

ALASKA by NC-700X, 2017
John B. Egger

SOUTHBOUND, June 27 – July 10 2017

Date	Start	End	Start mileage	Day's miles
6/27/17	Anchorage, AK	Tok, AK	9,699	332
6/28/17	Tok, AK	Haines Junction, YT	10,031	338
6/29/17	Haines Junction, YT	Big Creek P Park, YT	10,338	307
6/30/17	Big Creek PP, YT	Bell2 Lodge, BC	10,677	339
7/1/17	Bell2 Lodge, BC	Fraser Lake, BC	11,009	332
7/2/17	Fraser Lake, BC	Whistler NP, AB	11,388	379
7/3/17	Whistler NP, AB	Ponderay, ID	11,729	341
7/4/17	Ponderay, ID	Bozeman, MT	12,168	439
7/5/17	Bozeman, MT	Glendive, MT	12,598	430
7/6/17	Glendive, MT	Fargo, ND	12,983	385
7/7/17	Fargo, ND	Tomah, WI	13,392	409
7/8/17	Tomah, WI	Elkhart, IN	13,815	423
7/9/17	Elkhart, IN	Meadville, PA	14,172	357
7/10/17	Meadville, PA	Towson, MD... Home!	14,540	368
7/10/17	Towson, MD	-----	14,889	349

Day 1, Tuesday June 27, 2017: Anchorage to Tok AK (332 miles)

I left Andrea and Jeff's at 8:00 AM, wobbling down the driveway, unfamiliar with the 88 lbs of boxes. I'm glad A & J insisted on moving the Element and the Fit... bet they are, too! I made my usual stop for gas at the Holiday on Tudor (that's where I recorded my mileage), then it was west on Boniface to north on the Glenn Highway. I had the grips at 75% and the vest at #2, but was getting a chilly breeze through my jacket. Up the sleeves? There must be vents open somewhere.

When I stopped to snag a photo of Matanuska Glacier (my "Day 1" photo), I found that the jacket's velcro waist strap on the right was totally loose; tightening it helped a lot. The day was gray and overcast, though I noticed no rain. I'm glad I had installed the clear face shield, stashing the dark smoke tinted one.

At 75 miles, a bit north of Palmer, some blue sky emerged. Great road along a river. At one point I came to a moose and her calf, beautiful light brown, at roadside. Everyone was slowing, including a couple of bikes behind me--- they stopped, in fact.

After gas and lunch in Glenallen, I took a left at the T where 1 meets 4: Right to Valdez, left to Fairbanks (4) and Tok (1). That section of coincidence went on longer than I recalled, and I feared I was on the way to Fairbanks. But of course the right turn came along, where 1 and 4 diverge. This "Tok Cutoff" had many frost heaves and some short gravel/dirt construction areas, with one pilot car stretch. The NC and I had no trouble with any.

At Tok I fueled at the Shell, chatting with a Fairbanks-bound couple on a Harley. Not paying attention, I rode over to Fast Eddy's to check in, about 3PM: No wallet! I went out to the bike,

intending to ride back across the street (and a bit west) to the gas station when some men talking nearby told me I'd dropped my wallet! I guess it had been caught on my luggage racks. Good news.

In mid-afternoon I saw two riders stopped at roadside, and pulled up to see if they needed help. Nope! One complimented the 700X.

I'd hoped for a beer or two at Fast Eddy's the rest of the afternoon, as I worked on my notes, but no: No beer without food. Forget it! I walked across the street to "The Outpost" and got a liter of Pepsi and an ice-cream sandwich.

That evening I did some planning, using *The Milepost* distances from 0 (Dawson Creek).

Day 2: Pine Lake, just east of Haines Junction: 300 mi. from Tok

Day 3: Big Creek Yukon Campground, 330 mi. from Pine Lake

Day 4: Bell 2 Lodge on the Cassiar, 320 mi. from Big Creek

Day 5: Piper's Glen Campground on the Yellowhead (Rt. 16), 365 mi from Bell 2 Lodge

Day 6: Honeymoon Lake Campground, 32 mi south of Jasper; 354 mi from Piper's Glen

Day 7: Idaho?

Motorcycle license plates at my Young's Motel building: AZ, CA, MT, GA, NC... and MD!

Day 2, Wednesday June 28, 2017: Tok AK to Pine Lake Campground, YT (306 miles?)

I arose at 6:24 and finished my 25-minute set of back stretches (prescribed decades ago by a physical therapist who was helping me with a back injury; she'd surely be surprised to learn I'm still doing it, but I think it helps with the physical demands of motorcycling) at 7:00 AM. After a modest breakfast of coffee and two oatmeal squares with peanut butter, the NC and I left Young's at 7:38 AM ADT (8:38 PDT).

We reached the Canadian border at 10 AM. Customs, 24 minutes later, went smoothly and an hour after that, with 114 miles behind us this morning, we stopped for gas and a snack in Beaver Creek. The following notes were prepared at day's end, at the Big Creek campground.

