

**Motorcycling North to Alaska
Towson MD to Anchorage AK
May 18 – June 2 2017
John B. Egger**

Day 1, Thursday May 18 2017: I left Jeffers Road at 9:12 AM with 4,285 miles on the black 2014 Honda NC-700X and swung by my friend Gary Fairbrother's to say goodbye. He snapped a couple of photos, and I headed for the Beltway with a little trepidation. I had never ridden with the three Givi cases loaded, and they totaled about 85 lbs. The bike had wobbled a little when I turned into Gary's driveway, but I knew I had to get used to it.

As I passed the I-795 exit, traffic on the west side of the I-695 Beltway became jammed. I never actually had to put my foot down, but only by careful use of 1st gear and planning ahead. Partly because I was unfamiliar with the loaded cases, this slow crawl was not pleasant, but soon the I-70 exit appeared and with its highway speed of 70 mph.

The ride to Breezewood PA was not particularly memorable, except for a car with Alaska license plates passing: A good omen? I was becoming familiar with the highway pegs, and liked them. On this hot day — 92°F forecast for Baltimore — I had all of the jacket, pants, and helmet vents open that I knew of. I enjoyed a pleasant gas and lunch stop in Breezewood, with the older lady at the Subway seeming especially nice to me, and walked around the parking lot a bit. I had taken a right at the 90° intersection at Breezewood, so it was easy to make the Pennsylvania Turnpike entry ramp. The older lady there was also especially nice, urging me to be careful and, when I replied "I'll do my best," said "That's not an option!"

The Turnpike west was pretty windy, and it was nice to have the brief protection of the Somerset tunnel. Taking the Cranberry exit north of Pittsburgh (\$18.25 cash), I headed north on I-79 and heeded my fuel warning by stopping at the Grove City exit for gas. I arrived at my brother Bob and Aggie's about 3:50 PM, pretty much right on schedule, with 348 miles on the trip odometer and 4,632 miles on the bike.

Bob immediately set to work trying to figure out my right mirror and handguard problem: I could get either of them tight, but not both. He didn't exactly figure it out, but fabricated a fix using a small piece of hard rubber and a couple of cable ties. I went for a short walk and enjoyed a pleasant evening with him; his wife Aggie's second-shift job meant I wasn't able to see her until the following morning. It was a pleasant, if short, visit, and nice to escape some rain under a solid roof. It turned much cooler during the night, and was in the 40°Fs when we arose.

Day 2, Friday May 19 2017, began about 8:30 AM when I pulled out onto Alden Street, headed for I-79 north to Erie. Chilly and overcast, I was reminded quickly of all those open vents and was unable to zip the few that I could reach and remember while riding. For a while I followed another motorcyclist, but was riding a little faster and after perhaps ten miles passed him or her. I swung past Erie and entered New York State, stopping at the Angola Service Area I have visited many times before – with my mother, and later on some of my own family's vacation trips. I snapped a photo of the bike in the parking lot, filled up with gas, and enjoyed coffee and a Cinnabon bun. At 10:00 AM I set the cell-phone's Google "Driving" to the Peace Bridge in Buffalo and headed out.

I was anxious about the Buffalo – Peace Bridge – Toronto area, but the I-90 exit for the Bridge to Canada was well marked and I had no need for GPS directions. There were perhaps 3 vehicles ahead of me, and I wasn't totally sure of what was going on. Reaching the booth, I

asked the attendant what he needed, and he replied, “Your passport.” I fetched it from the Lewis and Clark pouch carried around my neck, he asked me where I was going, why, and how long I’d be in Canada, stamped the passport, and sent me along; next stop, the \$3 collection point for the bridge toll. Wow. In 2010 at the Ogdensburg NY crossing my pickup was thoroughly searched, taking perhaps half an hour.

Resetting the driving instructions for Barrie ON, we immediately picked up the Queen Elizabeth Way. Traffic moved right along, about 70 mph, and I relied on the GPS function of my cell phone, mounted in a weatherproof Givi handlebar case. Unfortunately its loose fit behind a thick plastic window hampered visibility, and, trying to see what the instrument was telling me, I often pressed the plastic against the phone’s screen with my left hand and a couple of times even stopped under an overpass that eliminated the sun’s glare.

In heavy fast traffic every motorcyclist is primarily aware of his inherent vulnerability. Remaining safe is, by a wide margin, the top priority; actually getting where he wants to go is desirable but a way-down second in significance. I felt as if I were being swept along in a powerful river, occasionally able to nudge myself (as advised by the GPS and highway signs) off the stream’s strong main course and into tributaries identified with numbers like 403 and 407 and destinations such as Hamilton. Somehow, and it was a huge delight, I found myself on Route 400 north, which would take us all the way to the Trans-Canada, Route 17. We reached Barrie in mid-afternoon. I filled the fuel tank, bought an Ontario map, and enjoyed a nice Panera lunch before returning to the road north. Traffic was heavy, but I was thrilled to have negotiated the two big cities and the border, and finally to be on the way to the Great Lakes and less populous terrain. Preparing to leave Barrie, I plugged in my heated vest for the first time this trip — I had tested it, briefly, at home and was pleased to find that it worked exactly as planned, a real comfort.

Traffic was fast and heavy, and the nice women at the convenience store (where I’d bought the map) explained why: Victoria Day holiday weekend, Friday afternoon, everyone eager to get out of the city for the long weekend. SUVs with boats on the roofs or on trailers passed me, probably at 80 mph. I moved up to about 75 to reduce the speed differential, and was glad when traffic began to thin out. I spotted the exit to Parry Sound and Oastler Lake, found the Provincial Park, and was delighted to settle in to a nice site. I walked back to the office, determined that my site was not reserved, and paid the \$41.25 (Canadian) fee with my Visa card.

