

ALASKA by Gold Wing, 2018
John B. Egger

SOUTHBOUND, June 27 – July 10 2018

Day 1, Wednesday June 27, 2018: Anchorage to Tok AK (321 miles)

I left Andrea and Jeff's at 8:49 AM with 5,906 miles on the Gold Wing, cutting down through the front yard using "walk mode." The bike was still on high idle, initial engagement of the DCT transmission takes a few revs that produce a surge for which the rider must be prepared, and the yard was a little bumpy, so walking it seemed prudent. Boniface Parkway provided easy access to the northbound Glenn Highway. I wore the heated vest (not energized) and was soon quite hot. There was none of the forecast rain and actually a lot of blue sky.

That changed north of Palmer, with dark clouds and chilly temperature, especially around Chickaloon. There were a couple of short "loose gravel" sections and one pilot-car stretch. Its only followers were two other motorcycles and me; they were set up for more rugged roads and carried spare tires.

I rolled into the Caribou Hotel in Glenallen shortly after noon, 182 miles, to find that it's now Ernesto's with a short new menu of Mexican food. No coffee was offered, and when I asked for some a lukewarm and weak cup was provided. A second cup of coffee was also only moderately warm. I'd looked forward to my standard toasted cheese with fries. As an alternative the server suggested quesedillas, and they were good: two, each made of two tortillas with plenty of cheese and vegetables. But the check was \$16, about double what I'd paid for grilled cheese.

At 1:00 PM I fueled up at the Tesoro at the Route 2 corner and headed left toward the Tok Cutoff. It usually had a speed limit of 55 mph and most of the pavement was good, but there were frost heaves and "road damage" and "loose gravel" sections. 40 mph seemed prudent for some of it, with weaving around to miss broken pavement.

A beautiful blue sky and warm sun appeared about ten miles from Tok, but about three miles out a five-minute rainstorm began, gone by the time I pulled into the Chevron station at the T where the Cutoff joins the Alaska Highway.

We arrived at Young's Motel about 4:00 PM. I'd made a reservation, but with many more guests than at my early-June trip north only one room was available, the "pet-friendly" Room 10 in the older building. Its musty smell largely disappeared when I pushed the bed duvet into a corner, but had me wondering if I should search out different motels. Still, Fast Eddy's restaurant is just a few yards away... I took a shower and sauntered over for dinner (an IPA and half of their Northern Lights vegetarian pizza), then crossed the highway to Three Bears Sporting Goods to purchase a little dessert to enjoy in the room.

What next? I tried some trip planning, but without a *Milepost* (or snapshots of relevant pages) information about options was pretty slim, mostly from memory. It seemed prudent to call, tomorrow, Edmonton's Extreme Honda to confirm the July 5 tire appointment. It was nice to have my two favorite TV channels available, but I was very tired and went to bed at 10:00 PM. I hadn't slept well last night at Andrea and Jeff's, anxious and scared and excited about the 5,000 mile trip ahead of me. The Gold Wing's odometer stood at 6,227 miles, with 321 miles today.

- PLANNING:** Night 2 (Wed Jun 28): Pine Lake Campground, just east of Haines Jct ~300 mi
(3) (Thu Jun 29): Big Creek Yukon campground (330 mi fm Pine Lake)
(4) Fri Jun 30: Liard Hot Springs Campground (short day)
(5) Sat Jul 1: Pink Mountain Campground (short day)
(6) Sun Jul 2: Hotel in Grande Prairie AB (short day)
(7) Mon Jul 3: Hotel in Edmonton AB (short day)

(8) Tues Jul 4: Hotel in Edmonton AB (zero day)

(9) Wed Jul 5: The appointment for new tires! Then... Saskatoon SK and points east!

Day 2, Thursday June 28, 2018: Tok AK to Pine Lake Campground, YT (298 miles)

My usual morning starts about 4:30 and includes a 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), a shower (if I'm moteling it and didn't the previous night), and packing and checking the bike. When they opened at 6:00 I was ready for Fast Eddy's "short stack," which does contain only two pancakes but they're huge. We (the Wing and I) left shortly after 7:00 AM, and after a brief light rain the ride was comfortable to and past US Customs. I spotted a "Welcome to Yukon" sign and photographed the bike there (8:44 AM ADT but I think we switched to Pacific time (9:44) at the border), sensitive to having missed the opportunity at a similar sign on the northbound trip.

Soon after an uneventful Customs crossing into Canada, I stopped for gas and a snack in Beaver Creek at 10:30 AM PDT. I'd forgotten how far it was to Destruction Bay, but at least (unlike my anxious northbound ride last year) I had plenty of fuel. Most of the highway was smooth and pleasant, but there were some "loose gravel" and "rough road" sections. I stopped at a southbound-side rest area, Kluane River Viewpoint, where I was photographed by a fellow rider and enjoyed a slice of pizza and coffee, both saved from Fast Eddy's.

With plenty of fuel I rolled right through Burwash Landing and Destruction Bay, then past Congdon Creek Campground (where I couldn't stay last year because of bears) and Cottonwood RV Park (where I did). Fueling up in Haines Junction, I purchased a little food and was starting on the five miles to the campground when I spotted an ice cream shop that Andrea had recommended. Confounding my aversion to backtracking to someplace I'd already passed, I swung around and enjoyed a double-dip cone on their pleasant porch.

At 4:00 PM I parked the Gold Wing at the same Pine Lake Campground site at which I'd stayed twice before (renumbered from 9 to 10). The mosquitoes were pretty bad, but worse news came when I began setting up camp. On the passenger's seat was my tent, firmly under the elastic net, but behind it — not under the net, just sitting on the seat — was the Thermarest air mattress. What happened to the Guardian motorcycle-cover bag, which contained the air mattress and Helinox chair? And where were my Fly rain pants that had also been tucked under the net? The Thermarest must have slipped out, and without it the net did not secure the less-filled bag, allowing the bag, pants, and chair to depart along the rough construction between Beaver Creek and Destruction Bay. I was grateful the Thermarest had stuck around; sleeping without it would have been difficult and unpleasant. The Helinox chair was a bit of trouble to use, and the rain pants certainly were, though I'll probably replace both. Let that be a lesson to you, Johnny B! Like many tourers with the new 2018 Gold Wing, I never was pleased with its luggage situation, and made a mental note to drill a few holes when I get home.

Those mosquitoes... sitting at the picnic table, I draped myself in the Coughlin Hiker's Mosquito Net, because the headnet alone wasn't doing the whole job. Later, the tent (Eureka Mountain Pass 2) was warm and comfortable but there was a puzzling problem: The right saddlebag was self-opening! I thought maybe I'd closed something in the seal, but not so — it seemed closed and latched securely. I'd close it tightly, then look out ten minutes later and find it open! What th'...? If this persisted tomorrow I'll have to rope or strap it shut, even if that abrades paint, and return to using large black plastic trash bags as liners. Maybe, I thought, duct tape

would keep it closed — but I didn't have any. Perhaps a short backtrack tomorrow to Haines Junction would provide some.