There was quite a bit of construction today --- a pilot car stretch (A utility truck driver, coming west, motioned me to get up at the head of the line with the other motorcycles... nice of him, and I did.), just hard-packed dirt with some loose stone. Later, there was a stretch (~1 km) of wide flat dirt and stone; I took it at 58 kph and tolerated almost constant wiggling, but it wasn't too bad.

There was a lot of nice road today but it was chilly and overcast, with just a touch of rain. We met a lot of bikers. Two passed through Customs just after me and we chatted where I'd pulled over to clean my face shield (my Rain-X does nothing). They're German, I think. One, who's also a widower, is writing a book and asked to photograph me at the Beaver Creek stop. Another group of four or five, the ones at the head of the pilot-car line, was on their way to Haines. They seemed to want to do 120 kph and pulled away. I'd catch them when we came to another construction area, and met them last at the Destruction Bay gas station. Their bikes sported many stickers.

Western Yukon road was bad --- many frost heaves and rough areas. Maybe six short dirt stretches, a couple unmarked. I tried two selfies at Kluane Lake, using the Joby tripod I tried to fix with Jeff's Gorilla Tape, but not very successful. I tried it again, here at Pine Lake.

I spent about \$8.50 cash at Beaver Creek (coffee, two pastries), partly to get a \$10 bill for the camp. Girl got my receipt wrong: \$11.60 is right, but I got Premium, not Regular, and >7 liters @ \$1.599, not >9 @ \$1.399. I'm using MY data!

This is another beautiful Yukon Provincial (or is it Territorial?) Park. I really arrived too early to stop, 3:12 PM for a 5½ hour day with no lunch, but didn't see anything farther within a reasonable distance. 306 miles isn't too bad.

Broccoli and rice for dinner, foil pouch and frying pan. At 7:20 PM a motorcyclist just arrived and took Site 8 beside me. NO MORE COFFEE... it's too late! Raised bike on center stand; wiped and lubed chain, and it looks good. I wonder about the rear tire, though --- I'm seeing some little dots on the narrow lines at the center that could be wear indicators. I trusted Jeff to tell me if he didn't think it was OK for this trip. It only has 5,700 miles on it.

I guess my cell phone wasn't plugged in this afternoon... low-battery warning. I plugged it into the always-on cigarette lighter socket for a while, and it's now at 62%. No email here, no text messages received and I did not try sending. But I did send a SPOT "OK" message.

Day 3, Thursday June 29, 2017: Pine Lake to Big Creek Campground, Yukon. (338 mi.)

Site 9. Not one of Yukon's greats! LOTS of mosquitoes; I used DEET for the first time this summer. It's now 4:45 PM and I'm sitting on the chair in the tent, with many mosquitoes on the netting.

I saw one of the little mammals get hit this morning --- poor thing. Many others had been, of course. They were cute --- prairie dogs? Sit up on hind quarters. I hit none, glad to say.

It was a rough morning, with two pilot-car stretches approaching Whitehorse, one with a short section of SOFT DIRT. Flaggers let me go first... nice!

Nice lunch at the Yukon Motel in Teslin, with a man from Australia who rented a 650 V-Strom in Victoria BC and has done a lot in Alaska with it, now headed down the Cassiar to meet his brother at Kitwanga and head back to Victoria (where his brother lives). He arrived soon after I did and asked if he could join me at my table. I had lunch (grilled cheese w/fries, iced tea, coffee) and bought a "Yukon" sticker for my bike.

Tiring day. This morning at Pine Lake, Dave pulled out without saying goodbye --- I wonder if he heard some of my muttering "Jesus Christ, Dave," around 1:30 AM! I'm not certain he was participating but think I heard his name mentioned. Young, thoughtless kids, though old enough to know better, probably in their 20s. Site 7, I think; Dave was at 8 and I was 9.

I arose at 5:35 AM and finished stretches at 6:08, pulling out at 7:25 after a breakfast of two blueberry breakfast bars with peanut butter, and coffee. Another chilly, overcast, sporadic light rain day. (It's not chilly here in the tent, or even outside now, but it sure was on the road this morning.) At 5PM, I should make some dinner... but am afraid to open the net!

Day 4, Friday June 30, 2017: Big Creek to Bell2 Lodge BC (332 miles)

Boo to Bell 2 Lodge! No TV or free WiFi; and no vegetarian entree for dinner. Fish, chicken, or beef only; I had two beers (\$15), salad (\$9), and an ice cream sundae (\$10.50) for a bill of \$34.50 with no entree! The room was \$175, and the dinner with tip added \$41. A geographic monopoly! Tent sites were \$26, but, like Big Creek, were very mosquito'y. BACK TO CIVILIZATION tomorrow, east on the Yellowhead!

