

October 2019
Apex
Looking Through The Curve

Official newsletter of Bluegrass Beemers, Inc. Lexington, Kentucky
MOA #146 RA #49 <http://www.bluegrassbeemers.org>



What Alaska Looks Like
Photo: John Rice

Victoria

Victoria originally was a bicycle manufacturer founded in 1901 in Nurnberg, Germany. They made their first motorcycle, the Victoria KR-1 in 1921. It was fitted with the BMW M2 B15 engine.

The **BMW M2B15** was BMW's first opposed twin cylinder engine. Manufactured from 1920 to 1923, the M2B15 was originally intended to be a portable industrial engine, but it was used by several German motorcycle manufacturers to power their motorcycles. A variation of this engine was used in the First BMW motorcycle, the R32. The Victoria produces a blistering 4.5 Hp. This bike is fitted with a 2 speed transmission, and the rear wheel is V belt driven. Top speed is approximately 45 MPH. This Victoria is owned by Craig Vechorik, Bench Mark Works.



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Lexington, Kentucky MOA #146 RA #49

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Deadline for submissions is the last day of the month.

Back issues of *Apex* can be accessed on our website

Join us at Frisch's on Harrodsburg Rd.

in Lexington, Kentucky on any Saturday, 7-9:00 a.m.

BMW Club
Bluegrass Beemers



Unfinished Business

By John Rice

I bought a 2009 DR 650, a white one with 781 miles on its odometer, this week, which I'm calling a 71st birthday present. (Got to give Brenda the credit for it. When I said I was considering it, she immediately said "I think you should get it")

Several years ago, I bought one, a black 2009, at our breakfast and (after replacing the awful stock seat) loved it. I took some long trips on it, relishing the simplicity and the solid feel of a big single. After I came home with the first sidecar rig in 2015, I sold the

DR, too soon, for reasons that seemed pressing at the time but weren't, really.

Since I sold it, I found myself thinking about it, turning my head every time I saw one go by, every time I heard the distinct soft thump of the exhaust note. I had acquired some bits that I never got around to installing on the black one and just couldn't bring myself to dispose of them, knowing I guess in the recesses of my mind that there was "unfinished business" with the DR genre and that someday I might have another.



When Jay and I took our Alaska trip in June of 2019, we rented Kawasaki KLR 650's for the 10 day excursion which included both dirt roads and pavement. I liked the KLR, found it to be quite competent, but in my mind I kept comparing it to the DR, realizing that while I couldn't find real fault with the Kawasaki, I just wanted another Suzuki big single.

At Vintage Days in July, I kept my eye out for one, but none were on offer...until the last day. As Stuart, Ian and I were negotiating the mud bog that the site had become on Sunday, suddenly there was one on the side of a swap meet path with a "for sale" sign on it. A black, 2009. I talked briefly to the young man who had it, he mentioned a price which was a bit more than I had in mind and we parted, him with urgent errands to run and me off to see whatever the boys were interested in. But I kept returning to the DR in my head and then went back to see if I could make an offer that might mean bringing it home. But I couldn't find the guy again and it was time for us to leave.

Then last week my nephew Paul Rice went to Ashland Cycle Center to buy a battery for one of his bikes and called me with the news that there was one for sale, by owner, in the shop. Seems that the owner was a young man who had bought it new in 09, rode it a few miles and then parked it in his dad's garage while he went on to other interests. The dad, a motorcyclist himself, would take it out once in a while, but mostly it sat, so the carburetor kept gumming up with congealed gas. This last trip to get it cleaned resulted in a plastic part breaking off the carb and a replacement carb being ordered from eBay and the dad decided enough was enough, he'd just sell it. I talked to Rick, the owner of the dealership, who assured me that the bike was like new, except for

the typical age-related things that come with sitting idle for years.

On Thursday, three days after Paul's call, I took Jay in the sidecar 100 miles up to Ashland, looked the bike over, took it for a short test ride and handed over the money to put me back in the DR business, unfinished no longer.

The bike ran flawlessly all the way home with Jay riding it, though when we stopped for lunch at Root-a-Bakers, it seemed to have a bit of trouble firing back up. No worries though, it did start and Jay rode it back to my house in Winchester without a hitch. I then took it out for another 30 or so miles to get my time on it, refilling it with gas at a Shell station near my house before parking it for the evening. (BTW, it showed 48 mpg!).

I went in the house, got out the iPad and immediately ordered from ProCycle.com the three things I knew it would need: 1) a Corbin seat, 2) a centerstand and 3) a non-vacuum petcock.

The next day I went out to start it and it wouldn't fire. Finally, it did, with full throttle, but it ran terribly. I made it a mile or so with the bike bucking and misfiring before turning around and parking it at home, taking another bike on my errand. I made the assumption, based on "always go back to the last thing you did", that I had gotten bad gas.

When I returned home, I noticed as I was draining the tank that the vacuum petcock was not stopping the flow, regardless of position. These petcocks are always a problem, offering no "off" position and depending on the vacuum to seal it off, but I hadn't expected it to fail this soon. When I took off the air box cover, there was about a cup of gasoline in the bottom of the box and the foam filter was wet

about 1/3 of the way up. There was gasoline in the air tube leading to the carb mouth, but I couldn't get to it because of a screen, without a lot more disassembly. Apparently these Mikunis don't have an overflow vent, so gas that eventually seeped past the float needle started going into anyplace it could.

