

# ALASKA BY MOTORCYCLE, 2018

John B. Egger

Northbound, May 18 – June 3

**Day 1, Friday May 18 2018:** [Towson, MD to Pickerington, OH]

Shortly after 8 AM I backed the Gold Wing out of the driveway and parked it across the street while I backed the Tacoma in. Success: All three of my 4-wheelers fit in the driveway, noses touching tails, with the pickup's front bumper clearing the sidewalk by about two inches. The other motorcycle fit beside the narrowest car. Sorry to say, it was sprinkling lightly. It's never nice to start out in rain, and my mailman Jim (a Harley rider) seemed surprised that I was planning to depart when storms were forecast, but — within reason — I don't like weather to affect my plans.

With only 340 miles on the new Gold Wing's odometer, I pulled out at 8:38 AM, not wearing the rain suit but tucking it under the elastic net on the passenger's seat. I was worried about traffic on the west side Beltway, but it was light and never, as I recall, even slowed down. There was light rain, off and on, as we headed west on I-70. I was surprised that Navigation took me to Breezewood and the PA Turnpike, because the cell phone had chosen 68 through western Maryland. Maybe it's a "fastest" (bike) vs. "shortest" (phone) thing.

At the Breezewood Dunkin' Donuts I was again served, like last year, by a very pleasant older lady ("older" could, of course, mean ten years younger than me). Outside, a nice woman from Toronto photographed me with the Wing. About 50 miles later, I made our first gas stop at the Somerset Plaza, and half an hour later stopped for lunch at the Turnpike's New Stanton service plaza. A nice man and his wife spoke to me in the Quiznos line; they'd seen me at Breezewood. He has a 1999 Valkyrie. We chatted a bit while waiting for our food, and again out at the bike — he was parked beside me, and was walking their dog.

Not paying attention to the GPS, I did not realize how close New Stanton is to the divergence of I-70 (my route) from I-76 (the PA Turnpike), and was in the center lane when I discovered the imminent exit. Traffic prevented swerving over, so I let the GPS rescue me. We took the next exit, Irwin, and wound around (mostly on Route 136) until finally returning to the highway. But I made a real error merging onto I-70. The street intersecting it had a Yield sign, and I assumed there was a merge/yield lane... but not so! It basically just came out at 90° to the highway. With heavy trucks speeding by two feet away, I wound up on the narrow, debris-strewn shoulder for a short distance until an opening in the traffic appeared. Bad judgment, Johnny B!

There was a lot of traffic, and rain became heavy as we entered West Virginia. My clothes did not get wet, but I had trouble seeing. I had put no Rain-X on the windshield, so while it offered a bit of protection the view was filmy, misty, foggy — in general, hard to see. Sometimes I'd lower the windshield so wind would clear the helmet's face shield.

In Ohio the sky brightened — just to light gray; I recall no blue sky at all today — as we headed toward Columbus. I first used the delightful cruise control, set at 70 mph. Running low on fuel, we exited for gas at Thornville OH, and almost immediately I noticed it was late in the afternoon. When some motel signs came along I chose the Pickerington OH Comfort Inn about 4:30 PM. I'd ridden 415 miles today, and the Gold Wing's odometer now read 756 miles.

Tired and hot, I walked over to a nice Mexican restaurant for dinner, then took a shower. Quite a day. The Gold Wing is smooth and I controlled it pretty well in slow maneuvers. Luggage is a

pain, though! It's hard to swing my leg over the items strapped to the passenger's seat, but not everything will fit inside as it did with the NC-700X's Givi boxes.

SPOT link: <http://maps.google.com/maps?f=q&hl=en&geocode=&q=39.93028,-82.78818&ll=39.93028,-82.78818&ie=UTF8&z=12&om=1>

**Day 2, Saturday May 19 2018:** [Pickerington, OH to Terre Haute, IN]

I arose at my normal home time, 4:32 AM, did back stretches, and read some of Arnow's *Mountain Path*, which I had read last night also. But on the trip I'm going to suspend the habit of reading for an hour every morning.

We encountered heavy rain about 9:00 AM, and I donned rain gear under an overpass. The fog made it hard to see so I slowed to 60 mph. Ten miles east of Richmond, Indiana the weather cleared a bit. I looked unsuccessfully for a Dunkin' Donuts, finally pulling into a Bob Evans at 9:45, surprised to find no pastries or muffins. I got coffee and ate an oatmeal breakfast square brought from home.

In mid-morning we encountered a long construction backup resulting from some bridge work: a lot of foot-down, some shifting into neutral, but traffic — though down to one lane — was not slow enough to warrant shutting the motor off. I was worried about getting dizzy, but it didn't happen. The DCT sure is nice! I fueled up at Spiceland IN with 150 miles behind us today.

In late morning, approaching noon, I was engaged in a really unpleasant ride through Indianapolis. There was some heavy rain but few overpasses offering motorcyclists shelter, and though poor vision suggested lower speeds the multiple lanes, often elevated, seemed dominated by heavy fast trucks. I thought about pulling over, but the right lane usually had debris and often I couldn't tell if it was a merge lane or a shoulder: Once I'd almost decided to take a break on the shoulder when an 18-wheeler came up fast and passed on the right, in the "shoulder" I'd been planning to occupy. That was scary. I hunched over, lowered the windshield to clear the face shield, and moved on.

Shortly after noon, as I was reaching the western outskirts of Indianapolis, the rain stopped... and soon, so did I, enjoying a nice grilled-cheese sandwich with french fries at the Country Pride restaurant in a Clayton IN truck stop just west of Indianapolis, 212 miles so far today. After lunch, though, despite a brighter (still not blue) sky, we were peppered with several short bursts of heavy rain. I passed a fellow rider donning rain gear under an overpass, but when I saw motel signs decided I'd had enough. I pulled into a Holiday Inn Express in Terre Haute IN just a few miles from the Illinois border, dripping wet, at 2:00 PM. The pleasant young receptionists, a woman and a man, offered an attractive rate and suggested I just leave the bike in the shelter of the entry portico, where I'd parked it to register. We'd come 261 miles today, and the Gold Wing now had 1,017 miles on it. (This reminded me of last year's third day on the NC-700X, pulling into a Marathon ON motel on a rain-shortened day of about 250 miles. This year's weather-truncated day is #2, one day earlier.)

Almost as soon as I checked in, blue sky and a hot sun appeared, making me doubt the wisdom of stopping. Then again, the sky to the west, where I would have been heading, continued to be dark and foreboding.

Although the young hotel clerk said it was too far or unpleasant to walk over to the Wal-Mart in the nearby shopping area, I needed the exercise and had time, so I walked it (9 minutes) twice: Once for 4 doughnuts and information, then for dinner (a microwave burrito, a fancy packaged salad, and iced tea). That evening I worked on the bike's Bluetooth: It's still "pairing" with the

Sena5-FM headset, and once I actually got it to “Connect,” but still could get no headset audio. I took a couple of poor photos of the bike parked under the portico.

Caitlin hasn’t emailed about her first visit yet. I’m so eager to hear about my darling girls.

Frankly, I’m feeling rather low — sometimes wishing I’d never started on this trip. Bad weather is dangerous and a worry. I’m eating poorly and not exercising enough. We’ve covered only 676 miles in two days.

However, it was enjoyable to realize, in some of those non-rainy moments this morning, that I rode this route on the Super Hawk in 1965! From Meadville PA I’d ridden west and remember flat farming country down through Illinois to St. Louis MO, where the Super Hawk and I crossed at the famous arch. I visited Sedalia in an unsuccessful search for hints of Scott Joplin’s time there, sixty or seventy years before my 1965 pilgrimage.

