



Springtime in the Rockies

By Geoff Stevenson

Dedicated readers of this august publication know that Ernie Lalonde and I have ridden a few miles here and there over the years. Recent destinations, for example, have included Alaska, the Baja, Alabama and Tennessee.

We've had some great times on American and Mexican roads. But we've always believed Western Canada offers some of the best riding in the world and, even though we'd both ridden almost every major highway in B.C. and Alberta more than once, we



We admired Helmcken Falls in Wells Gray Park, with water thundering more than 400 feet to the gorge below.

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Next Breakfast/Brunch

Saturday, August 4



WHERE:

Pioneer House Restaurant
4675 Trans Canada Highway
Duncan, BC

WHEN:

9:30 am at the restaurant



Bike shuffle precedes departure

decided this trip would stay close to home.

We also had new steeds to try out. I was on a 2017 Honda CB1100EX (a retro bike with air cooling and spoked wheels – and lots of chrome, polished aluminum and stainless steel) and Ernie took his 2018 Triumph Bonneville T120.

At least that was the plan. But when a Triumph windshield ordered weeks earlier for the Bonneville failed to show up, Ernie decided to ride his trusty 2016 Triumph Tiger 800XC – which includes a sensible shield.

We wanted to avoid Vancouver traffic as much as possible, so rode to Nanaimo, took a B.C. ferry to Horseshoe Bay, and headed up the Sea-to-Sky Highway.

Day One: Victoria to Lillooet, 422km.

We were glad to be heading north on a holiday Monday. As we rode towards Whistler around noon, southbound traffic was already starting to build; we can only imagine how busy it was later that afternoon.

Fuel tanks were getting low in Pemberton, so we gassed up there and headed for the Duffey Lake road (Highway 99) twisties. We rode by a rodeo at Mount Currie and thought vaguely of stopping, but pressed on in bright sunshine.

We were soon in Lillooet (it seems to have faded away since Ma



Avola's Log Inn Pub provided tasty burgers – and a comfortable basement suite.

Murray died – you younger readers may need to Google Ma) and spent a quiet night at the Four Pines Motel on the main street.

Chinese food for supper at Mel's

was pretty average.

Day Two: Lillooet to Avola, 448km.

We're big fans of hot cereal for breakfast – especially from



If a tree falls in the forest...



At Mount Robson, sunny skies afforded a splendid view of the great mountain.

McDonald's or Tim's. But with no fast food outlets to be seen in Lillooet, we figured to ride to Clinton for a more conventional breakfast.

The sun shone brightly again. Apart from a section of one-lane gravel road where there had been a slide just north of Lillooet, this was a fine day of riding.

Soon we were headed north on Highway 97 through Clinton and east on Highway 24 to Little Fort and Clearwater.

The downtown Clearwater I used to know seems to have disappeared: A search for a lunch stop proved fruitless; indeed, half the stores in a mini-mall were empty.

However, a mile or two up the road this puzzle resolved itself: It seems the town has been re-established around the traffic circle on Highway 5 that includes the road leading into Wells Gray Park.

We reckoned that Helmcken Falls, about 45km from the traffic circle, would be worth seeing in the spring runoff and we weren't disappointed. They thunder more than 400 feet into a gorge that the geologists tell us has been formed over hundreds of thousands of years.

As we parked the bikes and prepared to walk perhaps 200 yards to the falls, we heard what sounded to me like rifle shots (perhaps a .22).

Looking towards the sound, we were startled to see a mature tree crash to the ground. We were in no danger since we were perhaps a hundred yards away, but it was a reminder that Mother Nature often has surprises for we humans. (It seemed this was just an old, dead tree's final act).

There's not much in Avola (if you've never heard of the town, you're not alone). The population might be 30; we walked around all the streets we could find and saw maybe 15 houses.

However, the Log Inn Pub promised self-styled world-famous burgers and we'd reserved two beds months before. I've stayed there before, although Larry, the owner, keeps expanding the operation.

In the beginning, there were just a couple of rudimentary cabins for guests. They're still operating, but he now has a three-bedroom house for rent – and a newly-renovated suite in the basement.

