

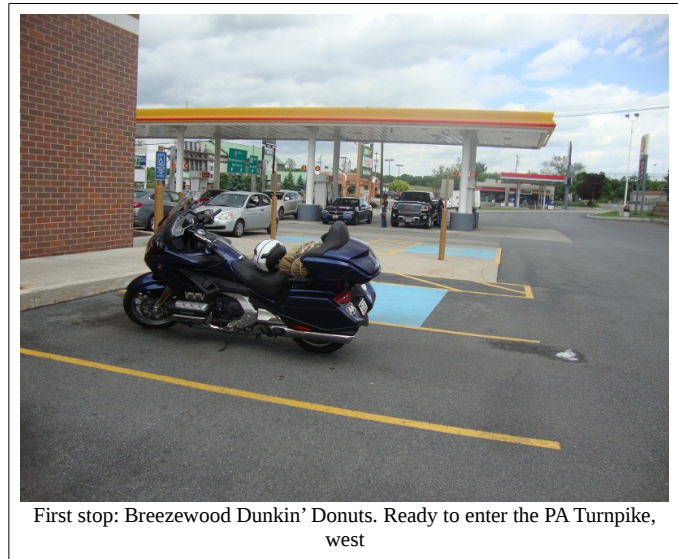
ALASKA by Gold Wing, 2019
John B. Egger

NORTHBOUND, May 20 – June 6, 2019

Day 1, Monday May 20 2019: Towson MD to Pickerington OH: 403 miles

Preparing to leave is stressful, so yesterday I reduced the morning pressure by parking and covering the two cars at the back of the driveway. This morning I moved the NC-700X beside the narrower car and the Gold Wing across the street, then backed the pickup in. As I'd hoped, and carefully measured, nose to tail the three four-wheelers cleared the front sidewalk by about two inches. After final packing and a check of the house, the Gold Wing and I pulled out at 8:46 AM, with 11,570 miles on the odometer.

We swung by my friend Gary's for a pleasant farewell, and at exactly 3.0 miles filled the tank before entering the Baltimore Beltway, I-695 West. Morning traffic is always a little questionable, but we found only a couple of slowdowns, and no foot-downs, before reaching I-70 West toward Frederick. About 11:00 AM we reached one of my favorite stops, the Breezewood PA Dunkin' Donuts: Gas for the steed, coffee and doughnuts for me. It's virtually adjacent to the entrance to the Pennsylvania Turnpike, I-76, where we headed west to a brief lunch stop at the Somerset Travel Plaza. Last year we missed the 76/70 split and wound up on the back streets of Irwin PA, but with that experience we successfully chose the I-70 West exit from the Turnpike.



First stop: Breezewood Dunkin' Donuts. Ready to enter the PA Turnpike, west

There was some traffic but only brief light rain, and we had a smooth cruise through a bit of West Virginia and into Ohio. I'd decided to stay again at the Comfort Inn in Pickerington, just east of Columbus. Since I wasn't feeling fatigued and the day was clear and pleasant, I decided to experiment with the Wing's "Navigation" GPS system, selecting that hotel as its destination. Although I remember it as virtually being on I-70, the GPS said to take an immediate exit and turn left onto a two-lane road (probably Exit 118 to Ohio 310). OK... eventually, after perhaps ten miles of rural Ohio countryside, we entered a residential area and finally some commerce. I was told I'd reached my destination, but I sure didn't see it! Weaving around a bit, including some probably illegal U-turns, I finally saw the Comfort Inn. Sure enough, very close to an I-70 exit, but I'd come in from the back. They found records of last-year's stay and, as a "Choice Preferred" customer offered a good rate. It was a relief to be there! Like last year, we arrived about 4:30 PM; 403 miles today, for 11,973 on the odometer.

Tired and hot, I began this year's practice of showering immediately, and then walked to the nice Mexican restaurant in a nearby shopping center for dinner and an IPA. After renewing bandages for a poison ivy infection on my right leg, I enjoyed a pleasant and restful night.

SPOT link (Pickerington OH): <http://maps.google.com/maps?f=q&hl=en&geocode=&q=39.93001,-82.78815&ll=39.93001,-82.78815&ie=UTF8&z=12&om=1>

Day 2, Tuesday May 21 2019: Pickerington OH to Galesburg IL: 437 miles

We pulled out after breakfast and almost immediately hit 8 AM Columbus rush-hour traffic, but it was slow for only perhaps half an hour. We stopped for gas at the first station after the traffic cleared, and at 10:15 AM at the first Indiana rest area. Its coffee machine wouldn't take either of my credit cards, so I exchanged a \$20 bill for three \$5's and 20 quarters and used five of the latter for a fair cup of coffee. A Clif bar rounded out the stop.

Last year I'd had a nice grilled-cheese sandwich at a truck stop after a difficult rainy passage through Indianapolis, and looked forward to the same lunch today. But eventually I realized that was on I-70 and this year I'd switched to I-74, riding northwest to Peoria and then to I-80.

At least that was the plan. In one of Indianapolis's confusing spaghetti-bowl interchanges I missed the merge of I-70 and 74, continuing on the former. The GPS immediately informed me of the error, advising an exit for I-65 north toward Chicago. Pleading with myself "But I don't want to go to Chicago!" I took it anyway, and after a few miles exited onto a smaller road. Right turns, left turns... but suddenly we were at the famous Indianapolis Motor Speedway, less than fifty feet from the rear of grandstands! I could hear cars practicing or tuning for the famous upcoming Memorial Day race, high-pitched, high-RPM whines just off to my right. I couldn't see the cars, but to hear them and see the Speedway was a thrill, an unexpected bonus for missing my exit. Crawfordsville Road soon brought us to an I-74 ramp, and back on the road to Peoria.

About 1:00 PM (noon, Central time) the Wing and I enjoyed a mutually refreshing stop at a curious little place, Casey's General Store, in Veedersburg IL. It was maybe a mile off the Interstate, via Routes 41 and 136. Nice place! The young woman making their sandwiches had never heard anyone ask for "just cheese, no meat," and asked if I wanted a lot! I did, and got it. How unlike the corporate Subway policy, where "Extra cheese" at 50¢ is two (maybe four) thin triangles. There were two small tables where I enjoyed that lunch before returning to I-74.

With Peoria as my "destination," Navigation wanted to go directly to the city center. Nix on that... a map check showed a big loop, I-474, around the city to the southwest, so I changed the destination to Galesburg, shortly after the loop rejoins I-74. Holiday Inn Express turned out, as I suspected, to be a high-priced business-oriented motel, but the clerk kindly referred me to the related and adjacent Baymont Inn. I checked in about 4:15 PM. We'd traveled 441 miles today, and the odometer stands at 12,414 miles.

SPOT link corrected: <http://maps.google.com/maps?f=q&hl=en&geocode=&q=40.94660,-90.33557&ll=40.94660,-90.33557&ie=UTF8&z=12&om=1>

Day 3, Wednesday May 22 2019: Galesburg IL to Blair NE: 357 miles

At 6:30 AM the tire pressures were OK: 35/40 vs the book's 36/41. There was some rain last night, but the Baymont clerks had let me park the Wing under the entry portico.