Nice campground, but it sure seemed expensive. Still, it was a huge comfort finally to be out along the Great Lakes (Georgian Bay on Lake Huron, in this case) and pulling away from the megalopolis. My second Joby camera tripod broke, exactly as the first one had years ago in Scotland, the first time I tried to use it. The night was quite cold; I put my rain jacket on after a 4AM call of nature and found it helped a lot. I think my down sleeping bag, rated for 32°F, is showing its age. (Part of the problem may have been that I left the tent open, with only the mosquito netting zipped up. Live and learn. It’s the jacket-vent problem in a different context.) In the morning several people commented on the unusually chilly night. Still, it was great to spend the first night in my Eureka Mountain Pass 2 tent and I prepared for the next day’s ride. There were now 5,004 miles on the odometer; I’d traveled 372 miles on Day 2 and 719 miles since leaving home.

Day 3, Saturday May 20 2017, began under chilly and overcast skies, with both the heated grips (at 75%) and the electric vest (level 2) put to use. Pulling out of the Park, I turned

right toward Parry Sound, vaguely remembering it was on a loop that would take me back to Route 400, and — sure enough — it did. I was so pleased to be out of the urban areas and skimming the north shore of the Great Lakes. A brighter day would have been nice, but I spotted a turnout where I had photographed my Toyota pickup on my 2010 drive to Alaska and quickly pulled over for a shot of the bike there. The lake and sky look cold, not like the brilliant blues in the 2010 photo.

It was thrilling to be getting into Sigurd Olson country! At one point, which I recalled from seven years ago, the road crested a hill and began a long descent. The lake and its shoreline presented a wide vista ahead and to the left, so stunning it was hard to keep attention to the highway. So many times I was tempted to stop for photographs, but already have many of them.

My hope was to make Sudbury for gas and lunch, but with perhaps 20 miles to go I chickened out and took an exit that led me to a station related somehow to Indians, at Estaire. When I was in the station paying for my gas a group of perhaps four motorcycles arrived, all BMWs as I recall. They were headed to San Diego CA and had many travel stickers on their luggage boxes. I told them this was my first tour, and they said “Never too late to start!” I was impressed with their stickers, and they with my destination of Anchorage. I suspect they, too, had hoped for Sudbury but got cold feet. I doubt if anyone deliberately targets Estaire Fuel.

With a full tank, I still planned on a relaxed lunch in Sudbury, but the intersection for Route 17 west arrived before any restaurants and I didn't feel like diverging from my route, so it was 17 west without lunch. But McKerrow soon arrived, with a nice Tim Horton's where I enjoyed a toasted cheese sandwich and doughnut, and chatted briefly with a biker headed east who'd been through the Colorado Rockies. He commented on how desolate that Route 17 was, skirting the Lakes; I'd noticed and commented on that back in 2010 and found things hadn't changed. There was very little traffic for many miles.

I enjoyed a second (late) lunch after fueling up at Sault Ste. Marie ON, and traveled on to my planned night stop, the Provincial Park at Pancake Bay. The odometer now showed 5,355 miles, for a 351-mile day and 1,070 miles from home. It had been a chilly and overcast day, but without actual rain, and I settled in at a roomy and flat site, choosing one without lake frontage — I just wanted to eat and rest. I enjoyed walking around the campground and seeing the lakefront sites, and had a pleasant chat with Agnes and Michael, Polish bicyclists camped across the camp road from me. They're planning to see Whitehorse! Me too, but by a much easier means. Very pleasant young people; it was a delight to talk with them. The Eureka kept some light rain off, during the night, but — finally learning to zip the tent closed — I was warm and comfortable.

Day 4, Sunday May 21 2017, began as usual with arising about 5:20 AM and my old back-stretch routine taking until 6. Though sorry to lose the time, I'm wary of the somewhat cramped leg position and the slouching back of my riding stance and, as I have done on many backpacking trips, rely on the stretches to increase flexibility and strength, staving off potential injuries — especially as I age. Time well spent.

Michael and Agnes had hoped for another 100 km day (62 miles) if it didn't rain, but it didn't look good for that plan: It was raining lightly before I even reached the highway, and I was glad to have donned rain pants and jacket. (I would have worn the latter just for warmth, even if rain hadn't threatened.) In 97 miles I was in Wawa, and enjoyed a stop at the Subway there.

Despite the “free wifi” claim I was unable to connect and fussed with it for some frustrating minutes before facing the chilly light rain and wet roads. I plugged in the vest and decided to continue through town, believing the street looped toward 17 again (as in Parry Sound). I soon discovered two things: The street does not (apparently) intersect the highway again, and my vest was not becoming warm. In some frustration I swung around, returned to the parking area in front of the Subway, and discovered the problem: I had plugged the vest directly into the power lead from the Denali distribution box, without using the vest controller, and blown a fuse. Something had seemed a bit strange, with the very short black male connector at the bottom of the left side of the vest having to plug into the short red female connector emerging from under the tank at the right side of the seat, but for some reason it had worked between Pancake and Wawa.

Back at the Subway parking lot I opened the “frunk” (the NC-700X’s unique “front trunk”) and the Denali power distribution box, and mistakenly believed the vest was on circuit #5 with a 5-amp fuse, despite being pretty sure I’d put it on #6 with its 7.5-amp fuse. I replaced #5’s fuse, but of course the controller indicator still didn’t light, so in frustration I buttoned everything up and left Wawa around 11 AM with no electricity in the vest. It was a bleak and rainy day, but even without juice the quilted vest (under the standard and rain jackets) helped a lot. A short time later I encountered my first and only really heavy downpour of the entire trip. Almost immediately spotting a rest area across the road (eastbound), I made an awkward U-turn, pulled into the parking area, and took refuge in the privy. There’s nothing like a solid roof and walls in a heavy rain and chilly wind, even at a bit of a cost.

The rain abated after perhaps ten minutes and we sallied forth, pulling up at the White River, Ontario A&W restaurant for lunch. There I finally got wifi working and was able to check and respond to email for the first time on this trip. I left about 1:30 PM, but it was still raining and visibility was poor when I reached Marathon an hour or so later, so I left Route 17 to visit the city center in hopes of finding a chain motel like Ramada. No deal, and I didn’t care for the looks of the only motel I noticed there, so it was back to 17. Almost immediately at the northwest corner was the Airport Motor Inn, and it looked nice. Still, I started for Terrace Bay, the next town west on 17... but moderately heavy rain began almost immediately so I swung back to Airport and took a room for the night. It was about 3:00 PM. I had covered only 229 miles, for a total of 5,584 on the odometer (1,299 so far on this trip).

