

North American Reeky Tour 2004

Northwest Leg

Alan Brennan - 1998 Harley-Davidson Road Glide - 1804 miles

The End

Neah Bay

A warm blast of air hit my face as I fast approached the Utah border in southeast Idaho. I'd been chilled to the bone for the last couple of days, and the rush of warmth let me know that I had finally outridden the cold front that had been dogging me since



I left Neah Bay, "the most North West point in the United States." The rain had started soaking me some miles before I reached the town, but I pressed on because I had a quest to fulfill. I could barely see the Strait of Juan de Fuca for the haze of the rain. I didn't think it had looked all that threatening from the ferry, and I had naturally expected some drizzle, but this was real rain, and of sustained duration.

On arrival at Neah Bay, I tried to get coffee at a cafe. The posted hours were Monday to Saturday, noon to nine. It was 3pm on Friday, and the cafe was closed. I was confused. There was another coffee shop a bit farther down the road on the way out of town, but I decided not to bother; I felt that outrunning the rain (that was now absolutely pelting me) was the best choice. I would have taken a picture, if there had been anything noteworthy to take a picture of. Off I went, back down toward US Highway 101, in my quest for the coast.

This was a trip filled with bad omens from the start. The idea to go to Neah Bay was mine, and I was encouraged in the endeavor by my friend Andrew. All indications were that Washington State Highway 123 was a great road, not to be missed. Well, when I got to the turnoff to this beloved highway, just past Port Angeles, I found out that the road was closed for road construction. Off down US-101, then.

US-101 in this corner of the US is a fairly flat stretch of road, except for a very nice ten mile stretch of road with some very nice turns. Of course, as luck would have it, just as I approached the sign heralding twisties for the next ten miles, ahead loomed two lumbering, camper laden, vintage pickup trucks. Several signs encouraged slow traffic to use turnouts, but these folks would have none of it. It took three miles and some rather dangerous riding (shame on me) to get past the wankers.

With a bit of luck, I was through this stretch of road before I got into the rain. It started as a drizzle, but by the time I left Neah Bay it was really coming down pretty steadily. I rode back to the intersection of US-101 (there is no “loop” way out of Neah Bay, it’s in and back the way you came), where I stopped for gas, coffee and a change of socks. The locals there were pretty friendly, and let me know that the storm was supposedly coming up from the south. My plans were leading me right into the teeth of this system.

After sucking down the coffee and getting the dry socks on, I stepped into a conversation with some folks gassing up at the pumps. Their plans were to go to Neah Bay, but when I told them that the rain was really coming down hard there, it seemed to dampen their spirits. I said, hey, you’re in a truck, no worries! I think they abandoned plans for the Bay and left for other parts. By the time I finished my business at the strangely named Sappho Junction, the rain had started to come down hard again (having chased me from the Bay), and it was decision time. With melancholy, I abandoned my plans to head west and south on US-101, and headed back east.



The eastern backtrack would take me through what I knew would be the “rain shadow” that is a funny feature of the Olympic peninsula. Around Sequim and Port Angeles, the rainfall is typically much lower than in the rest of the Puget Sound area, and especially the Olympic peninsula. Sure enough, I got out of the rain and even into the sunshine a bit. Past Port Angeles though, I hit the rain again. Weighing my options, I decided that heading all the way back to Seattle offered the best plan. I could have a warm dry bed, a little more time with my family, and as short a route to Portland as I wanted in the morning.

This decision, of course was not to be taken lightly. It meant the end of a nicely conceived plan of riding a very pretty and adventurous route (I believe the late Robby Byrnes once lamented the gang aglay of well laid plans). It meant that I would have to once again cross the Hood Canal bridge (more on this later). It also meant that I got to witness the aftermath of a quite bad road accident.

Remember that nice section of twisties on US-101 I mentioned? Well, on the return trip I had no lumbering campers to deal with, but the rain had wet the road a bit, so I had to be cautious. Still, it was fun. Toward the end of the sojourn through these twisties, I noticed a vehicle or two flashing their high beams at me. Hmm, warning of a cop on the beat, perhaps? Well, coming out of the penultimate curve, there was a cop alright. Two cruisers parked off to the left side of the road. Several other cars stopped, flares out and lit on the road, somber faces of people standing, and a gray late-model pickup truck on its back in a ditch just past the first curve, its cab crushed. Not a good sight.