SPOT link: <http://maps.google.com/maps?f=q&hl=en&geocode=&q=39.43443,-87.33441&ll=39.43443,-87.33441&ie=UTF8&z=12&om=1>

### Day 3, Sunday May 20 2018: [At Terre Haute, IN]

I arose at 4:32 AM and finished back stretches and a shower, then recorded yesterday’s data. I decided not to read *Mountain Path* this morning. Caitlin did not email — Rats. I hope she was good to my girls.

Relax, Johnny B! Take it easy and be safe.

Woah — At 6 AM the weather forecasts were terrible for the St. Louis area: 60 mph gusts, thunderstorms. The cell-phone weather forecast didn’t look so bad. It was 170 miles to St. Louis, a 2:30 trip — I thought I could make that, at least; I should be relaxed and careful, but not a scaredy-cat! At 8:00 AM, however, the Weather Channel forecast was for thunderstorms headed northeast from St. Louis, with 60-mph gusts and quarter-sized hail. Forget it! The meteorologists’ advice was to hole up in a secure place, and I was in one.

I did receive a nice email from Leah this morning. Callie greeted her but there was no mention of Coco. It was great to hear from her!

At ten o’clock on a hot and sunny morning in Terre Haute I strolled over to the Pilot Travel Plaza across I-70 for a United States road map. The clerk, a pleasant young woman, urged me to “be safe out there,” probably noticing my Roadrunner Magazine cap. After another walk to Wal-Mart and Subway I returned to the room about 11:30. Nice weather here just east of Terre Haute, but the sky was ominous and dark over I-70 West where I’d be heading, and there were some sprinkles on the walk back from Wal-Mart. This exercise cost me a good “Noir Alley” movie on TCM, but with Jack Benny’s “To Be or Not To Be” on at 12:30, it was time for a nap.

I decided to learn how to don my Fly-brand rain pants. I’d had trouble telling the front from the rear, but determined the pocket is on left leg front, stripes are on the outside, the patch is on the seat, and the tags at the back. Each arch strap has only one snap on the inside, and on the outside connects to a snap adjacent to short covering strap, to the snap between the origin of covering strap and the zipper (in front of it on left, behind it on right); there are two to select tightness. Man, no wonder I have trouble pulling these things on in a roadside downpour!

How to don the pants: Unsnap inside arch end, then (1) Fit the pants over both boots, sitting down, with all leg material clearing heels. (2) Zip each leg up, (3) Arch strap to outside snap adjacent to covering strap (4) Covering strap to first snap (over zipper/arch strap) or second for tighter fit. Step 1 is the key — you can’t do it standing on one leg at roadside! E.g., the NC-700X heading into Jasper last summer, when I severely tore the pants — I thought that sound was velcro separating!

Later that afternoon, experimenting with Navigation, I set as waypoints St. Louis, Warrenton MO, Hays KS, Walsenburg CO. But these were all on the route the GPS had chosen to Walsenburg anyway, so I don't think they had any effect. Setting waypoints is probably a way of telling the GPS what route the rider wants it to lay out. I learned that Kansas City, MO is 412 mi — I should be able to beat that, weather permitting, and then one more day to Colorado.

After a good Mexican dinner at Real Hacienda in the Wal-Mart shopping strip, I did another set of back stretches. They and walking have been good. I've been walking somewhat bent over, like times when I'd strained my back. Today, nice and upright. Good on me! I took a couple of photos of the Wing at the hotel, using the cell phone.

I hoped I could get through Kansas City (413 miles) before its rush hour (or at all!). Relax, don't push it! One ManorCare stay was enough. Actually, too much.

SPOT link: No link; same location as last night

#### **Day 4, Monday May 21 2018:** [Terre Haute, IN to Junction City, KS]

Determined to leave this unanticipated layover this morning, I arose at 4:32 AM and handled normal morning activities until the hotel's nice breakfast bar opened at 6:30. Resisting heavy waffles, I had cereal with fruit, juice, and a bagel.

We left the Terre Haute Holiday Inn Express at 7:22 AM with 1,017 miles on the odometer. Rain pants were in the trunk, but the jacket was more accessible under the passenger's seat elastic net. The early morning brought frequent light rain; I varied the windshield from full up to nearly full down and had no trouble seeing. In 70 miles I refueled in Effingham IL; with the switch to Central time at the Illinois border the bike clock showed 7:30 CDT. My plan was to stop every two hours, and we actually stopped at the Silver Lake Rest Area from 8:35 to 8:50 AM CDT, pretty close! I had a cup of surprisingly good machine-brewed coffee and took a selfie with the camera.

Around 200 miles at 10:00 AM the GPS took us to I-270, swinging north around St. Louis, with no traffic trouble. (But we did miss the famous arch, probably on a more southern route.) West of St. Louis, eastbound traffic was backed up for miles due to a bad accident involving a semi and a small red car (upside down and torn up), and later another long backup caused by construction that funneled several lanes down to one. Glad I was going west!

At 11:35 I stopped for lunch, with 313 miles today, at a Subway in Boonville MO. I planned a one-hour break, and walked around a bit, but finally couldn't resist the good weather and left twenty minutes early after asking a man to use my cell phone to photograph me and the bike.

Kansas City was harder to ride through than St. Louis — more city riding, more turns, underpasses, merges. It was about 100 miles from our lunch stop. I recall being through it by 2:00 PM. I set the cruise control to 78 mph and relaxed. Twice the fuel gauge got down to one bar (it has six of them), but it never flashed warnings like those I was to see later and had often seen on the NC-700X. At the Topeka Plaza a Harley rider, filling up nearby, came over and admired the Gold Wing. He knew pre-2018 ones and was amazed at its slimness, also commenting on pegs moved forward. Everybody knows more about this bike than I do! On the long straight stretches in Kansas with nothing but grassland, I was glad to have plenty of gas.

At 3:00 PM I saw a sign for Marriott Gardens Motel at Junction City in 42 miles, a bit past my 3:30 planned stop. I figured there must be less-pretentious motels in Junction City, and pulled off I-70 almost directly into an empty EconoLodge parking lot. At 3:40, we had come 540 miles today, my longest day of the whole trip.

The motel, which seemed rather dingy, was owned/managed by a man named Rocky Patel, reminding me of the Gadsden AL EconoLodge that was owned and operated by an Iranian couple. But the room had a refrigerator, microwave, and coffeemaker, and a guest laundry was available; the powerful window-unit AC quickly cooled the room. The low point was the mattress, an old-fashioned innerspring that was lumpy and sagging. Well, I'll make it for one night...

Firing up the cell phone, I found a nice email from Leah about Callie, but there was no mention of Coco yet.

Wandering outside, I quickly discovered there was no restaurant nearby. But I got two excellent slices of pizza at a nearby gas station/convenience store (Handy's). From their receipt, this area is known as Grandview Plaza, not Junction City, Kansas.

SPOT link: <http://fms.ws/wL18h/39.02772N/96.80173W>

**Day 5, Tuesday, May 22, 2018:** [Junction City, KS to Walsenburg, CO]

Again arising at 4:32 AM, after the normal morning routine I headed for the 6:00 AM breakfast bar. This inexpensive and worn place provided a nice modest breakfast, where I finished at 6:30 AM and chatted with a nice older Michigan couple (again, "older" meaning probably five years younger than me) who were also headed for Colorado, in an RV.

