

Another shot at the Great Divide



After staying home for the summers of 2016 and 2017, I'm off again tomorrow morning. Whether that is for two days or two month, my will, courage, new scooter, and God will determine.

I plan to head SW on state and county roads to the Bicycle Route 66. Then SW until I hit interesting dirt in NM. Eventually I want to turn N up the Rockies, before looping Home. After the 4 day whimp-out of 2016, I'm not setting big expectation or even goals.

Be safe. Take care of the bike. Stay found. Keep going. One day, one ride at a time.

Last fall I decided to down size. My CB500X is a fine enduro machine. But at 500 lb+gear it's just too much for my aging arthritic hands and shoulders. The Honda PCX 150 scooter is barely over 200 lbs, no clutch, easy to flat foot, agile, will run 55 mph all day and eats up all the dirt I've found on IN. I've had it on a couple of overnights and we did great. Stay tuned to see how we do on a longer trip.

Tomorrow, I head to Benton, IL

Day 1

Monday, June 4, 2018
West Lafayette, IN to Chester. IL
315 miles 715am-515pm
Sunny, 55 deg-80 deg

First, it's the mid-west, beans, corn, silos, small towns-nothing photo worthy. The bike ran solidly, smooth, 55-60mph all day. No navigation issues. The Garmin preped files took me along IL and US roads with no problems.

I stopped every 50 miles, to stretch, gas every 100 miles (90+mpgal). By 2pm I was at Benton. So I cancelled that motel and rode 2 hr across the rest of IL to Chester, right on the Mississippi, south of St Louis.

Tomorrow will have LOTs of little roads, lots of navigation, and onto ACA's Route 66. SLOW. Weather is supposed to be like today.



Tuesday, June 5, 2018

277 miles, 630am to 230 pm

Mostly 4 lane, pseudo-interstate

As soon as I crossed the Mississippi, the Google-bike route sent me onto a GRAVEL road. I'm fine on packed dirt, but I didn't want to spend the day fighting gravel. So I turned around, rode the pavement to the next town, then pulled out PAPER maps.

I found a way across the state, some narrow twisties, think Brown County IN. Most of the way, though, was on US60, four lane limited access, 60+ mph. I made great time, but it got tedious.

In the early pm, I noticed my right bag was blazing hot, it was sitting on the muffler and blocking airflow thru the radiator 😊. So I moved that bag to behind me on the seat -yea bungee net!

By 2ish I was off the "interstate" into Springfield, and on to Route 66. That's one goal checked off. As I headed west on city streets, I was hot and feeling a little fuzzy. There's a Best Western! Done. Bring on a shower, a beer, and some down time.

On to Oklahoma tomorrow, maybe Chandler, at FIRST light



Wednesday, June 6, 2018

295 miles, 530am-130pm

Springfield, MO to Oklahoma City, OK

I was on the road at first light. Route 66, the whole way. Even when the ACA Route diverged, I just stayed on Rt66. The trip around Tulsa ended up on a major road, but there were no issues. My PCX kept up with traffic. With a GPX and good signs, it was fine.

Most of the time was at 60 mph on a mix of 2 and 4 lane roads, but no traffic issues.

I met two other riders , a Harley and a GoldWing also doing Rt66.

It was in the low 90s when I got in. Done for another day.

Tomorrow looks a lot like today, just a little hotter. I'm planning to get out early again.

Heading S into the desert does NOT sound as good now, as it did in January. I'm thinking about going thru Albuquerque to Grants, then N into the mountains, maybe on dirt.

Stay tuned.



Thursday June 7, 2018

295 miles. 545am-245pm

Oklahoma City, OK to Amarillo, TX

I was out at first light, again. As I neared the western edge of town I saw a lightning flash ahead. So after pumping gas, I put my Goretex jacket over my mesh armor jacket. Sure enough, I rode right into the rain, with strikes off to the south. The bike was fine, and I stayed dry. I could see light ahead, so I just rode thru the storm,

The whole day was on frontage roads back and forth beside I-40. The surface was often bad, so I ran at 45 mph way more than I wanted.