We left at 7:45 AM, immediately stopping for gas. North on I-74, we reached I-80 at Rock Island IL and headed west. About 10:15 the first Iowa rest stop (a new one for my "states visited" map) had no coffee! But we old backpackers come prepared, and I "brewed" a cup of instant Espresso using the Men's room lukewarm water, and had another Clif bar. Darting out to the bike to fetch the instant coffee, I left the helmet in the small rest-room building, and a kind lady

returning to the adjacent car asked if the helmet was mine, and not to forget it! With thanks I assured her that was unlikely. That instant Espresso packs a wallop; good stuff! Half an hour later, fueling up in Grinnell, we'd traveled 168 miles today.

Today's ride was primarily just across Iowa. It was disconcerting to see "Road Closed Ahead when Blinking" warnings, due to the heavy rainfall and flooding. These were Interstate highways, not some little county farm-to-markets! Well, I'd anticipated rough weather, allowed several extra days for it, and — so far — had escaped it. By the time the Oklahoma tornadoes had moved northeast into Illinois, Indiana and Ohio, the Wing and I had scooted past into Iowa.

Seeking gas and lunch, I followed signs to Casey's General Store in Van Meter IA, again perhaps a mile or so off the Interstate. At this one they'd had other customers ask for "just cheese, no meat" and weren't as generous as the Veedersburg folks. The smaller place had no tables so I sat on the front curb, but a side benefit was a nice conversation with an old ex-biker.

I'd chosen Omaha as my GPS destination, but to swing north around it on I-680 switched it to Blair NE. It looked, from my paper road map, as if there was a bridge from I-29 (the major north-south Interstate to which I-680 connected) across the Missouri River. More "Road Closed...when Blinking" signs; I hoped all the flooding had not affected this bridge. But there was no problem, and I-29 took me north to Route 30 west where we crossed the river and rode perhaps 10 miles to Blair NE (the second of my planned two new states). I entered Nebraska at 2:05 PM, finding Route 30 flat and straight.

GPS quickly found the satisfactory Super-8, where we arrived at 2:30 PM. The helpful manager directed me up the street to a Walgreens for more poison-ivy bandages... and a pint of Haagen-Dazs ice cream! It took the manager and me a little while to get the internet functioning (the cell phone's "Internet" wouldn't display the motel's page, with its space for password entry, until I deleted several saved pages). Pizza delivery for dinner... also quite satisfactory!

SPOT link (Blair NE): <http://maps.google.com/maps?f=q&hl=en&geocode=&q=41.53836,-96.13039&ll=41.53836,-96.13039&ie=UTF8&z=12&om=1>

Day 4, Thursday May 23 2019: Blair NE to Murdo SD: 374 miles

At 6:30 AM, tire pressures were 35/40... still good! (Book is 36/41 psi.)

We pulled out at 7:25 AM with 12,771 miles on the odometer and the GPS set for Sioux Falls SD (on I-90). She just backtracked us east on 30 to I-29 North. Its speed limit was 85 mph, but stiff wind gusts made me more comfortable at 75 or even 70 mph. There were plenty of signs warning of potential road closures, but we encountered none.

At Sioux Falls SD (150 miles) we spent half an hour with fuel and snack, leaving at 10:30 AM, and fueled up again at Chamberlain SD (301 miles) at 12:30 PM. Fields at roadside were waterlogged, with many billboards seemingly erected in shallow lakes. I felt so sorry for farmers relying on that land for a living. Lunchtime... but a map check showed Murdo not far ahead, and Andrea had encouraged me to stop at its Pioneer Auto Museum. Signs advertised a Super-8 there too, so it looked like a good bet. We pulled in just before 2:00 PM, 374 miles today showing on the Trip A daily odometer, 13,146 miles on the Gold Wing.

The Super-8, right on I-90, was appealing and I checked in, finding it was associated somehow with the Museum that was only a short walk away. I paid the Museum's \$10 admission fee and headed for its diner for a very good lunch: grilled cheese with fries.

The Museum was an interesting and curious place, with displays of many items (such as smoking pipes and stuffed dolls) in addition to many (perhaps over two hundred) cars. Nearly all

were completely unrestored. Though many were parked on dirt, they were well protected under metal roofs. I saw only three Hudsons, but many other interesting and curious historic vehicles and tractors. I spent about two hours there and enjoyed the visit, but it was definitely not a traditional museum like Montana's Deer Lodge I visited on the way home with the NC-700X.

At the Museum and when showering that evening, I became a little dizzy. The former I blame on walking around wearing my reading glasses; the latter had something to do, I think, with the nature of the shower. It was all monochrome beige, and seemed a little bouncy. Maybe it was a Bathfitter installation—I've heard they seldom perfectly tightly over existing fixtures. Testing with closed eyes and standing on one foot, I managed both successfully. Dinner was a delivery pizza. It was a good day, and it was nice to see the Museum.

SPOT link (Murdo SD): <http://maps.google.com/maps?f=q&hl=en&geocode=&q=43.88495,-100.70642&ll=43.88495,-100.70642&ie=UTF8&z=12&om=1>

Day 5, Friday, May 24, 2019: Murdo SD to Gillette WY: 299 miles

My tire pressures, at 6:45 AM, were 34.5/40.2 (book 36/41), which I assumed were OK; it had rained during the night so I lay on the Quest tarp when doing this testing. It was misty and overcast but not raining. When we left at 7:25 AM with the odometer reading 13,146 miles, the tire-warning light was blinking and the display showed Front 33 psi. But the warning went out when the pressure reached 34 psi, and later was 37. I'll top it up tomorrow.

Ah, Wall Drug... it's hard to resist the omnipresent road signs! I've been there before, but at other times resisted the lure. But today the 8:30 AM need for fuel, coffee, and snack coincided with the Wall exit and, after a bit of confused winding around town, we found a parking spot at the Drug's main entrance. A kind man snapped a photo of us there, and I texted it to my family while enjoying 5¢ coffee and two (excellent, but not 5¢) doughnuts. We'd come 83 miles on this chilly morning.



A chilly morning ride reached Wall Drug's 5¢ coffee and free ice water

Back on the blustery Interstate 90, I headed west with a GPS destination of Billings MT. I'd heard of snow in Rapid City, and there it was, on the roadside ground and hillsides. We passed the exits for Mt. Rushmore and headed toward the Wyoming border. But suddenly Navigation told me to leave I-90 to Route 34 North. I wasn't sure what was going on, but quite a few trucks were doing it too, so I followed her directions and wound up in Belle Fourche. Stopping for fuel and a snack at 10:45, I checked the paper map and found that the GPS chose Route 212 because it took a more direct route (like the hypotenuse of a triangle) to I-90 at Hardin MT. But it looked like a simple two-lane road with few services for many miles (reminding me of Colorado's Route 10 last year) and when, immediately heading out of Belle Fourche, we were stopped for one lane of construction, I gave up, U-turned, and took 85 back to I-90. It was a big relief to reach it, and I set Gillette WY as the new destination.