With the tank off, I removed the petcock and took it apart. The o-ring that is the sealing mechanism had disintegrated into tiny hardened pieces which fell off the disc when I started to remove it. Fortunately, I had a petcock that I had ordered earlier for Ian's Kawasaki and it turned out to be the same bolt pattern and outlet size. I guess the Japanese factories, like the old British and Italian marques used to do, all buy such things from the same supplier.

With the new non-vacuum petcock installed, the air cleaner re-oiled and the gas mostly

evaporated from the tube, the bike fired right up and idled perfectly. A short test ride of 20 miles indicated no problems. When I returned, I changed the oil on the assumption that some gas may have found its way into the engine and, after 1,000 initial miles, it's a good idea anyway. There's a new oil filter in the Procycle order that should be here soon.

The tires look new, but the date code on them is "3308" indicating the 33rd week of 2008, making them about 11 years old. So new rubber and inner tubes are on the way as well.

Despite this minor glitch, the DR650 is everything I remembered and exactly what I wanted it to be. At my age I can't guarantee how long I'll keep it this time, but I think it will be with me for quite a while.



BMW R32
Owned by Craig Vechorik

North to Alaska

Part Three, with more gravel

By John Rice

We left two overmatched but optimistic geriatric dual sport riders facing the start of the McCarthy Highway)

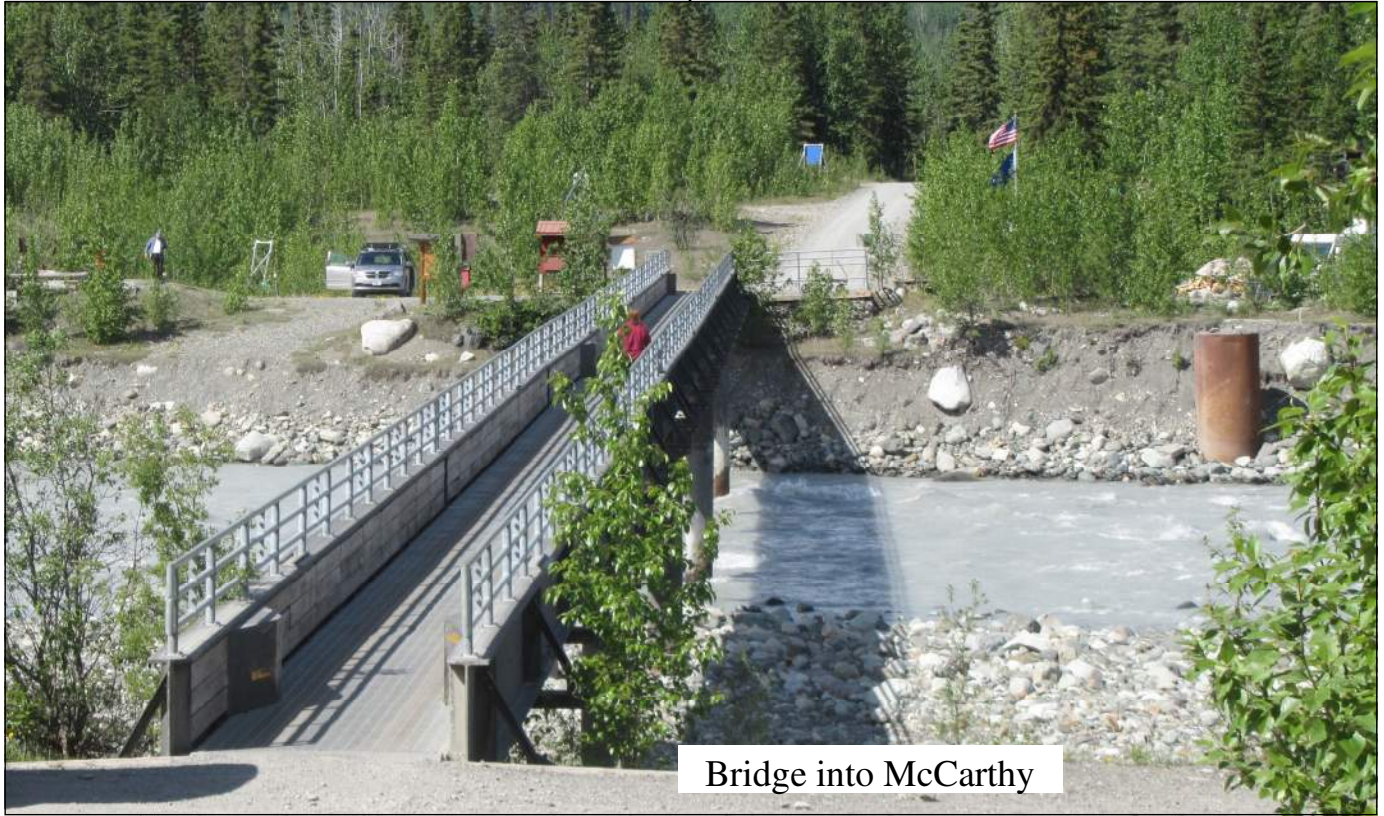
The McCarthy Highway was named by either someone with a perverse sense of humor or someone who had never seen an actual highway. It is 60 miles of dirt and gravel, some of it rutted like a single track trail, bordered with abandoned railroad rails in some places. About halfway in there is a high railroad trestle off to the left where the old tracks lead, leaning like a drunk on a lamppost, just waiting to fall. The railroad was built through here for copper miners, back in the day, going through McCarthy and on to Kennecott, four

more miles down at the end of the road. Kennecott was the working town where the mines and processing plants were located and McCarthy was where the miners and others came to blow off steam with a variety of entertainments, some legal, some not, on offer. Kennecott is now a National Park and McCarthy is, well, still McCarthy.

