

Day 1

Was at Phil and Dorothee's by 6:30 pm the day before departure. The meal was right out of a cooking magazine. I had picked up one of my favorite wines at the Fakeway wine shop, an Italian....Brunello di Montalcino.....not knowing that she was doing homemade pasta, a cream raviolibut not before a salad with cheese and some kind of thinly sliced ham that I have to find sometime.....all really came together. She did a dessert for Phil as he has a major sweet tooth...then by 9 or so I was in a really large and well appointed bedroom ensuite bathroom and shower....I smile at that as I look around at what I am in now! (Phil and I got \$40/night rooms downtown Amarillo...so you can imagine.)

I was nervous about riding in the dark the first hour after a 5 am departure. I worry about the deer....we were hauling ass on top of that but the cool air was nice and we knew every mile we got behind us in the cool was one less mile of 100+ degree riding that was to come in the afternoon.

Not traveling on the interstate was a delight and the hill country riding never is enough...then it got a bit FLAT. We did finally stop for coffee and a muffin....never been so long without coffee....would give anything for one right now! I would have gone out to look for one already but I left my gun at home. (tough neighborhood here).

I loved going thru lots of little towns with their county court houses and friendly people. Did lots of gas stops and folks stopped to ask where we were going and wish us a good day...small town things you miss.

Phil is the perfect riding companion and a great navigator...always messing with his cameras and the webcam thingy he has now attached to the front of his bike. He will do a video production of this trip that is suitable for SXSW and be totally modest about it.

We stopped to take shots of the windmills, for about 10 miles wind

mills as far as you could see in the middle of cotton fields. Later there were sunflower fields...again.....big as the West Texas sky.

Did have to stop for fuel in Post Texas. We found it highly competitive for the worst places to live in all of the USA. My first employer had a plant there and got considerable performance mileage from threatening to send low performing managers to Post Texas for a developmental transfer.....they tended to get their act together before needing this transfer.

We did make Lubbock before the heat got unbearable in the last 2 hours en route to Amarillo. And...found a cold beer and a very good Italian lunch. Phil is a foodie as it turns out and a bit of an ice cream snob. He had Tortellini which he seemed to really like but when he found out they had spumoni for desert his eyes glassed over and I totally lost his attention to anything else for about an hour.

The windmills dominated the sky but the smell of a combination of the oil jacks, also called the donkey jacks that pump crude oil from the ground and the competing smell of cowshit from everywhere dominated the smell. The panhandle grows energy but not without an unmistakable aroma!

Met up with Robin for dinner and a tour last night. She is a high school buddy and long time friend of Susie who grew up in Amarillo. Susie insisted we contact her. She was very nice and helpful.

Did 500 miles day one.....late start today....6am. Will keep you in the loop.....great trip so far.

Day 2

Late start on day 2.....6 a.m. We hit the first McDonald's for a cup of coffee in Amarillo given there was no coffee pot in the room and the neighborhood was unsafe to venture out without a gun. But then, what do you expect for \$40 per night.

It was quite dark still but nice and cool so we shot out across the high desert plains in the moon light. The sun poked its head out to our right about the time we started our decent into a cloud with about 50 feet of visibility. We slowed down to a crawl half afraid of being hit by a truck or hitting someone who had neglected to turn their lights on.

Suddenly the cloud/fog lifted but only by about 12 feet. It was beautiful! You could reach out and touch the orange from the Sun.....we were a part of the sunrise for several miles...then with dropping elevation we were again in a thick fog and almost no visibility for about 50 miles. Complicating things the fog made our windshields soupy and impossible to see through and wet our clothes. It was stressful driving for over an hour and a half.

Then we got to the metropolis of Dumas, Tx. By now the Sun was at our right and all was right with the world...except the smell of Dumas.....feed lot after feed lot...the town reeked of cowshit...not just a part of the town but 3 miles before, all the time there and 3 miles after....unbelievable!

