

B.C. on a Beemer
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It would be a redundant use of this magazine's publication space to extol the long distance touring abilities of the BMW R1200 GS. Perhaps more unknown to the BMW ON reader however, is the vast beauty and exciting road-tripping opportunities available in British Columbia, Canada, that oft-forgotten, western-most reach of, to many, "the great white North".

Rocky Mountain Motorcycle Holidays, a Vancouver and Whistler, BC-based motorcycle touring outfit, has capitalized on the region's natural splendor and makes it their business to show off the province to the world. It was in their good company therefore, that I embarked upon my first proper motorcycle-borne adventure around BC.

First, a bit of background: The reader must realize that the city of Vancouver and the province of British Columbia has topped many a list when it comes to the world's best place to live. Provincial license plates preach super natural beauty; our snowcapped Coast Mountains plunge into the crystalline sea, sandy beaches and some of the world's most formidable trees abound, and – despite what the nay-sayers will tell you – we average 289 days of sunshine a year in Vancouver.

Appropriately, the three weeks leading up to the trip were record breaking in the heat and sunshine sector for the greater Vancouver area, and made for obvious concerns regarding the weather turning wet just in time for departure. Fortunately, Mother Nature is a fickle mistress, and while all weather forecasts forewarned of misery, the sun smiled upon us from a deep blue sky and gave way to what would quickly become a theme of the trip: bright and beautiful weather, wherever we found ourselves.

Being that this was my first organized motorcycle tour; it was exciting to come together with the other guests and guides to meet, greet and familiarize myself with the brilliant individuals with whom I would be spending the next 12 days. I immediately knew them all to be first-rate individuals because they obviously are; anyone with a passion for motorcycling – and a penchant for sharing it with others – falls into the "instant lifelong friend" category of other motorcyclists.

Somewhat in that vein, the boys at Rocky Mountain Holidays have correctly observed and acted upon the fact that a huge amount of serious motorcycle enthusiasts reside in England. While many of their guests hail from the Americas, South Africa, and Oceania, the company attracts the majority of their clients from Britain's bike culture, and sees many of them returning year after year. As a result, our first meal together in Whistler consisted basically of myriad opinions on the current state of motorcycling in Europe and North America, what's going on in this

year's MotoGP series, and why there are so many speed cameras in England compared to none in BC.

Day number one of actual riding dawned bright and blue with a sunny disposition, matching up nicely with the overall mood of the group. While the town of Whistler is an internationally respected hotbed of outdoor recreation, and is overrun with mountain bikers or skiers anytime of year, we were aiming for emptier roads and tucked-away places, and were on our way by 8:30. Anyone leaving Whistler and heading north on the Sea to Sky Highway via the Duffy Lake Road is soon presented with a kaleidoscopic palette of BC's natural offerings. The still snow-capped peaks of the Garibaldi, Cayoosh, and other Coast Mountain sub-ranges dominate the sightline for the first 100km, and then suddenly vanish entirely, only to be replaced by the stepped, arid desert and deep river canyons of BC's interior, where 35 degrees Celsius is entirely possible, even in early June.

After our first day, about 450 km of mostly twisty two-lane highways, a night of sound sleeping and good eating in Sun Peaks resort outside Kamloops saw us ready and raring to ride toward Jasper, Alberta, and the Rocky Mountains. Again, the weather behind us looked threatening with the weatherman calling for sleet, but we were away safely under a warm sun, riding north through central BC on the mellow, meandering Highway 5 beside the fast flowing Thompson river.

Rocky Mountain Holidays provides the bikes, maintenance, accommodation, breakfasts, snacks, and fantastic dinners as part of the package, but leaves lunch and fuel up to the guests. Ergo, it was at lunchtime on day two that Jarvis Simes, the lead guide and self-appointed chief eater, presented his theory on how copious amounts of Alberta-bred beef and buffalo jerky can easily pass for daylong sustenance on a 400km ride. While some of the un-initiated received this as gospel, others smiled, nodded, and promptly went in search of other nutrients, no doubt to their loss in Jarvis' opinion. Regardless, food soon became less of a focus, as we mounted the bikes again and rode east; it was time to tackle the Rocky Mountains.