My fragile mortality now pointed out to me in the thought that this event could hardly have had a pleasant outcome, I pressed on to the Hood Canal bridge. I hadn't realized that I would have to recross it to get into Seattle until I got close, and by now the rain (at least the drizzle part) had caught up to me again, it had gotten dark, and the wind from the south had picked up quite a bit.

Do any of you kind readers know of the construction of the Hood Canal bridge? It is very long, has two raised spans on either end, and a causeway with a lateral draw bridge in the center. If you want a good visual definition of leeward and windward, check out a causeway type bridge in a strong wind. Scary to look at, and the promise of a cross wind on a bridge at night in the rain is downright puckering. Now for the fun part: the raised spans and the drawbridge section are (did you guess it?) constructed as metal grate roadbeds. Biker heaven, this ain't.

Seattle and Portland

My plans for a coastal peninsula run dampened, I returned to Seattle via the Kingston ferry yet again. This would make my third run on the ferry. I got back to my ex's place, and damned if the dog (Bear is his name) didn't act like he hadn't seen me in weeks. Could he have known that when I had left earlier that day, that I hadn't planned to come back for a while? It was the spookiest thing. My ex let me borrow a tarp to throw over the bike for the night, and kindly shared some wine to help me dry out a bit. I got a couple pieces of left over pizza for supper. It rained like crazy Friday night, and I figure I was better off there than in my tent somewhere on the Washington coast getting drenched.



The following morning I repacked the bike and headed for Portland for my afternoon meeting with Paul Calman. I made damn good time to Olympia, and despite the heavily leaden skies, did not get rained on to any significant degree. I decided to head out to the coast just past the city, and had a really neat trip inbound from the coast on highway four to Kelso. I took a bit of a detour to see Altoona, the namesake of my hometown in Pennsylvania. Not much to see, really, but I got some pictures and moved on. Highway four was a good road with barely any traffic, and I thoroughly enjoyed my ride that afternoon.



I called Paul Calman from a gas station in Kelso, he'd been in Hillsboro about an hour. I arranged to meet him at Powell's Technical Books in an hour and a half, and struck out across the Lewis and Clark bridge into Oregon, and down US-30 toward Portland.

Traffic was not too bad, even into the city, but I got a bit confused once the highway merged to I-205 near downtown Portland. I figured I needed to get off early, but I was a bit indecisive and didn't exit until I was on the south side of town. This part of town is more familiar to me, but it still took quite a bit of wandering for me to find my way back up to the north side. Eventually I wound my way around the Amtrak station and found Park Avenue. The confusion over the address was not a big deal, for as I wound south on Park and struck a U-turn (noticing that I was headed away from the 333 direction), I saw two grizzled travellers poised next to a pair of Gold Wings, and I knew I had made the connection.



Powell's was a pretty nifty place, and I almost wish I had planned to spend the night in Portland. I still had 750 miles to go to get home though, so we chatted a bit, traded some snapshots, and I hit the road - up across the Broadway bridge and onto I-84. I struggled a bit with the dark and tiredness, passing a number of fleabag motels and RV campgrounds. I knew that I had a remote, comfortable place to sleep once I hit the Blue Mountains.

I filled up at the Wild Horse casino just southeast of Pendleton. It had just started to drizzle, and an old native fellow commented that he thought it was a bit wet to be out on "one of these things." I chuckled and said I didn't think this was much to compare with what I'd been through the day before. By the time I got up Emigration Hill and found the side road off the side road that I was looking for, the rain had picked up a bit and I hurriedly made camp, setting up the tent and rainfly and unloading my gear into the tent. Thankful for the safe travel so far, I settled down to sleep with the sound of steady rainfall on my tent. I was also much thankful that I was not riding through it.