I had set Walsenburg CO as my GPS destination and was soon taken off I-90 West to Route 156, heading southwest. Unsure of its services, I filled up at the station at the exit and headed down the two-lane highway. I saw no speed-limit signs and traffic was light, so I left the cruise control at 75 until signs appeared approaching the town of Ellsworth KS about 8:15 AM. I carefully slowed to 45, then to 30, as signs directed, and was surprised to be pulled over by a trooper at the heart of the town. He said he clocked me at 76 mph in a 65 zone (I told him I'd left the cruise at 75), checked my license and insurance, and gave me a written warning. He said it's very common for people coming off the Interstate to maintain their speeds. I told him I hadn't seen any 65-mph limit signs, but didn't make an issue of it. Hmmm... can you say "speed trap"?

Soon after a half-hour snack break around 9:30 at McDonald's in Great Bend, I made a slight mistake by disagreeing with the GPS. (That's usually, though not always, a bad idea.) Routes 56 and 156 split a short way out of Great Bend, and I thought the correct route was 56 while the electronics said to stay on 156. There was some town just south of the split and I got into it before backtracking, losing only perhaps 8 minutes.

At Garden City KS Route 156 met Routes 50/400, for which I was headed. Low on fuel, I pulled into the first station I saw, an unpaved and empty strange place named Acorn Truck Stop, with only diesel and one 87-octane regular pump. The two young people in the office seemed friendly enough. I gratefully filled up and moved along. Almost immediately the 156-50/400 intersection appeared with a big bright moderately crowded truck stop. I needed no fuel but had lunch there, my standard truck-stop grilled cheese and fries, about 12:30 PM.

I took 400/50 to Los Animus and Rocky Ford CO (entering the state about 1:00 PM), picking up Route 10 there, southwest to Walsenburg. A short way down 10 I noticed that my fuel gauge was down to two bars but anticipated fuel along the highway. I wasn't pleased to see the sky becoming dark ahead, or (especially) to find Route 10 so desolate: Not merely no services, but hardly any houses or farming or commercial structures.

Perhaps 20 miles down the 63-mile highway fierce wind gusts began, blowing tumbleweed across the road, accompanied by rain. Through the fog the clusters of tumbleweed marching across the road had a weird ghostly appearance, some kind of frightening apparition. The gusts

were so strong that I worried about keeping the bike upright and on the road. When powerful hail began, I pulled to the right edge of the pavement (there was no shoulder), lowered the side stand, and activated the emergency flashers. Worried that the bike — sitting on the road in poor visibility — would be hit, I grabbed my rain jacket and darted up a short grassy hill to get clear of it. I got one arm into the jacket but, with it blowing around behind me, couldn't find the other.

Almost immediately a car pulled up behind the bike. Its two occupants urged me over and made space in the back seat. They were a nice young couple whose names, Shania and Justin (?), I learned when I met them later at a Walsenburg gas station. The hail soon stopped, so I thanked them profusely, fired up the Wing, and headed out. Concerned about the desolation and low fuel, I set the cruise control at 50 mph and hopefully watched the GPS "miles to destination" tick off.

Made it! I finally saw a lone gas station — another weird one, requiring prepaying the cashier — and my benefactors were at the pump ahead of me! They greeted me warmly and I thanked them again. Noticing their Jesus bumper sticker, I thought of an observation I'd recently heard about a positive correlation between people's religious belief and how nice they were. Pleased to be fuel-filled and at my destination, I carelessly failed to secure my Platypus water bag's drinking hose when leaving the station. Dragging on the road, it lost its bite valve on the way to the motel. Aieeee! No more drinking and driving. I'd ridden perhaps only a mile up to the main highway, I-25, when several brightly lit chain gas stations appeared, reminiscent of the Acorn Truck Stop incident at Garden City KS.

The Best Western on I-25 just north of town was the only available chain motel, and although I needed rest after two hard days it was too expensive, in money (\$120) and time, to stay another night. I wanted some low-mileage days, camping, hiking... Kind servers at the adjacent Taco Bell chose good vegetarian options for my dinner. Back at the motel, in blustery wind I ventured out to get data (today 485 miles; total odometer 2,042 miles) and to move the bike under the roof at the corner near my room, as the clerk said I could.

SPOT link: <http://fms.ws/wOIw7/37.65538N/104.79485W>

**Day 6, Wednesday, May 23, 2018:** [Walsenburg, CO to Mesa Verde National Park, CO]

I fell asleep early last night and awoke at 1:45 AM, sleeping fitfully until 5:30 and finishing morning duties at 7:00 AM. Checking tire pressures for the first time, I found 35 psi front (the book says 36; I left it alone) and 38 psi rear, which I pumped up to 42 (book is 41). This was my first use of the Slime electric inflator with this bike, and I was pleased to see that it worked fine with the electrical outlet provided with the heated vest. Preparing for the tire check, I got the big bike onto its center stand for the first time, amused to find a Route 10 tumbleweed stuck in the muffler shield.

After the nice complimentary breakfast bar, we left at 8:30, but the tire low-pressure warning light almost immediately came on so I pulled into a nearby parking lot to check pressures: 35 and 42. Hmmm... nothing wrong with that. I found the Owner's Manual and learned that the light often goes out after a few miles... and it did. But I was not pleased, following my first pressure check and top-up.

I was looking forward to Wolf Creek Pass, but there was a lot of flat-plains riding between Walsenburg and the mountains. At a Subway snack stop in South Fork I chatted with a couple of older ex-bikers at the adjacent table. I'd mentioned that soon after starting the day's ride I stopped to put on the vest, then again for the rain jacket, as it quickly became colder heading west from Walsenburg. They told me warmth would return by Pagosa Springs, after I got through the pass. It did.

Wolf Creek Pass and the road to and from it were gorgeous. The speed limit was often only 40 mph, with dark green firs and lighter aspen (I presume), a rushing creek at roadside, and often rock faces almost right up to the road (with many “fallen rock” warnings). The pavement was perfect, smooth as glass, and it was great fun to swoop the curves on the big motorcycle. We stopped at the Pass itself and I prevailed upon one of a pair of Continental Divide Trail thru-hikers for a couple of great photos, one at the impressive board that identified the Pass, Divide, and Trail, and another at the simple green road sign for Wolf Creek Pass. The former is more impressive, I guess, but I sort of prefer the simple road sign. The hikers had left the Mexican border, the southern terminus of the Trail, a few weeks ago.

In Pagosa Springs, having come down from the Pass, I stopped for lunch at a Subway and continued west on Route 160. Following the GPS and road signs, I used the Senior lifetime National Park pass to enter Mesa Verde at no charge, and reserved a tent site for two nights at half price (\$31.58). Selecting the Zuni Loop’s Site 41, I wandered down to the gift shop/snack bar for some muffins and... a beer! I was surprised they sold it in a National Park. By 8:15 PM the sun was going down and it was getting chilly, so I turned my attention to the jumble of things I’d tossed into the tent.

Today’s ride was 264 miles, for a total of 2,306 miles on the Gold Wing. In Walsenburg I’d wished for some short distances, camping, and hiking... and I’m getting them! By the way, I finished Harriet Arnow’s *Mountain Path*. Good book.

SPOT link (at the Mesa Verde campground): <http://fms.ws/wQSur/37.29922N/108.41472W>

#### **Day 7, Thursday May 24 2018:** [At Mesa Verde NP, CO]

It’s cold here! I went back to bed after an early-morning walk to the bathroom and finally arose about 5:45 AM to face the back stretches. At 7:00 the restaurant’s \$8 pancake breakfast beckoned. Since I was unable to get a discount for having none of the meat offerings, it was basically \$8 for three medium pancakes, not a great deal. (It was all-you-can-eat, but that was three for me.) But they were good!