The two or three wooden plank-surfaced bridges were no problem this afternoon; dry, hit them straight on. Worse was a loose gravel section, twisty and uphill. I was afraid to turn as sharply as the road did, and wound up in the northbound lane -- unoccupied, fortunately.

I saw a bear on AK1 early this morning (I was only on it from 7:25 to 8:00) and a rather scrawny looking wolf/coyote/fox at 10:30 on the Cassiar. Mottled gray and brown, very thin, he

didn't look healthy. A large RV had stopped with blinkers flashing to warn me. I saw no other wildlife today.

The Cassiar was perfect to Dease Lake, less so south of there but still very good. There were occasional short stretches of dark, wet gravel, about 100 meters, that I took at full speed (90 kph), plus that touchy one. No long stretches like the AK west of Whitehorse!

I rode mostly 80 to 100 kph. The limit was usually 90 (~56 mph) but often 80 (50 mph). The Alaska Highway was often 100 (62 mph). There was some light rain this morning, and more about 2:00 PM, with some clear sun and blue sky at mid-day.

My Australian lunch mate and I met again at Dease Lake. He'd stayed last night at Boya Lake, as his professionally designed schedule advised, so he rode 75 miles less than me this morning. He's bound for Tatogga Lake, another short day (it's 50 miles north of Bell 2).

I took 3 camera photos along the Cassiar, just to give an idea. Snowy Rockies are become prominent as I move south. I kept looking for the great "Continental Divide" sign where I was photographed in 2010 (my 1994 Toyota pickup trip), but never did see it. The map of Canada shows the highway crossing the Divide around Dease Lake.

My chain looked perfect: 1½" play. I wiped and lubed it. The 700X was complimented by a full-bearded Harley rider, chatting the the attendant when I pulled up. He knows it, and likes it. He pulled out before me, southbound.

There's no cell coverage, at Dease or here at Bell 2. Internet here is \$11.50 for 30 minutes... pfui! Where is a Subway on Rt. 16? I can collect 1, maybe 2, free 6" subs. (Cell phone email)

I had a good restful night last night at Big Creek, after I let some of the air out of the Thermarest and used only my inflatable (with Helen's campy cover) and a clean T-shirt as a pillow. The tent protected me from the night's light rain and Big Creek's terrible mosquitoes. This morning on the bike I could not SEE very well, and kept raising the face shield to clear it and adjusting my bifocals. I finally realized a mosquito had bitten my right eyelid, and it was badly swollen. I'd noticed a problem in the tent, on arising, but assumed it was just night sand. No such luck... it was bad on the northern end of the Cassiar, mostly cloudy vision from the right eye, not offering much help to the left. As the day progressed the swelling subsided and my vision cleared up.

The riders at Dease Lake were a nice group, including another 50-year absentee on a Honda CBR-1000 (I think). Same story as me: Family/kids → no cycle for 50 years. We didn't get into how/why we both returned to it. There was a Suzuki 1200 (a 4-cylinder) with a SIDECAR at the pump; its owner is going to the Isle of Man to see the sidecar race. [Man, \$42 and I'm still hungry. I should bring in the stove and make some of my seasoned instant mashed potatoes. 7:43 PM. There's a mosquito in this room! Where'd she come from? 9PM --- finished a stretching routine here in "Crew 2" room; nice to have ∞ space! I should have brought in the Quest and tent fly to let them dry.

Dave was quite a trip at Pine Lake. Gregarious... I liked him. North Carolina, a Yamaha 2003 FR-1 (1000 cc), I think. He has a helmet camera and does YouTube stuff. I think he was in the group talking until 2AM; he was disappointed when I excused myself at 8PM. (A Tenderfoot/Biscuit dependent type? That YouTube stuff suggests he's not totally, or even nearly, my type, despite motorcycle touring and camping. Robert W. Service: "Do things just for the doing, letting others tell the story..." But what of my own journals, etc.? They're for myself, family, and friends.

I'm playing MUSIC on my cell phone --- Jelly earlier, now ELO. Brought the blue electric bag in, charging camera battery, toothbrush; cell phone is 100%. I do like that ELO music: "All Over the World," "Don't Bring Me Down," "Evil Woman."

Using my Canada map, I tried to judge the distance from Coeur d'Alene to Baltimore... 2400 miles. 7 days => 343 mi/da. Easy, on US Interstates. As Jimmy says in "Hoosiers," "I'll make it."

Day 5, Saturday July 1, 2017, Bell2 Lodge to Piper Glen RV Park BC, 379 miles.

The day started @ Bell2 Lodge, Room "Crew 2." Arose 5:35, stretch to 6:12, interesting time since there's STILL a mosquito buzzing in here. Yesterday's 533.9 km trip ~ 332 miles.

About 11 AM, the Rt. 16/37 intersection: 17,976 mi, 259.3 Trip A. Did not see the beautiful Cassiar signpost. Photo @ diner.

