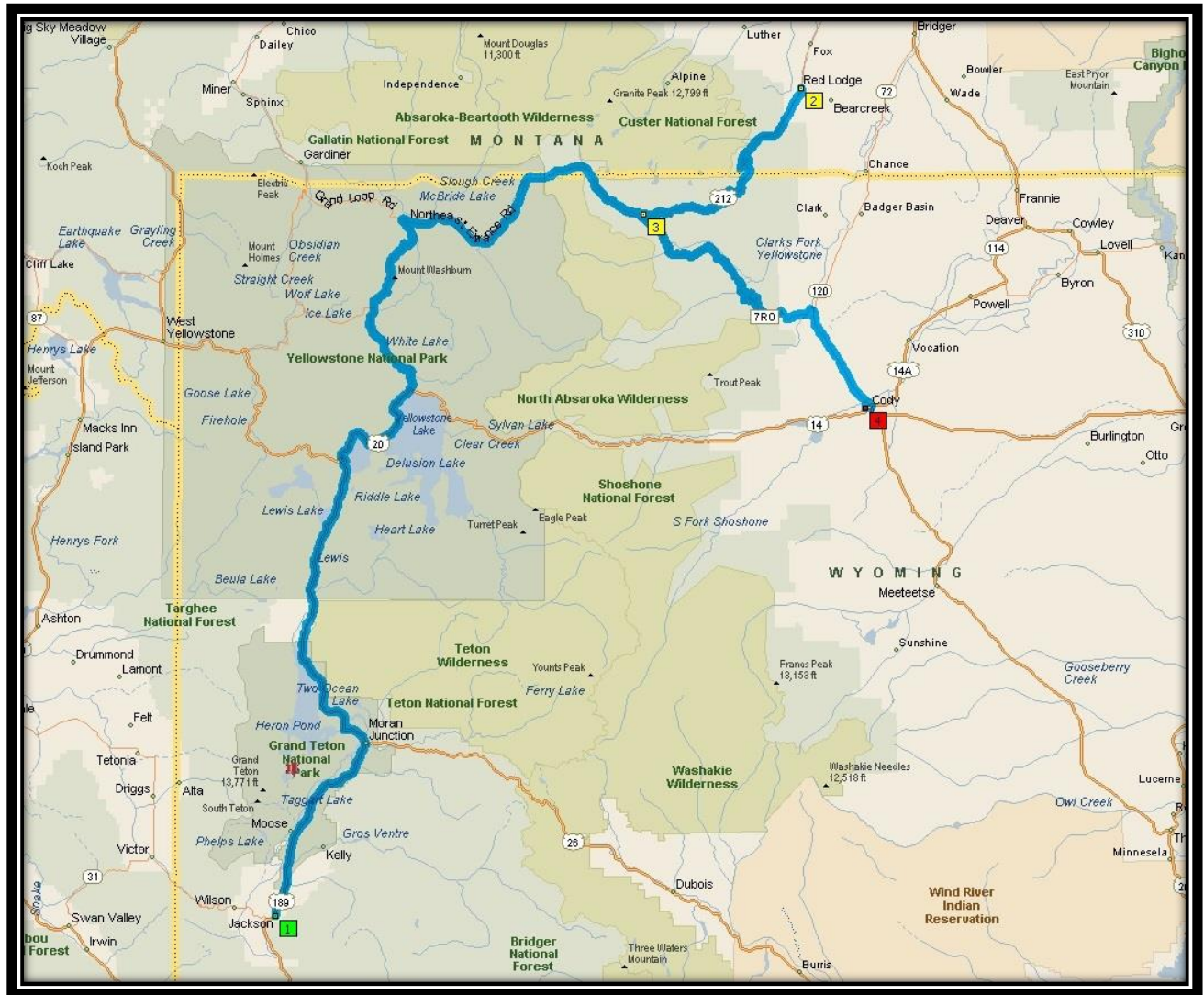
Jackson is very much an international vacation destination. There were many, many Japanese tourists who don't know how to drive very well. I was almost run down by one of them who was driving a passenger van.



THURSDAY, JULY 17, 2014

Jackson Hole, WY to Cody, WY via Red Lodge, MT

345 Miles



We had our last breakfast in Jackson at the Bunnery again.
Yes, it was that good.

We rode north on US26 again passing the Tetons on our left.
It is always kind of sad passing them knowing this will be your
last glimpse of them for a while. I had to snap a few pictures
like this one from the seat of the Wing as we rode. What a
beautiful place!



We rode north through Yellowstone on the eastern side of the park taking in the majestic scenery as we rode by various thermal features, Lake Yellowstone, and the Grand Canyon of Yellowstone only to mention a few. As we headed to the northeast gate of the park, we stopped near Roosevelt Lodge for some gas at one of the stations in the park. No surprise but this was the highest price gas we encountered on the whole trip at an even \$4.00 per gallon.



From there we continued on the park road about 30 miles to the park exit onto US212 in the little settlement of Silver Gate. For much of this thirty miles you ride along the Yellowstone River. It was hard not to have visions of ourselves fly fishing here after our experience the day before on the Snake.

Heading to
Silver Gate
much open

you pass
ground where large herds of buffalo can be seen. It's a good idea to keep a safe distance from buffalo as they tend to be very grumpy animals. Every year in Yellowstone one or two tourists get too close and are killed. Forgive me, but I was hoping the Japanese guy driving that van would want a good close up picture of one of the beasts Lakota and Dakota tribes call Tanka.



US212 is the Beartooth Highway and we were headed to Red Lodge passing over Beartooth Pass on the way. Just down from Silver Gate by only 4 or 5 miles, US212 also passes through Cooke City. Cooke City is a one street town that has some restaurants and souvenir shops for tourists heading into and out of Yellowstone.