We rolled into the Gillette Comfort Inn with 299 miles for the day, 13,445 miles on the odometer. Dinner was at a pleasant Mexican restaurant, Los Compadres, a short walk away.

SPOT [Gillette] link: <http://maps.google.com/maps?f=q&hl=en&geocode=&q=44.29226,-105.52602&ll=44.29226,-105.52602&ie=UTF8&z=12&om=1>

Day 6, Saturday, May 25, 2019: Gillette WY to Bozeman MT: 372 miles

Time, at 7:04 AM, to top up the tire pressures... But the bike was under the motel portico on its side stand, with its left side near a low brick wall, so both valves were hard to reach. I made the front (34→36) but couldn't get the Slime inflator screwed onto the rear valve. With the bike leaning to the left on its side stand, adjacent to that low wall, there simply was very little room. I lay on the pavement but got the Slime screwed onto the rear valve only enough to allow air to escape, and couldn't get it tighter.

Needing the space offered by the center stand, I pushed the bike across the parking lot to a level spot where I could use it. Whew! Now to go back to the portico for the Slime inflator... Wait, what's that black electrical wire coming from behind the left saddlebag? I quickly realized it was the Slime's power cord. There it was: the little Slime inflator, behind the left saddlebag, hanging onto the rear tire at about the 11:00 position, still screwed to the valve, with its black electric wire wound around it. I had pushed the bike for about four full wheel revolutions, and was immensely grateful that the valve was not damaged or pulled out; apparently there was space for the Slime to go around without catching on anything. Pressure, by now, was down to about 30 psi, so it took a while for the little inflator to reach 41, but what a relief! Another lesson in something not to do. I had breakfast, checked out, and was so pleased to be able to hit the road.

It was a great riding day except for some short rain about 2:00 PM. Traffic was light, wind gusts few, with a bright blue sky and fluffy white clouds. I left Gillette with the rain jacket and an activated heated vest, but turned the vest's juice off at the first rest stop. I also changed the destination to Bozeman; the Billings "fastest route" program kept telling me to exit I-90 onto things like Dead Stallion Road... I could be wrong, but a couple of them looked unpaved. Forget it, folks!

It was nice to see the snowy Rocky Mountains ahead, drawing forth memories of my 1965 Super Hawk ride and the thrill of first seeing the Rockies. That little naked bike, with a Boy Scout knapsack... what a trip. The hilly and rocky roadside terrain reminded me of the fields I used to roam alone as a boy in Vermont, in the early 1950s.

When the Sena bluetooth headset battery finally gave out, I discovered something that, no doubt, every other rider knows: Out on the road, at least, I could use the bike's speakers, set at high volume, to listen to my New Orleans Rhythm Kings, Jelly Roll Morton piano solos, and Bob Milne boogie-woogie!

I should have learned, last year, to be careful about fuel in Montana (over 5 gallons, in a 5.1 gallon tank, when we finally reached I-90 coming up from Idaho Falls), but the Town Pump in Billings MT provided 4.9 gallons at 11:00 AM; we'd come 224 miles today. Another Montana nail-biter. Lunch at this truck stop was different: One selected wrapped items from refrigerated carts and heated them with an adjacent microwave oven, then offered the items' wrappers' bar codes for payment. Nice selection; I had macaroni and cheese.

We rolled in to the Bozeman, MT Comfort Inn at 2:30 PM, for a 372 mile day, making 13,817 miles on the odometer. I enjoyed a pleasant dinner at Santa Fe Red's restaurant. Like Gillette's Mexican restaurant last night, it was only a short Croc-walk away.

SPOT link [Bozeman]: <http://maps.google.com/maps?f=q&hl=en&geocode=&q=45.69354,-111.04436&ll=45.69354,-111.04436&ie=UTF8&z=12&om=1>

Day 7, Sunday May 26 2019: Bozeman MT to Coeur d'Alene ID: 367 miles

We pulled out about 7:30 AM, immediately fueled up, and soon rode past the intersection of I-25 and I-90 that I was so grateful to reach last year. I was thrilled to see that nearby Pilot station last year, but gratified not to suffer that anxiety again.

Interstate 90 became quite twisty and was often wet; several times I kicked out the cruise control to slow for curves. Perhaps 30% of the morning found very light rain. At the Missoula snack-and-fuel stop I was delighted to receive an email from catsitter Caitlin: Shy Coco has come out, and has been chirping, which Caitlin and I both love to hear. I donned the heated vest and was glad for it.

The poor GPS became confused at some two-lane construction areas, informing me that we were on I-90 East and advising exits at several construction access roads ("Make a U-turn when possible"... I don't think so!) She soon began to behave. The Rocky Mountain scenery was becoming increasingly attractive, unfortunately most so in hilly, twisty areas where something else had to claim my attention. Awww... But it was generally a very pleasant ride today, and I had a real sense of euphoria, cruising the Montana Rockies on this big, comfortable machine, turning maybe 2,500 rpm at 70 mph, while listening to Jelly's 1929 solo jazz piano, New Orleans Rhythm Kings' joyful 1924 jazz band, and Milne's boogie piano. (I have a "Best of Mamas and Papas" album there too; Mama Cass Elliot's voice is beautiful.) The Super Hawk, at 70 mph, would have been turning 6,000 rpm; it's now hard to imagine riding that 305cc bike, with no windshield or fairing and its flat handlebars, on its long 1965 trip, culminating in Seattle via Lake Louise AB and then back to Meadville PA. Well, I was only 20 or 21 years old then.

Shortly after 2:00 PM Mountain time, but now 1:00 Pacific Daylight Time, we wound up the day at the Coeur d'Alene ID Super-8 at the intersection of I-90 and Route 95, which runs north to Canada. I've come down 95 after entering the States at the Idaho entry point. I reached Coeur d'Alene on the Super Hawk (heading west to Seattle, so I must have been at this very intersection), but the NC-700X and I, a couple of years ago, turned east at Sandpoint, north of Coeur d'Alene.

After a vegetable calzone at the Pizza Factory restaurant, a short walk from the motel, I strolled over to an Exxon Jiffy-Mart and bought a paper road map of Washington. Trip planning suggested that after a short day tomorrow to Ellensburg (where I tried to get a job in 1965) or Cle Elum, I could easily reach Mt. Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest, northeast of Bellingham, on Tuesday—three days before my ferry reservation, exactly the good-weather plan! But who could have been sure of good weather?

Andrea is flying to Walla Walla WA tomorrow, for her friend Linnea Pearson's wedding, and it's only perhaps 95 miles south of my I-90 route. I'm not going down. We'll be together in Alaska, and although Linnea was Andrea's roommate during one of my visits I don't really know her.