After settling in, I took a less harried look at the electrics, replaced Circuit #6’s 7.5-amp fuse, and found my vest controller working again. Hooray!

Day 5, Monday May 22 2017 began as usual with a 5:23 AM arising and back stretches until 6AM. I enjoyed a waffle at the motel’s fine breakfast bar, loaded up the bike, checked out, and hit the road. I made it about 5 miles, unable to see more than perhaps fifty feet in the dense fog. It seemed as if there were droplets of water simply suspended in the air, waiting for my face shield to smash into them. Riding within sight distance would have meant perhaps 25 miles per hour, far too dangerous on that highway. By 9:15 AM I had recovered my room key and was back in 209, preparing to investigate Canadian daytime television. I rode into town to get some lunch, but the recommended place, Roumors, was closed for Victoria Day so I returned to the motel. It was a good taste of riding conditions, and confirmed the wisdom of my decision: the shield became translucent immediately and raising it caused my eyeglasses to cloud. I was glad

to make it the few miles back to the motel. As for the television, I'd seen "Whatever Happened to Baby Jane?" decades ago in a movie theater, but it commanded some of my attention on this forced layover. Odometer 5,602 (18 miles today, about 11 on that canceled road start and 7 back and forth to town).

Day 6, Tuesday May 23 2017: Although eager to be moving again, I overslept my normal rising time by 25 minutes (5:47 AM) and finished the stretches at 6:22. After breakfast, I had the pannier boxes on by 7:09 and left the motel at 7:37 AM, hopeful that yesterday's fog would be absent. There was some light rain, but I was grateful to find visibility almost unaffected. I hoped for Terrace Bay, and it arrived, so I hoped for Nipigon and made it by 9:45 AM. (About ten miles east of Nipigon I stopped at a scenic overlook and swapped photos with a tourist couple. Nice shot, even in the gray skies.)

I left the Nipigon Subway at 10:05 AM (EDT) and, taking the cutoff that bypasses Thunder Bay, refueled in Upsala at 1:00 PM. I enjoyed a great lunch at the Upsala Family Restaurant, grilled cheese on thick homemade brown bread with a huge heap of shoestring fried potatoes. A BMW rider who came in and sat at the next table had been visiting family in Toronto and was hoping to make home, Winnipeg, that evening. He left before me but was riding a bit slower and I passed him 10 miles west of Upsala.

Despite the continuing overcast skies, there was no more rain, so I pushed on. Perhaps 30 miles east of Dryden, my intended stopping point for the night, the sky began to clear, and by the time that city arrived the sun was out and there were only a few fluffy white clouds in a bright blue sky. Where was this about eight hours ago? The Holiday Inn Express was too expensive (\$140 minus a 10% senior discount, which only offset some kind of tax) but I didn't feel like shopping around. About 4:30 PM, I checked in with 6,007 miles on the odometer for a 406-mile day and 1,722 miles on this trip.

Before the drive chain cooled, I cleaned and lubed it; its slack looked OK. I walked across the highway to Wal-Mart, but it had no Rain-X for plastic, recommended on the NC-700X forum. Walking the other direction (west, on the north side of the highway like my motel), I found PI's Family Restaurant. It looked interesting so I had a nice Greek salad for dinner, returned to the motel, and — forgoing both a shower and the swimming pool that some of my \$140 was paying for — retired at 8:30 PMEDT.

Day 7, Wednesday May 24 2017: Arising about 5:20 and completing the stretches at 6:00, I visited the Dryden Holiday Inn Express breakfast bar, loaded the bike, and departed at 7:33 AM (I think it's still Eastern time). I reset the Honda's instruments to the MKS system (if I recall my engineering days correctly), replacing miles and gallons with kilometers (9,842 on departure) and liters: 100 kph = 62.1 mph.

It was a beautiful but cool morning, with grips and vest put to good use, and it was a pleasure to cruise through the Kenora region, with crystal blue lakes, dark green firs, and massive rock outcroppings under a clear blue sky with fluffy white clouds. I had considered pushing on to Kenora yesterday, but it would have been another hundred miles on an already-400-mile day. I'd stayed in a Kenora motel in 2010, but discovered that Route 17 actually swings past Kenora so a town visit would be out of my way: I skipped it, and headed toward the

Manitoba border. Ontario is a huge province! I enjoyed a rest stop, from about 9:30 to 10:00 AM, at Clearwater Market, between Kenora and the line, and bought a map of Canada there.

Approaching Winnipeg, Manitoba, I found a small commercial area where Exit 348A starts a loop around the city, and stopped for lunch at its Subway restaurant. From my new map it looked as if Brandon MB was about 120 miles, an easy afternoon, and I even considered trying for someplace in Saskatchewan. No... it was 207 km from Kenora to Winnipeg, and I started the day well east of Kenora. The afternoon, mostly taken at 100 to 110 kph, was notable chiefly for its wind gusts. I'd heard weather forecasts warning of them, and of a severe low-pressure front heading east from Alberta, and was concerned about it.

Nearing Brandon, I saw signs for a Motel 6, found it convenient to the highway, and checked in about 4:00 PM (Eastern time, but I think MB is Central so maybe it was around 3 PM CDT). Only \$84 Canadian, but the room had no armchair and I had to figure out how to fix the lever that actuated the shower — it was lying on the edge of the tub and I tried various things before finding that it simply threaded onto a shaft behind the tiles. On this trip I found that low-end chain motels seemed to cater to construction crews like highway workers or Canadian Pacific railway crews, and this motel was full or nearly so that night. At the desk man's suggestion I ordered a pizza from Romano's, a small Greek pizza so hearty that I could eat only half of it. Despite some shortcomings the room had a hair dryer, refrigerator, and an iron, and there was a wonderful breakfast bar the next morning. Good TV coverage also... "The Young and the Restless" at 4:30 PM (EDT).