I found it awkward to write about today's good ride lying down with knees bent and notebook on a thigh, because the ballpoint won't write pointed upward. But I thought I should try. I took a selfie at the Kluane River rest area and asked another rider to snap one at the overlook railing. Two couples riding tricycles had arrived, one a Gold Wing conversion and the other a Harley, and we met a couple moving from Anchorage to Kansas using a pickup truck to tow a small automobile and a trailer. I didn't warn them about Ellsworth.

There was a long stretch of dirt into Destruction Bay. I remember thinking how glad I was that rain hadn't turned it into slick mud, when suddenly we arrived at a section that had been wetted down deliberately, perhaps to quell dust. I thought of a "Tales From the Crypt" story about a sadistic administrator of a home for the blind who finds himself in a maze of corridors lined with razor blades; its punch line was "And then some fool turned out the lights." Or turned on the water. But it hadn't sunk in much so my tires were still largely riding on solid dirt. I followed the tricycles with plenty of dirt but no trouble.

My right saddlebag "open" warning light flickered off and on, going off at a big bump. (Maybe that's where I lost my gear.) I saw a fox and a bear today, and listened to the music on my thumb drive for several hours until the little Sena battery drained. The black balaclava seemed to be giving me a headache, so I removed it at the Kluane River stop.

At 9:30 PM I looked out of the tent: That right saddlebag was open again! I checked its release cable (inside the left saddlebag) and turned the ignition on and off — the right warning briefly went out, but came on again. Duct tape tomorrow? I have first-aid tape. Backtrack to buy duct tape?

Day 3, Friday June 29, 2018: Pine Lake to Big Creek Campground, Yukon. (328 mi.)

I arose at 4:34 AM and found the right saddlebag CLOSED! Yay! After stretches, packing, and some kind of modest breakfast and coffee, I headed east about 7:00 AM.

It was a good riding day. Often I felt elated to be riding in the Yukon Territory, on this beautiful motorcycle no less. We enjoyed clear skies for most of the morning, with a few large gray clouds but no precipitation. There was a miles-long stretch of dirt west of Whitehorse, and another as we approached Teslin. I saw a brown bear between Teslin and this campground, which is about 25 miles west of the Cassiar Highway. I took no photographs today.

7:30 PM: Before hiding out in the tent (bad mosquitoes, as usual, here) I heard five "beeps" and assumed they were from a neighbor's vehicle. My right saddlebag was open — I figured I'd forgotten to close it. But after entering the tent I heard the sequence of beeps again and went out to check: Yes, open! I noticed I'd left the trunk open and closed it, then turned the ignition on and shut the saddlebag, then ignition off. There's been no action since then, and nothing in the Owner's Manual about it. Same thing as last night at Pine Lake?

I called Extreme Honda (Edmonton) from Teslin's Yukon Motel, adding a FRONT tire to the request and OK'ing Dunlops instead of the twice-as-expensive Bridgestones. Service at the restaurant was not good: No coffee refill, even when I signaled. Finally I went back into the waitresses' break area, where all three were chatting, and asked for coffee and water (none of the latter had been provided with the meal). Strange, and not the norm.

The motel still had no nice white-on-black "Yukon" sticker like the one I obtained for the NC last year. Outside, as I prepared to leave, a man asked about the metal grid bridge; I admitted it was a bit disconcerting but one learned to just accept some wiggling and he seemed to

understand. Rain began just as I crested the hill rising up from the Teslin River (PS: It's the Nisultin Bay Bridge, not the Teslin River Bridge, according to a tourist booklet.). When I stopped to don the rain jacket, two tricycle riders slowed to ask if I was OK — nice, and, it seems, no longer the norm, probably due to the huge improvement in motorcycle reliability since the 1960s.

I suffered a little DIZZINESS while preparing dinner, probably due to wearing the 2X reading glasses again, but walked a bit and it passed. Dinner was a Knorr's "Sidekick" Mac'n'Cheese, awkward to prepare in aluminum pans (each barely holds the specified two cups of liquid) on the Pocket Rocket and better with milk and butter, but OK. I'm almost out of instant COFFEE — how did I let that happen? I'd planned to fill my zip-lock bag with it at Andrea's but forgot.

Her 51st birthday is tomorrow. Yay!

Day 4, Saturday June 30, 2018: Big Creek to Strawberry Flats Campground BC (209 miles)

I had a good night last night, arising at 4:56 AM and finishing stretches about 5:30 with light rain beginning. It was very quiet here last night. Three pickups with huge camper trailers, evidently traveling together, came in about 8PM, but they quickly found sites and were quiet campers. With two cups of my last instant coffee but no food for breakfast, I headed out about 7:00 AM, planning for breakfast along the road.

Watson Lake was only perhaps 40 miles down the Alaska Highway, and at 7:45 AM I pulled into a little gas station and convenience store identified as, or associated with, "A Nice Motel." After fuel and a danish, and a cup of coffee for which the nice lady did not charge me, I snapped a shot of the bike and prevailed upon a man to take one of me. With plenty of time to reach Edmonton for the July 5 tire appointment, I planned a short day to the Liard Hot Springs Campground.

The day and riding were pleasant for a while, and about 10 miles south of Watson Lake I took a photo to convey an idea of the highway. But the sky soon became an overcast gray and on-and-off rain began. I saw two bears and a bison, and a little later another bison with light tan calf walking along the road. How cute! Rounding a curve, I saw ahead some structure blocking the northbound lane with traffic (sparse though it was) guided carefully around it. It was an 18-wheeler, and the "structure" was the underside of its trailer. Its tractor was off the northbound side of the highway, but if he was northbound I don't visualize an accident that would leave the trailer on its right side, its underside exposed to the north. Well, I'm neither a truck driver nor an accident investigator. Several tourists, including me, were delighted to see a herd of perhaps 25 bison on the grass at the northbound side of the highway. That was something! I'm not clear exactly where it was. With no mention of it in my breakfast notes, perhaps it was between Liard Hot Springs and Muncho Lake.

It wasn't far to Liard Hot Springs. Shortly after 10:00, I stopped at a small convenience store across from the Campground entrance to ask about food. The selection was mighty thin there, but the clerk suggested the adjacent restaurant and asked if police were at the wreck yet. I said "No," and he said it had happened early that morning. Mercy. Ah, the far North. Still un-breakfasted, I parked the bike and went to the restaurant: Nice place, terrific veggie omelet with toast, plenty of coffee. Glad I stopped there! But what next? I'd only come 168 miles, but had no information about camping opportunities between here and Pink Mountain (too far). I should have photographed some pages from Andrea's *Milepost!* But there must be something, so I headed out.

