



The city of Vancouver and the province of British Columbia has topped many a list when it comes to the world's best places to live. Provincial license plates preach 'Super Natural Beauty' for good reason: our snowcapped Coast Mountains plunge into the crystalline sea and – despite what the naysayers believe – we average 289 days of sunshine a year in Vancouver. Vancouverites are a spoiled bunch: parklands and forested areas abound within the city limits, beaches fill with sunseekers 6–7 months of the year, and when the weather turns cold, there is passable skiing 15 minutes from the downtown core, and world-class schussing but an hour and a half away in Whistler.

SUMMER ROAD-TRIPPING ON TWO WHEELS

story and photos by THEO BIRKNER

Unfortunately, while it's a blessing to many who choose Vancouver as their place of residence, the city's proximity to outdoor escape can almost double as a curse. Since we're never really forced to leave the urban confines of our concrete jungle, many stones are left unturned on the sprawling network of B.C. back roads.

I was alarmed to learn this past summer that Becca, my girlfriend of three years, had never seen the Duffy Lake Road, the northernmost branch of the Sea-to-Sky Highway (B.C. Highway 99) and possibly one of the most

picturesque sections of road in this province. I was determined to make an excursion happen through this mountainous maze of lakes and alpine meadows, and I decided that it must be done by motorcycle. This stroke of genius, while almost flawless, arrived with only one problem. I have a license and several years of experience, and Becca loves the pillion position, but we would require a more suitable steed. My Suzuki GSX-R "streetfighter" was decidedly unwilling to carry two people cross-country for more than an hour or two, and would not do at all.

Before I could say, "Hey, I wonder where I could get a great bike for two for the weekend?" Brandon Douglas of Rocky Mountain Motorcycle Holidays had me set up with a 2006 Triumph Tiger 955 from their rental fleet, washed, fueled, fettled and raring to go. He saw me off on Friday night with a smile and a wave, with tidbits of road reports and the general chitchat that adventure road-trippers like.

Saturday morning dawned bright and beautiful, and Becca and I set off, tackling the beautifully appointed, mostly reconstructed Sea-to-Sky

LOOKING SOUTH ACROSS BIRKEN LAKE ON THE PEMBERTON PORTAGE ROAD, AN OFFSHOOT OF THE DUFFY LAKE ROAD, HIGHWAY 99.



Highway on our way to Squamish and beyond. Vancouver to Whistler was business as usual: oceans catching mountains under a cloudless sky, and with just enough traffic on the road to let you slow down and really take in the scenery. Whistler flew by in a flash of mountain-bike hardware, and traffic levels dropped off drastically, even more so after Pemberton and Mt. Currie.

For those not in the know, the real introduction to the Duffy Lake Road comes in the form of a 21-kilometre stretch of 13% gradient, a hill known to cause brake fires on the way down, and engine overheating on the way up. On a bike, however, as with many troublesome sections of road, it's a pleasure and a jaunt, and the Tiger's 110 horsepower was more than enough to fling us and our overnight luggage up the hill in style. Once on the plateau, the views only grow more spectacular. While Mt. Currie casts a menacing shadow over Pemberton, it's merely an introductory monolith to the pass between the Pemberton ice cap and Chilcotin plateau, where the Cayoosh, Cerise Creek, Marriott Basin and Joffre Lakes regions all seem to push their peaks toward the sky in an effort to better one another and raise travellers' eyebrows around every bend.

The mountains eventually begin to release their grip on the land, and soon

the "danger, avalanche area" signs disappear altogether. Although it's scarcely believable considering how much terrain runs alongside, the map told us that the Pemberton to Lillooet stretch is only 100 kilometres long, and as the bike's odometer ticked over, we rounded the corner only to have the earth seemingly drop out from beneath us. The mighty Fraser runs right past Lillooet, and has carved itself a canyon worthy of respect. On the other side of town—and an even greater distraction when in view—is one of British Columbia's answers to Lake Louise. Seton Lake, a 24-kilometre-long

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boomerang of aquamarine glory, is surrounded by snowy peaks and granite walls on all sides and looks simply brilliant. A perfectly situated highway rest stop allows picnicking travellers to slake their lust for food and scenery simultaneously, and rejuvenates those road-tripping in either direction.