Near the terminus is a large sign warning travelers not to take this road any farther. Seems that by this time, the traveler might already know that. We went on.

The “road” ends at a gorge, with a pedestrian bridge across into the town. We had been told





Bridge into McCarthy

at the rental company that our metal panniers were chosen to be just narrow enough to allow our bikes to cross the bridge, so that we wouldn't have to leave the motorcycles and walk in. Some of the pedestrians on the bridge look at us strangely as we follow them across, feathering our clutches to avoid scooping up a walker or two as we go.

A few hundred yards up from the crossing is the historic "town" of McCarthy, reduced now to a smattering of buildings including our old -looking hotel (which we later learn is a reconstruction, using bits and pieces from others that had been here), a bar across the street and some supporting commercial establishments. The general store is more modern than the other places, stocked with everything one might need from food to clothing to tire repair equipment. The other visitors seem to all be younger than us, fit people here for hiking, bicycling and river adventures...and drinking. Lots of drinking. Also in town is a contingent of glaciologists, half of them Chinese and the

other half US-based graduate students, come to study the Kennecott Glacier which runs through this valley. In addition to our hotel, there are numerous backpacker-style hostels and lodging rooms for such hardier folks.

We check in to our tiny room, distributing our gear as best we can across the floor leaving a walkway to get in and out. In keeping with the historic nature, there is no AC and the bathroom facilities are shared, across the hall. Making our way across the dirt Main Street, we meet bartender Megan who hails from northern Kentucky, happy to see fellow Bluegrass staters. An adventurous young woman, she tells us that she was working in a Newport bar when she read an ad offering work and lodging for summer jobs here in Alaska and decided on a whim to go for it.

Later we opt for some porch-sitting in the rockers at the front of our hotel, sipping a little bourbon, watching as dogs play in the dusty street and the youngsters are getting tuned up



McCarthy traffic

for a night of various excesses that we old folks know their bodies will regret in the morning.

In the early daylight, (not “dawn”, that would have been about 3 AM) Jay and I went exploring around the town, walking the few dirt and gravel streets and down by the river. There is a separate vehicle bridge for the local residents, closed by a locked chain link fence, access to which costs dearly we are told. If you really, really want or need a vehicle that won’t come across the footbridge, you can pay a hefty monthly fee for a key to the gate. Near the gate is an outfitter and water adventure company occupying a large old house. Some of the youngsters we saw last night are bivouacked here, draped around the house, in tents or on the porch, with various bits of nylon clothing strung on lines to dry. They

won’t be up and functional for a while. In the river, a few yards from the bank, is an old van, mired up to the hubs in a sandbar, apparently being used as a party hut. Ahh, to be young again...no, wait, the hangover might not be worth it.

Along the lower road are private houses, many with extra rooms for the summer employees. There is the huge generator, the size of a house, supplying electrical power for the town, the one we heard starting and stopping all night through our open window.

It is still too early for the breakfast, so we sit in the tiny lobby of the hotel to wait. The hotel manager brought us coffee and tea. He is a slightly built, very busy guy, mid-50’s or so, closely cropped graying hair, black-rimmed glasses, with an air of quiet confidence about



The town's generator

Along the
road to
McCarthy



Entering
McCarthy

him. He says he can do this in summers, and live wherever he wants in the world, because of his “past life”, smiling but not saying what that was. It brings to mind the beginning of John LeCarre novels where the “retired “ MI-6 agent gets called back from just such a secluded life to do more extraordinary things.