The next hour and a half was miserable: moderate rain intensified by moving through it, great difficulty seeing the road... much of it was at 35-40 mph, hunched over behind the windshield and trying to peer through it using just my eyeglasses, with face shield and sun shield flipped up.

For variety I'd flip the face shield down and lower the windshield — actually better vision, but less protection from the rain. Trucks and cars and even a couple of motorcycles passed, but I wasn't comfortable going any faster. I'd pretty much decided that was enough, under those conditions, and had plenty of time until my tire appointment, when the big Northern Rockies Lodge at Muncho Lake appeared on the right. Gratefully, I pulled in.

After refueling (at \$1.959/L, the highest price this year, exceeded only by the single-pump Purden Lake Inn's \$2/L last summer) I parked and went in for some welcome respite from the rain. When the clerk pointed out the restaurant but I explained I'd just had a big breakfast at Liard and wanted only coffee, she let me use what seemed like an employees' break room to get coffee and, later, refills, for which I was never charged.

I was looking forlornly at the puddles, still showing moderate rain, when a man riding a BMW F800 came in and persuaded Karen, the clerk, to let him use the Lodge's (non-free) wifi for free ("I'm probably paying \$30 for gas"; he apologized later for his brusqueness). He said his kids would be worried after two days without contact. (I did not try to obtain wifi; my SPOT lets family know where I am.) As his machine suggests, he's a more aggressive rider than me! He said his one near-crash was on the Campbell Highway, an unpaved road between Watson Lake and Dawson City that, like the Liard Trail I drove in the pickup in 2010, had potholes deceptively filled with loose, unpacked, dirt. After emailing his family and chatting briefly with me, he jumped on his BMW and headed south in the rain, unsure of where he'd stay that night but hoping for Fort Nelson. Whew!

On the other hand, I was discouraged and decided it would be OK to wrap it up for the day. Karen said they had tent sites, but only "unimproved" ones (space on a grass lawn) were available and they were \$42. I actually decided to take one, but by then none was available. Well, nothing to do but move along, I guess. I asked about camping or motels south, and Karen knew only of GG's Motel, in about 5 km; she said to tell him she sent me. But as I pulled out, I was heartened to find the sky brightening and the rain abating, even seeming to stop. I was only 5 or 10 minutes out of Northern Rockies Lodge when a small "Strawberry Flats Campground" sign appeared. Surprised after being told there was nothing, I braked and swung in, delighted to find that it's a BC Provincial Park campground, \$20/night, right on the lake. It was only about 2:00 PM when I chose Site 6, and almost immediately a bright sun appeared. I considered repacking and moving along but I'm OK for the day at 209 miles, more than the planned 168 to Liard Hot Springs Campground. While signs warned that lake water was not potable, down the campground road was a hand pump with no such warning; several of us agreed it's probably safe to drink.

I walked to the turnaround at the end of the campground and snapped a few photos of Muncho Lake and my campsite. After a Knorr's "Sidekick" dinner, I checked tire pressures: front 37.5 psi (manual says 36), but it may not be completely cool even after five hours and I'm not bleeding any off! Learned my lesson about that with the NC last year. I can't reach the rear tire valve without moving the bike, and I'm not doing that. I washed and Rain-X'd the windshield, then explored the campground's hiking trail. It crosses the road (the AK Hwy) and goes to a rocky bank of a river. I climbed up and over it, down into the broad rocky riverbed (the river obviously is quite wide sometimes, but now it's only a 3' stream), and hunted for the next sign. None! Across the stream was a pile of rocks that could have been a cairn, and I walked closer to it (Where's my monocular? Oh yeah, back at the camp...) but I saw several similar rock piles and no sign. Forget it! I walked back to my camp via the two-lane path from the AK to the turnaround at this campground's end, and then along the campground road. Tired and chilly in the cool wind, I holed up in the tent about 7:00 PM, about an hour before the ranger came along to collect my

\$20. I asked her to come around to the tent door — she seemed uneasy about that so I wonder what she’s seen, but the most exciting thing here was my \$20 bill.

A couple of large rigs, and a boat, pulled in — and out — about 5:30 or 6:00 PM. Mercy. What does one do with a 27’ trailer pulled by a big pickup? It doesn’t seem wise to count on finding an appropriate lakefront site in a campground that late on Friday or Saturday night.

I hope I have no trouble getting hotel rooms in Grande Prairie and Edmonton. I’ll try tomorrow if there’s phone service. The Gold Wing will give me hotel options!

No mosquitoes, almost, here! Lake breeze? What a change from Pine Lake and Big Creek. The ROADS are also much better, smoother. But there was a “loose gravel” section this morning, hardly distinguishable from the pavement except for the dark color and lack of lane markers.

Trying to figure out what I did today, I described a sequence: Watson Lake (gas, photos, nice lady) → Liard Hot Springs (breakfast, was asked about wreck north) → Muncho (gas, shelter from rain). Tomorrow: Buckinghorse River Wayside (270 miles) or Pink Mountain (289 miles). A great sign at the campground entrance showed all BC parks, identifying those offering camping! Who needs that *Milepost*?

Day 5, Sunday July 1, 2018: Strawberry Flats to Buckinghorse River Wayside (265 miles)

I arose at the usual 4:32 and finished stretching at 5:01 AM. With no coffee and no food for breakfast, and eager to travel without rain, I departed at 6:04 AM, heading for Toad River and anticipating breakfast (maybe brunch) in Fort Nelson. The sky was dark gray but there was no precipitation, and I soon passed GG’s Motel, its parking area filled with 18-wheelers.

The Alaska Highway was beautiful and there was virtually no traffic, though the dark sky was an ever-present concern. I snapped a roadside photo along the Toad River and soon arrived at the town. I started to bypass the gas station, down only one fuel-guage bar from Muncho Lake, but didn’t know the road ahead and the car following me pulled in, so I reconsidered and did too. The big blue Gold Wing took only 3 liters, but a full tank is always comforting.

Light rain began when we were barely out of town, and I donned the rain jacket. The face shield seemed good; I must have Rain-X’d it at Strawberry. But the 80-kph (~50 mph) limit was too fast for the wet, impaired-visibility, twisty road and we slowed to 40 mph. I’d been looking forward to the traverse over Stone Mountain, with spectacular views, stone sheep, and bears last year, but in the murky gray haze and light rain this morning saw no wildlife and hardly any views. Down off the mountain, I passed the Highway’s intersection with Route 77, The Liard Trail that I’d driven in the 1994 Toyota pickup in 2010 — what a road that was! Twenty miles later, at 9:15 AM PDT, we rolled into Fort Nelson.

