



THE BEEMER READER

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Springtime in the Rockies

(Second of two instalments)

By Geoff Stevenson

Day Four: Jasper to Airdrie, 513km.

We were getting used to blue skies and dry roads by now, but today we tangled with an Alberta afternoon thunderstorm – and even had wet pavement for a few miles.

First off, we bumped and thumped down the Icefields Parkway (Highway 93) on pavement that was pretty rough for long distances. This is a tough climate for road builders, but the frost heaves seemed especially serious this spring.



The road rolls on..... Highway 11, just west of Rocky Mountain House, leading us onto the Alberta prairie.

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Next Breakfast/Brunch

Sunday, September 2



WHERE:

Black Goose Inn
1051 Resort Drive
Parksville

Meeting Place:

8:15 am
Tim Hortons
Millstream Road



Fernie boasts best food of the trip

Parts of this road were being repaved – and not a day too soon.

Breakfast was at Sunwapta Falls Lodge, perhaps 40 minutes south of Jasper. This provided the most exotic hot cereal of the trip – and the most expensive at \$13.95 (we declined to sample the coffee at \$3.69 a cup).

To be fair, the cereal included a wide variety of toppings (including yoghurt, cranberries, dried bananas, fresh fruits and various nuts) And, since it was self-service, a guy could probably have had a second bowl for that price.

We turned east at Saskatchewan River Crossing and headed east on Highway 11 to Rocky Mountain House. By then, my low fuel light was blinking vigorously and we gassed up again.

Some fairly simple math showed that I was getting around 80mpg on the big Honda, pretty impressive for a 560lb bike (metric adherents should free to convert to litres/100km).

This road is mostly straight and flat and we were cruising at a sedate 95-100 km/h. But I was still impressed (much credit goes to the Honda's tall gearing: 100km/h in sixth is just 3,000rpm).

Our destination this night was the house of Ernie's brother-in-law in Airdrie, about 35km north of Calgary. The forecast had warned of an afternoon thunderstorm; sure enough, we could see black skies on the horizon as we headed south and east.

We missed the rain, but spent

perhaps half an hour on wet pavement as we neared Airdrie.

After the mostly impersonal; hostel, a quiet suburban home with comfortable beds was a welcome change (although Ernie generously slept on a basement couch while I luxuriated upstairs).

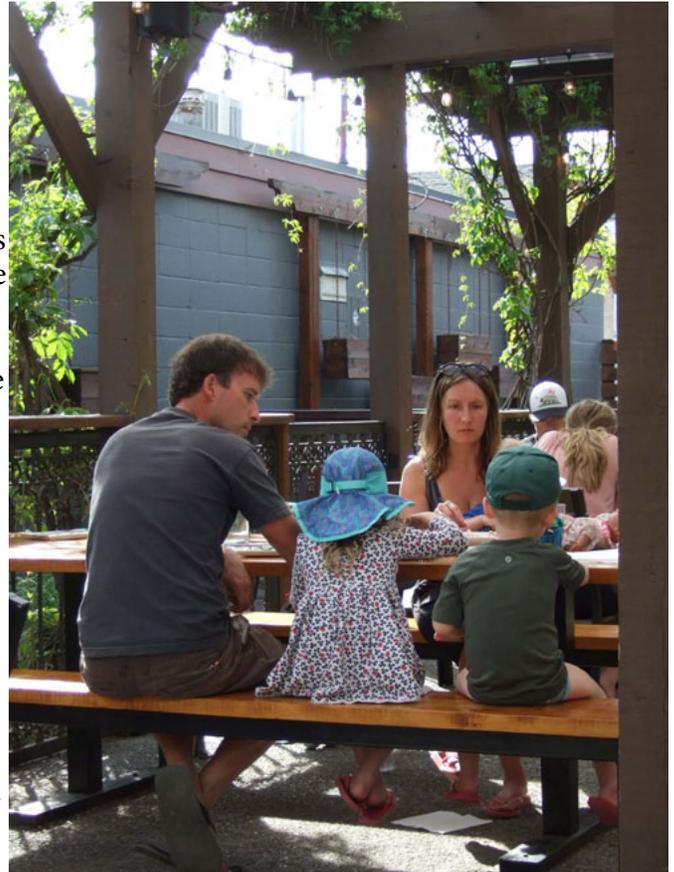
Day Five: Airdrie to Fernie, 407km.