379 miles (610.5 km) today. Total 18,327 km ~ 11,381 mi [~9,698 @ Andrea's = 1,683 mi]

Now at Piper Glen RV Park, 8 miles east of Fraser Lake BC. Tenting is rather an afterthought here, and there are no site numbers. A moderate wind off the lake is keeping mosquitoes down, to perhaps 3% of what they were at Big Creek (and would have been at Bell2 if I'd tented there; they were bad when I tented in 2010).

The sky was overcast and medium gray when I pulled out of Bell2 at 7:35, foregoing the rain gear. About 5km down, I saw a crow at a black lump on the right shoulder. I hoped it was a tire carcass but knew a crow wouldn't bother with that. It was a beautiful glossy black bear, probably hit at night by a northbound vehicle. Sad start to the day.

I whipped across a couple of wooden-plank bridges, so short that at road speed (80-90 kph) it took about a second. I was dreading the 150' Nass River Bridge ("slippery when wet," and it certainly would be wet today). Rain jacket on, 8:15 AM. I had a lot of trouble seeing, and the Rain-X does not seem to help. I'd tilt my head down, so drops would be blown down and off, but then my bifocals would slip down. Dirty road spatter, and a still-partly-swollen right eyelid.

I'd looked forward to sending Dash some spectacular photos of the snowy Rockies looming ahead as we got farther south, but could only catch glimpses of them, mostly just the bases as the higher slopes were hidden by the gray blanket. No photos at all on the road this morning.

I made the Nass bridge, and pulled into the immediate-south rest area to don rain pants (tearing the right leg even more). Two riders, southbound also, passed; they too had just negotiated the bridge and gave me a toot and thumbs-up. 150' isn't like those 20' ones; there was plenty enough room to get into trouble. Much worse than the steel decking like Teslin.

The worst road was a long stretch (OK, put me on the spot... maybe 10 km?) marked "loose gravel" and "no lane markings." Actually there was gravel, but the base was hard and many vehicles had traversed it, so I kept road pace (~90 kph) and was reminded of the gravel only with an occasional wobble. The worst aspect was the lack of markers at road edge (often there was no shoulder at all) or center separating us from NOBOs. Where was the lane? When I was ready to pull out of the rest area with my rain pants on, a bus-type RV had just crossed the bridge. I considered jumping out ahead of him and am glad I didn't. He moved right along, and served as a guide or pilot for me, showing where the road was. I just followed him, not very closely. He'd get down to 80 occasionally, but hit 115 once in a while -- I just stuck with him, grateful for the guidance.

He turned off at a Kitwanga sign near the end, and maybe I should have because I could not find the wonderful signboard I photographed in 2010, with a map of the highway. I followed the road sign 37 to 16 for Prince George/Rupert. The young man at the 37/16 gas station knew nothing of that sign. RATS --- another one missed.

Photo of me at the station/diner by another biker. Grilled cheese/fries again --- breakfast served until 11 and it was 10:57... except pancakes, which I wanted! There were many bikers in the diner, wet rain gear. One was from Ohio, surprised that someone beat him (distance-wise). They're headed for Fairbanks, as I recall, and had heard about Yukon pilot cars.

Yellowhead east was a delight: smooth (not pebbly, and certainly not loose gravel) and well painted, light traffic. I just cruised, discouraged to find >300 km to do in the afternoon despite 295 km in the morning. Major issue was best foot position! But the sun came out and the road was dry -- what's not to like? The km ticked off until I reached Piper Glen and a pleasant woman accepted my \$22 + tax (Visa).

I met many riders today, and nearly all waved.

I skipped breakfast at Bell2, not wanting to pay \$4 for a commercially baked muffin or \$3 for a cookie. Man, \$43 for no dinner, and \$175 for a room with no television. Well, I'm sure their costs are high there, but they also have a geographical monopoly! Well, now I know what it's like. I skipped the available jacuzzi (no extra charge).

I'm sure glad that morning is over. Dangerous, anxious (anxiety?), stressful, at times scary. Oh, I forgot a real scare! I'd just taken the 90° left at the Mezaidin intersection with 37A and was accelerating toward a small bridge, a concrete jersey-wall type wall on its right and narrower than the road, with a mild turn to the left. As I approached and started setting up for the turn, in poor vision as usual, two double tank trucks speeded over the bridge heading north, toward me. My route was narrowed considerably, between the speeding trucks and the concrete wall, and I could not see well at all. My planned line was too close to the trucks so I bumped it out a little, still hoping to avoid everything and make that narrow channel that I could barely see. Of course I did, but its memory stayed with me all morning. Yikes!

I suspect this will be a NOISY place (now 8:55 PM). Many families with their big RVs and lawn furniture set up outside. Well, as [Longmire's] Henry would say, "It is what it is." Now... some gas records.

Day 6, Sunday July 2, 2017: Piper Glen RV Park BC to Whistler National Park AB (341 miles)

McBride 12:15-:45 (Mileposts: PG 131, Jasper is PG 234 so 103 mi to Jasper); I've come 220 miles today with 133 to go to Honeymoon Lake Campground.