Less than 15 miles east of Cooke City you reach the intersection of US212 and the Chief Joseph Highway that heads to Cody. Traveling this direction we would pass the intersection and head up Beartooth Pass to Red Lodge Montana where we had lunch at the Red Lodge Café and gassed the bikes up and headed over the pass again the other direction back towards Cody.

I have often said that the 100 miles from Cody, WY to Red Lodge, MT are the most scenic consecutive hundred miles anywhere in the country. Having done this hundred miles several times, I am more convinced than ever that this is true. I think most of the Big Ride crew is with me on this.



US212 features steep zigzags and switchbacks as you cross the Montana-Wyoming border and go over the 10,947' high Beartooth Pass. We stopped for a few pictures at the top of Beartooth Pass. Stinky struck his trademark pose as he looked down on the world below.



As you can see in the picture some afternoon thunder storms were blowing in. By the time we got back down to the intersection with the Chief Joseph Highway we had already stopped to put rain gear on.

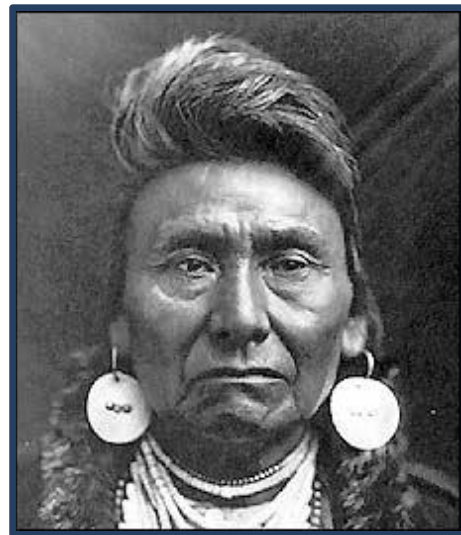


The rain dampened our enjoyment of the CJH as those big sweepers are super slippery when wet. To add to the problem we got pelted with some light hail along the route. It wouldn't have been bad except I didn't put gloves on when we put the rain gear on. The hail even though small really stings bare skin.

Even with all this the road is one of the best motorcycle roads in the country. The 46 miles of the Chief Joseph Highway pass through Dead Indian Pass then wind through the Absaroka Mountains and through the Shoshone National Forest.

The following clip is from a web site telling the Chief Joseph story:

The Chief Joseph Scenic Byway is named after the Native American chief of the Nez Perce Tribe. Following the Battle of the Big Hole in Idaho in 1877, Chief Joseph fled east through Yellowstone. He and 1,000 members of his tribe ran from the US Cavalry, who were trying to force the tribe onto a reservation so that white ranchers could have their lands. While crossing Yellowstone, the Nez Perce briefly captured several tourists before going north up the Clarks Fork River. The Nez Perce were trying to flee to Canada (an 1,800 mile trek), but surrendered after the six-day Battle of the Bear Paw



in northeastern Montana. The tribe was stopped only 30 miles from their destination, the Canadian border.

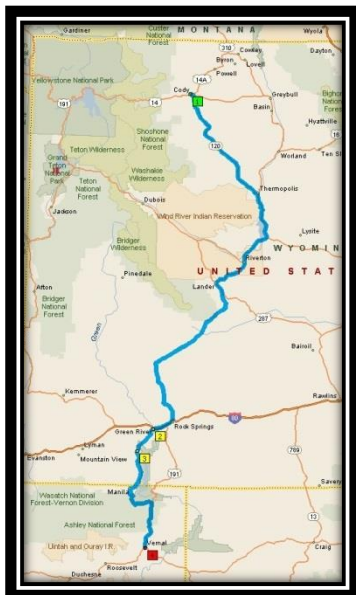
In his speech of surrender, Chief Joseph expressed dignity and defeat with his famous words, 'Hear me, my chiefs, I am tired; my heart is sick and sad. From where the sun now stands, I will fight no more forever.' The Nez Perce tribe was forced onto reservations in Oklahoma and Washington despite promises to allow them back on their lands. Yellowstone's Nez Perce Creek is named for this valiant attempt at freedom.

In Cody we went straight to the motel to escape what looked to be another round of the storms blowing through. We stayed at the Sunrise Motor Inn which was average in our book. We have always wanted to stay at the historic Irma Hotel in town that was named after one of Buffalo Bill's daughters. Unfortunately we could not get a room there. Those rooms are as hard to get as the rooms in the Old Faithful Inn at Yellowstone.

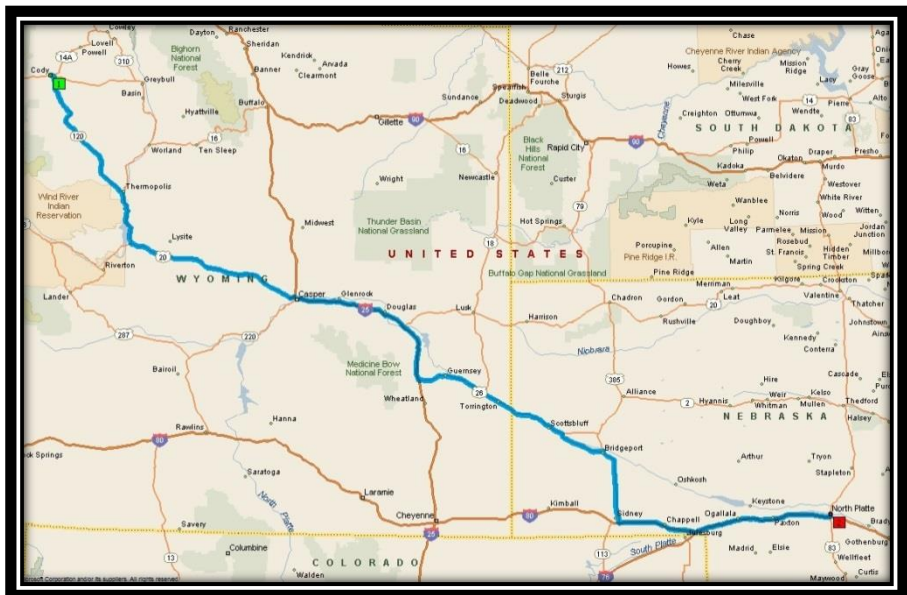


We had dinner at a home town restaurant just a block down the street. The Sunset Restaurant's best feature was proximity.