But it was fun, and navigation was never a problem. I leap frogged 5 Germans on Harley's. They ran faster, but missed turns or had to regroup or adjust gear.

By the time I got in, I was pooped and starting to get hot.

But, a hot shower, a cold beer, and a cool bed to unlink on is restoring me.

Tomorrow is the last day heading west along I-40, to Albuquerque? Then its west to Grants before turning north into the mountains, along dirt roads - at least, that's the plan.



This is the apartment Jean and I lived in for 1 1/2 years in the early 1970's when I was in the Army, stationed at Sandia Base (teaching Electronics-what else). Not much change after 2/3's of a lifetime.

Friday, June 8, 2018

305 miles, 5:45am-2:45pm with time zone change

It ALL went just as I hoped/planned; out early, cool for the first 4 hours, back and forth along Frontage roads of I-40. Absolutely NO navigational issues (yea Adventure Cycle GPX files and my Garmin Montana). I even had 15 miles of dirt, just before I had to ride the interstate for 80 miles.

There were no issues, but I watched my mirror like a hawk and slid over to the big paved shoulder when need be.

By the time I dropped into Albuquerque it was pushing 100 deg, and I felt it, as I found the apartment, then rode all the way across town to the motel.

It ALL worked.

After getting settled in my room, I went to tuck the scooter in. The oil was at the very end of the stick. Crap. I know I've been pushing her against the stop all day, but she's a HONDA.

I had to add a cup of oil (it only hold a little over a quart). There's no leak. The engine's just burning it. It sounds and moves fine. I think I've just pushed her too hard for too long.

So, tomorrow, after I get to Grants (with another 20 mile I40 run), I'll check the oil, and top it off if needed. Then I'm going to ride PAVED back roads at 40mph, to Cuba, and then to Abiquiu. These are the same towns the dirt route goes to. Tomorrow night I'll re-evaluate.

Oh well, if everything was flawless, it wouldn't be an adventure.



Albuquerque - Grants - Cuba - Abiquiu

Saturday, June 9 5:45am - 2:45pm

245 miles

From Albuquerque Route 66 followed frontage roads of I40 for 25 miles, then up onto the interstate for 25 miles. I checked the oil before and after running the interstate - just fine. The last 30 miles into Grants was also on frontage roads.

I screwed around Grants for a while looking for Walmart, to buy a 1 gallon gas can (reserve), then headed NORTH toward the mountains. This scenery was why I came. But it looked so familiar. I realized this is the same route I rode on my XT250 a couple of years ago, north from Las Cruces.

There was NO traffic, open prairie leading into the mountains, very few people (Pueblo Nation), and 125 miles without gas. No sweat.

When I passed into the National Forests, all the dirt roads were closed due to fire danger. It's good I'd decided not to try the Divide today.

Coming into Albiqiu, I pulled into the wrong dirt entry road. Within 20 yards, I was nearly stuck and thrown. Those little tires just sink into NM sand/dirt roads - not like Indiana dirt. So I'm staying on pavement for the rest of this trip. Maybe I need a Rokon (Google it)

Oh, the oil level was fine when I got into the motel. Yesterday was either an anomaly or I blew the measurement.

I'm looking for roads north and Colorado towns I haven't seen before, Salida, Vail perhaps.



Sunday June 10

218 miles. 5:45am-11:15am

Abiquiu NM to Salida CO

This was the BEST day, so far. It was clear, temps in the 60-70. For all but the last hour, the roads were two lane, well surfaced, and EMPTY, just me, my bike, and God's country.

As I went north, two arms of the Rockies closed in on each side - gorgeous! I knew it was going to be a short day, so I stopped when I crossed into CO, for a sit-down cafe breakfast, right next door to a pot shop. This reminds me of the old south, with dry and wet counties.