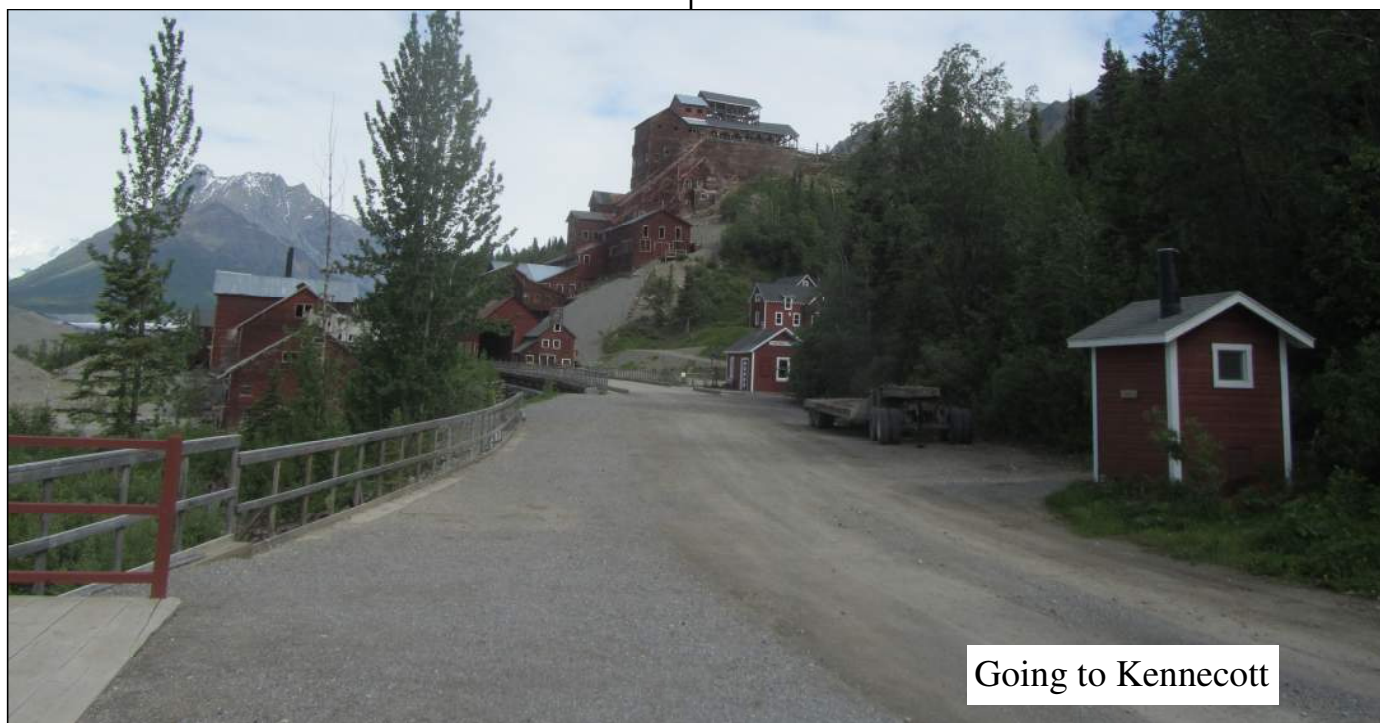
Breakfast was at the Bistro when it opened at 7, next door to the bar across the street. There is a pleasant young woman serving “no choices, you get what I’m offering”, which turns out to be very tasty scrambled eggs and thick slices of grilled ham with properly done home fries. Jay’s a vegetarian, so I do my best to eat both pieces.

Outside we talked with the glaciologists who were laying out their complicated measuring equipment and loading up a truck to go down to the glacier. They, both the Americans and the Chinese scientists, are not fans of the current administration’s environmental policies.

We packed up and rode the four miles of dirt down to the town and mine site at Kennecott. A Lynx ran across a few yards in front of me, a tall, impossibly long legged cat with a relatively small body, as if somehow a Kentucky bobcat had mated with a Great Dane. At Kennecott, the Park Ranger confirmed with a photo what I had seen, telling me that the warming weather had resulted in a bumper crop of snowshoe hares this season so the lynx are happy.

In one of the restored buildings, we watched a video including old films of mine and processing operations in the early 1900’s. The use of the available technology of the time to extract every bit of copper from the ore was amazing, the environmental impact also horrifying. The mine and processing plant operated 364 days per year, despite the Alaskan winters, closing only for Christmas.

Beside the town, the Kennecott Glacier is



No question, they say, that advanced global warming exists, is human caused and becoming irreversibly dire.

way, way down in its canyon now, covered in a debris field twenty feet or more deep, such that we can’t see the ice. Picture the dirt left

behind in one winter by melting snow in a parking lot, then multiply that by 10,000 years.

no, this bear just wanted us to know who is boss here. We didn't argue the point.



Ending our tour of Kennecott, we reverse down the dirt road again, but Jay suddenly turned around having realized that he had lost his phone. He is met by a guy on a four-wheeler, coming up the road, holding the missing phone in his hand. What are the odds?

A few miles from McCarthy, a large black bear, bigger than the NC and TN bears we are used to seeing, strolled out of the woods on to the road and stopped to stare us down. I thought there would be a cub crossing, as have seen in those mountains, but

As we came back into Chitina, there is a moose swimming placidly in One Mile Lake. She stops briefly to look at us, and then proceeds on with her swim. "Can't a girl get some privacy?"





The old railroad station at McCarthy

We were, of course, in rain off & on as we went down to Valdez, but it cleared as we got to the mountain range just north. As we ascend the spectacular Thompson Pass, I decided not to stop for pictures because it was getting “late” (by the clock, not the sun) which turned out to be a mistake. Never count on the weather in Alaska.

Valdez, with its large arch over the entrance to town, is the southern end of the pipeline that starts up at Prudhoe Bay. There is a refinery at the terminus, though gas is still expensive here, within a mile of where it’s being made. The big tankers come in at that harbor, which is around the point from Valdez, not easily seen. The city is all new since 1964, having been moved four miles away after the Good Friday earthquake, to this side of the harbor. The prior site was razed and made

into a park after being deemed too unstable for resettling.