FRIDAY, JULY 18, 2014
Cody, WY to Vernal, UT
400 Miles



Cody to North Platte, NE
585 Miles



We ate breakfast at Granny's in Cody. It has become a tradition for us to have breakfast there every time we're in Cody. It was as good as usual and our waitress could have been Granny herself.

We would all ride out together this morning headed southeast on WY120 but in Shoshone, a couple of hours down the road we would part ways.



Stinky and Road Dog were headed straight home to all those 'responsibilities' but Smokey and I were on the long road home through Monument Valley, UT.

In Shoshone we stopped at a gas station for gas, a break, and to say cheerio. Stinky and Road Dog would continue on US20 to Casper and pick up I-25 headed south. Smokey and I headed south on US26 toward Riverton.

Smokey's Harley had a little issue, just a stripped out shifter, but we decided to look up the dealership in Green River down on I-80 so we continued there and checked the bike in for service. Smokey and I had lunch while the guys put a new shifter on and checked out some other things for him. The folks there were super nice and made us feel welcome while we waited. I wish I could find a Honda shop that would make me feel that welcome and appreciated as a customer.

From Green River we rode through the Flaming Gorge National Recreation Area which is centered around a large artificial lake formed by Flaming Gorge Dam. The Green River originates near the continental divide in the Wind River Mountains of central Wyoming. From Flaming Gorge the Green River joins the Colorado and flows through five more National Parks and Forests before its waters reach the Gulf of California. The most scenic and most twisty part of the road is in Utah where the lake lies beneath steep red cliffs of Weber sandstone which prompted the famous one armed explorer John Wesley Powell to name the canyon Flaming Gorge in 1869.

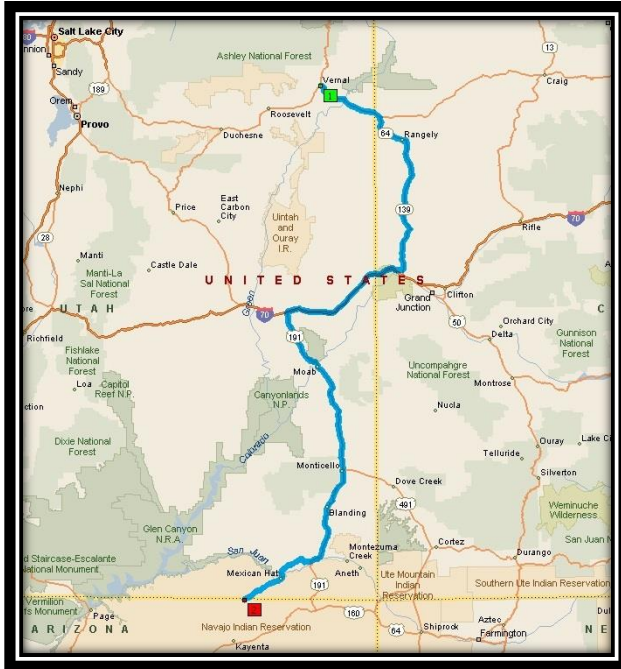
We had never been through here before but it was very scenic and we enjoyed the 100 mile ride down its western side and around the southern end to Vernal, UT.

Even with the stop at the Harley dealership Smokey and I were in Vernal, UT in plenty of time to check into Antlers Best Western Motel and enjoy a swim and the hot tub before dinner. This was a great motel where our room was unusually large and outside of the Kudar it was the best room of the whole trip.



Meanwhile Stinky and Road Dog made it to North Platte, NE after riding 585 miles.

SATURDAY, JULY 19, 2014 (Buck & Smokey)
Vernal, UT to Monument Valley, UT
363 Miles



From Vernal, UT Smokey and I rode southeast on US40 across the Colorado border to Dinosaur, CO.

This really is dinosaur country with Dinosaur National Monument near Vernal and active digs going on in the area. At our ages I guess you could say that Smokey and I were in our natural habitat.

From Dinosaur we went due south on CO139 until it took us to I-70 just west of Grand Junction.

Then we took I-70 west to US191 and headed south through Moab and by Arches National Park all the way down to Blanding, UT. South of there we took US163 on to Monument Valley through Mexican Hat. It was 102° there.

Monument Valley is a beautiful place and the views there have been made iconic of the west by Hollywood. Famous film critic Keith Phipps once said, "its five square miles have defined what decades of moviegoers think of when they imagine the American West."

Over a dozen movies, and not all of them westerns, have been filmed at least in part on location here. Here are the most notable:

1. Stagecoach (1939)
2. My Darling Clementine (1946)
3. She Wore a Yellow Ribbon (1949)
4. The Searchers (1956)
5. How the West Was Won (1962)
6. Easy Rider (1968)
7. 2001: A Space Odyssey (1968)
8. The Eiger Sanction (1975)
9. National Lampoon's Vacation (1983)
10. Back to the Future Part III (1990)
11. Forrest Gump (1994)
12. The Lone Ranger (2013)