A hundred miles down the road or so another small town, a three letter town that fully deserved 4 letters...I will call it URG, had no place to buy a beer but an America flag on every house and business.....I did take a picture of the school bus as it was a normal size Chevy Suburban.

The next town was Kit Carson in Colorado with population about 1400. We needed gasoline but there was only a closed gas station. Fortunately the pumps worked if you had a credit card but the station had been closed for years.....very strange.

Keep in mind that these cities all look alike and are about 125 miles apart with lots of open plains between....so if you have a problem, it is definitely your problem. If you get a chance to buy gas...you buy it.

We searched for most of the day for a place to get a beer and a hamburger in between looking for gas. The last thing we ate was muffins Phil brought from home at the 6am McDonalds visit.....we finally ate lunch/dinner at 7pm. These conservative west Texas and Colorado towns are making a considerable contribution toward my sobriety and I do not appreciate it one bit.

I cannot say enough about the scenery and the wealth you feel when traveling through one of the breadbasket states...so much lush land and productivity of corn, cattle, cotton.....feeding America and much of the rest of the world. There are also hundreds of miles of nothing, nothing but beauty.....stone formations and really big sky. Your mind wanders to what the first settlers saw and how they traversed this roughed but scenic land.

The rare gas stations in these little non-towns are a hoot. We were on empty when one poked it's head up just over the Oklahoma line. It was a metal building/tireshop/general store/kind of gas station where each pump would only pump one grade of gas. I wandered to the back looking for a bathroom and witness the first lawnmower I had ever scene on a car lift....took a picture of it. Anyway, this young man came back and caught me gawking at 50 years of accumulated junk and asked what I was doing back there. I told him looking for a bath room. He said well just you follow me and I will show you. Turns out there is a

somewhat obscure door down a hallway near the front of the place and on that door a small sign in the poorly lit hall way reading "Front Door, Enter Here". He stopped in front of the door.....and read it to me while pointing at each word....then he said follow me and did the same thing on the Men's bathroom at the rear of the cluttered room. Made me feel like Ned in the First Grade Reader but I am sure he got a kick out of it!

About 200 miles later, something worth mentioning was a coffee stop we hit around noon in one of the small towns. It was time to take my jacket off so I stooped over to put it in my saddle bags not realizing that I was too close to main street and my butt was well into the traffic zone...I heard Phil screaming Nathan, Nathan...looked up to see a lady hitting her brakes to keep from hitting me....Yep, almost got me ass run over. I can see the obit now....Nathan Gibson killed in an "almost motorcycle" accident. Got his ass run over but fortunately his motorcycle was unharmed!

Beautiful scenery today....great day of riding. Now at 4000 feet and temps are perfect. Mt. Rushmore tomorrow and who knows what is going to happen.

Very memorable ride so far!

Day 3

This was a very good travel day and travel strategy, again. Phil wisely suggested we not go to Mount Rushmore today for good reasons. For one we needed a relaxed day. Secondly, the travel stop lady told us that there had been 6 motorcycle fatalities already and many on the road to Mt. Rushmore due to the challenges of the curves and the congestion. Two things will make this stop less unsafe if done on Sunday. First, cycles are starting to leave town in droves and there will be less congestion. Secondly, making that mountainous ride after being on the bike all day is of suspect judgment. Personally, I suspect inexperience, riding after dark and alcohol are the main cause but I have no first hand knowledge....possibly with the exception of the alcohol part.

Take away drinking, night driving, riding in poor weather conditions and inexperienced drivers and motorcycles are much more safe than cars....at least in my unbiased opinion. I am, after all, a self proclaimed expert on motorcycle safety.

Any way...we got off to a very late start with a leisurely breakfast then headed to the historic site of "CarHenge". A take off on Stonehenge or course. You have to see a pic to appreciate. I attach one pic. Some Crazy planted a dozen 50s, 60s and 70s cars in the dirt in the image of Stonehenge....put up a store selling overpriced t-shirts and is making a fortune. He did pick some pretty cool cars....56 Cadillac, Rambler Gremlin, 61 Dodge Dart....a number of cars that are a bit unusual...and now enshrined, very unusual. The original stone henge was put together by religious crazies about 1500 years B.C. Their leaders did it to give the tribe a sense of purpose and obligate the next generation to continue working to fulfill the obligation. Very large churches are built today for the same purpose....very strange.