The Gold Wing and I left the camp at 8:20 AM, stopped again by a tire-pressure warning but the gauge showed 36/42 so I just rode on. As before, in a few miles the warnings ceased. I parked at the Chapin Mesa museum at 9:00 AM, bought a \$5 ticket for the 3:00 PM guided tour of Balcony House, and tried to figure out what to do until then. Wetherill Mesa has a lot of things that only open on Memorial Day, and my chat with the campground store’s clerks suggested it wasn’t worth visiting, so I rejected it in favor of Chapin. But after watching a 30-minute movie about cliff dwellers I spoke with a young man, working a desk, who said there were several things I could do on Wetherill. Regretting the wasted time, I jumped on the bike and headed there, arriving about a quarter after eleven. There were lots of vehicles in the parking area, suggesting indeed that there was plenty to do!

Walking down to the area of activity, I put my sunglasses on. I don’t know about causality, but found myself drifting to the left edge of the sidewalk and becoming dizzy. I was adjacent to a short sidewalk leading to an open roofed shelter with picnic tables, made it to one of them, and sat down. Drinking some water, eating a muffin, and a brief rest got me going again, and I immediately began on the 1-mile self-guided Step House Trail. All went well — an enjoyable short walk — and I took a few photos using the camera. Perhaps if I’d not deliberately killed time at Chapin there would have been time for the Long House walk (~ 1 hour), but there wasn’t, so I headed out, leaving plenty of time for a pleasant relaxed lunch at the big Far View Terrace and to reach the parking area for the Chapin Mesa’s Balcony House tour at 2:30 PM.

Riding on the long road down Wetherill Mesa to the cliff dwellings, and the shorter one down Chapin Mesa to its attractions, was pleasant. Although one had to anticipate fallen rocks and loose gravel, the pavement was smooth. Speed limits varied between 30 and 40 mph, and there were many curves and some 15 mph hairpins. Both mesas had suffered massive fires, and in places there were miles of charred slender trees as far as one could see, with signposts identifying the name and year of the fires. I generally preferred a lower speed than the cars and RVs, so I let many of them pass me.

The Balcony House Tour, guided by a slender young woman named Ranger Fong (so she said, but I doubt if “Ranger” was actually part of her name.), began at 3:00 PM. There were some physically challenging sections, three ladders and crawling through a tunnel, but nothing that fazed an old Adirondack hiker and all went well. I left the parking area about 4:20 PM and was back at camp an hour later. The day’s riding in the park was 77 miles. A good day!

The tent had blown over in the wind; the camping gear I’d left in it was all lightweight. The heavy motorcycle clothes and helmet fixed that! A pair of riders, one on an older Gold Wing and the other riding a Harley, chose the site just uphill from me. Nice fellows, “mature” but younger than me — they’re from Illinois.

Before preparing one of my vintage-2013 Appalachian Trail repackaged freeze-dried dinners (Backpacker’s Pantry Katmandu Curry), I walked down to the restaurant for some coffee and to charge the cell phone. It picked up enough juice to check for email. Later that evening, walking down to the bathroom, I had another minor dizzy spell and headed for a boulder near one of the campsites, planning to sit down, but it ameliorated. I was wearing my 2X drugstore readers and blame them. Careful, Johnny B!

SPOT link (at the Wetherill dwellings): <http://fms.ws/wSDRP/37.19613N/108.53807W>

### **Day 8, Friday May 25 2018:** [Mesa Verde NP, CO to Orem, UT]

After back stretches inside the tent I packed up, skipping breakfast, and pulled out around 7:30 AM. My neighbors, the 65-year-old hiker/bicyclist with the white 2005 Gold Wing and 61-year-old Roger with the Harley, had gone to the restaurant, so we couldn’t say goodbye. As I rode down the hill toward the RV service area, the tire pressure light came on again. I ignored it, and before I reached the park entrance at Route 160 it had gone out. Roger said Honda should fix it.

The sky was clear and the temperature perhaps 70° F. Following the GPS northwest on Route 491, I stopped for breakfast of coffee and a fried apple pie at the McDonald’s in Dove Creek CO (and was delighted to find an email from Caitlin about the cats) and crossed into Utah, picking up Route 191 north. Stopping at a rest area north of the Canyonlands National Park entrance road (Route 113?) but south of Moab. I asked a young woman to use my cell phone to snap a photo, then texted it to the family. Her male companion complimented the Wing.

I had lunch at a Green River UT Subway, associated with a large Conoco Truck Stop. Exiting, I was focusing on other vehicles, and drove down over a curb even though it was painted red. Clunk! I assumed no damage (and later found none) and rode on. Before Green River, I’d set the cruise control at 80 mph, the speed limit on Route 70. Out of Green River, Routes 6/191 probably had a 65 limit. It was hot and the land was dry and barren, about the least appealing terrain I can imagine. I saw several paint-faded “Land for Sale” signs, 5-acre parcels... who would want such a thing?

The rock formations around Canyonlands and Arches National Parks were certainly impressive, but 6/191 (northwest out of Green River) to Price was hot and dreary. On Route 6, after 191 branched off, I snapped a photo to convey an impression of the road ahead. As usual,



several more-spectacular views soon appeared as we headed northwest toward the Salt Lake City area.

The GPS, with Provo set as my destination, took us to Route 15 north, then to the downtown-Provo exit (265?). I took it: the fuel light was blinking. The first station I pulled into had gone out of business four days earlier, but I was able to fill up at a station across the street (4.759g, still about 3/4 gallon left). There had been many motels advertised at a prior exit, but I saw none at this one. Two young men gave me some confusing directions to a Marriott several blocks away, but I was sure I could do better and backtracked to I-15 north. Good move, Johnny B: A sign listing a half-dozen motels appeared almost immediately, in Orem, a few miles north of Provo. I easily found the Comfort Inn (I'd been looking specifically for one) and was offered a good rate (\$100.70, all inclusions) by Kevin, a pleasant young man who saw the Cornell email address on my Choice Hotels discount card and said his father graduated there in the mid-1980s. He let me leave the Gold Wing parked where I'd pulled in, under the entry portico, as I'd been allowed to do at Terre Haute. Nice!

At my room, I telephoned the Orem Honda dealer to arrange the bike's first service, primarily an oil change, which Pete's advised at 3,000 miles. The dealer told me the factory's recommendation for a first service is at 4,000 miles, so rather reluctantly I said I'd find a dealer in Idaho or Montana to handle it later.

That evening I had a pizza delivered from Lucy's, did my laundry, and took a shower. It had been a good day, covering 326 miles and making 2,709 miles on the odometer. I'd parked at the motel at 3:22 PM.

SPOT link: <http://fms.ws/wUzTs/40.27305N/111.70551W>

### **Day 9, Saturday May 26 2018:** [Orem, UT to Butte, MT]

This was not a particularly exciting day, except for almost running out of gas. I left the Orem Comfort Inn at 7:30 AM, following the GPS north on I-15 with the cruise control set at the speed limit, often 80 mph today.

Almost exactly at my goal of a break every two hours, I found an appealing rest area at Malad City ID at 9:34 AM, 140 miles today. It featured free coffee and cookies, sponsored by a Masonic Lodge; I enjoyed talking with several volunteers there. It had been pleasant riding this morning, cool with little traffic.

The Gold Wing has a display that is supposed to show the range left in the gas tank, but apparently I don't have it figured out yet. About 260 miles south of Idaho Falls, the bike display was showing a range of 330 miles, so I figured that would be my next fuel stop. But the fuel light started blinking when the range was still showing 220 miles! I gratefully pulled into the Sage Hill Plaza, Blackfoot ID, and got 4.739g, a bit less than 50 mpg. This Plaza is apparently an Indian establishment. I also had lunch there, my usual grilled cheese (though more fancy than usual: Swiss on sourdough) with fries, for only \$3.29! Coffee was another \$1.09. Other large service providers soon came along, north on I-15, but I was glad I'd stopped at Sage Hill.