WHISTLER Site 1F, 4:45 PM MDT; 548.9A, 4.5B, 18,876 km total odo (A= 341 mi today, with 11,722 miles odo). Chain looks fine, 1½" slack, wiped and wax-lubed it when it was warm. MAP: "East Access Route" looks like 180 mi Castle Jct to USA, and 160 mi Jasper to Castle Junction = 340 mi to US! Wish I had a US map. Well, it is what it is. I may have a long day just to reach the border. SANDPOINT motel? Coeur d'Alene is too far.

8:40 PM MDT: This place is busy, crowded and noisy. But I have a spot and would have been worried if I'd gone on. I'll have to make up the extra 30 miles tomorrow.

Bike started on the 3rd or 4th try at Pipers'; wet, maybe? It did rain a little just after I got the tent packed. I decided to wear the rain jacket, but after about 10 minutes stopped and packed it in the top box. Some construction this morning, with a long stretch of grooved pavement. Having skipped breakfast, I was hoping for a waffle at Tim Horton's but (when I finally found the place, right near 16 -- I'd been in behind a long row of warehouses or industrial buildings, dead-ending in dirt) it was just egg-a-muffin things and doughnuts. I had the latter. I could not get the Internet to work, despite the phone saying I was connected. I gave up and hit the road, figuring there

would be gas stops before McBride. NO DEAL... except Purden Lake Resort, regular \$2/liter! I probably could have made McBride, but who needs the stress?

A heavy cloudburst had me trying to get into the rain pants --- what a mess! Standing in the rain, at roadside, zippers caught on fabric --- I finally gave up and let them flap. Of course it stopped raining within a few minutes and the road was dry.

Dry and HOT! I turned off the grips and vest, and after McBride didn't even wear the latter. (My audio recorder got wet again, and won't play back until it dries out. Very sensitive to water.)

Spectacular views of the Fraser River, green and white, rushing alongside and passing under the highway several times, and the ROCKIES! I took several photos while astride the bike (not moving!), including Mt. Robson ahead, though its upper part was cloud-covered.

The Park gate man, responding to my question about campsites, said it's very busy but I might be lucky, or they could send me to an OVERFLOW area (Snaring River) north of Jasper. At this point I was worried, and went into Jasper mostly to see if I could get on the internet and reserve a Honeymoon site... but the restaurant had no wifi. Tired, hot, dehydrated and hungry, I had a Greek salad, coffee, and water(s), traded a text message with Andrea, and decided to try each campground until I found a site. Presto, #1, Whistler, barely out of Jasper. Well, it's now nearly 5PM by the new Mountain time, and 550 km today --- enough!

I met two women here, at site 1A, bikers from Edmonton: Honda Shadow (V-twin Harley clone) and a Ural BMW clone. Very cool. They'd never heard of the NC-700X, but were impressed with my trip.

A nice young man took my photo in front of the McBride station (I had a Veggie Samosa) with mountains in the background. Several other bikers were there.

Knorr's Spanish Rice for dinner, using my food pouch and a frying pan. I have only some peanut butter and a packet of mashed potatoes left. I had a "buttery mashed potatoes" packet for dinner at Piper's.

Day 6, Monday July 3 2017: Whistler BC Campground to Days Inn, Ponderay ID (376 miles)

With a farewell wave to the Edmonton girls, we headed down the Icefields Parkway. When I paused to take a photograph a group of about six motorcyclists passed. When we all stopped at Sunwapta Pass at 8:30, they snapped a photo of me and the NC. They rode at the speed limit, I about 10% faster. There were a few tour buses, Oriental tourists it seemed, but southbound traffic was very light and I held about 100 kph.

The shops at Lake Louise were crowded, so after a 10:18 AM fillup at the Husky station we headed out. Stupidest move of the day: I tried to set up the Platypus drinking hose while moving south on 93 from Lake Louise, trying to find it --- blowing around behind me --- with my right hand while holding the throttle with my left. Suddenly the motor died. After a brief panic, I realized my awkward left hand position had hit the kill switch. Hmm... don't do that!

Our ride continued down 93, with mountains looming, toward Radium Hot Springs. I stopped there for lunch, leaving at 1:15 PM. We got to Kingsgate customs at 3:50 PM behind about a dozen vehicles, but the bike was easily pushed without starting its motor and once we reached the agent, a nice young man, we were through in a couple of minutes. I'd planned to end the day in Sandpoint, but stopped a bit early at a Days Inn in Ponderay, snagging the last room. After finding a paper road map, doing laundry, and enjoying half of a Pizza Hut pizza, we were ready for a restful night.

Our day had been 446 miles, for a total odometer of 12,168 miles.