Our motel is a large, industrial looking affair, more functional than stylish. The room is tiny, with no furniture other than the two beds and some sort of small shelf thing under the window. We resort to hanging our riding gear from the water pipes that go across the ceiling. The desk clerks are a young couple who have moved here for this job, where they can live on site during the summer seasons and go elsewhere for different work when the motel, along with most of the town, is closed for the winter. Despite being an “ice free harbor”, we are told Valdez is the snowiest town in Alaska, getting an annual average accumulation of 25 feet. That is taller than a two story building. When you’re shoveling out the 6 inches from your driveway next winter, lift your gaze up high and give a moment of thought for that

figure. In the worst of the winter the closed business lots, like our motel, are used by the city to “store” the snow pushed from the streets. We didn’t see it, but apparently they have some really impressive machinery to deal with the snowfall.

We walk through town to the waterfront for supper at the Wheelhouse overlooking the harbor. Not exactly memorable food or drink, but waitress Mickey who is an Alaskan, returning after having spent some time in Texas, is a font of local information.

On the recommendation of the motel clerk, we found TraDa’s a few blocks away for breakfast. Operated by its effusive owner and his shy daughter, the place opens at 4 AM to service the boat workers and others who start their day early, and need a lot of food to tide them over. We had no such plans, but ate all that was offered anyway. From there we walked down to the Valdez Museum, to stroll through exhibits of pioneer days here and watched a video of interviews with people who experienced the 1964 earthquake. Some were adults living and working in the town, some were boys at the time, playing on the docks when the quake hit. Several recall see-

ing a large cargo ship from the bay with its rear launched 30 feet in the air, water dripping off the propellor, then thrown up on the dock and back out to sea by the tsunami-like waves. I had been in college with a guy from Anchorage who was an early teen when it hit. He had described to me riding his bicycle down to center of town where one side of the street was now dozens of feet lower than the other. Later we rode over to the old Valdez site, now a sort of park, where we met a 64 year old man, who had been a child here in 1964, walking there with his wife, grandkids and dogs. He recalled the town as it was then, showing us around to where the docks were, and gestured down the gravel path to where his house had been before the quake’s destruction.

There is a road around the bay to the pipeline terminus, but “civilians” can’t get too near for security purposes. From the pullouts along the water, we can see Valdez across the water, but except for the cruise ship docked there, it is hard to tell it is a city at this distance. These little park-like pullouts have tables, barbecue grills and lots of bear warnings posted everywhere. Throw those steaks on the grill, but be prepared to run for your SUV.



Across the bay from Valdez



Within minutes, the entire Exxon
oil spill response team was in action!

Valdez Museum

www.bluegrassbeemers.org

Back in town we stopped along the harbor strip to discuss where we might find lunch when a woman walked up to us and pointed at two of the restaurants. “Lunch at the Fat Mermaid, dinner at Mike’s” she says with confidence. We took her suggestions and were not disappointed. The Fat Mermaid provided an excellent quinoa bowl and conversation with the Turkish waiter who is finishing up his PhD at the university.

Motorcycle dual sport travel comes with the necessity to do laundry, so we spent a couple of hours at the facility within our motel. There we met an Amish woman at the washers, dressed in traditional garb, with several baskets. She tells she is “old order” but she and 12 others, including children, drove up here from Indiana in a 15 passenger bus and she seems proficient at using the electric laundry equipment. Later saw one of the younger males of the group watching TV in the breakfast lounge, playing on his iPhone. As with many other subjects in life, there is a lot about the Amish that I do not know.

Under dense cloud cover we checked out in the morning and headed for Sheep Mountain. Heavy fog over the mountains occluded any view from Thompson Pass, making it hard to see more than 50 feet in front of the bike. I missed my chance to take a photo as we came in. On the way up we passed a family we had seen the day before in town. A man and woman, with a small child maybe 5 years old at most, on three bicycles loaded for travel. On the pass today, the child was perhaps in the man’s trailer, marked “Baby” on the back. Not sure where they’d stashed the extra bicycle. They were pedaling hard up the steep grade, but appeared to be happy about it. We went up to Worthington Glacier, but any view from there was fogged in as well. In and out of cold rain all the way to Glenallen, though the fog cleared enough to see the mountains on both sides, deep creeks and rushing water, so beautiful, but so common up here that it quickly becomes routine. What I first thought was a groundhog turned out to be a fat porcupine sitting on the side of the road, munching



Sheep Mountain cabins

grass. Sun had returned by our gas stop at Glenallen, where we ate lunch outside at a Thai kiosk, and talked to some Chinese and Philippine dip-netters. Not sure exactly what that sport entails, but they were excited about it.

The rain/sun alternations continued all the way to Sheep Mountain. At a pullout for leg-stretching and photos, we met two local guys on HD's, one on a trike conversion, both sporting lots of buttons and patches on their vests. They tell us that there was a brief "spring" a few weeks ago, then the snow returned until this week. Lucky us.

Sheep Mountain Lodge is nice, consisting of several rustic cabins on the hillside and a restaurant with excellent apple pie. We struck up a conversation with two couples at the next table who say they ride too and have recently done an Eidleweiss Tour of Europe. One of the women, no doubt visually impaired, said I "had a Sean Connery thing going on". I thought briefly about trying to adopt a Scottish accent, but didn't.