SPOT link [Coeur d'Alene]: <http://maps.google.com/maps?f=q&hl=en&geocode=&q=47.70129,-116.79353&ll=47.70129,-116.79353&ie=UTF8&z=12&om=1>

Day 8, Monday May 27 2019: Coeur d'Alene ID to Cle Elum WA: 226 miles

We left at 7:45 AM in a blustery wind, with the odometer reading 14,184 miles, fueled up immediately, and picked up I-90 West toward Spokane and Seattle. With a sign announcing “Seattle 239 miles” I had, again, to think in wonder of the Super Hawk: facing that distance on that little bike with zero wind protection... quite a difference with the Wing — set the cruise control, raise the windshield, turn on the music, and watch the miles melt away.

Riding weather was perfect today. I started wearing the vest but removed it at the first rest stop. That morning I stopped at a rest area announcing “Free Coffee,” sponsored by a veterans’ group and had a pleasant chat with a couple of the veterans offering the coffee — one was a biker himself. As I prepared to leave, two riders pulled in beside my Gold Wing, one on a Triumph with his wife, the other a 1200cc Aspencade Gold Wing from the early 1980s. One of them kindly took a couple of photos of me with my bike, and, although I pulled out first, they soon passed with friendly waves.



The rider of a 1980s Gold Wing took this at an eastern WA stop for free coffee

Late in the morning when I stopped at Wanapum or Echo Vista View Point (I remembered a sign for the “Wild Horse Monument”), joining many other tourists. It overlooked the Columbia River, far below. A kind young man snapped a couple of photos of me, and I one of the Wing. We descended a long hill, crossed a bridge over the river, and climbed a matching hill on the other side. With the cruise control set a 70 we ascended with ease, but I imagined the Super Hawk in 3rd at perhaps 45 mph.



John among others overlooking the Columbia River at a viewpoint

It was lunchtime at Love’s Truck Stop in Ellensburg, and I had one of the Subway Veggie Delites with its “extra cheese” (four thin triangles for 50¢ or \$1), fondly remembering the generosity of the girl at the Illinois Casey’s.

Way too early to stop, I moved on to Cle Elum. Navigation showed only an EconoLodge motel there, with nothing else east of Seattle, so I found it and was pleased to get the “Choice Preferred” discounted rate. The kind proprietor affirmed that there was nothing else until Seattle. It was only 12:30 PM, with 226 miles for the day and 14,410 miles on the odometer. But a short day was planned, and I didn’t want to face Seattle that afternoon. I had lunch (the standard grilled cheese) and a pleasant dinner at Cle Elum’s Colonial Restaurant, a spot favored by motorcyclists and an easy walk across the street.

SPOT link [Cle Elum]: <http://maps.google.com/maps?f=q&hl=en&geocode=&q=47.19239,-120.92049&ll=47.19239,-120.92049&ie=UTF8&z=12&om=1>

Day 9, Tuesday May 28 2019: Cle Elum to Mt. Baker–Snoqualmie National Forest WA: 207 miles

It promised to be an interesting day. I thought I remembered coming in to the EconoLodge from the right, but the manager said I'd pick up I-90 West quickly if I turned left out of the motel. I did... and I did. Snoqualmie Pass, here we come!

I hoped to stop for coffee at the Alpine-themed lodge, right at the pass, where I'd stopped near the start of my eastbound Super Hawk return to Pennsylvania: 25¢ for a cup of coffee... outrageous, I thought in 1965. But today the sky was overcast and misty, traffic moderately heavy and fast, and I saw no restaurant or even parking area at the Pass heading west. Rats.

Traffic became heavier as we approached Seattle, frequently slowing but requiring no foot-downs until the single-lane exit to 405 North. I'd wondered why there was a long line of vehicles in the lane to my right, then realized what my Navigation's single right arrow meant. I stopped basically on the boundary between the rightmost (405-bound) and second lane, with my right turn signal on, pleading for sympathy, and a car soon let me in. Thanks! 405 traffic was heavy but I don't recall any more foot-downs.

Route 405 is, I presume, a Route I-5 bypass of Seattle, but it was still very heavily traveled. Traffic began to lighten after we reached its merge with I-5 North. I had set the ferry terminal in Bellingham, 355 Harris Avenue, as my destination. We reached Bellingham about 11:00 AM (fuel records show a fillup at 11:06) and quickly found the terminal and the loading area. I backtracked out toward I-5, stopping at a Subway for lunch.

With Deming WA the new destination, we were taken to the Mt. Baker Highway, Route 542, a major exit (two lanes) east from I-5 north of Bellingham. Unsure of what was ahead, I stopped at a couple of small gas stations with grocery supplies, and proceeded on. Delighted to find a Visitors' Center just east of the small town of Glacier, I met a woman coming out of an "Employees Only" door and asked where I could go in. She told me, basically, nowhere because the Center was only open on weekends! She said the Douglas Fir Campground was just down the road. OK...



But where? I wondered if every little dirt road intersecting 542 led to the campground. But a couple of pleasant young hikers, justly proud of having climbed Mt. Baker, had eyeballed the posted map and said it looked like about 1½ miles down the road so, with considerable uncertainty, I plugged ahead. After turning into one private townhouse development and quickly U-turning back to the road, I finally saw the nice "Douglas Fir Campground" sign. I headed in, cruised around a little and chose Site 28, switching the Gold Wing off at 1:40 PM. With the Eureka Mountain Pass 2 set up for the first time this trip, I strolled back to the camp bulletin board, near the entrance, to register.

My lifetime Senior Pass gave me the half-price rate of \$10 per night (thanks again to whoever suggested buying that, years ago) but with no tens I waited for the campground hosts, whose large camper was nearby. I was planning to stay three nights, but rules emphasized that sites could not be reserved for more than one night, presumably because they might have been reserved on the Internet. This was distressing; could I count on only one night at a time? But the kind host couple explained that, while most sites (including the preferred riverbank sites) were classified as “Reserved” and that rule applied to them, I had chosen one of the handful of “Unreserved” or “Walk-on”

sites at which occupants could stay as long as they wished. Yay! My practice of choosing sites that looked fine to me but that might not strongly appeal to others worked again!

I sent a SPOT message and strolled around the campground, then upstream on the Horseshoe Bend Trail for about ten minutes, beside the gorgeous and powerful fast-moving green and white North Fork of the Nooksack River. Firing up the Pocket Rocket, I prepared one of the Backpacker Pantry freeze-dried dinners that I’d saved from my truncated 2013 Appalachian Trail hike. That was it for today! I was exactly where I’d hoped and, if weather was good, planned to be. Two days at this beautiful National Forest, then down to the ferry.

SPOT link [Mt. Baker NF]: <http://maps.google.com/maps?f=q&hl=en&geocode=&q=48.90239,-121.91263&ll=48.90239,-121.91263&ie=UTF8&z=12&om=1>

Day 10, Wednesday May 29 2019: At Mt. Baker—Snoqualmie National Forest, WA

I didn’t feel like firing up the Gold Wing, so it was time to explore this campground’s opportunities for hiking.