With 10,262 km (6,377 miles) on the odometer, it had been a 370 mile day; I've traveled 2,091 miles from home.

Day 8, Thursday May 25 2017: Arising, stretching, and enjoying the Brandon MB Motel 6's superb breakfast bar, I vaguely considered taking another weather-justified "zero" because of that low-pressure front and wind forecast. I couldn't really justify it, though, and headed out toward the Saskatchewan line and Regina, aiming for Swift Current in western SK tonight.

We fueled up in Whitewood, in eastern Saskatchewan, gas for the bike and lunch or snacks for me, from 10:15 to 10:50 AM (I was still using EDT, so local time I suppose was an hour earlier). The morning featured, if that's the word, scattered rain, but I had no trouble seeing.

Around noon, approaching Regina, I was in rainy construction-work traffic when I saw a welcoming "Regina" sign ahead on the right. In 2010 I'd sent my University colleague Dr. Tamara Woroby a shot of me waving in front of a "Regina" sign that delighted her (she had grown up there), but I recalled it as being a huge sign on top of a hill so I rode past this one. Traffic was slow due to lane closures and construction, so I hadn't gone far beyond it when I had second thoughts, pulled over onto the paved shoulder, and pushed myself back, straddling the bike, until I was in view of the sign. With the bike on its side stand I took two photos with the cell phone, capturing the "Regina" sign in each. My face in one of them, mostly concealed by the large helmet, looks rather anxious or concerned, which was in fact the case. I wanted to get this over with and out of there, and soon was.

After another welcomed loop route around Regina, I passed through Medicine Hat on that windy and sporadically rainy afternoon (though nothing like the downpour that had me hiding in a privy) and pulled up at the Motel 6 in Swift Current. It had been a 392 mile day, with 10,892

km (6,768 miles) on the odometer, indicating I'd ridden 2,483 miles from Towson. Dinner was ravioli delivered by Boston Pizza. In the evening I checked tire pressures: 35 and 37 psi. Hmm... with recommended 36 and 42, I fired up the little Slime inflator, using my self-installed cigarette lighter outlet, and brought them up to spec. Wind gusts almost blew me over on the short walk back to the motel, and a big cardboard carton went whipping past to slam against a fence.

Day 9, Friday May 26 2017: Again I arose at 5:22 and finished stretches at 5:58 AM. The Swift Current Motel 6 room was better appointed than Brandon's, and I didn't have to fix the shower lever, but its breakfast bar was pitiful: just a selection of heavy muffins brought over from the nearby Tim Horton's. I had one, but that was it for breakfast.

The day's immediate goal was Calgary, where I'd stayed in 2010 when driving the little Toyota pickup, but I really hoped to make Lake Louise. I was tired of this flat and windy prairie and wanted to get into the mountains.

The wind gusts were tough, and trying to hold that heavy helmet upright made my neck ache — a literal pain in the neck. When I stopped for fuel and for lunch at a Bassano AB Subway, a nice young man who admired my motorcycle said gusts had been much worse yesterday. Closer to Calgary, I became concerned about the flashing "low fuel" warning, and was greatly relieved to roll into Strathmore, with several stations to choose from. (Later I did a little calculating. If the tank is 1/5 full when the warning comes on, that's about 3/4 of a gallon, and at 62 mpg that's 46 miles or 74 km remaining. But Andrea's husband Jeff warns that perhaps not all of that 3.7 gallon tank capacity is usable, some required to cool and prime the fuel pump.) With a comfortably full tank I could roll right around Calgary, following the "Trail" (I forget the name of this particular trail) that loops around the north side of the city to the westbound exit toward Banff. I do not recall if I had set the cell-phone GPS for Banff, but that, as expected, was not necessary anyway.

Traffic seemed moderately heavy heading west from Calgary toward Banff, and of course I imagined that each party ahead of me was headed for the last available campsite in the Lake Louise campground. I'd been noticing that motorcyclists seemed less collegial west of Swift Current, many not waving or failing to return my wave. I can't think of any reason for that, so it's probably just random, and maybe not even a valid observation. In the late afternoon I was becoming a little tired and hungry, looking forward to a comfortable camp in surroundings that, if not exactly familiar, I'd visited before, having camped at Lake Louise with the Super Hawk in 1965 and the Toyota in 2010.

At the National Park entrance at Banff, a pleasant young man told me admission was free (150th Anniversary celebration of Canadian National Parks, I think) but asked if I had a campsite reservation at Lake Louise. When I said "No," he said they fill up quickly but something might be available. With some trepidation I headed up Route 1 toward the Lake and Route 93, the famous "Icefields Parkway." Exiting at Lake Louise Village, I parked the bike and walked to the Visitors' Center to ask about the campground. A pleasant young lady told me it wasn't open yet (June 1), but that there were plenty of sites available at the Monarch Camping Area of Yoho BC Provincial Park, up the road a bit at Field BC.

Eager for a spot for the night, I failed to obtain fuel or food and headed right out toward Field. Routes 1 and 93 intersect somewhere around there, and I found it a little confusing, but

about 24 km later — and down a long descent to the west — I found the “Monarch Camping” signs and closed down for the night at a pleasant, solid and level and accessible, campsite. My watch or clock read 5:50 PM, but that’s probably Eastern time and we’re in Mountain now, so that was very likely 3:50 PM MDT. The fee was \$17.60 Canadian; I had only a \$20 but a pleasant young lady from West Virginia, also paying her fee, pointed out the available credit-card forms so I Visa’d it. I cleaned and lubed the chain, and can’t find notes on what I had for dinner — perhaps the last of my breakfast bars slathered with peanut butter.

I took several dramatic photos of this attractive site, with stunning Rocky Mountains as a backdrop, and emailed one to several friends and family members. That evening I assembled and tried the little Helinox backpacker’s chair inside the tent: comfortable with its back support and away from mosquitoes and chilly winds. I had traveled 766 km (476 miles) today, my longest day yet explained by eagerness to get off the prairie and into the mountains. The odometer read 11,658 km (7,340 mi), so I’ve traveled 2,955 miles since leaving home.