Oregon, Idaho, and Home

The rain stopped sometime during the night, and when I rolled out of the tent Sunday at dawn, the sky was relatively clear and the ground (and my bike) just slightly damp. I had noticed a generous gob of cow shit on my boot late the previous day as I set up camp, and as I gave the bike a pre-ride inspection, I noticed I had quite a generous gob of the same material on the right side crashbar and floorboard. Nice. As I was about finished packing up, I actually had another vehicle ride by my site. I got a wave from the driver and a curious look from his dog.



I stopped for gas again in Ontario, and foolishly went to the cafe next door for breakfast. The coffee was awful and the food very forgettable. Ah well, dining on the road is a complete crap shoot, and this roll I lost. Win some, lose some. I was dodging rain pretty much the whole day, and Boise was the worst of it, even though I managed to wind my way quite successfully through the city traffic (which is always bad on the freeway in Boise, even on Sunday), and only got hit with a bit of a sprinkle.

The rest of Idaho went fast, I did 80 to 90 just about the whole way, occasionally getting stuck behind trucks passing trucks. When I hit the warm air just a few miles outside Snowville, I stopped to take a picture of the sky, just so all the kind readers would know what a cold front looks like! I motored my way home another 70 or so miles, pulled into the garage and immediately dropped a pan under the bike and drained the oil. Did I mention that I sprung a new oil leak on the ride home? Showed up Friday. I had bought two quarts of 20W50 dinosaur juice at a Shucks in Kelso, and needed to use one at my penultimate gas stop in Jerome, ID.



Now the Harley is down for a complete change of fluids, lubing of the cables, and a new rocker cover gasket. I took a ride Tuesday to the bike shop in Brigham City to pick up the front wheel for the Tempter, looks like it is going to be my ride for the next couple of weeks while I slow-leak the gasket repair job. Now on to the job of covering the first part of the journey:

The Beginning

Utah, Idaho and Montana

I had the bike packed up and loaded to go, dark and early (4:45 a.m. departure time) on the morning of Friday the 27th. Let me tell you, I was glad that I had the foresight to put warm clothes on under the leathers, because it was damned cold that morning.

I took I-15 up past Pocatello, as there isn't much in the way of an alternative route, and headed out on US-26 toward Arco from Blackfoot. Somewhere along the way I lost my road atlas and a hand towel. Guess I'm not all that careful in packing up sometimes. This is where Reeky gets radioactive. Arco (well, Atomic City to be exact) is the site of the world's first nuclear power plant, EBR-1. It is also home to Pickle's Place, where the featured menu item is the Atomic Burger. That's with mushrooms, for the curious.

The ride up US-93 toward and into Montana was typically pleasant, not much traffic and very fun twisties toward the continental divide at the Idaho-Montana border. I

ran into a couple touring on their Dyna Glide at the summit, and they were kind enough to get a picture of me with my bike at the “Welcome to Montana” sign. There was a purported “Lewis and Clark Event” at the rest area there, but it turned out to be not much of anything. Some fellow playing a fiddle and another guy doing some blacksmith work. I didn’t dawdle too long for that.



Off into Montana then, where the irrepressible Keith Schiffer awaited. I took a couple pictures in the town that is the namesake to my daughter-in-law, Darby. The terrain around Darby was marked by the evidence of a large forest fire, probably a couple of years old, but not much older. I could imagine the firefighting that went on, seeing acres and acres of consumed forest, and small patches of unburned trees surrounding structures and dwellings. It must have been a hell of a fight.



Well, I suppose it wouldn’t be a real motorcycle trip without the real and ever present threat of bodily injury. I was nearly run over by the driver of an SUV in Missoula, the only obstacle to easy riding the whole day so far. City traffic sucks. This particular prince of the road pulled out of a parking lot and across two lanes of traffic, causing me to need to swerve left and brake hard to avoid a collision. Blasting on the horn when it became obvious what he was doing meant nothing, he kept right on coming. Then I got the requisite silly stare from his SWMBO in the passenger seat, “Gee honey, why is that man you almost killed honking at us?”