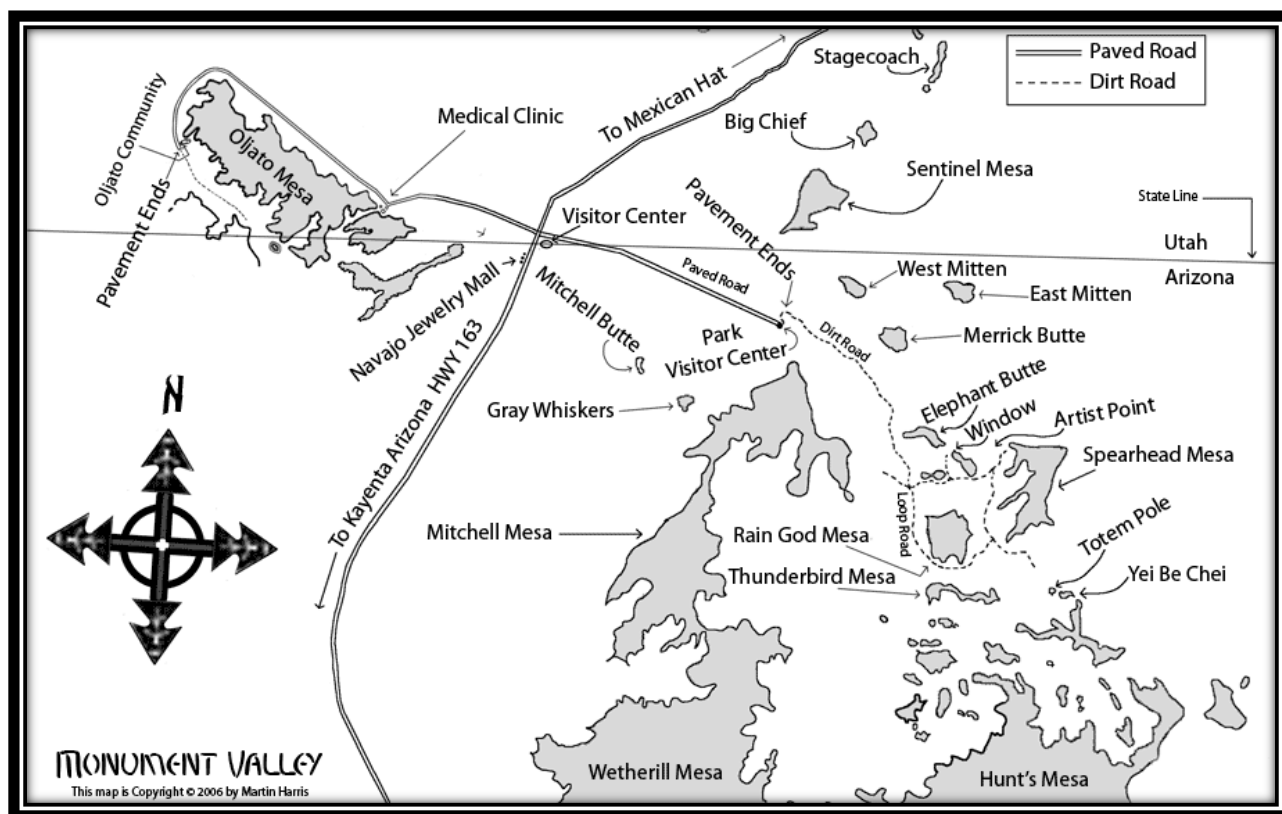


Monument Valley's Hollywood connection began in 1938 when sheep rancher Harry Goulding and his wife, Mike, were about to go broke due to drought and the depression. In desperation, Harry and Mike got in their car and drove to Hollywood, CA. They were packing a collection of photographs of Monument Valley taken by their friend and professional photographer, Josef Muench.

As the story goes, Harry walked into the office of John Ford and threatened to sleep on the floor there until Mr. Ford saw him. As security was summoned, the location manager for Ford's new movie "Stagecoach" happened to walk through the office. "Where exactly is this?" he asked, noticing the photos Harry had brought. The next thing Harry Goulding knew, he was making his pitch to Mr. Ford.

Within weeks, the entire cast and crew of "Stagecoach," more than 100 people, found themselves living in a tent city outside the Gouldings' front door in Monument Valley. Ford stayed in the Gouldings' spare room. John Wayne, the film's star, slept in a tent. "Stagecoach" was released in 1939 and became a popular hit movie which made John Wayne and Monument Valley cinema superstars.

Many of the monuments here were named by the early settlers of Monument Valley. They based these descriptive names what they imagined the shapes looked like. Other monuments were named by the Navajo people who related their names to the spiritual meanings they believed about each of the mesas, buttes and spires of the rock structures.



The mostly unpaved scenic Valley Drive is marked well identifying all the monuments and scenes along its route. These descriptions and pictures came from a tourism web site.

The Mittens and Merrick Butte

The initial descent from the visitor center includes the roughest section of the whole road, where it traverses a steep, rocky hillside via a series of switchbacks, but this difficult part is quite short and the road soon levels out, then passes by three of the most famous Monument Valley formations, all on the east side - West Mitten Butte (which may be seen close up via the 3.2 mile Wildcat Trail), Merrick Butte and East Mitten Butte. On the right side of the road, the flat land is bordered by the eastern face of Mitchell Mesa, rising 1,000 feet above. A side track forks north near Merrick Butte, but like all back roads in the park this may only be traveled as part of a Navajo guided tour.



West Mitten Butte

Elephant Butte

The Valley Drive takes a sharp bend to the right as it approaches an area of deep red-colored badlands beneath the end of Elephant Butte, which has a high, sheer-sided block of sandstone on one side and a narrow, tapering ridge on the other. The road surface becomes quite bumpy during a short climb around the west edge of the ridge but improves thereafter. The butte does not look very much like an elephant, although the resemblance is said to improve during the afternoon, as shadows lengthen.



Elephant Butte

Three Sisters

Viewpoint number three is on the west side of the road, opposite the edge of Elephant Butte. The Three Sisters are a group of thin pinnacles, eroded remnants of a narrow ridge extending southwards from one corner of Mitchell Mesa - together with adjoining Wetherill Mesa these two flat-topped hills shield this part of Monument Valley from US 163 further west. There are several similar groups of spires elsewhere in the valley including Castle Rock, and Bear and Rabbit, a few miles north near Monument Pass. A little way south of the viewpoint, the Valley Drive arrives at a cross-roads; right is a spur road to John Ford's Point, while the main route leads straight ahead, and becomes one-way.