Mark the owner of the lodge lets us ride the bikes up the grassy slope to our cabin. He's a young fellow, a rider as well, with a dirt bike and a Triumph 800 Tiger at home. Mark tells us that snow motorcycling with a ski track kit on his YZ, is "the best thing he's ever done" and recommends it highly, saying we should

come back in the winter to try it. Ah, the exuberance of youth, where a fall at speed from a dirt bike brings laughter and maybe some soreness in the morning, not hospitaliza-



Alaskan Fine Dining

tion.....too young to understand what being our age is like.

There are some of "our kind" up here. We met with two guys our age, maybe one is older, on rented BMW 800s, from same rental company as us. They have done a similar route to ours, but included a glacier flight over Denali. Back home they live in southern California, and ride in Baja. I took their pictures for them at the lodge and as they wandered around the grounds

Out early the next day, headed down to Palmer because the restaurant at Sheep Mountain isn't open 'til 8. Despite the name of the place, we have yet to see any sheep. In Palmer we find a very good breakfast at the busy Noisy Goose cafe.

On our way out we visited the "only domesticated Musk Ox Farm in the world". It didn't open until 10, so we took some photos of the huge, hairy beasts with their helmet-like horns and left, pondering just what makes a "domestic" Musk Ox. Do they do laundry, cook, light housecleaning? Perhaps make good house pets?

It is cold and overcast as we follow the huge Matanuska Glacier through its eponymous valley below. We can easily see where it once had been, many miles longer, now receded.

A moose standing near the pavement watches us passively as we approach, chewing slowly, until returning into the forest as if we are too boring to hold its interest. A mile or two later, a second one looks at us briefly from the side of the road then bolts forward in front of us, running like a horse...I didn't know they could really do that...across the highway, big hooves clapping on the hard surface, and disappears into the woods on the other side. Knowing that they can trot that quickly heightens my awareness considerably.

We take a short detour over to the coastal port of Whittier, through what I shall always think of as "the Tunnel of Impending Doom". There is a \$13 toll to use the tunnel and when we arrive at the booth on our motorcycles, the op-

erator leaves his place to come out and give us the "motorcycle lecture" and hands us the safety brochure. He and it inform us that the tunnel is 2.5 miles long (longest in North America, we are told) with a road surface only 11' 6" wide. The rails are less than 5 feet apart, but with a channel of about 4 inches on the inside of each side of the rail for the train wheels, leaving less than 4 feet between to ride on. The toll operator emphasizes that if our tires are less than 4 inches wide, (the front ones are and the rear ones only a bit wider) they will go down in the channel and cause a crash. The tunnel is shared with the train and automobiles in alternating sessions and motorcycles go alone after the last cars have finished the trip. This is because when motorcycles crash, the crews have to go in there to



The Tunnel of Impending Doom

drag them out. In the warning brochure, there is a section on the tunnel lights, including the sequence of flashes to watch for if you have been in the tunnel too long and a train is coming. You are instructed to get off your bike, leave it there and run for the nearest “safety” spot, a cubbyhole in the tunnel wall, where you can watch the locomotive smash your machine. I’m trying to figure just how I would explain that event to the lady at the rental company. We waited about a half hour for our turn, lining up with a young military man and his wife two up on a Harley with open pipes. We let them go first. If it had been paint stripes 3 feet apart, anyone could have gone through at 50mph without a second thought. But after being warned “get in a rail channel and you will crash” and “if you are in there too long, the train will crush your bike”, the ride through at 25 mph was a nervous exercise. Just for spice, there are exhaust fans near each end, which give you a blast of air across your path as you go by. The sense of relief as you and the bike exit into daylight, making the 90 degree turn across the rails, is marvelous.

Whittier, a ferry docking and commercial port location, is tiny, with just one circle and one street on the harbor. There is a single residence building, apparently containing everything but the harbor side tourist stuff. Google “Town under

one roof” for more information. Outside a restaurant, we met some German tourists and their German friend who has lived here for 52 years. The resident says, in a heavy German accent, that “everything was different back then”. He tells us that in those days, the train driver would stop for a while on this side of the tunnel to let passengers fish, if requested.

On the way back out, I could see the bright glow at the end of the tunnel and thought it was my cataracts making it look like a headlight...but it was in fact a headlight, of a train, waiting impatiently to enter the tunnel. This tunnel experience was not on my “bucket list”, but I’m going to add it just so I can check it off and not do it again.

Our destination was the harbor town of Seward, down on the Kenai Peninsula. Kentucky history will tell you that it was Ambassador to Russia, Cassius Marcellus Clay of Madison County, who actually initiated and negotiated the sale of Alaska to the US, but Secretary of State William Seward, a Clay nemesis, took all the credit. So for we Kentuckians, this town should be named “Clay, Alaska”. It looks more “old west” than some others we’ve



seen here, built on the slope going to the water. Across from our lodging is an old hotel, restored, that would be at home in a black and white John Wayne movie. It has a restaurant, but like others on this street at this hour, there is a long waiting line to get in.