The PCX ran like a dream. It actually was better at 9000 feet, than at 2000 feet, love that fuel injection. I also lucked into how to use my gear behind me as a seat back - listen to my tunes, recline on my bike, watch the mountains coming in - PERFECT.

The last hour, climbing up Poncha pass, the road was busy with tourists and RVs. But there was a wide shoulder, so no problem. I thought about going on to Vail, but all the motels there were full.

So, I tried to go to church - it is Sunday. The front door was LOCKED. The usher told me the service was nearly over, and the congregation was concerned with a push-in shooting - sad.

The motel wasn't ready yet, so I went downtown to a historic bar, back-in bike parking with three Harley's right out front. I drank a beer, ate peanuts, and watched the tourists.

I felt lucky to find this place. Down town is infested with yuppy sandwich and coffee shops - places I'd like to avoid. Salida is a real outdoor recreation center, even the taxis have bike carriers and rooftop gear box. There was a 5:1 ratio of boots to flip flops.

Chill, rest, soak up the atmosphere, and head north to Leadville, Vail, Steamboat Springs tomorrow - another short day. But, there are limited opportunities to stop, so it's a little too short, or way too far, or way out-of-the-way.



Monday, June 10, 5:30am - 11:00am

187 miles : Salida CO - Leadville - Vail - Steamboat Springs

It was cool, at first light as I rode out of Salida (7000'). Climbing up to Leadville it got COLD. I was expecting it to warm up, as usual. With 20 miles left to go into Leadville, my hands hurt so much that I had to stop and change the wool glove liners for my water proof winter gloves. The sign coming into Leadville said it was 40 deg, at 10,100'. That explained it. But the scooter just purred right up.

I put on my down hoodie, under my Goretex jacket, with the hood up, inside my helmet. Ahhh. Much better.

It was only 30 miles into Vail, all down. I was able to stay off of the brakes, just rode the twisties. Vail runs about 20 miles along the canyon, up-scale strip malls and condos. But the road was fine, not interstate, no problems.

When I turned onto CO131 north 80 miles to Steamboat Springs, there were bicyclists, a steady stream, 1500+, I found out. It's the second day of Tour of the Rockies - a 6 day on-road circle thru all the best climbs and scenery. It was fun to ride with them.

But! There were also a bunch of Personal Support Vehicles who didn't know how to provide support without clogging up the roads. Often the locals (and I) were backed up 10 or more deep. I sure hope this goes well and they don't cause any accidents.

I even saw a tour ambulance and 6 CO highway motorcycle police.

I got into town and went straight to the motorcycle shop near my motel. It is mostly an ATV shop with some dirt bikes and a few scooters, run out of the owner's super garage/barn/Butler building. It is a two man operation, the owner and a mechanic apprentice.

He looked at my tires - the front is fine, but the rear needs to be replaced soon. He found the right tire in Idaho, and had it air lifted in to be installed tomorrow pm. I was way more confident in his advice and skills when a CO Department of Natural Resources truck pulled up with a bike for him to work on.

I had to wait 1 1/2 hr to get into my motel. So I found a patio pizza and brewery, sat on the deck over the river, ate, drank, answered emails, and chatted with the tourists and locals.

I'm here for two days, today and a rest day. That's ok. My Air Hawk seat cushion needs to be repaired, I'm going to ship all my camping and wilderness emergency stuff home, wash clothes, and maybe sit on that deck again.

When my new tire is on (tomorrow by now, I'm told) then I can say again, "All's well".



I actually slept in until 6:30am - two hours longer than any other day so far. I walked down to a cafe and had a slow breakfast. Then, back in my room, I sorted my gear, cutting out all of the camping and food. When I repacked for the bike, I had about half of what I brought. I won't need to hang a pannier now. Everything now fits nicely behind me on my seat. Then, I took the excess gear to UPS.

After leaving Steamboat Springs, I wanted to go north, at least to Casper WY, maybe to MT, before turning east. But there is a big fire right across the only real road going that way.

So, I spent an hour figuring out a good, back road route, with motels, due east. It'll get me home Saturday evening, probably. Stay tuned.