Three Sisters

John Ford's Point

Film director John Ford used Monument Valley as a location for many Westerns between 1939 (Stagecoach) and 1960, and one site he featured often is now known as John Ford's Point - a promontory at the edge of a plateau overlooking a large area of uneven, undulating desert land around the first few miles of the Valley Drive, with several isolated peaks beyond. The main summits in view are Sentinel Mesa, West Mitten Butte, Big Indian, Merrick Butte and the Castle Rock-Stagecoach group, plus Three Sisters/Mitchell Mesa to the west and Elephant Mesa to the east. Along



John Ford's Point



with Artist's Point, this is the best overlook in the park and has a suitably large parking area to accommodate the many tour buses that stop here. A permanent Navajo jewelry store is located nearby, and visitors can recreate the iconic image of a lone rider on a horse standing at the edge of the viewpoint for just \$2 per person - paid to the owner of one of the horses stationed here most of the day just for this purpose.

Camel Butte

The fifth stop is by the crossroads - a view of Camel Butte, another thin, narrow sandstone peak but not one particularly interesting to look at. The road is now at its highest point, and next begins a gradual descent as the Valley Drive heads further south, running along the edge of a wide empty valley known as Tse Biyi. Several lesser tracks cross this sandy expanse but again these are not open to the general public.



Camel Butte

The Hub

The next junction is reached 1.3 miles from the crossroads, where the main route bears east and enters a more confined valley between Rain God Mesa and Thunderbird Mesa. The other track leads to places in the south of the tribal park including Saddle Rock, Submarine Rock, Totem Pole, several sandstone arches, Anasazi dwellings and petroglyphs, though this section may only be visited on an escorted tour. A little way southwest of the junction, The Hub is a single, solitary spire, 150 feet high, with a cluster of Navajo dwellings at its base. There are no rocks beyond this for about 4 miles, as far as Hunts Mesa which forms the southern boundary of Monument Valley.



Rain God Mesa

Totem Pole and Yei Bi Chei

The one-way loop road continues close to Rain God Mesa through increasingly sandy ground; large dunes rise up to the south, in front of the larger Thunderbird Mesa, and a shallow wash (Sand Spring, the main water source in the area) runs alongside. At the edge of the sands is another isolated group of spires (Yei Bi Chei) next to which stands one of the most well-known peaks in the valley. Totem Pole is a tall, red sandstone column, 450 feet high but only 40 foot across, slightly detached from its neighbors, and pointing skywards against a backdrop of wide but more distant cliffs of the Tse Biyi Yazzie and Hunts Mesa formations. The pinnacles are quite far from the viewpoint (one mile) so not easy to photograph in detail. A closer view is possible from other tracks further south, which form part of the extended guided tour across the southern half of the park.



Yei Bi Chei and Totem Pole

Totem Pole and Sand Spring

The next pull-out is officially a viewpoint of Sand Spring and the nearby red-orange dunes but it also gives a better perspective of Totem Pole and Yei Bi Chei, since the overlook is a little closer to these formations than stop number 7. The parking area is along a side track that branches off at



Totem Pole and Sand Spring



the south end of Spearhead Mesa, a route that continues across a creekbed (Gypsum Wash) and on to the southern section of the park, off-limits to private vehicles. Spearhead is a multi-pointed mesa that borders the main road for a mile northwards, as far as Artist's Point. The surface of this section is often partly covered by windblown sand that may on occasions be deep enough to cause problems for some vehicles.

Artist's Point

Another short spur forks north and climbs gradually to the edge of a plateau, where the ground falls away quite steeply and ahead stretch many miles of flat land punctuated by the familiar peaks of West Mitten Butte, Merrick Butte and East Mitten Butte, plus the more distant pinnacles around Monument Pass. This is Artist's Point, perhaps the second best overlook along the drive (after John Ford's Point), but one rather less visited and so more peaceful. The edge of Spearhead Mesa towers quite high above to the east, and to the west are the smaller spans of Cly Butte and Elephant Butte (see QTVR).



View from Artist's Point

North Window

The penultimate stop along the Valley Drive is at North Window - a gap between the edges of Elephant Butte and Cly Butte which frames East Mitten Butte, 3 miles to the north. The parking area is just off the main road, from where visitors may walk (not drive) along a 1/3 mile track that leads closer to the two buttes for even better views. The Mitten looks different from this angle as the distinctive spire on its north side is not in view. North Window is one of the most visited stops so the viewpoint can get rather crowded.



Horsemen, North Window

The Thumb

The last recognized overlook along the Valley Drive is next to The Thumb, a rounded pinnacle at the eastern tip of Camel Butte, close to the parking area for North Window. Not far beyond, the Valley Drive arrives back at the crossroads near John Ford's Point, from where the visitor center is 3.5 miles north.



The Thumb

Smokey and I spent the night at Goulding's Lodge where much of what I have recorded here was learned in the free museum on the property. They also have a restaurant that has a fantastic view of the valley.

The sun sets behind Goulding's and limited the scenic view of sunset. But we knew that that meant our view of the sunrise the next morning would be worth getting up to see. So we set an alarm and went to bed early anticipating what we would see the next morning.