Day 7, Tuesday July 4, 2017: Ponderay ID to Bozeman MT (430 miles; total odo 12,598 mi)

Although I'd planned to pick up I-90 East at Coeur d'Alene, the cell phone and my daughter suggested Route 200 east out of Sandpoint. Good idea! Curves, scenery (e.g., my photo of the NC at the beautiful Lake Pend Oreille), and little traffic until later, when we met some small towns' Fourth-of-July celebrations that were enjoyable anyway. Somewhere two silver or gray cars, one a Lexus, arrived and we leapfrogged several times. I preferred a speed of "limit + 10 mph." On a couple of occasions, a line of maybe 7 cars developed, traveling at the limit or less, often led by an RV. It was hard to pass a long tight line. The silver Lexus was speedy, and I hit 87 or 88 in 5th during one pass of the long line.

For a while I followed an SUV at a nice pace, with the silver pair behind me, but it chose a turn marked "To I-90 via ...something..." I started to pass, had second thoughts about I-90 and hard-braked on the SUV's tail, finding the Lexus right behind there too. I waved an apology, and in about 20 miles we were on I-90 East.

About 11:45 I stopped for lunch at a rest stop, remembering the pizza, doughnuts, and coffee I had. The pair of silver/gray cars was there too. I asked if it were they I was leapfrogging with. Yep — I apologized for the quick turn and they said they had not noticed it. They left before me, and I didn't see them again.

My hydration system worked well: I emptied the Platypus bag this afternoon. It was warm enough that I removed the pants liner this morning.

I considered stopping at Butte, about 340 mi (the daily average needed to arrive home in a week) but felt fine and it was a beautiful day for riding, with perfect roads. Billings is too far (~575 mi) but Bozeman looked good so that's where we lodged for the night.

As I prepared to lube my chain, a slender man approached, a biker very interested in the NC-700X. He's on a Polaris Slingshot (I looked at it while walking back from Parada Buffet that evening) with his 26-year-old son. He was a California State Trooper before contracting colon cancer and having to retire in his early 60s. He cautioned me about dehydration, once suffering it on a ride so severely that hospitalization was required, and now drinks constantly. I assured him I was careful, showing him my Platypus hose bite-valve system.

Day 8, Wednesday July 5, 2017: Bozeman MT to Glendive MT (385 miles, odo 12,983)

Arising at 5:45 AM, I stretched and checked tires and chain (all OK), but this Motel 6 had no in-room coffee and no breakfast of any kind. It promised to be a hot day.

Five miles out, a gray and white bird hit my face shield. I continued with somewhat cloudy vision but stopped after a few miles to clean the shield. My heated-grip control box was bent, and at the next stop I found white feathers embedded in it. Poor fellow. I'm sure glad I had the face shield down, or it would have come right inside the helmet.

With breakfast consisting only of the last Ponderay doughnut, I was ready for lunch at a Subway in Billings. After a snack and gas at Miles City (12,897 odo) I took a couple of photos, one a generic I-94 shot with the Sony camera. This was quite interesting country; we passed over the Powder River.

My stop was at the first Miles City exit and the gas/convenience store was the only thing there. I found the next exit from I-94 more satisfactory, with many options including a Subway... but with no I-94 signs, how is a traveler to know?

I saw one black Montana State Trooper vehicle today, but I was doing less than 5% above the 80-mph speed limit so wasn't concerned. It was so hot that I tried opening my jacket, but that was kind of like standing in front of a hair dryer.

The Glendive exits followed the same pattern. Two exits showed only one motel (a non-chain) so I decided to ride on to Wilcox. But then another Glendive exit appeared, with many motels, including the nice and very reasonable (\$79) Comfort Inn that I chose. (Does Montana have some kind of rule against signs?) I took a shower, and had a pizza delivered.

Day 9, Thursday July 6, 2017: Glendive MT to Fargo ND (401 miles, odo 13,384)

It was a pleasant, cool morning when I had a small breakfast despite an excellent breakfast bar. I sat with a gray-haired man who had also just ridden from Alaska! There was a BMW GS1200 with BMW aluminum luggage just outside the front doors. He looked at the NC and called it a nice bike. But we were both eager to enjoy the cool morning air. I had checked and wiped/lubed the chain last night, and left the tires alone, pulling out at 6:34 MDT... soon to be CDT.

It really was cool! I would have zipped up my vents if I could have done it while in motion, but it wasn't worth stopping for. Remembering Dasher's plea for more photos, I stopped a couple of times for cell-phone shots, especially at Grasslands National Park. I'm glad I took an exit to a "Scenic View" at Theodore Roosevelt National Park. I asked a couple to photograph me; the man wore a Harley T-shirt but was 4-wheeling it with his wife today.

Around 11:30 AM I stopped at Coffee Cup Truck Plaza for a Subway sub --- ate it and moved on, but needed both rest and coffee so I stopped shortly later at a nice North Dakota rest area. I sent photos to the kids from there, in text messages.