Continuing up Highway 99 toward Cache Creek, the Tiger motored on confidently through the growing number of fast sweepers, and tackled one-lane bridges and 20 km/h hairpin corners with equal ease as they cropped up. It's a task to keep one's eyes on the road as the lush, river-fed farmlands and the red-hued mountains collide under the sun in an almost iridescent display of nature's palette. Highway 99 comes to an end at a relatively nondescript junction, and it's 97 North to Prince George, or South to Cache Creek and eventually Kamloops. We turned right, flashed through Cache Creek—a blaze of dusty heat—and upped our speed on the fast-paced, well-paved Trans-Canada Highway toward Kamloops. The Thompson River Valley is a pleasure, desert and farmlands together. The golfers in the audience will appreciate a day or seven in Kamloops, as it promotes itself as the hottest market in Canadian golf and boasts no less than six award-winning courses. Unfortunately for me, golf was

not on the itinerary for my passenger, and we carried on toward Vernon and our eventual overnight destination, Coral Beach.

The ride down Highway 97 into Vernon is a pleasurable introduction to the North Okanagan, and although the landscape hints at 40° on most summer days, wineries begin to pop up all over the place and it's clear that B.C.'s summer vacation hot spot is just around the corner. After 567 kilometres in the saddle, however, we saved the grape juice for another day and were pleased to arrive at our overnight stop, a friend's cabin on the Okanagan Lake. Nestled between Vernon and Kelowna, Lake Country is a spectacular reminder that whatever season you find yourself in, the Okanagan isn't a bad place to be. Plenty of opportunity for adrenaline-pumping activities like skiing, sailing, wakeboarding, and kite-boarding continue year-round, and for the more sedate individual, wine-tasting, endless beaches and generally gorgeous weather abounds.

After a swim in the lake the next morning, it was back on the bike for another epic day. The Tiger fired right up and was eager to get going, despite the few short hours of rest. It didn't miss a beat on the gravelly back roads of Winfield and plunked us safely on the highway into Kelowna. We made an effort to blow through the core, get

over the no-longer-floating bridge to Westbank, and hustle down the coast of Okanagan Lake to Penticton. Once free of Saturday traffic and—in my opinion—oddly scheduled weekend roadwork, we made good time southbound on Highway 97.

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While Osoyoos and the Similkameen Valley, just a few kilometres down the road, is another brilliant place to spend a few days, we opted to cut right from Skaha Lake back home to Vancouver. Happily, the shortcut stint of Highway 3A from Skaha Lake to Keremeos is a gem. There are a couple of near 180-degree sweepers that make you want to double back a few times and do them again and again, especially on a bike. Time, however, does not always allow for such frivolities and as the clock marched on, we pushed toward

Vancouver via Manning Park and the Hope-Princeton Highway (although in this case it was the Princeton-Hope). Again, while this region of B.C. can be done in a day, it really is best to give yourself a few. There is so much history, wine, good food and natural beauty that a week could easily be spent lollygagging around. Then again, doing it in a day is better than not at all, and we arrived in Princeton after negotiating a flurry of farm country and heart-stopping crosswinds. A suggestion: Bromley Rock recreation area, just east of Princeton, is a fantastic little picnic spot, with river swimming and cliff-jumping for the warm-blooded among us.

With Princeton over and done with (complete with the requisite sunny afternoon ice-cream treat), we were onto the twisty glories of Manning Park. Truly a four-season outdoor recreation destination, Manning Park is also a great place to possibly spot some wildlife, and definitely to ride some exciting roads. As with most main highways and byways in B.C., the road is more than well marked, and while speeding is obviously discouraged, “spirited” riding is very possible.

Admittedly, Manning Park and the enormity of the Hope Slide are the last hurrahs of the weekend's loop, as the highways join together outside Hope and weekenders take up the procession home toward the big city. The summer



PASSENGER BECCA, RESTING RIVERSIDE BY THE SIMILKAMEEN RIVER OUTSIDE KEREMEOS, B.C.

sun was setting beautifully over the Vancouver core as we rolled through Abbotsford, and we took it all in as we crossed the Ironworkers Memorial Bridge back into North Vancouver, our starting point 36 hours and just under 1100 kilometres ago.

It was a fantastic way to spend half a weekend. Before falling into bed that night, I reflected on the amazing ease with which we accessed these views and experiences and on the sad reality that many Vancouverites have barely ever ventured outside the city limits with domestic destinations in mind. So if you have your bike license, go find a bike and go adventuring. If you don't have your permit yet, ride along on someone else's bike, or get a car, bus or bicycle. Either way, whether you're from somewhere far away and have never visited the area, are born and raised in Vancouver and have never left, or have only been here for month, you owe it to yourself. B.C. is waiting for you, and it's pretty darn spectacular. **MMM**