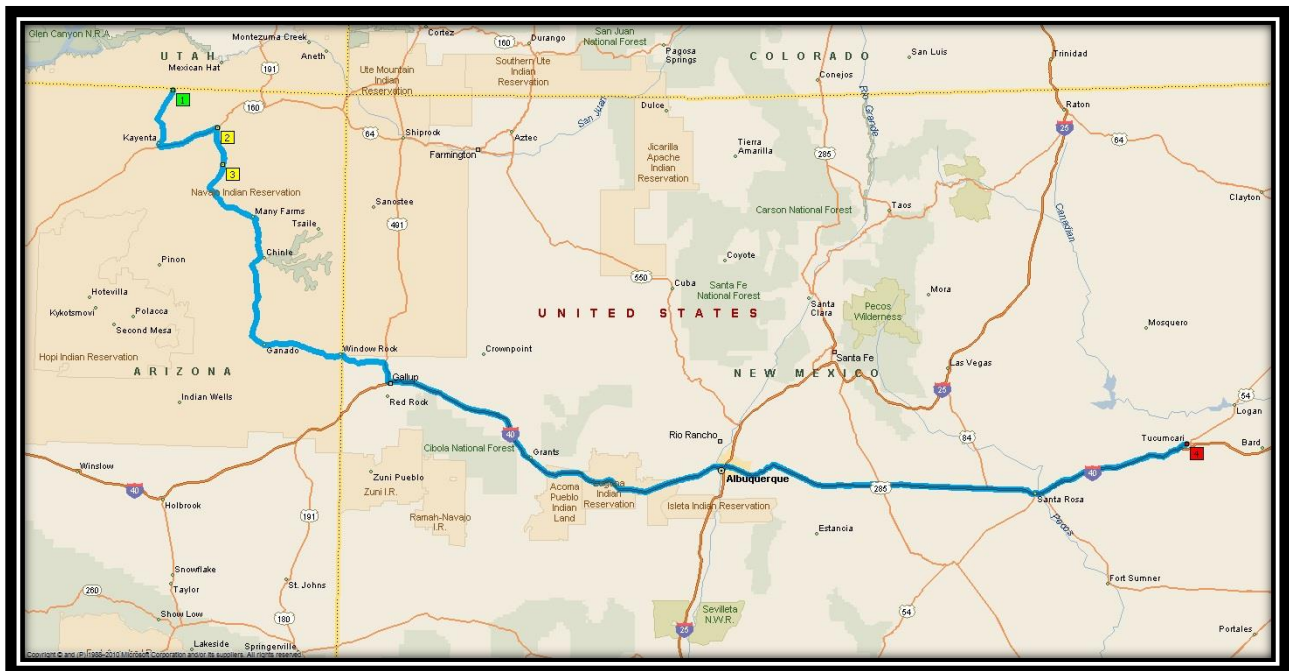
Meanwhile, Stinky and Road Dog had made it all the way to Columbia, MO and were poised for a short leg into Nashville and their return to the real world on Sunday.



North Platte, NE to Columbia, MO (Stinky & Road Dog)
547 Miles



SUNDAY, JULY 20, 2014
Monument Valley, UT to Tucumcari, NM (Buck & Smokey)
507 Miles



The sunrise Sunday morning was nothing less than spectacular. Our church friends back home have often asked us if we ever visit a local church while we are on a Big Ride. The answer is YES, but not the kind of 'inside' church that they mean. This is where Smokey and I worshipped on this Sunday morning.....



After church, Smokey and I headed out of Monument Valley on US163 headed south. Crossing the border into Arizona in only a couple of miles as our route took us through Many Farms, by Canyon de Chelly National Monument, through Ganado and Window Rock as we crossed into New Mexico. It seemed as though all of a sudden we began to see something in the scenery that we had not seen for several days: trees! NM264 took us to I-40 in Gallup. From here the I-40 slab would be our route all the way home.

From Gallup to Albuquerque is about 140 miles which put us there around lunch time. I wanted to shop a little in Old Town for some silver jewelry so we stopped there for lunch.



It was a good stop to cool down before the hot ride on into Tucumcari another 175 miles east on I-40.

We didn't see triple digit temps like we did in Mexican Hat, but we got pretty darn close. It was 99° in Tucumcari when we checked into the Quality Inn. Of course, the first thing we did was put our swimsuits on and dive into the pool.

After cooling off we went to dinner. Our first choice in Tucumcari is always Del's Restaurant but this was Sunday and Del's is closed on Sunday. The Big Ride crew is old enough to remember when most everything was closed on Sundays.

We opted for Rockin' Y's Roadhouse just down Tucumcari Boulevard (Old Route 66) from our motel. The meal and service were great and while we enjoyed it, it just wasn't Del's.