A creature of habit, I again stopped at the A&W beside the car wash where I’d cleared the truck of Liard Trail mud. After two orders of pancakes (these were not Fast Eddy’s huge “short stacks”) and coffee, helpful locals pointed me to a nice IGA grocery where I picked up instant coffee (the top priority!), bagels, and cream cheese. By now the sun was out, and there were large patches of blue sky, the first I’d seen all day. What joy!

Heading south, we came first to the Prophet River campground, but it was only 11:15 AM, so on to Buckinghorse. I could easily have made Pink Mountain, the private campground where I’d stayed last year, and even Dawson Creek, but had lots of time and wanted to see what the provincial park was like. I’d calculated, eyeballing the Canada map, that Buckinghorse was only 19 miles north of Pink — the GPS showed more like 30.

I found the campground with no trouble, and after cruising to the turnaround at its end arbitrarily chose Site 6. It was only about 2:00 PM, and except for one or two big trailers parked

at the turnaround the campground was deserted. To the right of my site's picnic table was a flat grassy area between the campground road and woods; to the table's left was a wide opening I thought was a pathway to the river. I set up the tent on the flat grassy area, and parked the bike to the table's left, at the right edge of the opening to the river. Mosquitoes here! I holed up in the tent but carelessly left about a foot of zipper open and wound up with a dozen or so unwelcome guests.

A couple of hours later, other campers began to arrive and I learned what that ten-foot-wide opening is for: camper trailers! When a pickup-trailer rig from Ontario backed in, carefully working around my motorcycle, I apologized and offered to move it but the driver said he'd be OK. (Obviously I should have moved the bike anyway.) He was probably thinking, "What a jerk!" but I didn't know... Of course why a path to the river had to be ten feet wide, with one every two or three campsites...

My neighbor at 7 was traveling with another couple in a similar rig at Site 8. The two wives stopped to chat while I was preparing my "Sidekick" dinner on the Pocket Rocket, pleasant women from a bit north of Toronto who seemed impressed by my AK and YT stickers. Later, Dennis (my skillful-driving neighbor) invited me to use his camper and have a beer, sitting comfortably at a table and out of the chilly wind, while he and his wife (sorry, I don't have her name — Brianna?) had dinner at their traveling companions'. I was actually pretty comfortable in the tent, but Dennis seemed so eager for me to enjoy his hospitality that I felt a bit obligated. The beer, an IPA, was good, and so was the back support (I hope someone is enjoying that Helinox!).

There was a bit of rain, and at 1:30 AM I got the idea that if water got into my heated-vest electrical outlet it might short out the battery and leave the bike dead, so I padded out and secured the outlet's cap. Probably unnecessary, but it made me feel better.

Day 6, Monday July 2 2018: Buckinghorse River Wayside to Grande Prairie AB (261 miles)

Arising again at 4:32, I finished stretches at 5:02 and after a couple of cups of coffee (Yay!) and a bagel with cream cheese inadvertently shared with a squirrel, I pulled out as quietly as I could at 6:43 AM under gray overcast skies with perhaps a small patch of blue. It was chilly! I wore a T-shirt, the heated vest, the NorthFace wind shirt, and the NorthFace hiking shirt. The Alaska Highway was nearly empty. Its pavement became better the farther south I got, and the wide grassy areas on each side, between the road and trees, became wider. I was already starting to miss the North!

Pink Mountain, for gas, came along at 7:18 AM by the bike's clock, but the receipt shows 6:18 AM. What's going on? Pacific or Mountain zone? We covered some long, straight stretches on the Alaska Highway south of Pink Mountain, nearing its southern terminus, and arrived at Dawson Creek at 9:15 or 10:15 AM. I found the Zero Milepost in the deserted "city center," parked the bike by it (no need to worry about traffic!), and snapped a couple of photos. Finally I saw a man walking away from the intersection and called to him, but he was using a cell phone and didn't respond. Another man, though, called out (I hadn't noticed him) and asked if I'd like to be photographed. He very kindly took several shots of me with the Wing. I'd forgotten to increase the camera's resolution from 5 to 12 megabytes (I thought RoadRunner magazine might need the higher resolution for its back-page readers' photos), so I went back later and snapped one of the bike, but that time there was no trace of a human photographer. Bye bye, Alaska Highway — mixed emotions! I'd been looking forward to good roads, lots of services, higher temperatures, and fewer or no mosquitoes, but now that I had them I missed the Yukon!

At a Tim Hortons I enjoyed coffee and doughnuts, then found a gas station to refuel and, after some unexpected and undesired weaving around Dawson Creek's residential and side streets, located Canada 2 to Grande Prairie where I'd reserved a room at Best Western. The trip from Dawson Creek to Grande Prairie couldn't have been very noteworthy, judging from my lack of notes!

Day 7, Tuesday July 3, 2018: Grande Prairie to Edmonton AB (298 miles)

Arose two minutes late! Slug-a-bed! 4:34 AM, stretches done 5:12. I enjoyed a superb complimentary breakfast at Paladino's Restaurant, connected with the hotel but open to the public only for dinner. The Best Western clerks had kindly allowed me to park on flagstones under the portico's overhanging roof, against the hotel wall; I used "walk mode" to move in and out of this privileged spot. It had been raining, and despite the partial cover when I began to pack the bike it was wet, and we hit the road (Route 43, toward Edmonton) about 7:00 AM in light rain.

Whew! I thought I'd lost my waterproof pocket notebook! That's what comes of putting it into a different pocket. What a disaster THAT would have been! Well, not like an accident or nuclear war, but re. my trip records! It was not in the Yosemite jacket's right breast pocket, its proper location, but a desperate all-pocket search turned it up in the right front hiking-pants pocket. Another lesson to be learned, one would have hoped!

As usual I varied between windshield with eyeglasses and face shield with eyeglasses. The rain and overcast day made for poor vision, but I could make out vehicles ahead. (I did fail to miss a few potholes, though.) As before I wore a T-shirt, heated vest (not turned on), NorthFace wind shirt, NorthFace hiking shirt, Yosemite jacket, and Fly rain jacket. The terrain was flat and boring... welcome to the prairie! Much of the way the speed limit was 110 kph (~ 69 mph), with periods of heavy rain and of none.

Spotting a small gas station and convenience store (Little Smoky Services) standing alone on an access road, I swung in to refuel. The young proprietor wouldn't activate the pump without my credit card (many wouldn't, but it saves time to try). He said he hadn't required that of the previous customer, who then drove off without paying a \$111 bill. When I said he'd probably have to sell a lot of gas to make up for that, he said his profit was 3¢ per liter. I obtained a receipt, but later found it did not include liters and price per liter; in my records I had to guess at them. That's the only time on the trip that happened.