Day 10, Saturday May 26 2017: I arose at 6:28 AM (probably 4:28 MDT.) and completed stretches at 7:03 AM. I wasn’t exactly sure what to do today, having planned on a zero at the Lake Louise Campground with a hike (in my New Balance walking shoes) back to the Tea House of the Six Glaciers again. (Hiking boots were too bulky for the Givi boxes.) But with no site at Lake Louise, and an extra 25 km (one-way), that seemed problematic. I left at 8:30 AM (EDT), fueled up at the Lake Louise Husky station, bought some food, and headed for Icefields.

The weather was beautiful, if cool (thanks again, heated grips and vest), and we cruised north on Route 93 at about 70 kph (42 mph), enjoying the stunning snowy mountains and often pulling over, onto the clear and nicely paved shoulder, to allow buses and other faster traffic to pass. I was in no hurry. I took a photo of the bike with a spectacular mountain backdrop, and pulled over at the Crowfoot Glacier viewing area where a kind man took a photo of me, the bike, and the glacier. (He joked that I probably was only interested in a shot of the bike; I laughed and said “Right! But some of my family would like to see me and the glacier too.”)

I planned lunch and fuel at Jasper, but — as had happened (ages ago, it seemed) at Sudbury — my intended route, the Yellowhead Highway (Route 16) east, arrived before the town and I took it, bypassing Jasper and revising fuel and food plans for Hinton. There were several kilometers of highway with construction in progress, motorcycle warnings of black, unmarked, grooved pavement, but I’d learned just to let the bike wiggle a little and we had no trouble. Once again, though, my planned route (Alberta Route 40, north to Grande Cache) arrived before reaching Hinton. This time, though, needing fuel and wanting a break and lunch, I rode on a couple of miles to a Hinton Subway and a Husky gas station. (The latter was irritating. There was no card reader at the pump, so I tried pumping anyway — no deal, so I headed into the station with my heavy helmet’s chin section flipped up. A rather unpleasant older woman told me I had to replace the nozzle to activate the pump, so I returned and did that, returned to the station with my card, and to the pump to fill, then to the station again to settle up. Data show I got only about 2.2 gallons and had traveled 200 miles since the last fillup at Lake Louise, for 92 mpg. Even with 40 mph travel on the Icefields that’s hard to believe. Perhaps I didn’t really fill the tank.)

Backtracking a couple of miles, I picked up Route 40 north. On the Super Hawk trip, with only a crude large-scale road map for planning, I’d visualized the faint-lined 40 as a desolate road through the wilderness, maybe not even paved, and was a bit excited and scared of it. But

I'd bailed at Lake Louise, heading up to Route 1 and down past Monarch to Golden BC and south to the States, never coming near Route 40. It was actually a well paved and pleasant highway, along which I snapped a photo of the bike against typical terrain. As we approached Grande Cache, I began to encounter more RVs and heavy trucks. This seems to be an extractive-industry (mining and logging) area, and 40 had many "Truck entrance" warnings.

Grande Cache came along. I inquired at one motel that had a room but at a rather high business rate (actually, about the \$140 I paid in Dryden), and the helpful clerk suggested the Grande Cache Inn that I'd ridden past just as entering town. It had been a Super 8 but was under new management, and the cordial new manager and clerk offered an introductory rate of \$89 (Canadian, of course). Deal! Nice room, Esso station and convenience store next door, refrigerator for my Lake Louise cream cheese and peanut butter. I ordered a pizza for delivery, took a shower, and settled in for the night. At 5:00 PM (probably 3:00 MDT), I recorded 497 km today (309 miles) and 12,155 km odometer (7,548 miles) for 3,263 miles since Towson.

Day 11, Sunday May 28 2017: Today's the day I make the Alaska Highway! Arising at 5:28 and finishing stretches at 6:04 AM (What time zone? Who knows?), I checked my tire pressures: 33 and 39 psi. I'd looked at them last night and they were high, so I bled off a few psi, and bet they would have been fine this morning if I hadn't. Maybe the tires were still warm from the day's ride. I put the Slime to work again and got them back to 36/42. Finding my Olympus audio note-taker not working despite replacing its battery with one of my spares, I bought a couple of AAAs at the Esso and then found I'd simply failed to turn on the power switch, necessary after a battery change. Well, I now have two brand-new expensive AAAs. Packing up, I could not find my new peanut butter but, anxious to be moving, assumed it was somewhere in my three Givi boxes. Later I realized I'd put it, and the even more forgotten cream cheese, in the room refrigerator. I hope somebody enjoyed them. It wasn't me.

Continuing north on Alberta 40, I encountered increased truck traffic with frequent side dirt roads used by heavy trucks. When they entered the highway they left long stretches of dirt on the pavement, turned into clouds of dust by vehicles passing over it. I stayed well back when a truck was entering ahead. But Grande Prairie soon arrived, and road signs were clear on the route to Dawson Creek, though I may also have used the GPS here. Between Grande Prairie AB and Dawson Creek BC I stopped for gas at Beaverlodge, shortly before 11:00 AM.

Dawson Creek proudly announced it was the start of the Alaska Highway, but I didn't see the Mile Zero milepost and just followed the road signs, winding up heading out of town on 97 north, the Alaska Highway. I came to the Chetwynd and Hudson's Hope turnoffs, but had already decided not to add the Hudson's Hope Loop. Kathy, the Visitor's Center hostess who had been so kind to me in 2010, might not even be there, the Center might not even be open on Sundays, and she might not remember me anyway. Been there, done that. But I did decide I should swing back and find that milepost, and made a U-turn to return to the city center. There it was!

A lady of about 60, clearly a fellow tourist, was on the sidewalk photographing the post, so I swung over and asked if she'd take a shot of me using my camera. She agreed at once. When she was soon joined by a younger woman, I swung back over and asked if they'd take one with my cell phone — they knew sending photos was easier by cell phone and again immediately agreed. All in all, I got two by camera and two by cell phone. Thanks to these kind ladies.