Soon passing through Idaho Falls and into Montana, I found I-15 pretty desolate: Long stretches of highway with grassland on each side, no services and few other signs of human habitation apart from an occasional small road, apparently to some ranch, with a "No Services" warning to travelers. My tank, filled at Blackfoot, was becoming less full... I do recall passing a couple of unappealing stations, confident that better alternatives were upcoming.

Finally, after riding for a while on one fuel-gauge bar, the fuel-pump icon and the bar began blinking, which the manual says happens when 0.92 gallons remain. I recall being about 40 miles

south of Butte, my destination for the day and, surely, a source of fuel. With just empty grassland on the rolling roadside hills, and empty miles ahead after every minor hill was crested, I didn't figure there was anything much to do except ride on. Though I could have slowed to, say, 50 mph, as I had heading into Walsenburg, I chose simply to see what would happen at 70. Trying to quell my anxiety and relax, I moved along... relieved finally to see a few signs for Butte businesses. When I-90 appeared, I headed east the few miles to Butte and pulled into a large Pilot Truck Plaza for fuel. By the time gasoline reached the bottom of the filler pipe, I'd pumped over 5 gallons; just to see if I could, I pumped 5.501 gallons into the tank with a rated capacity of 5.5 gallons! Admittedly I went right to the top of the filler pipe and a little sloshed out when I put the cap on. I'd traveled 231 miles since the Blackfoot fuel.

At only 2:45 PM, it wasn't surprising that the adjacent new EconoLodge seemed virtually empty. After a 453 mile day (now 3,163 miles on the bike), I obtained a nice modest and inexpensive room, then walked over to Truck Plaza and sent a postcard to my neighbor Helen Manke. She'd given me a Mesa Verde brochure as I was leaving home, so I wrote a little about my visit. There weren't any establishments around except the motel and truck stop, but dinner was nicely handled by a foot-long sub from the truck stop's Subway. I hoofed it back to the motel just as a fierce but brief storm of rain and hail began.

Still puzzled and concerned about the bike's first service, I telephoned what seemed to be the larger of the Butte Honda dealers, but late on a Saturday afternoon got only voice-mail. I left a message of my concern about heading into a holiday weekend and Canada with the oil change imminent, and then logged onto the internet's GL1800Riders forum to see what the group had to say. One respondent was from British Columbia. I'd found that Prince George has a dealer and would be at about my 4,000 mile point on Tuesday. But the general advice was "Don't worry about it!" One respondent said "4K, 5K... who cares?," while another advised avoiding on-the-road service if possible, even if it meant waiting to 10,000 miles. With about 5,500 miles to Anchorage I decided to do the oil change there.

That evening, after the brief storm, I raised the bike onto its center stand with the steering locked, unsure if it's easier locked or unlocked, and set the Navigation "Destination" as Kitwanga BC, the southern end of the Cassiar Highway. It selected a route of I-90 west to 83 north, then 82 to 93 (to the border), and in Canada Routes 3, 93 (west to Radium Hot Springs, then north to and up the Icefields) to 16 (the Yellowhead Highway) at Jasper, west to Prince George and Kitwanga. While tracing the route, the tire-warning light came on: my gauge showed the front slightly less than 35 psi and the rear just under 42. I Slimed the front to 36 and decided to ignore the light if it comes on tomorrow.

It was a close call today with the fuel. I vowed not to do that again.

SPOT link: <http://fms.ws/wWz5R/46.00618N/112.61436W>

#### **Day 10, Sunday May 27 2018:** [Butte, MT to Radium Hot Spring, BC]

The tire light did not come on this morning; maybe that front is very sensitive. I wore the heated vest (not plugged in) and scarf, but used the heated grips and seat, and they felt good! The GPS took me off I-90 West soon, onto Route 83. It passed by Flathead Lake with vacation properties and lots of nice straight tall pines. A couple of times I stopped at unpaved southbound pullouts to photograph the lake, but they were graded downhill from the road and with my sidestand on the left the bike's angle was too great so I moved on. There was secure footing on a northbound-side pullout, where I snapped a shot with a Lobo National Forest sign on the lake side of the road. The morning ride included Routes 83, 82, and 35; Route 83 was nice, with

smooth pavement, sweeping curves allowing a good lean at the speed limit (generally 70). But low on gas again, at 11:00 AM I was delighted to find a station at the intersection of 83 and 35 near Big Fork MT.

I think the GPS was not yet oriented to the way I entered or left the corner gas station's parking area. After a cheese danish and coffee, I pulled out, pretty sure I remembered a right turn from 83 at that intersection, finding myself headed north on 35. Almost immediately, though, there was Route 82 West, and I was again pretty sure of remembering it from the GPS route so, crossing my fingers and relying on memory (the old-fashioned human kind), I turned left onto it... and it worked! The GPS quickly picked up the route and used 82 to take us to 93 and then to Kalispell, via 93 Alternate with several traffic circles.

Around Kalispell and through Whitefish and Eureka, we passed through Customs at Roosville into Canada at 1:00 PM. I switched the bike's units to metric but maybe should have left them in English for comparability. I'm familiar with miles per gallon, but not with kilometers per liter. Now I can't figure out what's what! And I didn't need it to show speed, because unlike the digital speedometer of the NC-700X the Wing's analog speedometer has both mph and kph scales.

Noticing it was well past my intended two-hour break, I pulled into an east-bound rest area for a drink and met a pleasant 64-year-old man who was heading east on a BMW (R1200, I think, with nice Givi-shaped luggage). He is from Ontario but had flown west to buy the bike. We had a nice brief chat. He wondered if I'd ever had to pick the Wing up; when I said "no" and expressed some concern, he said he didn't worry much because his boxes held the BMW at about a 45° angle, as did my Givis on the NC.

Low on fuel again (1 bar, but no flashing), I became nervous about gas. My route (Canada's Route 93, heading west) was so desolate! No gas stations or motels... just grass and trees, mile after mile. I pulled into a station at Dry Canal identified on highway signs as having gas, but its pumps were blocked. Later I passed a station with one pump, but didn't like the looks of it. Finally a nice Centex station arrived shortly after 3:00 PM, at Fairmont Hot Springs BC. The pump required specifying an amount, so I chose \$20. That didn't quite fill the tank so I put the card in again, choosing again \$20. It took only another liter, but the lady in the station said I would be charged only the actual amount.

OK, gas... but no motels! I'd considered stopping around 2:30 PM, but after the rest stop with the BMW rider extended that to 3:30. There were plenty of billboards, but none advertising motels! Closer and closer to Radium Hot Springs, but no billboards! Some damned highway-beautification principle or something? We were pretty much right in the city when, finally, I saw a fancy Best Western at the southeast corner of 93 and 93S (which goes north to Banff). Not prepared for it, I went straight through the intersection, made a U-turn, and crossed the intersection (now heading east) to the hotel. \$139 but that's \$C, about \$100 US maybe. It was 3:45 PM (Pacific Daylight Time, I think). This place offers no free breakfast, and its multi-star restaurant is expensive (\$22 for penne pasta). But it was the first motel I came to, and who knows where the next one was. (I had not yet learned about the bike's ability to find motels along my route.) We'd come 437 miles today, with 3,601 miles on the motorcycle.

Deciding to eschew (rather than chew, ha ha) 5-star food and prices, I bought a Subway foot-long, iced tea, and chips at the Petro Canada on the opposite (northwest) corner from the hotel and, as I settled in for dinner, was delighted to find the television carrying the Fox News Channel. I wandered out again and bought a drink and road map of Canada at the station just east of the hotel, and upon returning moved some US currency out of, and Canadian into, my wallet.