The ride today was very windy and I sustained the neck ache I'd had crossing the Canadian prairie headed west. Gas mileage was also poor; when I stopped for gas around 166 miles on the tank, my gauge showed 54 mpg, low for the NC. Montana has an 80 mph speed limit, North Dakota 75, and I saw several ND troopers' cars.

I considered stopping at Bismark for a new rear tire, but it looked OK at the Mandan gas stop so we moved on. But thinking of Chicago and Cleveland traffic and possible rain, I decided to see if I could re-tire in Fargo. I got in about 3PM, LaQuinta offering a nice \$95 rate and a first-floor room with the bike right outside the window.

The Honda dealer had no 60/160's suggesting Minneapolis or Wisconsin. Pfu! But, responding to my question, he mentioned several other local dealers. The second I called, Wheels Inc. (a Kawasaki/Indian dealer) had a 60/160/ZR17, though Metzler rather than Michelin. The service man apologized for having to ask me to wait until 6PM! I rode over (after enjoying the complimentary spaghetti dinner in the La Quinta lobby), spent \$200 tire and labor, and was back at 6:45 PM, in time for another helping! (Round-trip from the motel to dealer was 7 miles.)

I was glad to get that prairie behind me again, the same feeling I had when, heading east in Canada, I approached Kenora! The strange mounds and rolling hills, as I moved east (especially east of Bismark) with genuinely flat land. I could sometimes see the white ribbons of concrete stretching ahead to the horizon, maybe 10 miles ahead.

It was easy riding except for the wind. I had to chuckle when I saw a "Bump" warning followed by a mild, barely noticeable, dip in the mirror-smooth pavement. Thus says the Yukon veteran!

I considered myself lucky to land at this motel, more upscale than my usual, and told the reception lady I was pleased with the \$95 charge. Rethinking my plan for the next days, with today's extra 40 miles... With July 7's 350 mi now 40 miles past Eau Claire, July 8 would be 40 miles PAST Chicago (and that's a Saturday... good!), and July 9 40 miles past Cleveland, maybe even to Bob's! (Yes, that's >40 mi, but easily doable.) July 10 would be about 300 miles to home.

Day 10, Friday July 7, 2017: Fargo ND to Tomah WI (423 miles, odo 13,815)

I arose at 5:35 and stretched until 6:02 AM. In the breakfast area I made quite a mess by “PUSH”ing the wrong direction on the waffle machine batter valve, so hard that it broke and poured batter onto the floor. A lady employee fixed it up without (whatever she was thinking) chastising me. I had Cheerios and yogurt instead. I was glad to escape Fargo in shame!

On I-94 I’d been tailing a modest-sized RV with 4 rear tires, at a good pace for me, when I smelled rubber, heard a “bang,” and found black missiles flying toward me. Aieeee! A small chunk of rubber hit my helmet, right side high up, above the face shield, causing no problem except a small mark on the helmet. (PS: Thanks, helmet!)

On the morning’s ride I yawned some --- what’s with that? I was awake a bit last night, excited about the imminent end of this trip. (I’d figured July 8 Tomah to Elkhart, July 9 to Meadville, July 10 to home.) Stopping at a nice rest area 40 miles west of Minneapolis, I drank my Platypus bag coffee and ate the banana and apple from LaQuinta, then sent texts with photos.

Traffic became fairly heavy about 25 miles out, so when a “694 Bypass of Minneapolis-St.Paul” sign appeared I didn’t think twice! I didn’t want 94 through the city, if that’s what it did. There was some construction on this bypass, with single-lane traffic. It was reassuring to see WI and IL license plates --- maybe I was going right! Exits to I-35 passed by, but eventually I-94 East arrived.

It was still early (~1:00 PM) with Eau Claire arrived; my plans seem to have ignored the added miles due to the bypass. Signs said something like “Eau Claire 20, Tomah 107” so I figured I could make Tomah.

At Tomah I found several motels. I tried Quality Inn, but the older lady (probably younger than me...) was not friendly and wouldn’t budge from \$119, so I rode across the main drag to the Econolodge. Another older lady said nothing was available, but a young middle-eastern man (perhaps the manager) said “Yes, we do.” The older lady fiddled with the computer and said “\$129,” but the man said the cheapest was \$99, and the lady reluctantly assigned me a room at that rate in an annex. (What’s with these old Wisconsin ladies?) The room was unimpressive at first, but it had a microwave, refrigerator, coffee machine, hairdryer, a complimentary breakfast, and free open wi-fi.

Next door was a group of young (20s’ish) people, maybe six, enjoying salsa music from a boom box and having some beer outside. They asked me about my ride and hoped I wouldn’t mind the music. I replied something like “Not at all, enjoy it! But I hope it’s over by, say, 10 PM.” They laughed --- and were gone long before then. A couple on a nice Gold Wing rolled in when I was returning from my walk over to Denny’s for dinner. They were about my age, and lived just north of Minneapolis-StPaul. The woman says they’ve ridden all over. I guess they went out somewhere to eat, because the bike disappeared but returned later.