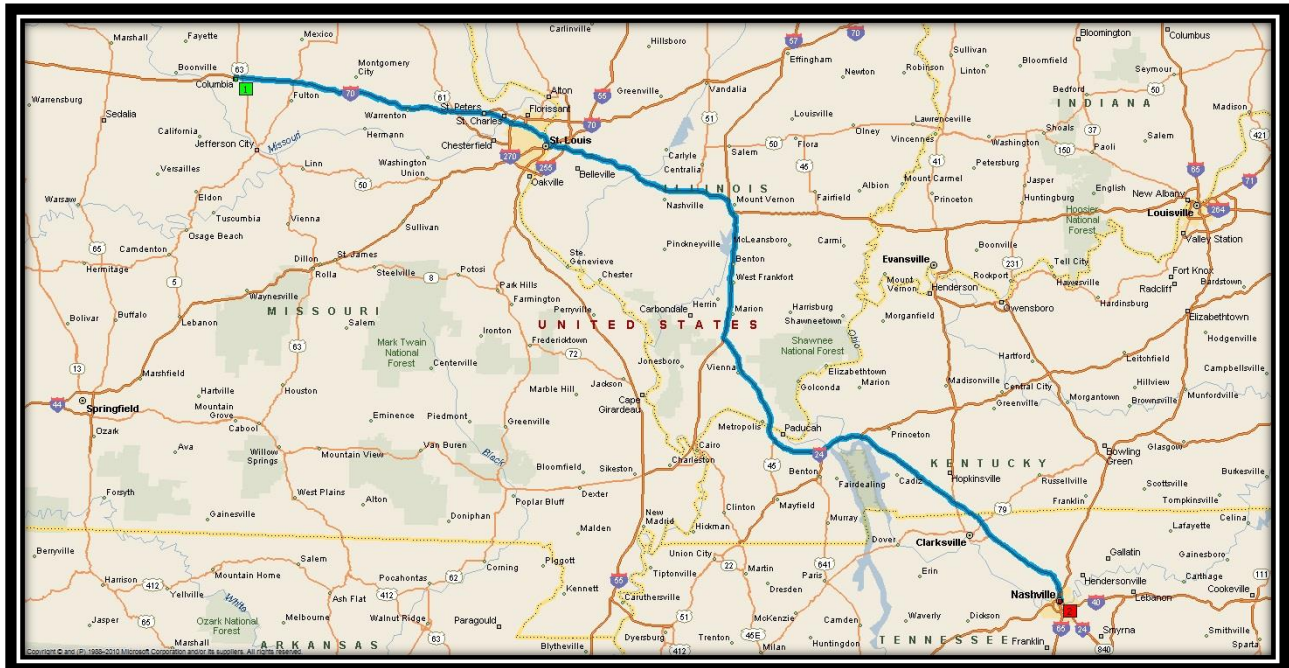


Rockin' Y's Roadhouse

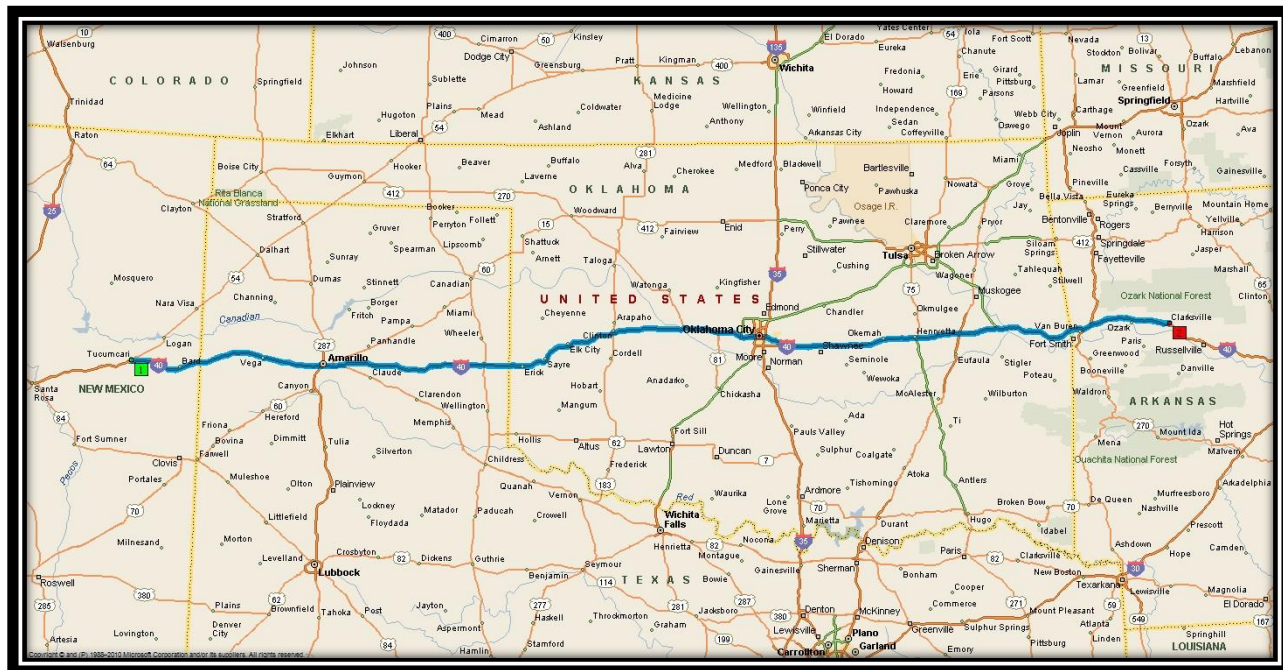
The next day Smokey and I would make it at least to Ft. Smith, AR and perhaps a little further if we felt like it. Time would tell.

Meanwhile the other guys had made it home safely from Columbia, MO.

Columbia, MO to Nashville, TN (Stinky & Road Dog) 430 Miles



MONDAY, JULY 21, 2014 (Buck & Smokey)
Tucumcari, NM to Clarksville, AR
608 Miles



We set out early on this Monday morning to ride more miles in the early morning instead of the hot afternoon we expected to see in eastern Oklahoma.

Starting out in the 70s we made great time into Texas and by the Cadillac Ranch in Amarillo. Before we knew it we were in Oklahoma. And the coniferous trees we began to see leaving Utah and Arizona yielded to a decidedly more deciduous forest.