SPOT link: <http://fms.ws/wYuVN/50.62183N/116.07246W>

**Day 11, Monday May 28 2018:** [Radium Hot Spring, BC to Jasper, AB]

After stretches and a shower, I checked the tires, 35/39, and Slimed them to 36/41. I hope the light stays off! Breakfast in the adjacent restaurant, not part of the hotel and not “complimentary,” started at 7:00 AM, and I had a good one: an Italian omelet with toast and coffee.

Starting out (with no tire-warning light) not wearing the vest or scarf, I soon stopped to put them on. There was no attendant at the National Park entry booth; is admission free today? Along Route 93S just north of Radium Hot Springs, bear-warning signs were flashing and I saw a bear with two very cute cubs, and later a deer who seemed to be considering crossing the road.

It was a pleasant ride and we arrived at Lake Louise about 9:45 AM. I had coffee and asked a kind fellow tourist to photograph me using the cell phone; I texted the photo to the family. Burned by low-fuel warnings, I filled up (only 2 gallons) and headed up the Icefields Parkway toward Jasper.

I tried to identify the roadside spot at which I’d photographed the NC-700X last year, and don’t think I did, but took two photos at 12 megabit resolution, maybe enough for Roadrunner Magazine’s last-page reader photos. Almost immediately Crowfoot Glacier arrived. I asked a young man to photograph me, using the camera. I had seen him at the Lake Louise coffee stop. He’s a rider back home in Switzerland, and had considered biking this summer in Canada but rented an RV instead — next year, he vowed! He liked the Gold Wing.

I rode about 70 kph (~42 mph) for a while, pulling over a few times to let cars and buses pass; the limit was often 90 kph. Even when I set the cruise control at the speed limit, cars would back up behind me. Well, on I-83 back in Towson a car at the speed limit would be like a boulder in a fast-flowing river. That Kansas warning made me a bit sensitive to legal limits. Eventually I decided I’d had my fill, and the scenery was becoming less spectacular anyway, so I took it up to 90 kph when that was the limit. Actually, there was a fair amount of construction on the northern half of Icefields, with one-lane delays and 50 kph limits.

We arrived at the Jasper Petro Canada, the one with a nice attached restaurant, about 2:00 PM. I had a grilled cheese sandwich with a tossed salad and coffee, then used the bike’s Navigation to find and take me right to the Best Western on Gieke Street. A pleasant young lady offered me a suite at \$169 or a basement room at \$87... guess which I chose! The day’s ride had been a short 226 miles (sightseeing along the Icefields), with 3,827 miles now on the Gold Wing.

After settling in, I walked to a grocery store. Again deciding to skip the Hotel’s highly rated restaurant, I bought two Veggie Samosas and two iced teas for dinner and three Knorr’s “Sidekick” pouches that had worked, last year, as camping dinners. The television in the room had the Fox News Channel, and when I first turned it on had my other favorite, Hallmark Movies and Mysteries! The latter seemed to disappear but I caught a little Sean Hannity on Fox.

I went out to clean and photograph the bike, and — just after I’d just used my microfiber cloth to clean the lights and windshield — found a Harley-logo A-frame sign about ten feet away, announcing a Motorcycle Cleaning Station with water and clean rags, right beside the building! I got the bike up onto its center stand, and now know how my right forearm became bruised and swollen: I have been pushing it against the passenger seat armrest when lifting. The bike went up pretty easily, probably, I realized, because it’s headed slightly uphill in this parking spot. Hmm... I wondered what that suggests about getting it down off the stand tomorrow morning?

That evening, considering the route ahead, I realized I just didn’t have much information and wished for at least some Milepost pages. I could reverse last year’s trip home. All I knew was the private Fraser Lake campground, Piper’s Glen. I could put in longer days with the Wing but don’t know where I’d stay. If I reverse last year, it would be only 7 days to Andrea’s!

After looking at the Owner's Manual, I put the manual ("Emergency") key and the plastic bike ID tag into my wallet. The key can open the trunk and saddlebags, and enable use of the bike ID to start and ride the motorcycle without the electronic key. I should practice!

SPOT link: <http://fms.ws/waurw/52.88541N/118.08089W>

**Day 12, Tuesday May 29 2018:** [Jasper, AB to Fraser Lake, BC]

It was 41°F in Jasper when I arose, vest weather for sure! By 6:20 AM I'd finished stretches and a shower, and checked the tire pressures: just under 36 and just over 41, which I declared to be OK. There was a little rain last night.

After confirming that the Jasper Best Western offered no breakfast but the \$17 special ("Try a Tim Horton's," the clerk suggested), I ate an oatmeal square and headed out. As expected, I had some trouble getting the bike off its center stand; the slight uphill made it easier to raise the bike onto the stand, but harder to bump it off! I was almost to Route 16 when I noticed only 3 bars of fuel, and backtracked to the Petro.

There were several sections of construction, some requiring stopping for one-lane traffic. I was cold! After a while I plugged the vest in, for the first time, and it worked fine. Later, suffering from wind getting into my jacket, I stopped to don the rain jacket. At 7:30 I pulled into the Mt. Robson viewing area where the gift shop was closed and the mountain nearly invisible behind fog, but I took two photos. Later, I passed the Purden Inn where I'd obtained fuel last year.

I'd been looking forward to my McBride stop. With a time-zone change it was shortly after 9:00 AM PDT, with 175 miles behind me today, that I enjoyed coffee, a danish, and a cinnamon roll there. The clerk said there were gas stations between McBride and Prince George, so I didn't get fuel, but immediately after getting back on the Yellowhead saw a "Fuel? No Services for 220 km" and backtracked to fill up.

There was some light rain, but the GPS got me through Prince George at 11:45 AM. I stopped for lunch at a Tim Horton's as we emerged on the west side of town.

Using the GPS to find hotels, I first set as a destination Burns Lake Inn but revised that, as too far, to Fraser Lake Inn. Rolling in around 2:30 PM, I found Fraser Lake Inn a dump, but saw a sign for the Cataline Motor Inn in an adjacent shopping center. Eager to get there, I quickly donned the helmet (pulling its magnetic snap off again) and began riding through the parking lot. Realizing my gloves were behind me on top of the items strapped to the passenger's seat, I reached back and got them. But at the Cataline office I couldn't find my (real, prescription bifocal) glasses and realized with trepidation they'd been sitting on top of the gloves. A slow ride back to Fraser Lake Inn didn't reveal the glasses, so I registered at the Cataline, then walked the path I had ridden. There they were, right where I'd grabbed the gloves, lying on the concrete parking lot near a gas station, not merely unbroken but even unscratched. Yay! With no spare pair, I don't know what I would have done if they'd been lost or broken. Let that be a lesson to you, Johnny B!

Later I walked over to a grocery store that was in the same shopping area as the Fraser Lake Inn, finding my Cataline neighbor, a young woman also wearing Crocs, there too. We exchanged a few courteous words. The Cataline room was not plush, but it had a refrigerator and microwave (even dishes and silverware); the nice office lady said it was a "kitchen suite" that was preferred by construction crews and used to have an actual stove and oven. It also had a hair dryer and TV, though the cable system was being worked on and channel availability varied during my stay. I

was pleased that I'd chosen it rather than the Fraser Lake Inn (of which I took a photo), with rooms upstairs and flashing neon signs for wine and cold beer downstairs.