Nearing Edmonton, the GPS took me from 43 to 16, the Yellowhead Highway, and then to 216. But the North and South exits were close and with little time for a decision I chose North — probably should have picked South. After some GPS-directed weaving around, I found myself on 216 South, then Route 111, directly to the hotel.

The Best Western Plus, Edmonton South, room had a nice king-sized bed and a couch and coffee table, but the telephones didn't work, there were no towels (just a note that they'd be brought up soon), and the room had not been vacuumed. I mentioned the latter as I passed the desk with some items from the bike, and later found the small white particles, like chips of paint, were gone but a clear plastic strip (like part of a small item's packaging) still lay in the middle of the rug. (There was also a white chip under a floor-length curtain.) A careless job by someone who did not care. A couple of hours later a maid arrived with towels.

One of my first tasks was laundry. I bagged it and carried it down to the guest laundry, but when I stopped for change at the desk was informed the washing machine didn't work. (Just then another guest came by and asked for towels.) This gang is not ready for prime time.

Another lesson: I couldn't find my reading glasses! Checked the bike, guest laundry room, bathroom... where did I lose them? Finally I looked where they were supposed to be, but I was sure they weren't: the right breast motorcycle-jacket pocket... and there they were. Well, I hadn't stashed the notebook where it was supposed to be; why should I think I did so with the glasses?

No Fox News on the TV, or Hallmark. AMC was having a "Jaws" marathon and I chose it as dependable and better than constant searching for something better. Andrea sent a link to a YouTube file of "Danny Dunn and the Homework Machine," and with great pleasure I listened to Side 1. Dinner, at the Royal Pizza across the parking lot, was an IPA and a Greek salad — this is a full Italian restaurant, not just a pizza joint. After dinner, I found a "Garage Sale Mystery" movie on Bravo and did a little planning. I figured Saskatoon at 331 miles, and Sault St. Marie at 1,320 — ah, don't push it, Johnny B. Number One priority: No injuries! Tomorrow: (1) Call Little Smoky Services for \$/L info, (2) wash or clean up Gold Wing before service, (3) figure out what to do with the rest of the day tomorrow!

Day 8, Wednesday July 4, 2018: Edmonton's Best Western Plus, South; zero miles.

Absolutely nothing ahead of me today. I arose about 7:00 AM, stretched and showered and enjoyed an excellent breakfast bar, and at 8:55 AM found the silly "Piranha" with a cameo by David Hasselhof. I couldn't find a phone number for that gas station, so I'll have to estimate based perhaps on average mileage. I slept well last night, after moving the bedside lamp (only one, despite a king-sized bed with a table on each side) and clock-radio from the left to right table. It was shaping up as kind of a wasted day, but I was tired and didn't feel like rushing around to the world's largest shopping mall or to a museum.

I brought a few items, still wet from Buckinghorse, up to dry out: the Quest tarp, plastic ground sheet, tent fly. Also took a photo of the rear tire, showing the wear indicator and some blue stripes I hadn't seen before.

Using the big map of Canada, I reckoned the following, showing (km, **mi**) from Edmonton: Saskatoon (532, **331**), Regina (790, **491**), Brandon (1140, **708**), Thunder Bay (2022, **1256**), and Sault St. Marie ON (2710, **1684**). I formulated the plan of riding to Saskatoon tomorrow (after the tire appointment), to Brandon Friday, Thunder Bay Saturday, and Sault St. Marie Sunday: 4 days to SSM and the border!

After lunch at the nearby Denny's (my standard grilled cheese with fries) and a nap, at 3:00 PM I visited the hotel's exercise room and spent ten minutes on a nice bicycle, another ten on a treadmill. I took it easy and was tempted to go through that routine a second time, but thought that might be unwise. On the treadmill my heart rate peaked at 103. Felt good; nice equipment. I was alone there.

Returning from Denny's, the room was warm and stuffy and the air conditioner didn't seem to be working. The desk clerk suggested unplugging and replugging it from the wall, and to do something with the switches. That got it working, but obviously should have been handled by the housekeeping crew in preparing the room for occupancy. A maintenance man also showed up and did something with the plugs that got the phones working.

Nice dinner at Pizza Royal: Lasagne Florentine and an IPA. I saved half of the entree for tomorrow's lunch, and will stash some hotel coffee in one of the Platypus bags. I felt good from the fitness room workout.

Day 9, Thursday July 5, 2018: Edmonton AB to Saskatoon SK (331 miles)

I arose at 4:50 AM, finished stretches at 5:30 and shower at 6:10. After a good breakfast bar (cheese omelet) and filling a Platypus bag with coffee, I left at 8:15 AM to negotiate the 3.8 miles to Extreme Honda. The GPS did perfectly, and I rolled into the Service parking area about 8:30 AM. A man opened the Service entrance door for me and we took care of some paperwork. The dealership opened at 9:00, but about 8:40 the door was opened for me and I was offered a cup of coffee. I settled down with some motorcycle magazines, mentally committing myself to spending the whole morning there. A couple of Gold Wings were among the display bikes — the red Tour model looked great! Wonder if I should have chosen red.

The work was done by 10:45 AM. I was kindly invited to use the employees' break room to have my lasagne lunch, went back to thank the two Service counter men for making the experience relatively pleasant, and left with my two new Dunlop tires at 11:25 AM. There were 7,893 miles on the blue Gold Wing.

I'd just reached the Yellowhead (16) when I noticed only one bar on the fuel gauge and recalled my plan to fill up before heading out. But I was passing through an industrial area with no gas stations... finally I took a promising exit, Baseline Road, and found retail shops and a Petro Canada station. (I couldn't help but think of my college friend Hoyt Stearns's whimsical conviction that if the common pronunciation of "Vaseline" is correct, this road's name should rhyme with it.) The GPS quickly took us back to 16 East.

It was a pleasant day. I wore only a T-shirt and hiking shirt under the motorcycle jacket, drank from the Platypus bag, and held the speed limit of 110 kph while listening to music from a thumb drive on the Sena headset. I looked for a Rest Area but found only small paved pull-outs with trash barrels. Finally in Lloydminster I refueled and had a second lunch at Tim Hortons. We soon passed a sign, at Vermillion, identifying the AB/SK border: I was in Saskatchewan!