Then we are off to a very scenic view very different than the high plains desert we had seen before evolving to the Black Hills National park. Motorcycles are everywhere not. Most seem to be leaving which is a good thing. The Black Hills are just that....the type fir tree here is very dark and any random cloud in the sky cast a show that is clearly black on the thick forest. A really fascinating and distinctive effect.

Most non-riders do not appreciate that riding is the same as yoga. You sit in one position and think of only one thing. The mind pushes out unimportant things and has clarity and focus. Many folks are sitting behind desk with their busy minds driving them crazy with an endless list of uncompleted trivia. The disciplined motorcycle guy does lose focus and gets safely to his or her destination feeling relaxed. The most disciplined office professional gets home very tired and needing a drink.

I rest my case.



Day 4

Day 4 was supposed to be the MAIN EVENT. I did enjoy it thoroughly but the old adage about it being about the journey not the destination is validated once again. The trek up and I am sure back easily trump one day of loud noise and loud people trying to sell you overpriced motorcycle stuff. I do attach a shot from the viewing stand of the thousands of motorcycles everywhere....

I do love my Harley but quite frankly, if you have seen one of them you have seen them all. Phil's Indian sets itself apart and is truly a beautiful motorcycle. The thought ran through my mind that if you could snap your finger and make all the Harleys go away you would see some pretty cool bikes without having to work so hard. Where is that genie when you need her? I also attach a shot of Phil and his Indian.

Sturgis is 50 miles from Sundance where we are staying, population 1300. No stop lights, one restaurant, one drug store that closes at 12 on Saturdays. Very peaceful and again a good place to land, much less expensive and preferable to Sturgis.

We shoved off for the craziness of Sturgis at 7am, arriving about 7:45 and found only a few thousand bikes or so already there...nothing like what was to come later in the day. We saw an eccentric old guy.....about our age show up on a loud, short, plump bike (a Buell) about the time we arrived. The guy had a goatee, was bald and had the beer belly from hell....he hit the breakfast restaurant door just behind us and was vying for a booth along with us....loads of people there even that early. Well, we ended up sharing a booth with him. Turns out he was a piece of work even by our standards. A retired firefighter up here as a vendor of "leather leggings" to protect your calves from whatever. He was non-stop, had to have been breathing through

his ears, trying to sell us on these things with a beginning price of about \$175 a pop. I felt like I had breakfast with an infomercial. He did pick up the entire tab so all is well that ends well.

Then it was largely people watching and motorcycle watching. Phil was hell bent on not leaving Sturgis empty handed, which means he was looking for “free stuff”. We filled out electronic forms on kiosks with made up addresses and made up phone numbers in order to be rewarded with a free t-shirt over and over again. Toward the end of the trip I actually got Phil a free bible to add to his saddlebag of “free stuff” (I suspect it did not make it out of Sturgis). At one stop he only got a cheap ball point pen which licked all the red off his lollipop, thought he was going to cry.

We did tour the Sturgis motorcycle museum on Main street and it was very well done. It had some Enfields and old BSAs and Triumphs mixed in with the Harleys that you knew would be there. It took me down memory lane a bit with some old Cushman motor scooters and my favorite a 1969 Honda 305 that was the cycle of my dreams as a teenager that I could not afford and never did get.

There was a black cloud in the distance by 3pm and we had enjoyed more than enough of Sturgis. We should have left at 2pm. We hit the front about 15 miles out of Sturgis and the gentle rain quickly deteriorated into high wind, very heavy rain, crashing lightening and (saving the best for last) ½ inch hail. Fortunately, we were able to pack in with a dozen other bikers under an overpass. We hung out there with large trucks periodically showering us with dirty road water until the rain slowed. As it turns out we left there too early as the heavy rain returned. There were no more overpasses to hide under. We got back to the hotel drenched but pretty happy that we had checked off the Sturgis rally day and could ride the beautiful Black Hills Forest on day 5.