Late in the morning I decided again to walk the Horseshoe Bend Trail upstream (no choice about that: the trail’s downstream end is at the campground), this time for an hour before turning back. It was a sunny and cool day, perfect for walking, and though I lacked hiking boots and poles the New Balance walking shoes were fine for this well-maintained and well used path. I took a couple of photographs, one of me sitting on a bench at about the halfway point, and reached



... and was fortunate (or wise!) to choose one of the few unreserved campsites



About halfway along the Horseshoe Bend Trail, North Fork Nooksack River

what seemed to be the trail's end in about fifty minutes. I had thought there might be a signpost, or even another access point at this end, but it just stopped with a couple of small fallen trees and overgrown brush. The river, broad and stony at this point, was far below. (I should say "A river..." but I'm presuming it was still the North Fork.)

Lunch and a nap (that ultralight yellow Thermarest Neo air mattress does very well) took me to mid-afternoon, and I didn't feel like just hanging around until dinner. There were no walking paths other than Horseshoe, but that Visitors Center was supposedly only 1½ miles west on the Mt. Baker Highway (Route 542), and it was pretty close to the little town of Glacier, where I might find food.

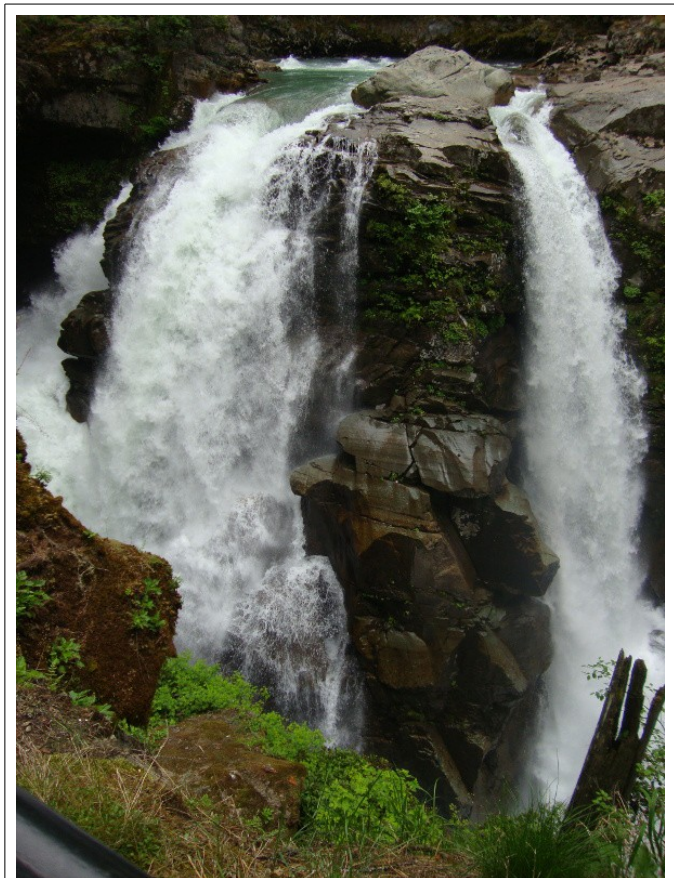
I don't mind road walking, and headed out at 2:30 PM. In only 15 minutes I reached Chair 9 Restaurant, praised by a man I'd chatted with at the campground, and five minutes later Glacier Creek Road where signs pointed to four trailheads. (I was delighted to discover all these hiking opportunities within easy walking distance, but quickly decided that the "8" after "Heliotrope Ridge Trail," for example, was not its length but the road distance to its trailhead. Boo.) I arrived at the Visitors Center about 3:15, left ten minutes later, and arrived at Graham's store in Glacier only ten minutes after that. I packed the little black REI backpack with goodies (no instant coffee, though), and arrived back at the campsite at 4:35 PM. A good walk! The Garmin GPS shows the Visitors Center as 1.51 miles from camp, and Graham's store 1.73 miles. Those are crow-fly miles; the walk was a bit farther. It was a pleasant way to spend the afternoon.

SPOT link [Mt. Baker NF]: <http://maps.google.com/maps?f=q&hl=en&geocode=&q=48.90239,-121.91263&ll=48.90239,-121.91263&ie=UTF8&z=12&om=1>

Day 11, Thursday May 30 2019: At Mt. Baker–Snoqualmie National Forest, WA : 50 miles

Well, let's see... another day to Bellingham ferry time. After back stretches I was having breakfast at the picnic table when Ahkash, the pleasant tall and slender gray-haired man I'd met earlier who uses his adopted "spiritual" Hindu name, stopped by on his dog-walk (she also has a spiritual name). A retired Seattle IT worker, as I recall, who lives in a Seattle suburb, he tried several faiths before feeling at home with a Hindu spiritual leader named Amma. This is a world I do not understand or embrace, but I can be respectful, and we got along fine. His familiarity with motorcycles helped.

At his urging I decided it was silly to be confined to walking distances when spectacular sights lay a few miles up the road, so the Gold Wing and I left for the end of the Mt. Baker Highway, Heather Meadows Visitors Center, just before 9:00 AM. In only fifteen minutes we reached



A few miles' ride east brought us to Nooksack Falls, about 9:30 AM

the parking area for the beautiful Nooksack Falls; alone there, I took several photographs. Continuing a slow ride, much of it at 25 mph, up this beautiful road—there were no other sightseers at this hour, and I moved aside for a couple of fast movers probably headed for work—I reached Heather Meadows at 10 AM. The sharp, rocky, snow-covered peaks were spectacular, but it was now time for some restful coffee and doughnuts. No deal! The only people there seemed to be chairlift workers. (I saw a “Chair 1, Experts Only” sign, and the numbered chair suggested that the Chair 9 restaurant was named analogous to golf’s “19th hole” bars. Ahkash later seconded this idea.) I snapped a couple of photos and, rather disappointed, headed back down.

After a few minutes I realized I’d sent no SPOT message and obtained no GPS reading at the top, so we U’d and returned to the lonely summit. I learned later that my SPOT email did not go out (irritatingly, despite its flashing “email” light), but did obtain Garmin GPS coordinates, and we departed (again) at 10:30. I’d also taken no coordinates at the Falls, and decided to stop there on the way back.

Taking the good dirt road down to the large unpaved parking area, I obtained the GPS coordinates [N48°54.390’, W121°48.494’] and headed out. But not well... there was a short uphill rise to the one-lane dirt road, and as I neared the crest I thought I was moving too fast to make the right turn onto the narrow road. But slowing down on the hill was not such a good idea: We pretty much stopped, not a stable configuration for a two-wheeler. I felt myself beginning to fall over and coast backward down the hill. To make matters worse, we were just to the left of a boulder placed to channel traffic into the parking area. In somewhat of a panic, I noticed we had stopped, and found my right footpeg in contact with the boulder, perhaps keeping us from rolling backward. I managed, awkwardly, to keep the machine upright, and shifted into Walk Mode (Forward), easing us up onto the dirt road. Yikes. (I discovered, later, that somewhere I seem to have broken my right little toe, and this is a likely candidate.) What a relief to be back in “Drive” and soon on the Highway. We were relaxing at Site 28 by lunchtime. Despite the scare at the Falls parking lot, and perhaps the broken toe, it had been a great morning! Thanks, Ahkash. The morning’s ride added 50 miles, for an odometer reading of 14,668 miles.