SPOT link: <http://fms.ws/wc-3F/54.05578N/124.84827W>

**Day 13, Wednesday May 30 2018:** [Fraser Lake to Bell 2 Lodge, BC]

By 6:15 AM I'd finished stretches and shower, and found tire pressures 34/39; I Slimed them to 37/42. The Slime inflator is hard to attach and detach without losing air; when I finally got it onto the front tire, its pressure was down to 29 psi.

It was chilly this morning! I started with (in this order) T-shirt, heated vest, NorthFace wind shirt, NorthFace hiking shirt, Scorpion Yosemite jacket, and Fly rain jacket, and I also put the liner in my Yosemite pants. My toes have been getting cold and there's still some wind coming into the jackets, but overall I've been fairly warm. The grips and seat have been set at level 3.

Fueling up at Smithers about 9:30 AM, I thought of the poor California couple, young kids really, I camped beside at Bell 2 in 2010 when I was driving the 1994 Toyota pickup. I was puzzled that they had a tent but no vehicle. They said their Honda automobile had an alternator problem on the Cassiar north of Bell 2 and had to (so they were told) be towed all the way to Smithers for repair. The towing and repair charges exhausted their vacation money.

Just a few minutes before 11:00 AM I arrived at the intersection of the Yellowhead and Cassiar Highways (16 and 37), with the day's ride so far 202 miles. Good weather this year, not like last year's rain — and, again unlike last year, the restaurant was still serving pancakes! (Breakfast officially stops at 11.) A young Oriental man, who parked his white Honda 1300 beside me, graciously took a few photographs of me and admired the Wing so much that he wanted it in the photo I took of him!

It was a good day today. The southern Cassiar was superb, nothing like all that dirt and gravel of last year. (Maybe that was the price for this year's conditions.) There was one pilot-car session where tar was being applied to cracks. I saw two bears along the road; one, I think a youngster, was peering out through roadside brush, perhaps judging if it was safe to cross. So cute!

I took several photos of the Wing on the southern Cassiar, looking north.

It sure was dead in the Bell 2 Lodge "Violet Chalet" with no TV! I couldn't remember how to tune the Sena FM tuner and its directions (if I could have understood them) were out in the trunk. I listened to Jelly Roll Morton on the cell phone, and thought I'd sent a SPOT message — again, apparently, I turned the device off too soon because no message from Bell 2 was received. A couple of walks over to the office reminded me that there are flying insects here. They were terrible in 2010 when I was camping here, and I'll be camping the next two nights. Welcome to the North.

I was planning to photograph the dreaded Nass River Bridge (150 meters of plank, one lane), but a new bridge is being constructed and the adjacent rest area (where I stopped last year after successfully crossing the wet planks) was closed, filled with workers and machines. The one lane of planks was still in use, but it was dry this year and we made it with no problem.

From the modest snack bar associated with the office I obtained an egg salad sandwich, chips, and iced tea for dinner. Despite my advice and plea last summer, there's still no vegetarian entree.

SPOT link: None

**Day 14, Thursday May 31 2018:** [Bell 2 Lodge, BC to Big Creek Campground, YT]

After the usual stretches and shower, I left Bell 2 Lodge about 7:15 AM with only an oatmeal square or two for breakfast, planning to handle that at Dease Lake. The morning sky was overcast, but we encountered only a little rain. I did see several bears, and there was construction at a bridge that, like a similar situation last year on the southern Cassiar, included a “loose gravel” hairpin turn on a steep uphill. I was more comfortable this year, with more experience and perhaps the Gold Wing’s wider tires. By the time we reached the Dease Lake gas station and restaurant at 10:00 AM, 150 miles north of Bell 2, the sky was clearing. I fueled up and headed in for some food.

Returning to the bike after a toasted cheese sandwich and coffee, I found three pleasant Oriental people (an older man, a younger man, and a young woman) admiring the Wing. They were riding too, wearing good gear as I recall, but their motorcycles were not nearby. They knew at once mine was a 2018, and asked about the DCT (the woman didn’t think she’d like it) and reverse, among other things. The older man, especially, seemed to know previous-years’ Wings, commenting how much slimmer mine was. After showing them “walk mode,” forward and reverse, we parted ways cordially as I resumed the northbound ride at 10:45 AM. I passed the road to Telegraph Creek (the subject of Edward Hoagland’s enjoyable book *Notes from the Century Before*) and wondered what it is like. Someday, maybe, but not now!

The Cassiar north of Dease I recall as uneventful, which has its appeal. There were a couple of bears and some cautions of “loose gravel” construction that were really hard-packed black dirt with a little gravel outside the vehicle tracks. I’d planned a photo at a “Welcome to Yukon” sign, like last year’s on the Alaska Highway, but the Cassiar’s was way up a sandy-looking hill so I bypassed it, assuming there would be another — but there never was. I did snap a photo or two as mountains appeared near the northern end of the road. I’d tried to set my Navigation’s destination as an “Intersection” (Route 37 with the Alaska Highway), but it insisted on a city name and there was none, so I chose the Route 37 Service gas station as my destination and we rolled in at 2:15 PM.

After fuel, a pleasant chat with the cordial proprietor, and getting some change for the campground fee, we turned left to wrap up the day with a 45-mile westward hop on the Alaska Highway, the first time I’d been on it this year. At the Big Creek Yukon Campground I chose last year’s Site 9. It was 2:45 PM; we’d traveled 320 miles today, and the Gold Wing now has 4,844 miles on it.

The best-laid plans — what’s that phrase? — Anyway, I was preparing to head over to the fee station with \$10 and a Loonie when I could not find my change. I was sure I had it when I got to this campsite, saved at the Rt. 37 stop specifically for these fees! A thorough search of all pockets turned up nothing, so I finally paid \$15C cash for the \$12 fee, figuring that would perversely cause the change to show up. Eventually it did, the following morning; it was scattered on the ground near the picnic table, obviously flung out of a pocket when I was waving clothes around.

Dinner was an interesting experiment: two “microwave” pizza rolls left from Fraser Lake, heated in aluminum pans on the Pocket Rocket. There were a few sprinkles, but at 5:00 PM the sun was out. My plan was to make the Pine Lake Campground near Haines Junction tomorrow, and Tok Saturday. I need to reserve a room at Young’s; maybe I can do that at the Teslin restaurant tomorrow, where I’ll also buy a Yukon sticker.

After my interesting dinner (the pizza rolls actually worked out pretty well), I enjoyed a nice visit with tall, slender, white-bearded Curt from Healy AK, traveling with his dog Maisie. Curt retired (like me, in 2012) from a career as a soil scientist. He’s driving a big pickup with a camper, gave me a thick piece of homemade bread and a Yukon map, and invited me to visit his

cabin in Healy. He had driven up the Cassiar from south of Meziadan Junction today, a bit farther than my trip from Bell 2.

A little later, still broad daylight at this latitude, a couple of young guys speaking French took Site 8. They're avid, if not especially knowledgeable, fire-builders, chopping a lot of wood with a hatchet. Well, each to his own. Finding it cool and windy, I closed up the tent and retired. It had been a good day.

SPOT link: <http://fms.ws/whlsF/60.15932N/129.70663W>

**Day 15, Friday June 1 2018:** [Big Creek to Pine Lake Campgrounds, YT]

I enjoyed a restful night, but it was cold when I arose at 4:32 so I donned the rain jacket and NorthFace wind hat. I finished the stretches and some packing, but it was so chilly that I stayed inside the closed tent as long as I reasonably could.

Pulling out around 7:00 AM under a gray overcast sky, the Wing and I began what turned out to be a less-than-pleasant ride, with light rain off and on all day. Between Big Creek and Teslin we encountered two long construction stretches of hard-packed dirt, not usually a problem but one of them contained a short section of slippery mud. Compared to that, the long wet metal-grating Teslin bridge was no particular concern.