The first order of business was to avoid Calgary morning rush hour, so we rode west from Airdrie and headed south through Cochrane and onto Highway 22, which would take us south just east of the Rockies.

(We'd hoped to ride Highwood Pass on Highway 40, the highest paved road in Canada, this day, but advance research showed it didn't open until June 1).

We saw lots of cherry blossom, daffodils and tulips in Airdrie and the farm grass sure was green as we rode away from the big city. We noted with smug satisfaction that Victoria's spring flowers were long finished – and that riding year-round in Airdrie presumably required a snowmobile.

But housing here's significantly more affordable than Victoria, with several new sub-divisions apparent



Nevados in Fernie, which serves Argentinian food, provided the best meals of the trip.

as we rode in. Of course, without the constraints of the ocean (or the Agricultural Land Commission), developing new housing is a whole lot easier (and cheaper) than in Greater Victoria.

This is gently rolling country. Yesterday's thunderstorm had long gone and we slipped south among the cattle and cereal fields of the Western Prairie.

Lunch was Chinese food in Blairmore, once a thriving coal-mining centre but now just hanging on, like so many small towns in rural Canada.



New electronic signs detect deer



We reckoned the owner of this trailer, parked in Grand Forks, was the busiest guy in town.

The restaurant owner told us that he'd come to Canada from China seven years ago and was now married with three young children. We had lots to talk about; he said he used to race Honda 400s back in his homeland and we had an interesting discussion about bikes in general, and the shortcomings of Harleys in particular.

It was clear that the good life in Canada had agreed with him: Since most successful racers weigh barely 150 pounds (think Valentino Rossi or Marc Marquez), we estimated he'd put on 75 pounds since his track days.

Next stop would be Fernie – but first we'd have a chance to experience a fairly new B.C. warning system to detect wildlife on highways.

These electronic signs use sensors to detect any wildlife present; the first system was installed by the B.C. government between Fort Steele and the Alberta border along

Highway 3.

We saw perhaps a dozen screens. But none were flashing – and we saw no wildlife in this area. This is hardly empirical evidence of anything, but riders need all the help they can get in that region and we thoroughly approved this wise spending of some of our tax dollars.

Fernie's another coal town that was in decline for years. But skiing (and mountain biking and hiking in the summer) have revived the region and a number of elegant downtown buildings from yesteryear are being lovingly restored.

There was good food, too. We dined (who knew you could actually dine in this part of the world?) at Nevados, an Argentinian restaurant on the main street.

Ernie pronounced his ribs to be the equal of any he'd eaten anywhere and my grilled swordfish salad was excellent.

Day Six: Fernie to Grand Forks,

425km.

The plan was to walk a mile or so from our motel to McDonald's for hot cereal and tea. But, at 0640, we discovered that they didn't open until 0700. However, the solution was across the road, where Tim's was already doing a brisk breakfast business.

We saw a few dream customers for a fast-food outlet: Young men heading to work who ate breakfast at Tim's and then ordered lunch to go.

The hot cereal there was a more generous serving and we retraced our steps to the motel to saddle up well fortified for the three high passes ahead this day.

But there would be wildlife challenges before we got into the mountains. Indeed, we lost count of the deer around Cranbrook. I had to brake hard once and it seemed prudent to slow to around 80km/h for a while.

In the end, there were no incidents (and only one moderately close call), but we've learned over the years that deer can be anywhere (and at anytime) and we ride accordingly.

West of Yahk the deer seemed to have disappeared and we despatched Kootenay, Bombi and Paulson Passes in short order. We had perfect weather and traffic was light. We've both ridden plenty of mountain passes in Washington, Oregon, California, Utah and Colorado, but this day was the equal of anything south of the border, in my view.



Flood damage evident in Grand Forks



That shiny red Chevy panel van greeted us for breakfast in Greenwood.

En route, we stopped in Cranbrook for lunch. The Black Rooster Classic Bar & Grill provided some seared ahi tuna and salad that I thought was both good food and good value.