(What I should have done: There was only one other vehicle in that big parking lot, so I could easily have approached the road from the far end of the lot, climbing the incline gradually and emerging onto the dirt road at only a small angle to it, not 90°.)

After lunch and nap, I couldn’t figure out anything new to do. Fetching a GPS reading at the Horseshoe Bend terminus seemed like a good idea, and timing the walks to and from it: N48° 54.272’, W121° 53.600’, out 39 minutes, back 36 minutes. I was at the camp by 4:45 PM after a good, satisfying walk, feeling that I’d moved well with sure footing and a straight back.

GPS coordinates at Heather Meadows: N48°51.753’ W121°40.743’



Ack, no coffee and doughnuts at Heather Meadows, just construction workers

Day 12, Friday May 31 2019: Mt. Baker NF WA to Bellingham WA (Ferry): 54 miles

Ahkash and Lela (the non-spiritual name of his dog) stopped to say goodbye at 8:15 AM. I packed up and sipped some final coffee before pulling out at 11:00, enjoying a relaxed ride on this beautiful day to the ferry terminal. We arrived shortly after noon.

I obtained vehicle and personal passes, then used Navigation to hunt up a Domino's Pizza a couple of miles away. No tables, just stools at a narrow counter, but I easily consumed an excellent small vegetarian pizza and a Coke. Text messages, now available, conveyed Andrea's distress at receiving no SPOT messages for several days. She had called the rangers who covered Douglas Fir, and one stopped by while I was sipping coffee, asking if I was John. She was impressed with their kindness and courtesy, but I felt bad for her worry; I'd thought SPOTs were unnecessary if I wasn't moving, and did try—unsuccessfully—at Heather Meadows. She pointed out that although I knew I wasn't moving, she didn't.

Ferry loading was scheduled as from 3:00 to 5:00 PM, and I arrived at 2:45, assigned to Lane 1 behind only one other motorcycle: a white BMW sporting Utah plates, with a sidecar. I was surprised to learn, chatting with its white-mustachio'd rider, that his wife was sitting in the sidecar. At perhaps 3:10 the stocky young man working the hot, sunny staging area began waving vehicles on... but not us. About 3:30 he suggested the woman might walk on, to get out of the sun, but when the man and wife couldn't see how they'd find each other, he OK'd the Utah vehicle's boarding. Great! I was now at the head of Lane 1. But others continued to load, pickups, boats, campers, cars... around 4:00 the young man even asked me to move aside so vehicles behind me in Lane 1 could load. By perhaps 4:15 it was just me and one pickup truck in the big, sunny lot. Increasingly irritated, I waved the young man over and asked if I could get some water. Hesitating a moment, he radio'd ahead for permission to load "the Haines motorcycle," and the Wing and I finally boarded the MV Columbia.

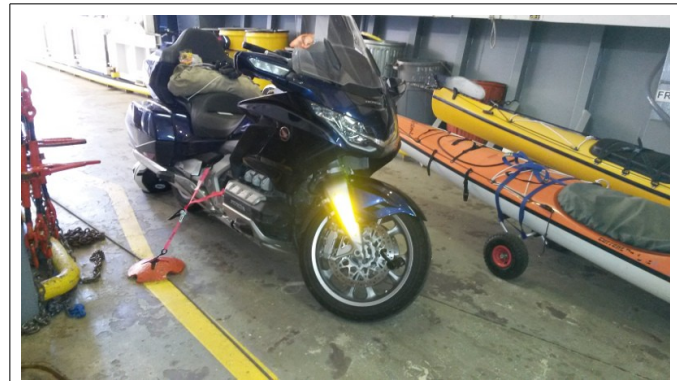


Near the end of the Horseshoe Bend Trail, a 1:15 round-trip, on my last day here



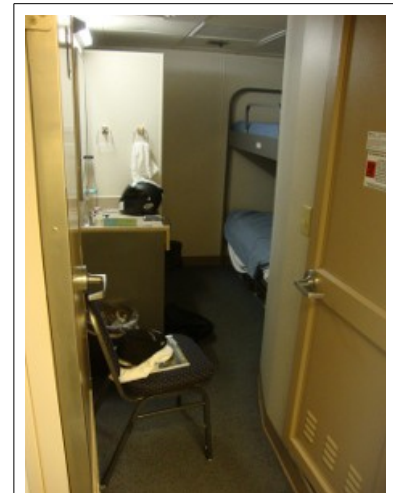
Ferry loading at Bellingham was from 3 to 5, and I arrived at 2:45 PM.

I was directed to an area one vehicle wide, between the hull on the left and some structure like a stairwell or utility shaft on the right. The deck worker pointed out a metal anchor on the floor, like a flower, to my right, and then departed. I procured my 10' ratcheting soft-ties and strapped the right side of the bike to that anchor. On the left, though, I saw no anchor. There was a large yellow pipe running along the hull, but two sea kayaks and a couple of bicycles were in the way. I decided the weight of the motorcycle, leaning to the left on its side stand, was enough to prevent a fall to the right, and of course my strap should prevent a fall to the left. No ship employee checked my work.



This is how I secured the Wing. I saw no anchor point on the bike's left side.

Tired and hot, I found my room and immediately headed for the guest laundry. It had showers too, so I made use of both. (I didn't realize my own bathroom had a small shower.) Pleased to now have clean clothes and self, I had a grilled-cheese sandwich for dinner in the Snack Bar and watched the ship's progress from a comfortable seat at the northeast corner of the top-deck viewing lounge before heading for bed. My stateroom was "double occupancy," and my nursing home experience led me to expect that a roommate would arrive at any minute; I was nervous every time there was a noise in the hall. None arrived that night or the next day, and finally, after a day and a half of anxiety, Sunday morning I inquired of an amused desk clerk who explained that I had paid for the room and no roommate would be forthcoming. What a relief! I guess the proper analogy is not one bed in a double room, but a motel room that contains, as most of them do, two beds.

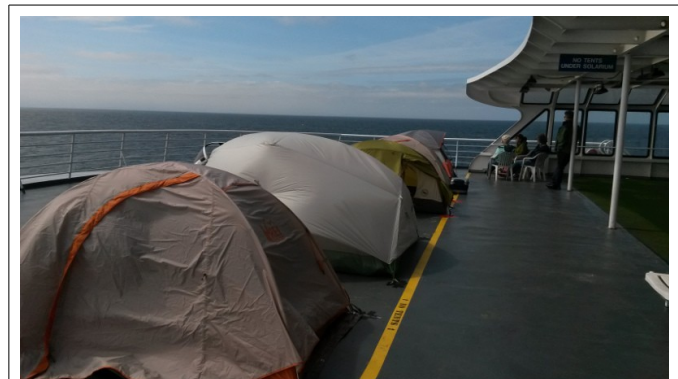


My stateroom from the hall. Bathroom with shower are behind the door at right

Day 13, Saturday June 1 2019: Aboard the MV Columbia AMH Ferry, BC

The Snack Bar provided a good oatmeal breakfast. Roaming around, I found the Solarium with its open deck where perhaps eight tents were pitched and other travelers had claimed lounge chairs under the roof. This is how Andrea traveled years ago, but I was glad to have a room.