In only a few minutes of our return we were in the hotel hot tub with a Jack and Coke and the ride back was a distant bad dream. After another Jack and coke the ride back improved to become a well-planned adventure, another inadvertent stroke of genius on our part!

We went back to the same steak house for dinner because the other options were eating very greasy fried chicken at the service station next door or getting back on the bikes for a 36 mile round trip. Other than me getting choked on a tough steak tip and nearly dying the meal was uneventful.

Day 5 tomorrow!





Day 5

The grand plan was for a 7:30 departure and to hit a number of popular sites in the Black Forest National Park. The problem was that the fog was so thick we could hardly see across the motel parking lot and the weather forecast called for 40% chance of thunder storms in southwestern South Dakota....which is exactly where our ride plan took us. Well, we decided to lollygag and wait/see.

Phil had his eye on a coffee shop/restaurant that opened at 7:30 that served high end lattes and possibly some breakfast. You have to keep in mind that Phil would just as well live off fancy new fangled lattes and lemon meringue pies. He even threatened to order me a latte. Scared me to death, was afraid I would suddenly start speaking Californian. I was saved by the calendar as this yuppie place did not open at all on Sundays. We ended up at a somewhat conservative mom and pop place that had normal coffee and somewhat normal food....except their advertised ham was off by one letter.....definitely it was Spam not Ham.

We killed some time there and it seemed the fog was lifting...and it did.

We had a splendid ride thru the Black Hills complete with very curvy roads and waterfalls and a river that flowed beside the road most of the time. The red limestone mountains that leaped from the valleys were magnificent and just breathtaking. The curves were sharp and continuous and the rain never came!

Phil has a GoPro camera attached to his cycle and got some beautiful footage of the ride as seen from the bike. I cannot wait to see the final product of his mini-documentary on our trip.

We ended up at a casino/saloon in Deadwood where the food was good and people watching entertaining. Our waitress...about our age, was just a hoot.

It just turned out to be a perfect, leisurely riding day...weather turned perfect and other than getting ourselves a couple parking tickets in Deadwood we could not have asked for anything more.

Off toward Texas tomorrow...bright and early!

Day 6

This will be the shortest update. Not because it was the shortest or most uneventful day.....quite the opposite. We saddled up at 7am and rode for 14 hours only to cover 600 miles. Following the path less taken...as in country roads vs. interstate, just takes time and is very well worth it. Phil did have an idea that there should be an amendment to the constitution to prevent towns of less than 15,000 to have speed limits of less than 45mph. I think this is a brilliant idea. Many of the speed limits in towns of around 1000 drop to 20 mph.....nothing but speed traps!

So, we headed to Sturgis from Sundance...about 50 miles and diverted to Main street one more time just to capture the difference on day makes. It was pretty much a ghost town except for vendors packing up their left over junk. Sturgis had morphed back into the one-horse town it is for 50 weeks out of the year.

We were then off to Rapid City to connect with 385 south, a two lane really beautiful ride but in stark contrast to the curvy, hilly forest and river lined ride of the day before in the Black Hills. 385 is high plains desert and prairie and very straight. You can see for 25 miles and the road has zero curves and even fewer trees. In Nebraska we connected to 26 to travel southeast. The grassy rolling pastures were just amazing...again, you could see for miles but see different things. This is big time cattle country and for good reasons.

We got some good shots of an abandoned steel bridge, attached, and of the sunset being chased by a summer rain storm, also attached. We did not get a picture of a state trooper chasing a big black Hereford cow who has gotten out of the fence which is too bad....he and the cow had about the same amount of body fat but the cow was in better shape.

We bit off a good bit of road today that put us in position to minimize riding in the Texas heat.

For the same reason, we are off at 6 am tomorrow.