We'd expected to stay in a cabin, but with no bathrooms. Larry (who's probably in his 60s) seemed to understand that old guys sometimes need bathroom breaks in the middle of the night and moved us into the new suite.

This was excellent value for money: We paid \$40 each and each had a double bed. The suite included bunk beds for another dozen sleepers, two new bathrooms and a



Buses and RVs outnumber bikes

full kitchen/living room.

Better still, he suggested we park our bikes in his carport, away from prying eyes (although I'd guess that crime in Avola is not a serious problem).

Of course, we had a world-famous burger for supper. How good were they? Probably over-rated – but we were hungry and they sure hit the spot.

We were impressed by Larry's efficient one-man operation. He cooked the burgers, served the cold beer, handled our room booking – and even rented rooms for a future stay to drop-in visitors while we were eating supper.

Day Three: Avola to Jasper, 226km.

It was hard to believe, but the weather just kept getting better. We rode north to Blue River for breakfast under a cloudless sky and enjoyed hot cereal at The Grill in the Sandman Inn.

We were watching closely for wildlife as we headed towards the Alberta border, especially early in the early morning, since the experts tell us deer are most dangerous an hour after sunrise and an hour before sunset.

Deer were not a problem this day (more on this later), but between Blue River and Valemount, Ernie (who was leading) signaled that there was something near the shoulder. We were perhaps 50



In Jasper, we could have rented a Harley sidecar unit for just \$300 a day. We declined the offer.

yards apart (here's another reason for not following too closely) and, as I slowed, a coyote raced across the highway and, with the greatest of ease, jumped over a 3-foot high concrete barrier and disappeared into the bush.

He probably weighed 70 pounds; I was pleased to see him go.

Spring runoff was in full flow as we rode north and east. Thunder River and Swift Current Stream seemed especially appropriately named.

We were soon at Mount Robson and reckoned we deserved a break – and a cup of green tea.

It's common to stop here and see little or nothing of the mountains (Mount Robson, almost 13,000

feet, is the highest peak in the Canadian Rockies). This day the mountain was visible for all to see; our bikes were, unsurprisingly, outnumbered by RVs and tour buses, presumably full of tourists gushing about the beauty of the scenery.

Walking around Jasper a hour or so later in riding gear was hot work. It was close to 30 now – and the busiest spot in town was the Jasper Brewing Company, where the patrons were shaded by an excellent awning as they enjoyed a cold beer (or three).

We had lunch at Subway and then burned it off walking the length and breadth of the small downtown area, including visiting the elegant



Jasper proves an expensive place to stay

old railroad station.

Staying in Jasper is not for the thin of wallet and we'd reserved bunk beds in a hostel south of town. We rode out there, got the bikes parked and unloaded and checked into the hostel.

There was a day when a hostel bed cost just a few bucks, but those days have gone (at least in a busy tourist town like Jasper). We paid almost \$50 each for the night – but I doubt there'd have been a hotel room in Jasper itself for less than a couple of hundred dollars.

Hostels have changed in another way, too, as Ernie observed. When I stayed in my first hostel in 1963 in rural New Zealand, part of the attraction was meeting people from other countries and talking to them. There appeared to be no conversations going on in the Jasper common room – but there were an awful lot of busy cellphone screens.

The hostel is a short walk from the Jasper SkyTram. We thought of riding to the top of 7,425-foot



In true BMW style, the \$50 each cost of the Jasper SkyTram keeps these travellers on terra firma.

Whistler's Mountain and admiring the 360-degree view – until we checked the cost. The ride was almost \$50 each; even the "special" for a family of four of \$118.85 seemed pretty rich to me.

The mixed dormitory in the hostel;

(there's also a separate dorm for women) had about 60 bunk beds. Fortunately, there were only about 20 guests this night – but we can assume it's a busy (and perhaps noisy) place in mid-summer.

To be continued...

Club 2018 Event Schedule

Date	Event	Location
Saturday, August 4, 2018	Monthly Gathering	Pioneer House, Duncan
August 9 - 12, 2018	43rd Stanley Stomp Rally	Grandjean, Idaho
August 16 - 19, 2018	Hotsprings Rally	Nakusp, BC
Saturday, August 25, 2018	Club BBQ	Chez Randy