We stroll up to another street and find, for me, an excellent halibut yellow curry at the Seward Brewing Company. The beer list is interesting but heavy on the ultra-hoppy IPA's, catering to a younger crowd than us, but still a good place to be and we didn't have to wait to get in.

From our room the next morning, we can see a bald eagle flying by our balcony, something unfortunate that must have had other plans for the day, carried in its talons. Ruined its day, made the eagle's. Fortunately, we have less strenuous options for breakfast.

Later we walked along the waterfront down to harbor. Over the years I have developed the habit of picking up a Swiss Army Knife on significant (foreign or long) trips as my souvenir. I engrave on the handle the location where I got it and that way I have a memento that I actually use instead of something gathering dust on a shelf. Fortunately the manufacturer makes lots of models, so repeats haven't been much of a problem. I hadn't spotted one for sale yet on this trip and wanted to make one last shot at finding one. It is about one mile around the waterfront from our hotel to the dock area, a pleasant walk that takes us past some historical markers (Seward is "mile 0" of the Iditarod Trail to Nome but the race now apparently starts in Anchorage) and by the campground where folks can pull their RV's almost to the water's edge. We spent some time talking with a young woman and her grandparents about their nice camper van, the long journey they had made up here to

hopefully convince her that she didn't need the boyfriend of whom they didn't approve, and petted her dog. In the dock area is "the Fish House" which is neither a restaurant or a fish market now, but rather a large "everything shop" where one can buy hardware, outfitter supplies, some groceries, clothing, etc. There may even be some fish for sale there, but I didn't see them. They did, however, have a Swiss Army Knife that would serve my purpose. Across the road there is a Norwegian cruise ship in harbor, with lots of folks in cruise clothes wheeling luggage down the sidewalk to get to the train station. One of them tells us that their cruise includes a train journey up into the country we've just come from. Seeing them all in line with their little rolling cases, I think I prefer our method of travel.

With time now growing short, we make the ride back up to Anchorage in sunshine, blue, mostly cloudless skies, no fog, and on this Monday morning, very little traffic. We pass a tributary leading to the sea where an unfortunate whale has met its demise on a sandbar. Alaska doesn't mark its roads well, resulting in us losing Rt. One a few times. I guess the locals already know where they're going.

Back in Anchorage, we have only a couple of hours until we turn the bikes in, so we find lunch at Paris Cafe downtown. In keeping with its name, the restaurant offers excellent, delicate, flaky pastries. The personable owner tells us that she has a young baker, not yet out of her teens, whom she hired on a whim. The girl, she says, is a natural and her product confirms that opinion.

Reluctantly, we turned the bikes in, no problems or unexpected dings found on inspection, and got a ride to the Lakefront Hotel. Suddenly it was all over and we were just another

set of tourists, waiting for our flights out in the morning. The hotel is across the highway from the airport and features its own “airstrip” on the lake. We enjoy a beer or two on the patio, watching the float planes take off and land. Several are parked in front of houses that dot the shoreline, the very picture of an idyllic life apparent in this summer evening.

THE TAKEAWAY

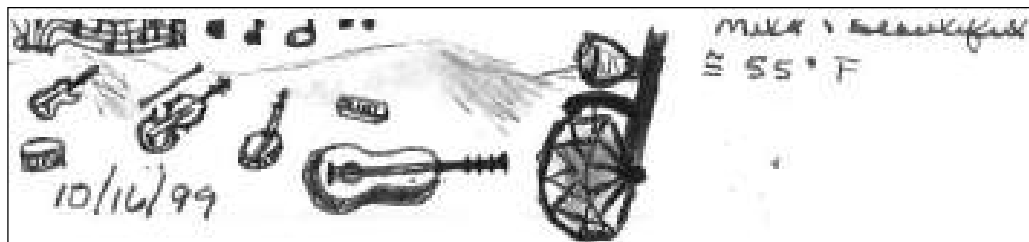
One could deduce from our hotel and motel experience here, that no one in Alaska travels with any clothes, or that perhaps because of the cold, they are wearing everything they have, all the time, so have no need for closets, shelves or any device on which to hang something. Having such conveniences seems to be very, very low on room designers’ priority list.

The KLR 650’s were exemplary for this place combining good road manners, steady and smooth, with more than enough off road prowess for the likes of us. Power was never an issue, though specs say only 35 horsepower, a meaningless figure with the tractable torque. Nothing, short of subtracting 35 years from our ages, would have been good on Route 8’s deep gravel, so that one bit of unpleasantness wasn’t the bike’s shortcoming. The machines returned decent gas mileage, in the 40’s, always a consideration when fuel is so hard to come by up here. As on our XT250’s, we both often reached for a 6th gear that wasn’t there. But at the low end, where it really counts, anything from 2,000 rpm and above, the bike will tractor away with no problem. On pavement the KLR handles curves well, even with 50/50 Heidenau tires, its longer wheelbase making it less twitchy than, for example, a DR650.