Passing through The Battlefords, where I'd considered stopping, I felt good and rode on, trying to decide what hotel to look for. Almost at once a Motel 6 sign appeared, the only motel sign I saw. I took the Marquis Drive exit as the sign directed and saw the big Motel 6 straight ahead. A pleasant young woman gave me the LAST room, a kitchenette, at \$113 all included. I was able to park the bike outside the window of my first-floor room (# 124), about 20' away! I did my laundry and had a satisfactory dinner (salad, potato wedges, cheese biscuit, and milk) at the Tim Hortons just across the parking lot (not a restaurant catering to vegetarians). I also bought a few doughnuts to enjoy in the room and at 9:45 PM was watching NCIS-LA, though Fox News Channel was also available.

I was pleased with this Motel 6, especially relative to that more-pricey Edmonton Best Western.

Day 10, Friday July 6, 2018: Saskatoon SK to Portage la Prairie MB (465 miles)

Arose at 4:32 after a somewhat restless night that included a 1:00 AM doughnut. I think I'm excited about approaching entry into the States. Stretches and shower finished at 5:30 AM, and I left the Motel 6 at 7:05. I became a bit confused leaving Saskatoon and, later, a fuel and lunch stop near Regina, entering highways headed west, not east. Of course in both cases the GPS rescued me with a little touring of some side streets.

The weather was perfect for riding. In mid-morning I stopped at a pleasant community rest area north of Regina, at Davidson, where I drank Edmonton coffee, ate Saskatoon doughnuts, and snapped a couple of photos. What a refreshing break! I enjoyed a break at another charming community rest area in the afternoon, probably around Grenfell or Whitewood SK, and took two photos there. I also opened the back panel of my jacket, and wished I'd removed the pants liner.

Twice I forgot to clip the Platypus hose to my jacket and left it hanging; surprisingly neither the binder clip that Andrea attached nor the bite valve was lost. I drank a lot from that bag today.

With quite a few miles behind me and not wanting to face Friday evening Winnipeg traffic, I began looking for motel signs as we approached Portage la Prairie MB. I saw only one: Days Inn. I'd stayed at them before, with mixed (as I recall) experiences, but no others were advertised so I took the proper exit and arrived at 4:51 PM after a 465-mile day.

This hotel has seen better days, with much luggage scarring of doors and woodwork and dingy carpets. There were no coffee packets in the room (though there was a coffee machine), and when I was gone a bathroom ceiling panel, hinged at one side, swung down to expose pipes. (Rather than switch rooms, an option I was offered, I noticed a screw slot in the side opposite the hinge and used my Leatherman to secure its latch.) I didn't understand how to get the wifi to work (being connected to the network wasn't enough; one also had to open the hotel's page and enter a password, so the kids later informed me!) so that was pretty frustrating. No FXN on the TV, and while TCM is shown in the listings it's reported as not being subscribed.

The hotel did have its own restaurant, and I enjoyed a very good Vegetable Biranyi and one of the Alexander Keith IPAs. It was nice not to have to go somewhere else to eat, or cobble together something from a fast-food place.

It seemed, today, as if I was having to refuel a lot. I think raising the windshield (for audio, and against wind) significantly reduced the bike's mileage. Let's do a little calculating... 13.692L for 140.3 miles → 39.4 mpg! Woah, 10 mpg below average! Wind and higher speed across the prairie can do that, too.

Planning: Sault St. Marie to Baltimore is only 852 miles, two days. If I plan things right, I'm now only four days from home, on the 10th as planned! Thunder Bay tomorrow, SSM Sunday, Monday and Tuesday in the States, home Tuesday PM. Saskatoon to Brandon is 377 miles, and today I rode 465, so I'm 88 miles east of Brandon. If so, I'm $548 - 88 = 460$ miles from Thunder. Hope I can get connections and decent hotels at Thunder, Marie, and in Indiana (?).

There sure was a lot of flat, boring country today! I crossed the border into Manitoba at 1:15 PM (maybe 2:15), and wondered how in the world I'd coped with these boring hundreds of miles on the Super Hawk in 1965. It first occurred to me that I hadn't: I'd entered Canada from central North Dakota, well west of here. But the name "Brandon" seemed familiar, and a check of the map showed that I really am just a little east of where I crossed the border 53 years ago. (I don't remember having a passport. Perhaps one was not required back then.) I'd entered Canada at the International Peace Garden on the border between North Dakota and Manitoba, and picked up Canada 1, headed west, pretty much at Brandon. With no fairing or windshield I'd coped with rain and wind on the highway by tailgating 18-wheelers... Ah, some things do get better over time!

Day 11, Saturday July 7, 2018: Portage la Prairie MB to Thunder Bay ON (494 miles)

I arose at 4:42, finished stretches and shower by 5:36, and pulled out around 7:00 AM, heading toward Winnipeg on Canada 1. Anticipating heat, I wore only a T-shirt under the motorcycle jacket and removed the pants liner. Winnipeg seemed farther than I'd anticipated, but we swung around it to the south, following Navigation's guidance, and were soon back on 1 East.

About 9:00 AM I spent 15 minutes at the attractive Pine Grove Rest Area, with coffee and a couple of mini-muffins from the skimpy Days Inn breakfast bar. It was a pleasure to approach the Kenora region, seeing the broad flat vistas of the prairie gradually limited by thin short trees (suggesting the "Fifty Island Water" area of Blackwood's "The Wendigo") at each side of the

highway, at first several hundred yards away but gradually becoming closer and larger as we traveled east. Soon came stretches where the highway was cut through rock — no more boring flat plain! — and I snapped a photo of one such cut. The city of Kenora was a bit off the Trans-Canada and I didn't feel any need to visit it again, so we passed on by. As always, the scenery was stunning: deep blue lakes bordered by dark green firs, under a light blue sky with puffy white cumulus clouds... I had to remind myself to keep an eye on the road!

The most distressing incident of the two-week ride south occurred about 11:00 AM as I was rising out of the Kenora district. The bike seemed to be drifting to the left, toward the yellow center line, more than could be explained by taking a turn too wide. When I corrected, I felt a bit dizzy and disoriented. Quickly checking for nearby traffic — none — I braked sharply and headed for the right shoulder, of which there wasn't much, stopping on a narrow paved strip between the right traffic lane and a guard rail. I wasn't very far ahead of traffic, for it soon began to pass, with an 18-wheeler tooting his horn several times. Sorry, buddy, I wouldn't have stopped there if it hadn't been an emergency. After a few minutes of straddling the bike my head seemed to clear. Realizing I couldn't stay there I waited for an open road and, with considerable trepidation, headed out. Only a few minutes later a westbound rest area (just a paved off-road parking area with privies) appeared, and I pulled in to walk a bit, eat a banana, drink coffee, and snap a photo, reassured by remembering that my dizziness at Mesa Verde cleared quickly and did not recur. Fifteen minutes later I had no trouble refueling, amid large vehicles towing boats on this beautiful weekend morning, at Clearwater Bay, Ontario. But the incident was an ever-present concern for the rest of the trip.