Seeing no reason to stop in Fort St. John I passed right through, and pulled in for gas and a campsite at Pink Mountain BC. The site was \$20, gas was about \$15, at 12,722 km on the odometer (7,900 miles) for a 352 mile day. It was nice to be camping on my first night on the famous Alaska (Alcan) Highway. I'd pulled into Site 22's parking area forward, and became concerned that its slight downhill might make it hard to get the bike out in the morning, so I started it up and noodled it around so it was facing outward. Much more comforting. A man with a beautiful long beard stopped by briefly; he'd done the Alcan on a Harley a few years ago, from California... pulling a trailer. Great beard.

Day 12, Monday May 29 2017: I arose at 5:20 and did the stretches, with breakfast about 6:30 AM finishing the large Jetboil canister of propane and starting on the other partial container I'd brought along. (I won't start a backpacking trip with a partial, unknown-quantity, fuel canister, so partial ones tend to accumulate. It made sense to finish them off when it was the motorcycle carrying the extra weight and space.) I had a little trouble entering the bathroom's code numbers on a keypad that had no visible numbers, but finally succeeded and was able to pack up and leave at 8:11 AM.

The day began quiet and cool, with little traffic for many miles. In late morning we began to encounter RVs, trucks, and beautiful sleek black bears. Fort Nelson came along at 10:30 AM; I fueled up and took a break at an A&W restaurant. It is adjacent to the car wash where I sprayed off the thick mud and dirt my Toyota pickup had accumulated on the Liard Highway in 2010. After coffee and a couple of excellent small fried fruit pies, the Honda and I headed north.

Ninety miles past Fort Nelson, we entered Stone Mountain Provincial Park. Stone Mountain was a real pleasure. The highway surface was smooth, though there were frequent warnings of loose stone and fallen rock. The road ascended, crested, and then descended, with turns of varying radii taken in 4th, 5th, or even 6th gear. There were many sheep that I called "bighorn" but later learned were stone sheep. (In my defense, they certainly had big curved horns.) At one point a group of them held up traffic as they sniffed and licked something on the highway surface. A trucker's honking horn didn't faze them.

Besides the sheep, I saw probably a dozen black bears, including a mother and two cubs, and perhaps a moose, a long-legged creature loping across the highway several hundred yards ahead of me. There was a bit of rain as I descended the mountain, but nothing serious.

My plan was to skip lunch to make Muncho Lake's McDonald camping area by early afternoon. I snapped a cell-phone selfie beside this beautiful lake, but the angle of the propped-up phone didn't allow the lake to be seen. I pulled into this camping area, but everyone had boats and fishing gear, and a lot of them were drinking beer. I asked where one could get water, and all anyone knew was "the lake." I sent a SPOT message when I first arrived, but then realized this was not for me, and, about 3:00 PM, moved on down the road toward Liard Hot Springs.

Eager to reach my goal for the day, I was moving right along when we encountered a 5 km dirt construction area. Its posted limit was 80 kph, and on hard-packed dirt with some loose stones I was doing almost that when a muddy section, stretching completely across the road, appeared. There was a layer of mud, maybe only an inch or two deep, over the hard-packed dirt, with wheel ruts where cars had passed over it. I hit it at probably 45 kph. As my front wheel crossed through a ridge between ruts it jerked to the right; I corrected by turning to the left, which cut through the ridge again and jerked the wheel to the left. To call my efforts "correcting"

may be a misnomer, and I was waving the handlebars back and forth, in a panic, finally putting my feet out and actually dragging them, briefly, in the mud. I don't know how severe my weaving was, possibly only 5° or 10°, but my experience has been that such oscillations usually become larger until the front wheel skids and one goes down. I don't know why that didn't happen here — perhaps because I was slowing down, or we reached the end of the mud. It was frightening, but I did not go down.

The Milepost showed gas available at Liard Hot Springs, and the only source I could find was a large white above-ground tank virtually across the road from the campground, named “Mussi Cho” on the credit-card receipt. They had only Regular grade. Another motorcyclist followed me in filling up with it. Entering the campground (\$26, cash only), I chose site 9, set up, and headed for the hot spring in a light rain. Dinner was one of my ill-advised Lake Louise purchases, Pad Thai noodles designed for “boil in the bag” cooking; I used a foil backpacker's pouch with some touchup in a frying pan on the Pocket Rocket, and it was fine. Later I strolled around the campground a bit, chatting with a couple from Tennessee who'd considered riding their Harleys but chose the RV instead. Though this was not a quiet campground (people were yelling, laughing, and chopping wood until nearly midnight), I had a restful night in some light rain. The odometer showed 13,284 km (8,249 miles), for a 349-mile day; I have ridden 3,964 miles since leaving home.

Day 13, Tuesday May 30 2017: I arose at 5:25 AM and finished stretches at 6:07. Who knows what time it “really” was? Maybe 3:25 and 4:07. I'd been speculating that I could make the AK border in two days from Liard... but then what? Tok was another 92 miles from the border. Well, there's no rigid schedule, that's for sure.

Between Liard and Watson Lake I saw probably a dozen wood bison, some bears, and a few beautiful wild horses. At one point, a mother bear and cub were descending the grassy bank on the right side of the highway when she heard the bike and stopped. I had slowed and, as I passed, gave my horn a couple of toots. I was sorry I did, for it frightened the cub, who turned and ran back up the hill. When Mom didn't follow, though, he stopped, and as I rode on they disappeared from view but I'm sure they got back together.

Refueling at the first station we NOBOs (Appalachian-Trail-ese for “northbound”) encounter in Watson Lake, the man there recommended Cathy's Kitchen, ahead on the left, for coffee and a snack. I missed it at first and started out of town, but decided a break was a good idea so swung back and found it. After a short stop we moved along, but found quite a bit of dirt road, under construction, between Watson Lake and Teslin. We had to follow a pilot car, and, spooked by that mud, I took it slow even on the hard-packed dirt with loose stones, 1st gear at about 24 kph. There was no mud, and although I felt bad about slowing the vehicles behind me I thought it was more important not to fall. When we got out of it, I followed a black pickup truck with a small open trailer, setting a pace I found congenial, all the way to Teslin. I was greatly relieved to make it over the infamous Nisultin (Teslin) metal-grate bridge, over ½ km long, with no trouble — identified in *The Milepost* as slippery when wet, Piet Boonstra even mentions it in his book *Motorcycling Stories* with some trepidation, and he's a former enduro racing champion. The pickup and I fueled up at the station on the right, just at the north end of the bridge, and its driver (from Homer) said he didn't mind my tailing him.