Somehow, Mt. Robson, the highest mountain in the Canadian Rockies at 12,972 ft. (3,954m), manages to completely hide from sight until you round a corner no more than ten or so miles from the base of it, at which point it dwarfs anything nearby and towers above you more and more as you approach. One reason for its optical dominance is that it actually stands as the most prominent peak in the entire North American Rocky Mountains, and hence commands the horizon like few other mountains do. Luckily, and again, in keeping with the weather, there were no microclimate-sourced weather systems surrounding the peak of Mt Robson, and sightseers could get their fill. Once informational plaques were read and awe-struck gazers and their cameras felt satisfied, we carried on toward Jasper and the rest of the Rockies.

The next two nights were spent at the most enjoyable establishment, the Tekarra Lodge, a rustic log-cabin based hotel perched on the edge of a cliff overlooking two rivers, a handful of mighty mountains, and boasting one of Jaspers best culinary

experiences. The food that night was much appreciated by everyone in attendance, many enjoying the fresh-as-fresh-can-be bison tenderloin and, odd so far from the coast, excellent seafood and sushi offerings.

Since motorcyclists sometimes have to enjoy other things in life than seeing the world go by from the back of bike, we took a day off in Jasper. Hot springs were visited and bathed in, horses were ridden, books were read, and golf balls were hit. As well, a couple of guided day rides were offered for those not content to sit idly by with motorcycles waiting (myself included), and they were a great success due to the fun twisty roads, stunning scenery, and that mainstay of Canadian National Parks: wildlife. While black bear and deer had been spotted just out of Whistler on the first day, the time spent in the Rockies resembled a zoology lecture with bear, elk, deer, rams, mountain goats, and even wolves showing themselves all over the place, including golf courses and roadways. The “bear-jam” a regular occurrence in the Canadian Rockies, is the most common reason for rush-hour type traffic delays, and they are neither few nor far between.

Eventually, it was decided that Jasper National Park wasn't the be all and end all of the Canadian Rockies, and we ventured south toward other expansive nature reserves like the Banff and Kootenay National Parks. Again, wildlife and spectacular sunshine was the name of the game, and all riders were careful to keep a tight grip on their bars as scenery-induced head swiveling threatened to run more than a few people off the road. Thankfully, we all stayed on long enough to make it all the way down the world-famous Columbia Icefields Parkway and into the shadow of Mount Rundle, Banff's mountainous guardian and the subject of many postcards. Our night on the town was highlighted by the multitudinous clash of cultures at St. James Hall, the local Irish pub and grill (where in the world *isn't* there a local Irish pub and grill?) where one Swede, two Canadians and a couple of Englishmen – riding German and British motorcycles – were fed traditional Irish fare and entertained by a Southern Blues cover band from Alberta. The next morning, dawning clear once the Irish haze cleared, found us riding back into BC and on toward the soul-soothing pleasures of 100+ degree hot springs in Fairmont Hot Springs, BC.

Once parked up and moved into the conveniently named Fairmont Hot Springs Fairmont Resort Hotel, we were treated to another fine display of restaurant selection by the Rocky Mountain guides, who sat us down to a sumptuous rack of lamb and roast new potatoes and vegetables, all garnished with genuine mint sauce and top notch service. (The latter has to be fine dining's most well-guarded and rewarding ingredient, in my humble opinion). Post meat-fest, the evening was whiled away in the bar, where entertainment took the form of an animated fellow whose show consisted of playing a smattering of cover songs while wearing a different style of hat for each one. While I cheerfully admit that some of his stuff wasn't bad, I will point out that I will never cease to be amazed by what passes for Friday night entertainment in the smaller towns of North America.

Anyway, back to the riding. Again, while there is no need wax poetic about the R1200 GS's abilities, I must do so about the ride itself. The Kootenay region of BC is

so smack full of quiet, delightfully twisty and well-paved roads, it's just silly. As well, I'm happy to report that, being a new convert to the full-sized adventure ride, I grown to like the big Beemer more and more for every mile I've spent on it and, quite frankly, I can't think of any basis for a complaint that's arisen in the short time we've been together.