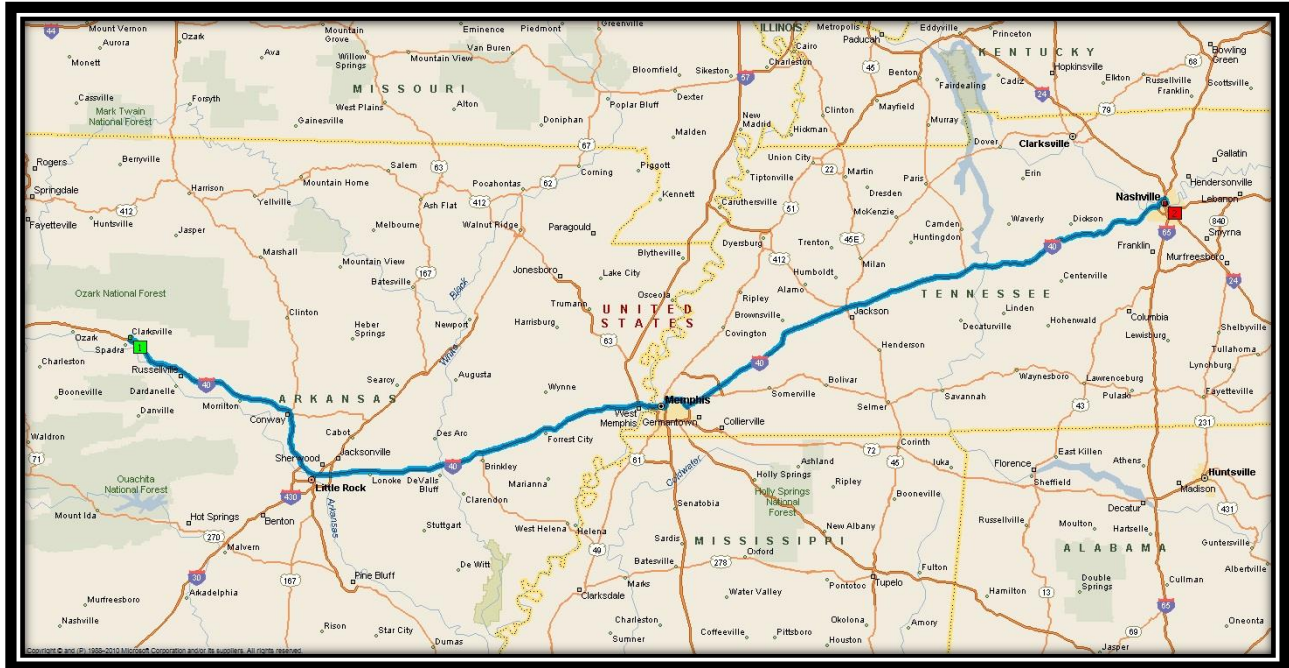
We made our goal of Ft. Smith and decided to go on a little further to the small town of Clarksville, AR. For the last night of the trip we treated ourselves to a Hampton Inn equipped with an indoor pool and a hot tub. It was about 5:30 when we checked in so we decided to go on to dinner before we unloaded our bikes.

Some folks that knew the area recommended the South Park Restaurant just a couple miles down the road. It was a great little home town place and as soon as we walked in we saw the people who had recommended it sitting at a table themselves so we knew the high praise they had given it was genuine.

Back at the motel a swim and some time in the hot tub helped us wind down. We had set ourselves up for a pretty easy day on Tuesday as we joined Stinky and Road Dog back in the real world.



TUESDAY, JULY 22, 2014 (Buck & Smokey)
Clarksville, AR to Nashville, TN
444 Miles



Again we got up early and woofed down the breakfast at the Hampton rushing to get onto the slab and put as many miles down as we could before the heat set in.

Clearly, the horses had smelled the barn. Smokey and I were in our driveways by about 2:30 in the afternoon. My GPS said we rode a total of 4,662 miles while the Wing odometer said 4,883. The actual mileage probably was somewhere between. The mileage number really doesn't matter that much because we made every mile count by riding them with best friends, creating some great memories, and checking some things off our bucket lists.

Another Big Ride is complete, but the journey continues.

The End

Fly Fishing

Smokey made all our arrangements through Jackson Hole Anglers. We thought our guides, Dave and Chase, did a great job and if you're ever in Jackson and want to do some fishing we recommend contacting them: phone: 888-458-7688 or email: info@jacksonholeanglers.com.



2014 Big Ride Itinerary

Day	Date	Start	End	Features	Motel	Motel Web Site	Day Miles	Trip Miles
1	Friday, July 11, 2014	Nashville	St. Joseph, MO		Days Inn		614	614
2	Saturday, July 12, 2014	St. Joseph, MO	Cheyenne, WY		Quality Inn Tucumcari		589	1,203
3	Sunday, July 13, 2014	Cheyenne, WY	Jackson, WY		Kudar	http://www.kudarmotel.com/	432	1,635
4	Monday, July 14, 2014	Jackson, WY	Jackson, WY	The Tetons and Jenny Lake	Kudar	http://www.kudarmotel.com/	110	1,745
5	Tuesday, July 15, 2014	Jackson, WY	Jackson, WY	Yellowstone and Old Faithful	Kudar	http://www.kudarmotel.com/	200	1,945
6	Wednesday, July 16, 2014	Jackson, WY	Jackson, WY	Fly Fishing	Kudar	http://www.kudarmotel.com/	-	1,945
7	Thursday, July 17, 2014	Jackson, WY	Cody, WY	Red Lodge then Cody	Sunrise Motor Inn (Cody)	http://sunriseinn Cody.com/	345	2,290
8	Friday, July 18, 2014	Cody, WY	Vernal, UT		Best Western Antlers Inn		400	2,690
9	Saturday, July 19, 2014	Vernal, UT	Monument Valley		Goulding's Lodge	http://www.gouldings.com/lodge/	363	3,053
10	Sunday, July 20, 2014	Monument Valley	Tucumcari, NM		Quality Inn		507	3,560
11	Monday, July 21, 2014	Tucumcari, NM	Clarksville, AR		Hampton Inn		608	4,168
12	Tuesday, July 22, 2014	Clarksville, AR	Home				444	4,612
Total Mileage by Computer							4,612	
Goldwing Odometer							4,883	
GPS							4,662	

The Riders

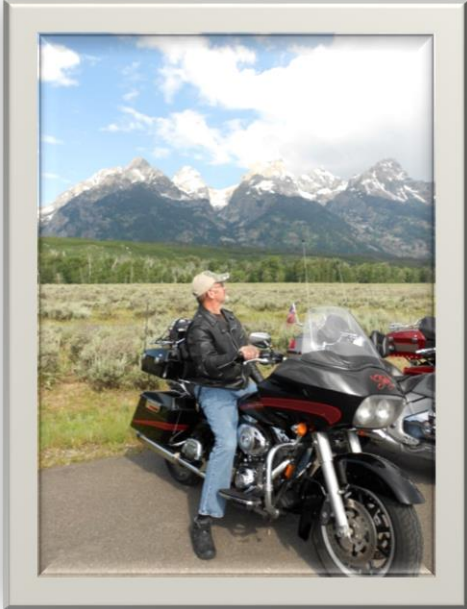


Buck



Smokey





Stinky



**Road
Dog**