After coffee and a refreshing snack, I moved on, rolling through Johnson's Crossing and pulling into the Yukon's Squanga Lake Provincial Park about 3:50 PM, again, coincidentally, choosing Site 9. The fee was \$12 cash for a night at this pleasant and clean campground, though water from the nearby pump was not potable so my backpacker's Sawyer filter was put to use for the first time on this trip. I prepared the second of my two ill-advised Lake Louise dinners, a Knorr's "Side Kicks" sour cream and chives noodle dish, again using the foil backpacking pouch with a frying pan finish, and it was fine. In the evening, a bicyclist rode in. He's from Anchorage, planning (at 7:30 PM... or maybe 6:30) another 20 or 30 miles east today, and asked me to so inform a cycling companion if he should arrive and inquire. That still looks to me like a hard way to travel. My odometer read 13853 km (8,603 miles) for a 353-mile day; since leaving home, 4,318 miles.

Day 14, Wednesday May 31 2017: I arose at 5:34 AM and finished stretches at 6:11, though I'm still uncertain about time zones. I learned later that Yukon is in the Pacific zone, so maybe that was 4:34 and 5:11. I'd been thinking of making Tok from Squanga, but (based on Milepost distances) figured it would be 360 miles to the AK border and 92 miles from there, and 452 is a longer day than I prefer, especially if there is construction or rain. I decided to split it over two days, with Congdon Creek Provincial Park on Kluane Lake looking like a good stopping point tonight. I left at 7:47 (maybe 6:47) AM.

It was cool, and I set 75% on the Oxford grips and level 2 on the Tourmaster vest. Almost immediately I came to a "loose gravel" warning and a stretch of dirt road; there was no traffic to hold up, but I took it carefully in 2nd gear and was through the stretch quickly — it had to be only perhaps a kilometer long. I'd barely reached 100 kph, back on the pavement, when another short dirt stretch appeared. Then another short paved piece and more dirt... this happened about four times, like a checkerboard, until finally, to my delight, the pavement persisted. I stopped to switch face shields from the dark-smoke to the clear, for it was very overcast. (Amazingly, that switch made it much less so!) The roads were wet, but I don't recall actually being rained on.

At Haines Junction, where the Alaska Highway takes a turn to the right and the Haines cutoff bears slightly left, I stopped for gas, coffee, a snack, and some electronic communication. Andrea's text message reported concern that she had not received my Squanga SPOT "OK" notice — I presume none of the other recipients did either but they're not talking. That thing seems to take a while, even after the "email" light begins flashing, and perhaps sometimes I turn it off too quickly. A Gold Wing rider about my age, up from Haines, pulled in and we chatted a bit. He says it's like an armchair and he has no trouble doing 500-mile days. But he knows and likes the NC-700X. His wife was with him; I didn't see a second bike so perhaps they were riding two up.

After a photo of the bike along Kluane Lake, I pulled into Congdon Creek Provincial Park, failing to notice, on the large highway sign, a placard featuring a tent slashed diagonally. At a fee station there was another "No Tenting" sign, this time spelled out in words for us clueless, but somehow I figured that just meant "Don't camp in front of this sign." At a nice site I raised the bike onto its center stand and cleaned and lubed the warm chain. I had removed the Givi cases but had gone no further toward setting up when I realized what those signs meant. The Milepost had warned that this area was sometimes closed due to bear activity. I reattached the

cases, looked around for anything left behind, and headed five miles back east to Cottonwood RV Park, which actually had been my first plan for the night.

This private park was pleasant, clean and spacious with nice facilities. Potable water, showers, free wifi available near the office (I used it sitting outside on the deck). Tenting sites were \$25, cash only, and I chose Site Q on the lake. It was sunny with a stiff cool wind, but I had the zipped-up tent with its Helinox chair and was completely comfortable. At 3:45 PM (what zone? Mountain, I think, but we're now in Pacific) I had the can of beans I'd bought at Lake Louise and chatted with the couple from Anchorage camping at the next site. They're Harley riders, but — like every other Harley rider I've met — chose something else, again an RV, for this trip.

At this stop the odometer showed 14,225 km (8,834 miles) for a 231-mile day (very close to half the distance from Squanga to Tok) and 4,549 miles since leaving home.

Day 15, Thursday June 1 2017: Alaska today! I arose at 5:22 and finished stretches at 5:59 AM (Mountain Daylight Time), had some coffee (instant, prepared on the Pocket Rocket) and a couple of “oatmeal square” breakfast bars with the last of my peanut butter (I hope someone enjoyed the jar I left at the Grande Cache Inn), and headed out about 7:30 AM. My five-bar gas gauge was showing four bars, and I didn't know the fuel supply ahead (yes, The Milepost would have shown that but it was packed away), so I planned to top it off at Destruction Bay.

To my surprise, though, that station opened at 7 AM and, while my MDT clock showed 7:45, in PDT hours it was 6:45 AM! A couple of vehicles were waiting for the opening, but I figured I probably had 80% of a tank (actually, perhaps as little as 60%) and headed out, not wanting to waste 15 minutes.

The highway to Beaver Creek was pleasant, despite the overcast day, but after many desolate miles and the gradual disappearance of more of the gas gauge's quintile bars I became very concerned about my fuel. I slowed to 80 kph (in this 100 kph limit area), around 50 mph, and the few other vehicles on the road passed. I enjoyed identifying the eastbound-side rest stop where I met a fellow ham radio operator, Red Cranford (ham call K5ALU), in 2010 when I had the Toyota pickup. We were both working mobile CW (Morse code) while driving west on the Alcan; he broke in on a chat I was having with a Seattle ham and said he was only ten miles ahead. He and his wife graciously waited at this rest area and we enjoyed a nice face-to-face visit (in hamspeak, an “eyeball QSO”); Andrea and Jeff and I met them later in Anchorage. This pleasant memory aside, it was hard to enjoy the scenery while worrying about running out of gas, and I wished I'd joined the wiser souls waiting 15 minutes at Destruction Bay. But the final-quintile warning flash and the “Welcome to Beaver Creek” signs appeared almost simultaneously, and soon the bike (gas) and I (coffee and pastries) were full. Next stop: Alcan, at the border!