All was not rosy however; for you sadistic types out there, rest assured – there was no shortage of motorcycle-oriented mishaps on this trip. On day number eight, being the adventurous type not afraid to try anything once, I decided to branch out and ride some bikes I'd never been on. A self-proclaimed admirer and avid fan of British road-going machinery, I was keen to get on the 1050cc variants of the Triumph Sprint ST and the Triumph Tiger, both critically acclaimed and reputable steeds, fully capable of handling whatever the road brings.

I thoroughly enjoyed my time astride the Triumph's. They were as expected; responsive and fun, both on the throttle and in the corners. The Sprint ST would no doubt make a fine long-ish distance sport-touring machine and the Tiger, although somewhat vaguely sprung, was comfortable and nimble – almost lazily athletic in its nature, if there is such a trait. Brand defection of this grandeur would no doubt be likened to something nearing adultery to the true Beemer-heads of the reading audience, but before you get up in arms, understand that my fling with the cycles from Coventry was never destined to be a long and fruitful one. In fact, I had an off – a rather serious one.

I will humbly present the truth and say that through what I can only blame on a momentary and untimely lapse of concentration, I lost all semblance of control on a patch of wet gravel, careened through the thankfully empty oncoming lane, into the ditch, out the other side, down an embankment into the forest, and ended up in a river. With God, adrenaline, and luck on my side, I was able to push through my discombobulated confusion at the bottom of said river bank and make my way back up to the side of the road where I lay down in defeat, only to eventually be discovered by and cared for by another group of riders on their way through.

I suppose that every motorcyclist is fully aware of the timeless adage that there are two types of riders: those who have gone down, and those that are on their way. Unfortunately, the dice rolled my way on this particular day, and it goes without saying that I'm thankful to still be walking, talking, and thinking. In short, the accident and the unplanned end of my trip had me reflecting on three things in particular.

Firstly – in a tongue-in-cheek sort of fashion – British motorcycles are not to be trusted. And while I suppose it's unfair to blame this episode solely on the switching of bikes, I will stubbornly – but not entirely seriously – carry on in such a fashion. Obviously I should have kept to my senses and remained comfortably perched on the 1200GS, one of the more accomplished and respected motorcycles of our time. It would no doubt have carried me safely, not to the hospital with a broken back and a battered ego like the ambulance did, but home to the Prestige Lakeside Resort in

Nelson that night, and on to Whistler and the scheduled end of our trip in three days time.

Secondly, and this time in all seriousness, I'm obviously excited to not have come out worse; the Tiger roars no more, and my helmet and jacket have been retired to the graveyard of protective gear, but I will ride again. Now re-invigorated with newfound care and caution, my love for travel on two wheels remains firmly undiminished, and my excitement for exploratory motorcycle mileage overruns with childlike anticipation.

Lastly, I could not have enjoyed the journey more. As alluded to earlier, BC and western Alberta are nothing short of spectacular, and the company with which I set out could not have been more pleasant. Rocky Mountain Holiday's customer service was top-notch, with visors and windscreens wiped at every stop, bikes and luggage washed and cared for every night, and snacks and beverages liberally disgorged from the chase vehicle at every ride break. As well, their local knowledge was seemingly limitless, with helpful and friendly connections and contacts spread throughout the province.

The bottom line is this, then: if you're out there on a bike, and you're hankering for a great place to get away from it all, jump onboard and get out to British Columbia. For the really in-depth experience, call up Rocky Mountain Motorcycle Holidays and do it in style. Regardless of whether it's a guided luxury vacation, or done on a shoestring, sleeping in ditches along the way, it's a pleasure and a privilege to bust out the road map and go looking for twisty roads, mind-blowing scenery, and not-so-shy wildlife.

Come visit super natural British Columbia. One disclaimer, however: When you do finally set out, pack more than you normally would; you might come up with several perfectly good reasons to stay a fair while longer than you planned. Plus, it's Canada; you never know when it might snow!