At noon I stopped at Quacker's Diner in Vermillion Bay for a good grilled cheese sandwich with fries, iced tea, and coffee. The town was under a "boil water" order so the diner reasonably declined to fill my Platypus bag, pointing out that Dryden, just down the road, had no such order. (The Subway there kindly filled the bag.) It was good to wrap myself around food and drink (as some Western novels picturesquely put it, or "get myself outside of..."); perhaps that would help deter dizziness. I hoped so.

Much of the Lake Superior Circle Tour (Route 17) was spectacular, but we were looping pretty far from the lake as I passed through Dryden (and the motel at which I'd stayed on the NC-700X trip north) and refueled in Ignace at 4:00 PM. I also purchased a bag of bite-sized Snickers candy, to maintain blood sugar, stashing it in the Wing's trunk. But it was a dangerously hot day, with travelers cautioned to avoid heat exhaustion, and the first time I looked at my candy it was one large soft lump of chocolate and Snickers pieces. At the night's motel I popped it into the refrigerator, where it became a hard lump.

Construction created three delays today. The longest, west of Dryden, funneled both directions' travelers down to one lane. Unaware that it was controlled by a traffic light, over the hill from my location, I pulled onto the shoulder and turned to bike off, waiting for the tail end of the eastbound line to move. In the boiling hot sun, motorcycle clothing, and memory of dizziness, I was not happy! When the eastbound line never seemed to shorten, I pulled out to rejoin it, obviously eventually getting through.

Navigation informed me there was a Comfort Inn in Thunder Bay; I chose it as my "destination," though I recalled from previous trips a bypass that allowed travelers to skip the town itself. I saw the bypass — Route 102, I think, Dolphin Road? — but continued on into the city. The Comfort Inn was right on the main drag, with several other hotels nearby. I arrived about 7:00 PM. They had a room for me, and the pleasant young lady at the desk recommended

the nearby Naxos middle-eastern restaurant. After an easy walk, I enjoyed pasta and another Alexander Keith IPA.

With 494 miles today, Navigation is telling me it's only 438 miles to Sault St. Marie, Michigan!

Day 12, Sunday July 8, 2018: Thunder Bay ON to Sault St. Marie MI (441 miles)

Arose at 4:54 and finished stretches at 5:24; I had taken a shower last night after that roasting hot day. Breakfast starts at 6:30 AM. I tried to reserve a room at the SSM MI Comfort Inn but couldn't get past the damn bot protector: click on photos with cars, etc. What a pain, especially on a cell phone. Finally gave up and, with my few remaining milliamps of current, made the reservation by telephone.

I had no trouble leaving Thunder Bay, and it was kind of nice to see the city instead of the bypass (Dawson St.?). The day began like yesterday, with just a T-shirt under the jacket. It continued on the Lake Superior Circle Tour (or Route), and now that we are actually down near the lake the scenery quickly became spectacular. I stopped at the viewpoint 15 miles east of Nipigon and prevailed upon a nice man driving a car with license plate JBE-922 to take my photograph. (At home, in Ontario somewhere, he has a 1976 Honda 750-4.) I had the NC photographed here last year, and the pickup here in 2010. On today's trip, it was the only lake-view photo I took.

The Great Lake views through dark green firs, or with them in the foreground, were spectacular. I had trouble not looking at them, but the road had priority! I stopped at a pleasant rest area about 9:00 AM, drinking coffee and eating two hotel mini-muffins. There was a lot of recreational traffic on this beautiful Sunday morning — working stiffs trying to make their expensive big pickups and boats earn their keep.

About 11:00 AM I saw a restaurant sign as I approached Marathon ("¼ mile ahead"), right on Route 17 rather than down in the town, and stopped for lunch: Marino's. Nice quiet place, friendly middle-aged waitress, good grilled cheese with fries, and plenty of coffee. Before departing I donned my hiking shirt, heated vest, and scarf — it was cold! I rode past the Airport Motor Inn where I'd stayed two nights last year — it was fun to revisit, in reverse order, places featured in my 2017 NC-700X ride. Wawa, where on a rainy day I blew a vest fuse... but I did not go into the town this year. White River's A&W, where I sought refuge from the rain and made my first internet connection last year... The views were spectacular, in this Sigurd Olson country! Especially stunning was the descent to Montreal River Bay, another spot where I had to remind myself to watch the road!

It had turned warm around Wawa, and I stopped at the entrance to the Pancake Bay campground (where I'd spent my third night last year) to shuck the vest, scarf, and shirt. Coming into Sault St. Marie ON, I pulled into an empty parking lot and called Comfort Inn in SSM, Michigan to confirm my reservation and reset the Navigation destination. Oh oh... the bike wouldn't start! Instead of the comforting instant firing, my motor remained silent and the display showed a horizontal cylinder and five star-like figures. But switching the ignition off, then back on, got us going. OK — now to get across the border!

My GPS ("Navigation") directed me to some SSM Ontario streets and I was thrilled to see clear "Bridge to USA" signs and road paintings. But I couldn't actually find it! I circled around and around, sure that there must be a normal-looking paved street that went to the bridge. Finally, as I approached an intersection for about the fifth time, a man stepped out in front of me and pointed to a structure on my left, just before the intersection. I'd seen it, but it looked like some

industrial facility with a lot of stainless steel construction. My benefactor said he'd seen me circling around and figured I could use some help. Yay! I U-turned and headed into the imposing fenced structure, found signs directing US-bound travelers, and was soon in Michigan! US Customs there was no problem — the nice young man there asked about my automatic transmission and gave me clear and simple directions to the Comfort Inn.

At the clerk's advice, I walked across the parking lot to an Applebee's and was greeted pleasantly by a man who opened the door for me. He suggested I have a drink at the bar, and when I said "No thanks, I plan to have a meal," said I could have that at the bar too. I should have explained that I'd ridden 450 miles that day and had no intention of sitting on a bar stool, but just said "Forget it" and chose a booth. (He had said I could sit wherever I wanted.) The pasta and IPA were good, but although the place was still nearly empty the waiter seemed eager for me to leave and I was still irritated by the greeter's pressure to sit at the bar. My tip was not generous.

Day 13, Monday July 9, 2018: Sault St. Marie MI to Richford OH (501 miles)

I was awake between 1 and 2 AM, probably excited to be in the States and nearing home, but fell asleep again to arise at 5:30. There was still time for stretches and a shower, and to check tire pressures (both a couple of psi low; Slimed to 36/41) before breakfast. We pulled out at 7:27 AM, fueled up at a nearby Shell, and easily picked up Interstate 75 South with its 75-mph speed limit. (Later, in a text message, I quipped to the family that the speed limit was 75 on I-75... I couldn't wait to get to I-90. Apparently only Jeff got the joke! Or, maybe, thought it was worth commenting on.)