Soon we were in Grand Forks and keen to inspect the damage from recent flooding. We'd hoped to take in a movie here (it was now Saturday night), but it turned out that the movie theatre was one of many downtown buildings seriously damaged by the water.

Will it ever reopen? Who knows?

Almost every building on the downtown core seemed to have been damaged. All had government inspection notices on their doors and entry to several was still

restricted. A few wooden floors we could see were badly damaged and electrical dryers remained in several stores.

Day Seven: Grand Forks to Hope, 293km.

More perfect weather saw us on the road early and soon in Greenwood for breakfast at the Copper Eagle restaurant on the main street (many of you have seen the old red Chevy panel van usually parked outside).

A few locals drifted in for their morning caffeine fix as we ate our meal (the asparagus quiche was very good), but we were soon back on the road and heading for Osoyoos – to check out more flood damage.

This was more great riding, especially the ascent and subsequent descent of Anarchist Mountain - and the spectacular views of Osoyoos, its farmland, lake and vineyards as we rode down the hill.

We parked the bikes and walked around the town, but, apart from a pile of a few hundred sandbags beside Highway 3, there were few signs of the flood damage done earlier in the month.

However, in a city park, we noted that the “high-tide” line from the flood was close to 4 feet above current lake levels, and we knew that at least one motel on the other side of town had been badly damaged by the water.

The B.C. Highways Department (and, now, its private contractors) keep trying to straighten out all those bends on the Hope-Princeton section of Highway 3, but we're pleased to report that they haven't succeeded – yet.

I first drove this road in 1969; it was a lot more fun then, although it might be safer today.

We could easily have reached Tsawwassen this day, but we agreed that riding the Trans-Canada with a few thousand other holiday weekenders heading back to the big city on a Sunday night was something to avoid.

So we stopped in Hope and enjoyed a lengthy walk in the sunshine around town. Supper was at an Italian restaurant. It was, as they say, overpriced and underwhelming (we should have probably chosen



Food in Hope disappoints the riders

another location, since it soon became clear we were the only patrons).

Day Eight: Hope to Victoria, 195km.

Breakfast was more of that fine Tim's hot cereal just down the road from our motel. We gassed up here, too, to avoid those transit taxes at the pumps in Vancouver.

(Incidentally, gas prices varied wildly. It was around \$1.30/litre at several places in Alberta – the cheapest I saw was \$1.27.9. Rural B.C. was mostly \$1.40-\$1.45, Vancouver \$1.60-plus.

Of course, at around 80 mpg. we can mostly ignore high prices. But a number of pickups towing big travel trailers flew by us in rural Alberta at what seemed to be 120km/h; they were probably

averaging closer to 15mpg, maybe less.)

We crossed the Fraser in Hope (muddy and angry) and headed for the ferry terminal along Highway 7, joining the Trans-Canada near Agassiz. After a 20-minute delay at the Tsawwassen ticket office (for no apparent reason), we made the 1100 sailing.

Our plan had been to keep the daily distances down. For years we'd regularly completed 800km days. But you see less that way – and often get to your destination dead tired. Could we be getting older? Probably.

Springtime in the Rockies had been a good plan. We were desperately lucky with the weather, but those roads ARE wonderful – just as we'd remembered.



After the flood: The "high-tide" line is still visible in Osoyoos, 4 feet above current lake levels.

Club 2018 / 2019 Event Schedule

Date	Event	Location
Sunday, September 2, 2018	Monthly Gathering	Black Goose Pub
Saturday, September 15, 2018	Monthly Ride	Port Renfrew / Cowichan Loop
September 15&16, 2018	Port Alberni Toy Run	Little Qualicum Falls Provincial Park
Sunday, September 24, 2018	CFA Capital City Toy Run	3510 Blanchard Street (Save-on-Foods)
Sunday, October 7, 2018	Monthly Gathering	The Crooked Goose
TBD October, 2018	Island BMW Octoberfest	Island BMW
Saturday, October 20, 2018	Annual General Meeting	SVI Rangers Hall
Saturday, November 3, 2018	Monthly Gathering	Spitfire Grill
Sunday, December 2, 2018	Monthly Gathering	1550's Pub
Tuesday, January 1, 2019	TROC	Island View Beach & Bob's House
Saturday, January 5, 2019	Monthly Gathering	Cherries Breakfast Bistro