At 9:40 AM we were told of emergence onto "open water," with motion-sensitive passengers advised to have taken their Dramamine an hour ago! (We chuckled,



Andrea and friends have camped up here; the old man was glad for a stateroom

but an announcement actually had been made then.) As I sat in the seventh-level observation lounge I found Hoonah AK on a map, and recalled my silly ca. 1970 version of Glen Campbell's hit song about Houston: "Goin' back to Hoonah, Hoonah, Hoonah!" At 11:25 AM, we were at N51°23.720' W127°52.011'.

I had just ordered lunch, another Snack Bar grilled cheese sandwich, when the PA system called me to the desk: My motorcycle had fallen over. I grabbed its key and rushed down the fifth-deck stairs to the car deck. A car-deck worker, himself a biker, had already raised the Gold Wing onto its side stand. He handed me a square piece of plastic that had popped off, and pointed out a scrape on the rear top box. The plastic piece was of greatest concern by far: It was the cover to the transmission switches, with N and D at top and bottom and A/M [automatic or manual] at the left, and had a small hole at its upper right corner. I secured the right tie-down strap again and installed (a bit late, obviously) one on the left, under the kayaks. The deck man brought out a ship's strap, which he tightened over the top of the seat. The machine was now solid.

Although I should have examined the switch box carefully, perhaps photographed it, I was in somewhat of a panic about being able to ride from Haines to Anchorage, and simply fitted the square piece into its frame over the actual switches. It seemed gently to snap into place. (It appears to be simply a rocker over the switches, so if that hadn't worked I imagined completely leaving it off and poking the N and D switches with a finger or pencil stub.) When I turned the ignition on and pressed the start button, the motor started perfectly. With some trepidation I gently pressed the "D" at the bottom edge of the broken square, and the Wing shifted into "1." OK! With great relief, I shifted back to "N" and switched the ignition off. As for the white $\frac{3}{4}$ "-wide scrape on the top of the top box, I found it could virtually be eliminated by vigorously rubbing it with fingers. Later I found the three luggage boxes to be opening and locking properly, and placed a small square of first-aid tape (no electrical or duct tape in my tool kit, amazingly) as weather protection over the $\frac{1}{4}$ "-square hole.

I'd found a place on Deck 5 near the top of the car-deck stairs with telephone connectivity, and had been texting Jeff about the incident when a young man asked about connections. He had arrived at the Bellingham loading lot at the last minute and had left his Triumph 1200, his "baby"



The crew, AWOL before, helped AFTER fall. New straps on left, and over seat.



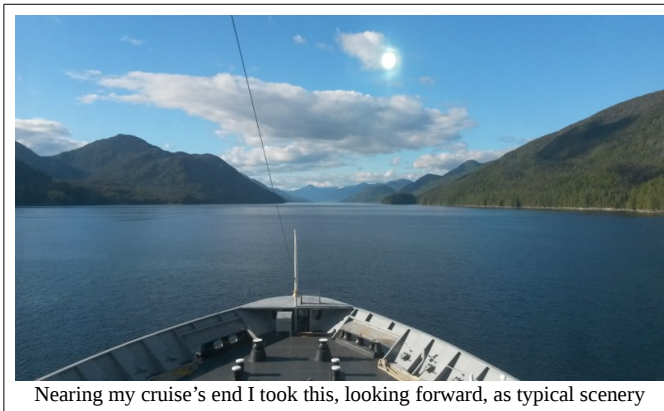
This was the major damage; I think it's delicately fitted on one of two mounts

that he'd ridden from North Carolina, parked there as he darted onto the ferry. His plan was to call a nearby motorcycle shop to pick up the bike, and needed to reach the shop by phone. I tried to help but outside on the open deck he seemed to have been successful.

Finally realizing the ship has a nice dining room, I skipped the habitual grilled cheese and enjoyed a nice Linguini Alfredo and a small salad with blue-cheese dressing. I overheard tourists at an adjacent table talking about the Adirondacks, but did not intrude.

SPOT link [Ferry1]:

<http://maps.google.com/maps?f=q&hl=en&geocode=&q=53.17483,-128.70384&ll=53.17483,-128.70384&ie=UTF8&z=12&om=1>



Nearing my cruise's end I took this, looking forward, as typical scenery

Day 14, Sunday June 2 2019: [Aboard the MV Columbia]

Breakfast in the dining room! Three large, heavy pancakes that I couldn't actually finish. We stopped at Ketchikan from 9 AM to 1 PM, and soon after landing I headed out for a walk, turning right on Tongass Avenue and sticking to it for about an hour. It wasn't very attractive: light industry and commerce, rather dirty and run-down. I wasn't impressed. (Andrea told me, later, to look up Ketchikan on the Internet to see what I'd missed.) I did obtain instant coffee and a couple of doughnuts at a Safeway, and prevailed upon a man to snap my photograph. I was back at the ship in time for lunch.



What I saw of Ketchikan was not impressive; I missed a lot, apparently!

That afternoon I found a hardbound novel in the deck's book rack, Kristin Hannah's *The Great Alone*, and substituted it for a second or third reading of Lee Child's *61 Hours* (the only book I had). Hannah's Alaska novel was enjoyable except for her uninformed references to "the ham radio." Dinner was Linguini Alfredo again, the only vegetarian entree I could come up with, but this time an IPA replaced the salad.

That evening we stopped briefly at Wrangell, with passengers told to be aboard by 7:30 PM.

SPOT link [Ferry2]: <http://maps.google.com/maps?f=q&hl=en&geocode=&q=56.37605,-132.59047&ll=56.37605,-132.59047&ie=UTF8&z=12&om=1>

Day 15, Monday June 3 2019: Ferry to Haines AK hotel: 5 miles

Back to oatmeal this morning; those pancakes were too much! We stopped at Juneau around 7 AM, but it was chilly and wet and I didn't leave the ship. I had spent an uncomfortable night; the bunk mattress was not very pleasant and I wondered if my air mattress on the floor would have been better. I finished Hannah's novel and, after a nice egg-salad sandwich for lunch, packed the bike preparing to leave.

At 2:10 PM I backed the Wing out of its parking area and turned it 90° to exit from the right side of the ship. The shifting switch, so far, has worked fine. Stopping in the parking lot to set Haines's Hotel Haslingland as the "destination," we covered the five miles to arrive at 3:00 PM. This historic hotel had no microwave and no restaurant, and cost \$130... but the proprietor was a pleasant ex-biker who's a fan of Pirsig's *Zen...*, and I guess that counts for something.

Unsure of where to eat, I walked to a Quik Stop store for milk and ice cream, but then learned of the nearby Pilot Light Restaurant. Nice small place, but they were out of the vegetarian lasagne so they offered to substitute summer squash in the "fish tacos." They were delicious, and I saved one for tomorrow.