The famous Mackinac Bridge was closer than I'd expected, only 42 miles across Michigan's Upper Peninsula. I paid the automobile fee of \$4 (later, I found the website lists \$2.50 for motorcycles) and headed up to the left of the two southbound lanes of the bridge, the metal grid lane, setting the cruise control at the car speed limit of 45 mph. There wasn't much traffic, still early in the day. We did fine at 45, no different from the Teslin River (Nisultin Bay) Bridge; a little wiggling but easily controlled. Side wind was moderate, but — as the pleasant toll-taker had warned — one had to prepare when entering and emerging from the wind protection of truck trailers. Perhaps 1/3 of the way across I found congestion ahead as the trucks, limited to 20 mph, were moving over into my lane. Two or three vehicles had stopped, broken down or involved in an accident, in the paved right lane. Well, at 15 to 20 mph the metal grid was a different story. We wobbled and wiggled around quite a bit at speeds that slowed, at times, to those of a walk. But perhaps 2/3 of the way across the right lane opened up. When the trucks shifted to it I was able to resume speed, soon coming to the Mackinac City exit sign I'd seen in YouTube videos. It had been a memorable and fun crossing!

I stopped at the first southbound rest area for coffee and a banana (both from the motel), an attractive site with even a short hiking trail through woods to a scenic view. I didn't take it. We soon hit the road at 75 mph again.

At 10:00 AM I was down to one bar on the fuel gauge, and took an exit whose sign included "Gas," winding up two miles east in a town called Roscommon. When it was clear that I had passed through and was heading out of town, having seen no gas station, I swung around and tried again, spotting a BP station on a side street (I think it actually was I-75 Business, a left turn as one enters town on the road from I-75). We filled up, but I was not pleased with this diversion. Live and learn! There are plenty of stations right on the main highway.

An hour later, under a hot sun, I stopped in Bay City for a pleasant ½ hour lunch at a Subway (sub, iced tea, fill Platypus water bag) where I sent text messages to the family: 238 miles by

11:30 AM, good progress! At Flint the GPS switched me to Route 23, toward Ann Arbor and Toledo. Traffic was moderate and fast. I refueled at Brighton MI — a confusing intersection under construction that had several of us on a residential street, prevented by “No Left Turn” signs from getting to a big gas station except by entering the quiet neighborhood and making U-turns. I think I wound up doing something illegal anyway (a few wrong-way yards to the gas station) but we made it to the life-giving elixir and had no trouble returning to 23 South to Toledo.

Headed for the Ohio Turnpike, traffic was narrowed by emergency vehicles dealing with an accident at a tree adjacent to the road, with obviously injured persons. On the Turnpike, I stopped at the first service area for a “cooler” (like a thick milkshake), coffee, and Platypus refill at a Gloria Jean’s. When I left, there was a clatter or scrape from the front tire. I stopped near the gas pumps to check it, finding the pressure fine (39 lbs by the bike’s sensor) and no obvious obstruction. The noise disappeared with a little riding; it may have been hot tar (so soft I slipped on a strip of it when walking back to the bike) stuck to the tire.

We encountered a couple of areas of construction, with eastbound traffic losing one of its three lanes for 5 miles once, and 7 miles later. That left two eastbound lanes, but they were separated by a Jersey-wall barricade. I rode the 5-miler in the left lane; with virtually no shoulder, I was anxious about what I could do if the Kenora dizzy episode were repeated. For the second split-lane section I prudently chose the right, with two advantages: someplace to pull off, and access to the exits. It was nice to see “Miles to Destination” shrink as “Trip A” (today’s) miles rose until they became equal around 430, indicating that I was ½ way home from Sault St. Marie, which Navigation said was 860 miles from Towson! That was my minimum goal for the day, attained at only 2:30 or 3:00 PM.

Since it was still early and riding conditions fine, I decided on (Trip A = 500, “Miles to Destination” = 360) as today’s goal. We were close to that right at an exit (accessible only to us right-laners) where Holiday Inn Express and Motel 6 were advertised. OK, folks, that’s it!

The Holiday Inn had a room for \$115, but right beside it was the Motel 6 at \$59, the obvious choice! I ordered a Papa John’s pizza and iced tea for delivery. There was no coffee machine or clock in the room, but it had a microwave and refrigerator. I fetched a bucket of ice for the tea, and the refrigerator kept it frozen all night.

Day 14, Tuesday July 10, 2018: Richford OH to Towson MD (367 miles)

Last day on the road... home this afternoon! I’m excited. Should be able to beat the Beltway rush-hour traffic. I arose at 4:42 and by 5:10 was done with stretches and a shower. I left the Motel 6 at 6:10 AM and again headed east on the Ohio Turnpike (I-80). We soon reached its eastern terminus, paid the toll, and headed down I-79 to Pittsburgh where we entered the PA Turnpike. Traffic was a bit heavy and there was some construction; the road seemed narrower than most Interstates (probably reflecting the Turnpike’s age) and I was a little nervous about potential dizziness, especially with no breakfast. At 9:00 AM I stopped at the first service area (Oakmont?) for coffee and pastries at Starbucks, and had the Platypus refilled.

We left the Turnpike at Breezewood about 10:45 AM and I headed for my favorite stop at Dunkin’ Donuts, my last stop before reaching home. My notes say I was there from 10:55 to 11:15... but it didn’t quite work out that way.

In an unfortunate near-conclusion to a mechanically flawless 10,000 mile tour, I couldn’t get the Gold Wing started! Pressing the start button produced the graphic I’d seen briefly in Sault St. Marie: five star patterns and something that looked like a sausage. I called several nearby Honda

dealers, and to my delight a representative of American Honda introduced himself as I nursed coffee and (another) doughnut. Though not a mechanic, he quickly diagnosed the trouble as electrical and soon had the motor running using my StarkPower battery. Rather ashamed that I hadn't thought to try this myself, I hit the road for the final 120 miles and arrived home about 4:45 PM, only a couple of hours later than planned.

The odometer read 10,486 miles, but we started with 340, so the trip was 10,146 miles. A few days later my home dealer's mechanics found some corrosion on the accessory terminals I'd installed, so it's quite possible that my own work was responsible for the problem.

If we excuse this last-stop hiccup and the flickering saddlebag warning light, the brand-new motorcycle performed beautifully. I'm no hot-rodder or peg dragger, but the bike responded powerfully and smoothly when asked to perform quick highway passes and handled superbly in smooth mountain turns for which I could make out radii and absence of dirt, gravel, and fallen rocks. Swinging this big smooth machine from side to side, when the road permitted, was a joy.

But the trip was over. It was time to enjoy my modest but comfortable home!