I’ve not included much commentary about the scenery, though that is said to be the draw for coming here. I’ve ridden in the Alps and Rockies, which aren’t as high in actual vertical meas-

urements but seem more so because the roads go up and over them, following centuries old paths. (Denali, at over 20,000 feet above sea level, is the highest peak in North America and, we are told, is a longer climb from base to summit than Everest, at 29,000 feet, which “starts” at a much higher base). In Alaska, the roads we traveled went around the mountains, so the feeling of ascent is lesser, though the sense of the peaks looming overhead is there. Instead, it is the vastness of the country that impresses. The emptiness, mostly devoid of signs of habitation, stays with me, but it is difficult to express, like trying to prove a negative or explain infinity. The forests go on to the horizon, the mountains that seem so dominant in one place quickly disappear behind the stands of trees along the roads. Power lines and poles are not along every road as they seem to be down where we come from, with many small towns using a combination of solar and generators for electricity. Services such as food, gasoline and other “necessities” are few and quite far between, leaving the rider with an aloneness that is not found down here in the “lower 48” not even in places like Montana or Wyoming or Idaho. “Civilization” is looser. We saw a house in a remote place on a long lonesome highway with a small plane in the driveway. It is clear that the owner uses the road as his or her runway. We took pictures, but looking at them is the difference between a photo of the ocean versus standing on the beach at the water’s edge. Words, at least the ones I know, in any order I know how to place them, cannot begin to convey the spaciousness. You have to be there and I’m glad I was. We met many people for whom this is, with all its inconveniences, the exact place they want to be and they are more than willing to exert a great deal of effort to live here. I’m not one of those, at least not at my age now, but I certainly can understand the appeal.

If you haven’t been, perhaps you should go. Just stay out of the tunnel.



TAKE ME BACK TO THE TWO-LANE
 WHERE THE TREES GLOW RED AND GOLD,
 WHERE THE MOM'S AND POP'S STILL HAVE A STOVE
 WHERE WINTER'S TALES ARE TOLD,
 WHERE A SANDWICH STILL COSTS A DOLLAR,
 FILLED HIGH WITH BALONEY AND CHEESE
 WHERE THE "GOOD GUYS" STAND A SHADE TALLER
 WHERE THE HOUND DOG IGNORES THE FLEAS

Here's the group for today:



- * 1). Jim Brundon
- * 2). Chester Martin
- * 3). Paul Elwyn
- * 4). Bill Voss
- * 5). Boone Sutherland
- * 6). Dave McCord
- 7). Pete Galskin
- 8). John Rice
- 9). Mike Gill
- * 10). Lowell Roark
- * 11). Mary Beard
- * 12). Mark Rense (K1200 RS)
- * 13). Dean Gasker (Green Moto Group V-7 Sport)

Boone

Books available on loan

The following books are available on loan. Email me when you want to borrow one, and I will bring it to breakfast (or whatever other arrangements need to be made...I can deliver within reason) and I'll put your name beside it on my list.

I don't mind if people keep them a while (it takes me forever to read a book now....I keep falling asleep and then have to re-read the last 10 pages or so) but I don't want to give them away for good. At least not yet.

John Rice



Bahnstormer By LJK Setwright
Streetwise By Malcolm Newell
The Bart Markel Story By Joe Scalzo
Mann of his Time By Ed Youngblood
Yesterday's Motorcycles By Karolevitz
The Scottish By Tommy Sandham
This Old Harley By Michael Dregni
Racer: the story of Gary Nixon By Joe Scalzo
All But My Life: Bio of Stirling Moss By Ken Purdy (OK, not a motorcycle book, but who doesn't like and respect Stirling Moss?)
Investment Biker By Jim Rogers
Obsessions Die Hard By Ed Culbertson
BMW Twins & Singles By Roy Bacon
Bitten by the Bullet By Steve Krzystyniak & Karen Goa
Cafe Racers of the 1960's By Mick Walker
More Proficient Motorcycling By David Hough
Tales of Triumph Motorcycles & the Meriden Factory:
By Hancox
Sport Riding Techniques By Nick Ienatasch
Total Control By Lee Parks
Smooth Riding By Reg Pridmore.



A Twist of The Wrist (Vol 1 & 2) By Keith Code
Triumph Tiger 100 and Daytona By J. R. Nelson
This Old Harley (anthology) By Dregni
Side Glances By Peter Egan
Mondo Enduro By Austin Vince
Big Sid's Vincati By Matthew Bieberman
101 Road Tales By Clement Salvadori
Riding with Rilke By Ted Bishop
Legendary Motorcycles By Luigi Corbetta
Red Tape and White Knuckles By Lois Pryce
A Man Called Mike By Hilton (bio of Mike Hailwood)
The Perfect Vehicle By Melissa Pierson
One Man Caravan By Robert Fulton (first known circumnavigation of the world by motorcycle)
Monkey Butt By Rick Sieman
Ariel: The postwar models By Roy Bacon
Short Way Up By Steve Wilson
Endless Horizon By Dan Walsh
Leanings (1 & 2) By Peter Egan
Into the Heart of Africa By Jerry Smith
The Last Hurrah By Des Molloy
(Autographed copy, with DVD of the trip)
Whatever Happened to the British Motorcycle Industry
By Bert Hopwood
Down the Road By Steve Wilson
Motorcycling Excellence
By Motorcycle Safety Foundation
Leanings 3 By Peter Egan
Ghost Rider By Neal Peart
Revolutionary Ride By Lois Pryce
How to Drive a Sidecar Rig by David Hough