The Wing and I had ridden 4.7 miles today.

SPOT link [Haines AK]: <http://maps.google.com/maps?f=q&hl=en&geocode=&q=59.22744,-135.44540&ll=59.22744,-135.44540&ie=UTF8&z=12&om=1>

Day 16, Tuesday June 4 2019: Haines AK to Pine Lake Campground YT: 153 miles

Morning found coffee and a small selection of pastries in the Haslingland lobby, which I enjoyed with a pleasant couple from Minnesota who was headed for the ferry to Prince Rupert. With only 150 miles to add to my 14,727 mile odometer today, I left late, about 9:15 AM, heading back into town for gas. Navigation took us, via a route I never would have expected, to the Haines Highway, Route 3, north. Almost immediately we encountered four miles of construction, guided by a pilot car; the pleasant flagger waved me to the front of



On my last day aboard, a kind fellow passenger shot this.



The Haines Road, between Haines AK and Haines Junction YT, was desolate

the line and she and I had a nice chat until the northbound pilot vehicle arrived. Largely hard-packed dirt, it posed the Wing no problem.

The Haines Highway was desolate. At one point a beautiful black bear was waiting on the left shoulder, apparently to be sure crossing would be safe; realizing I was stopping, he or she ambled across the highway and swiftly disappeared into the east-side woods. I think I encountered only perhaps a half-dozen, maybe ten, vehicles in the road's 150 miles. Canadian customs went smoothly, and I soon stopped to snap a photograph, using camera and tripod, at the attractive "Yukon" welcome sign. It was about 1:00 PM, Pacific time, when I rolled into the Haines Junction FasGas station for fuel and groceries. Before heading for Pine Lake I stopped at Frosty's for lunch (more grilled cheese with fries) and ice cream.

Soon I wished I'd skipped at least that ice cream! Just as I began to unpack and to set up the tent at Site 7, a stiff but brief rain and hail began. (My usual site, #10, was taken.) The water collecting on the plastic ground sheet seeped through the tent floor; I tried to dry it with the green washcloth. The air mattress and sleeping bag were kept dry, though, and I crawled into the bag for warmth. When the short storm stopped, I found chickpea-sized hail.

After registering, and learning that 7-8 is a double site (I'd wondered where the driveway to 8 was), I fired up the Pocket Rocket and heated the Haines fish (squash) tacos in an aluminum pan. Good idea, but it was hard to prevent some burning.

The ferry, besides Hannah's novel, provided a new Jack Reacher book: *Past Tense*. I brought it and was enjoying it.



Yukon Territory, celebrated in the poetry of Robert W. Service, is of course closer to the Lower 48 than Alaska.



My last campsite of the northbound ride: Site 7/8 at Haines Junction's Pine Lake.

SPOT link [Haines Jct YT]: <http://maps.google.com/maps?f=q&hl=en&geocode=&q=60.79992,-137.48978&ll=60.79992,-137.48978&ie=UTF8&z=12&om=1>

Day 17, Wednesday June 5 2019: Haines Junction YT to Tok AK: 293 miles

As expected, my accidental occupation of a double site posed no problem at the lightly occupied campground, and — with an odometer of 14,875 — we headed out at 7:00 AM wearing the rain jacket and heated vest. The early-morning ride was not pleasant: cold and wet. The summer-weight leather gloves were soaked from yesterday’s rain, and even with the grips set at maximum heat my hands were cold and fingers numb. Overcast skies added to the discomfort.

But the day warmed up and the early issues faded as we passed familiar places like the Cottonwood RV Park and Destruction Bay, where I prudently refueled — didn’t really need it, but the memory of an anxious low-fuel ride on the NC in 2017 was still powerful. Who needs that anxiety? The Destruction Bay stop was at 8:30 AM; Beaver Creek, where I paused for fuel, coffee, and snacks, was at 11:00 AM.

Heading northwest, I saw the attractive “Welcome to Alaska” sign on the eastbound side of the highway, but was beginning to consider myself an old experienced traveler and bypassed it. (I do have a nice photo there with the NC, as I recall.) A short distance ahead was US Customs, where we again enjoyed a friendly no-hassle crossing. Tok’s Fast Eddy’s and Young’s Motel came along about 1:00 PM Alaska time (2:00 PM by the Pacific zone time I’d left that morning). After a welcome, warming shower, I strolled over to Fast Eddy’s for a pleasant lunch of salad and iced tea. A convenience store across the highway provided snack food to accompany the television. We’d ridden 293 miles today.

SPOT link [Tok AK]: <http://maps.google.com/maps?f=q&hl=en&geocode=&q=63.33455,-142.95586&ll=63.33455,-142.95586&ie=UTF8&z=12&om=1>

Day 18, Thursday June 6 2019: Tok to Anchorage AK: 320 miles

At 6:15 AM I was enjoying breakfast in Fast Eddy’s Restaurant — their “short stack” of two pancakes was huge, about the size of the plate, and good! Like last year, my left hand was swollen from mosquito bites; the blame rests not with Young’s but with the Yukon and Pine Lake. I had a pleasant chat with two riders from Edmonton (one with a three-wheeled Can-Am type vehicle, the other with an older Gold Wing) who are roaming around in Alaska: Homer, Whittier, Fairbanks... I don’t think they’re going to Prudhoe, though... I hope not. They were familiar with Extreme Honda in Edmonton, where I got tires last year.

Departing with 15,167 on the odometer, at 7:15 AM I filled up at the Tok Chevron and headed down the Tok Cutoff, mindful of several warnings about rough pavement and frost heaves. We took it easy and rolled into the Glenallen Tesoro shortly after 10:00 AM. My usual lunch or snack stop, The Caribou Hotel, still features Ernesto’s Grill, and I did not enjoy the Mexican format introduced a year or two ago so I decided to stop at the famous Eureka Roadhouse instead.

Enjoying Eureka’s 25¢ coffee and excellent pie a la mode perhaps an hour later, I had a nice talk with two riders, one on a 1983 Gold Wing, who had toured



On the Glenn to Anchorage, a fellow rider took this, near Sheep Meadow Lodge

extensively. Soon after pulling out, I stopped for photographs at a couple of viewing areas. Near Sheep Mountain Lodge I met two riders, one of whom had a real, live dog riding with him, sitting upright on the passenger's seat! I had the camera out so one rider could snap my photo, and I wish I'd used it for a shot of the motorcycling dog. I recall short bristly hair, like an Airedale and the same size, but rust in color. The riders were planning to do the Dust-to-Dawson run.

We refueled at Palmer's Fred Meyer, about 1:30 PM sending Jeff a notice of (we hoped) imminent arrival and, avoiding the inadvertent ride toward Wasilla on the NC-700X in 2017, pulled in to the Andersons' in Anchorage at 2:30 PM. With the odometer showing 15,487 miles, this trip was over.

SPOT link [Anchorage]: <http://maps.google.com/maps?f=q&hl=en&geocode=&q=61.17653,-149.84407&ll=61.17653,-149.84407&ie=UTF8&z=12&om=1>