My cell phone isn’t charging properly; we’ll see. I should be able just to follow I-90 signs tomorrow. It’s 9:30 PM now... nighty-night!

Day 11, Saturday July 8, 2017: Tomah WI to Elkhart IN (357 miles, odo 14,172)

I arose, after a good night, at 5:22 AM and did the back-stretch routine, then had a waffle for breakfast and took an egg, a piece of bread, a banana, and an apple for lunch. The Gold Wing couple pulled out as I was walking back to my room --- early starters. I treated the NC to fuel at the gas station next door, and at 7:20 AM (CDT) we were off!

It was chilly! I wore just a T-shirt and shorts under the riding gear, and could not zip up the arm vents (of course one could not stop for such a thing!). At the next gas stop, 9:50 AM, in

Illinois bet well short of Chicago, I donned the heated vest (without juicing it) and zipped the arm vents closed. Much better! [This may have been at the “Belvidere Oasis,” where I’d stopped on the Illinois Toll Road headed into Chicago.]

The Chicago traffic started 25 miles out. I stayed on 90E; there was a loop (490?) that said “Indiana” and was tempting, but it also said O’Hare Airport... I skipped it. (A mistake!) The traffic was heavy. I did not select the “Express” lanes when first offered, not sure what that meant, but took them when next available. Still heavy traffic. I saw ahead the two touring motorcycles (BMW’s, I think) that had passed me earlier. The traffic was very slow, and I had to put my foot down several times but usually could say in 1st, slip the clutch, and wobble around.

Eventually we speeded up, and crossed the Indiana line about 11:50 AM CDT. Everyone was thrilled to get back up to speed!

Tolls! About three cash tolls and then two using VISA swipes, awkward on a motorcycle. I had to use the “Cash” lanes, lacking electronic passes.

At the first Indiana service area (not called an “Oasis” as in Illinois) I ate my stuff, drank Platypus coffee, and added banana bread and blueberry danish. I photographed the NC here. A nice young lady at a nearby outside table explained to her young daughters about my heavy protective gear... I heard the phrase “road rash”!

At 12:45 I was only about 75 miles from day’s end, having come 284 miles today. The rest of the day’s ride was unexceptional (Yay, I guess!) and I had no trouble finding the hotel. It seems lightly occupied, so perhaps my reservation was unnecessary. I ordered a Marco’s Pizza Greek salad and Garden pizza -- they brought Greek and Garden salads! I called, they realized their error, and the pizza arrived soon. Of course they could not take the extra salad back, so I stashed it in the refrigerator, perhaps for lunch tomorrow.

I was tired and went to bed at 8:30 PM. I guess it’s maybe still CDT.

Day 12, Sunday July 9, 2017: Elkhart IN to Meadville PA (368 miles, odo 14,540)

I arose at 5:22 and did stretched and posted emails (Jeff, Kim [McGavin?], Jill [Huey?], Jim [Dorn?], Mark [who?]) until 6:03, then breakfast.

It wasn’t a particularly memorable day, riding-wise. I paid tolls on the Indiana Toll Road (ticket at Elkhart, \$4 cash) and, after getting a ticket at the Indiana/Ohio line, the Ohio Turnpike (\$16.50 cash). I kept the tickets in my Givi cell-phone case, mounted on the handlebar. My right foot slipped on oil at booths, dropped by cars, but I never came near to falling.

I entered Ohio at 9:30 AM, stopped for a snack (one slice of pizza and a banana, and Platypus coffee) and gas at a service area. The weather was beautiful. I set the Oxford heated grips at 50%. I saw several State Troopers but was riding 70-75 mph in a 70 zone so figured I was OK. A couple on a Harley that was parked beside me at the Clyde Service Area pulled out first, and waved as they did.

The 80-90 separation was successfully negotiated, avoiding the I-76 (PA Turnpike) exit even though it said “Pennsylvania.” I stuck with the “80E to New York City” signs, crossing into PA about 11:45 AM and made 300 miles at 12:05 PM. I found I-79 North (next sign read: Meadville 27 miles) and pulled into a Conneaut Lake Road gas station with perhaps 6 bikes already there (mostly or all Harleys, with many riders unhelmeted). It was a nice Sunday for cruising --- these guys were locals, obviously not tourers.

I stalled the NC once at an Arch Street stop sign --- a four-way stop, and I and the cross-street party couldn’t decide who should go first --- but pulled into Bob and Aggie’s driveway at 1:15

PM. It was a 367.5-mile day (14,540 on the odometer), with tomorrow, to home, about 20 miles less.

At 8:14 PM I reported feeling tired! Should I start early tomorrow to miss the Baltimore Beltway rush? Naw... don't plan around that!

Day 13, Monday July 10, 2017: Meadville PA to Towson MD (349 miles)

My only trip note on this ride is a gas stop at the Somerset Plaza at 10:26 AM (2.749g). Once I got home I guess the incentive to record details of this familiar ride wasn't there!