I can't remember much about this final Canadian stretch of the Alcan, but it was a thrill suddenly to have the large wooden “Welcome to Alaska” sign hove into view. It was about 9AM by my timepieces, still set on Mountain Daylight Time. I snapped a photo of the sign and bike, then decided it might be worthwhile to wait a couple of minutes so a human photographer could include me. Sure enough, a kind man was willing so I have a photo that includes us all: sign, bike, and ... oh yeah ... me.

Customs went smoothly — to my answer that I was born in Greenville PA the official asked if that was near Warren; I said yes, Warren Ohio, and when he said “no PA” I thought for a second and replied that “yes, there’s also a Warren PA near there.” Maybe this was some kind of test, but if so I passed and was back on US soil (well, pavement) in a few minutes.

The Anchorage Harley-owning couple had warned of a few stiff and unmarked frost heaves on this section, and a couple of them surprised me with potent jolts to the spine. I do not recall construction work along here, and rolled into a convenient parking spot in front of Tok’s Fast Eddy’s about 11:00 AM, Alaska Daylight Time, having picked up (relative to my watch and clocks’ Mountain Daylight Time) one hour when entering Yukon’s Pacific and another with Alaska’s Alaska zones. I’d anticipated Tok at 1:00 PM, and that’s when I arrived, by my clocks. Time for a pleasant, slow, lunch and a shower and rest in my Young’s Motel room, kindly made available to me at that early hour.

Nice to have access to American TV again: Fox News (Neil Cavuto’s business show) popped right up when I turned the set on, and Hallmark Movies and Mysteries, my other favorite channel, was in the lineup too. My cell phone was now operable for actual calls, something other than internet and text. Despite traveling in Canada I had failed to obtain an international calling plan.

This 5½ hour riding day ended with 9,089 miles on the odometer (4,804 miles since leaving Towson on May 18), a 250-mile day.

Day 16, Friday June 2 2017: The final section, 328 miles from Tok to Anchorage! Again my arising and stretches-done times were 5:22 and 5:58 AM (properly reset, now, to Alaska time). I skipped a restaurant breakfast to finish some food odds and ends, like bagels from the pack and Coke from last night, and prepared to leave.

With a bright sun and unhurried pace, I checked the bike and, to my dismay, found an exceedingly loose chain — slack awkwardly measured with my Leatherman knife scale at over 3”. The manual says not to ride if it’s over 2-and-something, and this certainly was. But I had no means of tightening it: the 22mm socket I’d brought fits only the static left axle cover, and is far too small for the actual (right) rear-axle nut. Jeff and Andrea, camping with their new RV in Glenallen, were willing to come up to help, but one of their text messages mentioned Tok’s NAPA dealer. (A man working at “The Outpost” across the road from Fast Eddy’s, lacking a socket that big, also had mentioned the possibility of help at NAPA.) I “bought” some coffee — it was free at the nearby store — and waited fifteen minutes for the dealer’s 8:30 opening. He had a 27mm socket (impact rated, no less), I rode cautiously with it back to Young’s, broke out my ½ “breaker bar, and loosened the axle with no trouble. In a few minutes I had a measured 1½” slack, pretty much right on (easily within my margin of error) the 1-9/16” recommendation. Goodonus! I texted Andrea and hit the road, the “Tok Cutoff,” south about 9:30 AM.

After twenty pleasant miles I pulled over to check the chain: still 1½”, as well as I could measure. While I was checking it several touring motorcyclists rode past — it was nice that they waved, but I’m surprised none stopped to see if I was in trouble. This would have been automatic for fellow riders in the days of my prior motorcycling life, the 1960s. I passed them, later, as they had pulled into a roadside business for gas or a break, and waved to them. Gratified that the chain had held the slack, I didn’t check it again for the rest of the ride. After more unanticipated frost heaves and perhaps a little dirt construction, I reached Glenallen about noon, stopping for

gas and lunch. Andrea and Jeff were around here somewhere, with their new motor home, but were hiking out of cell range so we weren't able to get together here.

South of Glenallen it's just the Glenn Highway (not the Tok Cutoff), and it was a fine afternoon's ride. I stopped at a couple of turnoffs to snap photos, but only of the bike and mountains — nobody else was there. (I have to fix that Joby tripod.) After refueling at the Fred Meyer pumps in Palmer I failed to turn left at the traffic light after exiting the station, which would have put me back on the Glenn south toward Anchorage, and went straight through the light. After negotiating several small traffic circles I hadn't remembered, and finding the road narrowing, I sought directions: I was headed for Wasilla, apparently. After quite a bit more frustrating riding (either my direction-providers weren't that good, or I had failed to follow their advice) I finally hit the Parks Highway (3) and then its intersection with the Glenn (1). Oh joy!

It was a somewhat familiar ride down to the city, and anticipation of my long-sought destination made it pleasant despite the longitudinal depressions found along some of the Glenn here; I tried to ride on the hump between them. This was a speedy area, with 80 mph often required just to keep up with traffic. I'd already planned to take the Muldoon Road exit, because it simply becomes Tudor (which passes near Andrea's house) after a sweeping right-hand turn, minimizing possible confusion about directions (burned in Palmer). It was the southbound Glenn's first Anchorage exit, and at 5:37 PM I pulled into Andrea and Jeff's carport. They were still up around Glenallen somewhere and wouldn't be home for a day or two, but had left sheltered parking space for me. I'd come 356 miles today — the map's 328 plus my Palmer-Wasilla confusion, I guess. There were 9,447 miles on the odometer so the trip covered 5,162 miles; fuel consumption, carrying 300 lbs. of rider and gear at highway speeds, averaged an excellent 61.6 miles per gallon.

This trip was over.