Day 7

Day 7 was supposed to be a pretty short day...but then things do not always go as planned. We got off at dawn as planned but within a couple of hours the sprinkles turned into some fairly serious rain. Phil spotted a closed gas station as a place to get in out of the weather. We decided to sit it out for a while.

Then something magic happened. We got a Kansas agriculture lesson! Only 50 yards from us was an obscure little restaurant. I did not even notice it but Phil did. We walked over and sure enough it was open. The old man in there (about our age) was just fixing himself breakfast but offered to pour us a cup of coffee. He also poured out his life circumstances which was very interesting and quite frankly touching.

Seems the owner....now his sixty-something year old girlfriend owned the place and had been running it for 35 years. Her husband died in 2001...about 14 years ago. He had "taken up with her" 7 years ago. Seems they knew each other because his son had married her daughter and because of this they shared 3 grandchildren. Neither had ever lived anywhere else other than this 900 person town or whatever you want to call it.

He was a farmer. He was very open about the bushels of wheat, bushels of corn and so forth and the impact of the weather on the crops and the prices he got and the expenses. It did not take Phil or I long to figure he made about \$15,000/yr in the good years and lost about the same in the bad years. In the restaurant Ruth was pretty much killing herself for nothing and Willard was pretty much killing himself for nothing in the field.

They had each other and covered the backs of their neighbors and seemed to pretty happy and very happy to have the ear of two old geezers like us to talk to.

The clouds did not part but got as good as they were going to get so we hit the road hoping for the best. Most of the heavy stuff was gone so we make good time. The roads were straight and scenery did not change much, beautiful...but no trees.

Occasionally, we saw a tree...and would stop to take a picture of it. We suspected the rich land owner had planted an artificial tree just to mess with us.

We planned to stop for a hamburger and a beer but the towns offered nothing....for hundreds of miles.

Finally in Abilene We got to meet with Phil's niece Jenny...her husband Aaron, and 4 children....good dinner...headed for Austin tomorrow.

Day 8

This is the one you have been waiting, for as it is the last one. It was also our shortest ride day, which was no accident. After the 104 F riding from Lubbock to Amarillo on Day 1 we wanted to avoid mid-day Texas riding.

The first thing we encountered was a glorious sunrise that demanded a photo op stop. Although running a little behind our plan, we still stopped for Phil to get a couple of shots. I cannot wait for his photos and video clips of the trip.

Coming back home is always bitter sweet. Back to the list of things to do that is part of life. Back to reality, baby. On the road with all you need for a week (which is all you need for a lifetime as well) packed in a small bag is about as carefree as it gets. Your job is merely staying alive and enjoying the camino. How bad can that be?

We saw some very strange things. Believe it or not, we saw grown men pulling trailers with perfectly good and functional motorcycles on them....and this to a motorcycle event. I have not seen it billed as a trailer event. Maybe I did not get the e-mail. If you ever see one of my motorcycles on a trailer please call 911 because it has been stolen.

We also saw a young woman who must have been in card game the night before because she had definitely lost her shirt. There were quite a few women in the same game apparently but no one was taking pictures of most of them.

Tragically, this Sturgis event took the record for most fatalities. There were 12. The other record was the number of bikes attending....news agencies reported 1 million participants because it was the 75 anniversary.

I am a little surprised there were not more fatalities. The skill level I observed was scary. The fact that there were a large number of folks trailering their bikes from within the state and states sharing borders, should tell you something. If you cannot ride your bike a few hundred miles to the event you might be inexperienced. Inexperience is fine.....stay on a smaller bike, stay on less traveled, less challenging roads...work your way up. Another factor could have been physical condition. Most of the participants looked more like the Pillsbury Doughboy than someone who could stay in command of a 800 pound, 80 horsepower beast that makes a lot of noise.

I will close it out...we had an awesome ride, saw some breathtaking scenery and were smart enough to plan our week-long Sturgis trip to be 6 hours in Sturgis at the Rally...and the rest of the time riding motorcycles!