About 10:00 AM we reached the Yukon Motel, just west of the bridge, where I fueled up. I enjoyed a grilled cheese sandwich with fries, but was sorry to find no "Yukon" stickers like the nice one applied to the NC-700X last year. There were several other bikes in the parking lot, and one rider warned me that there was mud between Teslin and Whitehorse. But what was the alternative? With some trepidation I headed out, especially concerned when we reached construction "loose gravel." Sure enough, one of them had a low-lying muddy section, and although we did slip around a little it was only perhaps twenty or thirty feet and we got through it, choosing a line near its left edge. I don't like that slippery mud! I tried to relax, let the bike do its thing, and rely on forward momentum. It was a big relief to be back on the hard black "loose gravel" construction dirt, and especially to regain actual pavement.

We rolled into the Haines Junction Petro 60 gas station and convenience store at 2:00 PM, where I fueled up and bought some snack items before backtracking a few miles to the Pine Lake Yukon Campground. As on last year's ride home, I set up at Site 9, and by 3:30 PM, with light rain starting, had paid my \$12 fee and filtered a couple of liters of water. We'd come 335 miles today, and the bike has now traveled 5,179 miles.

Crossing the camp road to the water pump, I was surprised to see Curt's camper again set up at a site just across the road from me. But we had talked about route planning and when we agreed that 350 miles per day was about right I pointed out Pine Lake to him. "Great minds..." or something. When we talked briefly, later, he commented on the slippery mud, unpleasant even in his pickup, and was glad I'd made it through. Remembering that I'd been a professor, he asked if I had a doctorate. I said yes, but don't make a big deal out of it. I said that when one of my ham-radio club members (a Ph. D.) calls himself "Doctor" most of us subtly roll our eyes because there are probably a fair number of others in the club who also have the degree.

When it was still raining at 4:30 PM, I decided this camping was getting a bit tiresome, and that I don't need to do it to save money. But to "accentuate the positive," I realized I may see Andrea tomorrow! At Teslin I had reserved a room at Young's in Tok for tomorrow night. I hope Andrea and Jeff's race weekend at Tanacross isn't rained out.

SPOT link: <http://fms.ws/wkMoM/60.79977N/137.49014W>



**Day 16, Saturday June 2 2018:** [Pine Lake Campground (near Haines Junction) YT to Tok, AK]

A pretty rough day began with my departure from Pine Lake at 7:00 AM, declining Curt's offer of a banana. There was light rain, on and off, but it was a fairly smooth ride past Cottonwood RV Park (where I'd camped last year) and Congdon Creek Campground (where bear warnings had kept me from staying). Choosing not to repeat the low-fuel anxiety of last summer, I topped up at Destruction Bay, chatting briefly with a pleasant young woman who lives in Anchorage and is headed there. Her white Cadillac had passed me as I'd slowed due to poor vision in the rainy fog earlier that morning.

On the long stretch west of Destruction Bay rain began in earnest, maybe half-way to Beaver Creek. When I pulled onto the shoulder a couple of times to wait a bit, two vehicles stopped to see if I was OK — how nice! One was the Anchorage-bound woman in the white Cadillac.

As I tried for some progress, rain continued to reduce both my ability to see and the tires' traction on the wet pavement, especially at depressions where water had pooled. Deciding it would be prudent to wait for better conditions, I pulled into a northbound rest area, just a large open parking area with two privies, but when I wasn't moving the rain seemed pitifully light so we headed out again. The riding was tough! My tires slipped sideways on the pavement's occasional longitudinal ridges, and on its rough-road bumps. I couldn't see with the face shield down (the windshield had been full-down for a long time), and hail hit my face with it up. I rode about 40 mph (70 kph) with flashers on, and finally I saw a campground sign: Snag Junction Yukon Campground, 2 km ahead. Pulling in, I gratefully hid out in a large handicapped-friendly privy. The rain beat down on the metal roof, and though protected from it I was cold and wet.

This is ridiculous, I thought, and darted out to ask the bike's GPS how far Beaver Creek was: Only 21 km! I hit the road again, gingerly, with flashers on, at about 35 mph. We made my usual Beaver Creek stop (the last one on the right, when headed northwest --- FasGas?) and parked between two older Gold Wings. I was enjoying the warm shelter, and some snacks and coffee, when Curt rolled in. We greeted each other briefly.

Half an hour later I noticed the dirt driveway puddles were no longer being dimpled by fresh rain and the sun was actually visible, so I rushed into my gear and headed out. Making up for lost time, I was moving pretty swiftly when I caught Curt's pickup; he waved me by and I waved thanks. It was a smooth trip to Customs, though I missed the big "Welcome to Alaska" sign where I'd been hoping for a photograph. I'd believed it was west of Customs, after we westbounders got through, but it's east of Customs. Well, I'd missed the Yukon sign too.

After fueling at the Tok Shell, we backtracked a few hundred yards to Fast Eddy's and Young's, where I registered. I'd come 297 miles today, but some of them were pretty rugged; the bike now had 5,477 miles on it. Hope those guys were right about the oil change!

The room they'd reserved for me, 18, was tiny! And there was no shampoo or bath soap, just a puny facial bar that I used for both a shower and shampoo. After yet another grilled-cheese sandwich and fries, I rode about 14 miles to Tanacross, delighted to see Jeff and Andrea. Again, though, I forgot to take a photo.

I met Robin (a charming woman from Chicken, a medic and Chicken's postmaster), and it was nice again to see Maya (who works at Alaska Leathers in Anchorage), Derek, and Tim. Jeff suggested a new rear tire before I leave for home. I was back at Young's at 6:00 PM, with a light sprinkle beginning. Dinner was a beer and half of a Northern Lights (vegetarian) pizza; I saved the other half for tomorrow.

**Day 17, Sunday June 3 2018:** [Tok to Anchorage AK]

At 6:25 AM I was enjoying breakfast in Fast Eddy's Restaurant — their "short stack" of two pancakes was huge! They were the size of the plate, and good! There were mosquito bites on my right eyelid (welcome to Alaska... or Yukon, maybe from Pine Lake), a problem that had caused trouble as I started down the Cassiar last year, and the swollen back of my right hand made removing and replacing the glove difficult.

Shortly after 7:00 AM (Alaska Daylight Time) we made the ½ mile west and the left turn onto the Tok Cutoff, headed for Anchorage. It had some rough areas and a couple of frost heaves, hit too fast, jolted my spine, but there was no construction that I recall. I fueled up at the first Glenallen gas station, had a snack at the Caribou Hotel — 10:00 AM was too early for lunch — and stopped several times along the Glenn Highway to take photos. The twisty road around Long Lake, often with 30 mph warnings on the curves, was fun, and passing right through Palmer helped me to avoid getting lost there as I did last year.

Ignoring the GPS advice to approach Andrea and Jeff's by an unfamiliar route that exited the Glenn on Airport Heights Drive, we took the Boniface Parkway exit and the GPS picked up the route immediately, taking us to Tudor and then to Lake Otis. At 2:10 PM we arrived at Andrea and Jeff's. Overruling a scaredy-cat temptation to leave the Gold Wing parked on the street, I used the forward "walk mode" to park it up on the driveway beside Andrea's Honda Fit and texted a cell-phone photo of it to the Andersons at Tanacross. I was home! We'd traveled 323 miles today and had 5,825 miles on the bike. Since we'd started with 340, the trip north (via Mesa Verde) was 5,485 miles. That's 323 miles more than last year's trip north, which itself was not very direct.

SPOT link: <http://fms.ws/wphbW/61.17655N/149.84399W>