Ah well, try not to dwell on the excitement too much. The rest of the ride was pretty pleasant, although as I was closing in fast on 600 miles covered that day, I figured there was little chance I would make Browning before late evening. I stopped in a town called Big Fork, having spotted a campground and knowing I had lodging for the night if needed. “Keith, is Don still there?” “Nope, he left a couple hours ago.” “OK, I won’t worry about making Browning tonight.” “Where are you?” “A town called Big Fork.” “Are you coming in from the east?” “No, from the west.” “Are you near Great Falls?” “No, Keith, I’m west of Browning.” “What, north of Great Falls?” “No, Keith. West. West. Near Kalispell.” “Oh. You mean southwest.” “Yeah ok, whatever. I’ll call when I get close.” I rode until evening set in and I was dog tired, but still had enough light to set up camp. I ended up finding a spot just a few miles west of the divide; I called Keith from a cafe just a half mile from the campsite (no cell phone service, surprise surprise), and arranged to meet him at dawn at the divide.

That night a light rain rolled through, and I hoped that it would be gone by morning. Well, it was, and it was clear and chilly when I rode up toward the divide. Keith had been there about a half hour when I arrived, and we exchanged pleasantries upon see-

ing each other again after a couple of years. We rode to the campsite, broke camp, exchanged the shirts, and rode to West Glacier for breakfast. Keith thinks I'm a bit of a pedophile now, as I was quite taken with our cute but very young waitress. C'mon Keith, she was easy in her twenties, by at least a couple of days!



Keith rode with me all the way to Libby, a couple hundred miles I suppose, maybe a bit less than that. I should have made photocopies of the trip log when I had it in my possession, I hope somebody does that at some point of the trip. When we parted ways, I continued west on US-2, through the very pretty and friendly communities of Bonners Ferry and Sandpoint. I met the nicest elderly woman in the traveller's information booth in Bonners Ferry, we chatted



for quite a bit about my trip and she gave me a very good map of Washington, a perfect complement to the map I had just bought up the road at Moyie Springs. I met a couple of kids on dirt bikes at the gas station there, and now I'm kicking myself for not getting a picture of them. They seemed like good kids, one of them, the eldest, had a like-new KTM he had just bought used from one of his friends. \$2,000 is what I believe he said he paid. Looked like a steal to me.

It was in Bonners Ferry that I really scared the crap out of myself. There's a curving hill just past a bridge on the way out of the central district, and on this curve the road changes from four lanes to two. I had been enjoying the hell out of the new Avon Venom X I had just had installed on my front wheel, and had been joyfully cutting the curves with enthusiasm. On this particular curve, the road surface was old and slick, and I suppose my back tire hit a section of painted line as I moved from the vanishing right lane into the main flow of the road. The rear broke traction, and I went into about a 50 foot wobble. I was sure this bucking 750 pound bronco was going to toss me off, but after about four or five oscillations the beastie straightened out.

I'm not quite sure what, if anything, I did to quiet the wobble, but I do know that I completely laid off the brakes, and probably just ever so lightly decreased throttle through the adventure. Later, Andrew was to tell me that the best thing to do in that situation is transfer all the weight you can to the front wheel. It was at this point that I decided I was milking the back tire for mileage way too far, and when I got to Seattle I ponied up the cash for a new tire. Had I replaced the tire before the trip, I would have avoided some charges, but what the hell, I had some good mechanics take a look

at the bike and set the wheel back on right, gotta pay for that, I suppose. I'm still a bit tentative on cornering, though.

It was also in Bonners Ferry where I finalized my plans for travelling across Washington. I decided to follow US-2 to Newport, then pick up WA-20 for my sojourn across the state. Boy, am I glad I made that choice. WA-20 is a great road from start to finish, and the weather co-operated the whole way. I had another scary BDC (Brain Dead Cager) incident in Collville, but nothing else of dire note for the whole of the crossing. I'm going to put my bid in right here for the highest divide crossed in possession of the shirts, Sherman Pass at 5575 feet. This beats the continental divide on US-2 by about 350 feet. Can anyone top this? Shouldn't be too hard. Aw, hell, Looking at a map, I



see it's already about to be beat. Donner Summit, near Truckee, is over 7,000 feet, and the Nor Cal troops are doing Truckee this weekend (Sep 18-19). Oh well, I had the record for three weeks, anyway!



I'm going to cut the description of WA-20 short; I could go on for many

pages about how great the ride is. The North Cascades National Park crossing was probably the best part, but gee whiz, the whole length of this highway is so packed with good motorcycling roads that it's hard to pick a favorite spot. I called Andrew when I stopped in Winthrop for breakfast (Two Fingered Jack's was a good spot to eat, but beware, the town is very touristy), and arranged to meet him and Daniel



Bannon in Rockport. I showed up at the intersection of WA-20 and WA-530 to see Andrew and Daniel parked at the side of the road. They'd been there about 20 minutes, pretty good timing, I'd say. We continued on WA-20 over Deception Pass and down Whidbey Island, and came into the north Seattle metro area via the Clinton - Mukilteo ferry. We rode to Andrew's place in Lynnwood and began to make plans for the week. After some tentative discussion, I motored off to my lodging in Kenmore.

The NART tour had arrived in Emerald City!

The Middle

Seattle

The top priority upon my arrival in Seattle, and my main reason for volunteering for this leg of the trip in the first place, was a visit with my granddaughter. Olivia was a bit ambivalent about the shirts, but agreed to pose with them anyway. She declined to sign them, being a non-rider and all.



Monday I took care of business. Rode the Glide to Seattle Cycle Center and had a Metzeler 880 put on the rear. It cost a bit to have them do the work, but I think in the long run it will prove itself to be well worth it. I would never have made it back home confidently - and probably not safely - on that old worn Dunlop. I took a bit of a ride around town to scrub up the tire, and spent most of the time visiting with my son, daughter-in-law and granddaughter.



Tuesday was a riding day, Andrew and I rode to Pacific Raceways for a charity track day. A lot of the big name racer boys were there, and Bannon was doing 100 miles for charity on his Kawasaki something or other. I have to admit that I didn't know any of these guys, but Andrew knew who the big boys were, and we got signatures and pictures to make the day worthwhile. The rest of the day, quite naturally in my estimation, was spent with Olivia.

Wednesday was moto-GP racing video day at Smarty Pants in Georgetown. I met "the mighty Peckhammer" and Girl Wonder there for beers, conversation and shirt signing. Smarty Pants is a great place, very biker friendly, owned by a Chicago transplant and a pretty good guy. He had an old Honda parked out front Wednesday night, and one of his buddies was there wanting to take it for a ride. He had a bit of trouble with the side stand pulling out, I suppose he forgot that these two wheeled thingies require those to not fall over when not riding. He finally got the stand up after a wee bit of effort, and whipped on down the road. We were then treated to the sound of the



Honda whizzing by the restaurant about every ten minutes, and exchanged worrisome glances with the owner with each ride-by. All is well that ends well, he returned with bike and body none the worse for wear.



On the way back to Kenmore, I stopped on the nearly deserted US-99 that winds through downtown, and snapped an eerie photo of Emerald City at night. The next day, Thursday, I met Kelly “Culprit” at a Starbucks (where else?) in Woodinville and got the final PNW

signature on the shirts. We never did track down Jenner, despite posts to the newsgroup and several phone calls. I took the rest of Thursday to do a preliminary tour of my planned route out of town Friday morning, and to finish up the goal of completely covering the length of WA-20 as part of the tour. As a sidelight, I also managed to cover the entire distance of two other Washington state highways, WA-104 (twice!) and WA-525. These last two weren’t that extensive, they’re short routes north of Seattle. Um, looking at a AAA road atlas from 1990, it appears as if I may have done the entirety of WA-4 in the south as well, but that will require a little more research, and a better map.

So the final tally for miles logged, shirts and not shirts, is 3,253.3 miles. New front tire before the start, new rear tire halfway through the trip, a blown gasket, numerous adventures both good and bad, and a safe arrival home. What more could a guy want? I know! Being met by SWMBO (with dinner and a bottle of wine), grateful to see me home. Woo hoo!

The End. No, Really, I Mean it this Time

Well, that winds the story around to the beginning conclusion, or the end at the beginning, or, well, you know what I mean, where I started the story! I guess the big story will be over when we complete this thing to Texas, and when I get the post-trip overhaul of the Harley done. Good a time as any to do a 35K mile maintenance on the thing. Ciao!