I also washed my clothes, again. Then the bike shop called to say my tire was here. They could install it at 1pm.

Everything is renewed, ready. So, I got a pizza and a beer, most left over for supper.



Wednesday, June 13

300 miles: 515am-300pm

Steamboat Springs to Holyoke's, CO

35 deg to 95 deg

Sunny all day

I left at first light, down hoodie and winter gloves on, and headed East and up on US 40 to Rabbit Ears Pass. Then East in CO 14 for 150 miles (total) of the best mountain riding I've ever seen. No traffic, a climb up to Cameron Pass, then tight, narrow twisties down and down and down, maybe a 5000' drop often with sheer granite walls just beside the road and the creek. Eventually, suddenly, it opened up, and I was out of the mountains.

The bike and new tire were fine. I was so cold that I hurt.

But if you ever get the chance to do this ride, DO IT.

The ride around Fort Collins was unremarkable, city traffic and construction zones, but warming up.

Then it was east out onto the prairie, open - major side wind and some traffic - with temps rising.

The second half of the day (150 miles) across the prairie, had a rhythm - on leaving a little town, look far down the road, there's a silo - ride thru the increasing temps and heavy side wind 10-15 miles to the silo - it's the next town. Find a shady spot, pause, stand up, stretch, drink, repeat to the next town.

I'm in Holyoke, on the eastern edge of CO. Tomorrow, I expect to be a repeat of the prairie ride of today, for 300 miles to Beatrice NE. Getting out early should get me in before it gets toooo hot.



Thursday, June 14, 2018

Holyoke, CO to Beatrice NE

352 miles: 5:30am MDT to 3:00 CDT

Sunny all day, major wind from S all afternoon. 98 deg when I arrived

Two lane, no traffic, all day.

Back into the Big 10 (Big 13??)

The first half was an easy ride, with no traffic, gentle climbs, and simple navigation. But about noon, I was forced onto a detour. When I rejoined the route, I must have missed a turn. For an hour I rode on while the previous road I was still on slowly diverged from the correct road. At my next gas stop, I checked with Google maps, and found the error.

So I had to drop due south to fix the error. That ended up adding ~ 50 miles, 1 hour. I was getting pooped when I made it to the motel.

Two more days. Tomorrow is nearly all US 36, 4 lane divided all the way across MO.

No photos today.

Friday June 15, 2018

308 miles, 5:45am - 1:00pm

Beatrice, NE to Monroe City, MO

The whole goal was to get to east MO as quickly as practical, to avoid the 100+ deg heat index. Navigation was trivial, S on 77 to 36 then E all day. US36 became two lane limited access, which turned into 4 lane limited access as soon as I entered MO, i.e. Interstate-ish.

I rode 55-60 mph for 25 miles, pulled over with the engine on, drank, stretched, rode on to a stop for gas at about 50 miles - all day.

There were no problems with traffic, it was light, the sight lines were long, and everyone was courteous.

The engine was running a little rough, and was almost 1 cup of oil low at the end of the day. My PCX deserves some special mechanic attention when I get home.

Tomorrow I'll be on 2 lane (I think) roads, US24, etc, and plan to run 50 mph. Home early afternoon.

As I rode east, the open skies filled in with more and more trees.



Back safely home.

Saturday June 16, 2018

Monroe City, MO to West Lafayette, IN

305 miles, 5:15am (CDT) - 1:45pm(EDT)

There was a heat advisory - 90+ deg temp and high humidity. So, as usual, I was out at first light, and rode steadily.

The views were pretty common for the mid-west; beans and corn, gentle rolling hills. The road was mostly 2 lane, with a wide variety of surface quality - smooth and fast to broken and slow.

Navigation was straight forward, though there was one closed road to get around.

The temps rose very quickly. In eastern IL, I even had a flash of light-headedness, grey out. Crap!

Focus focus focus.

It was great/a relief to make it home. Gears all put away. The bike gets some attention tomorrow.

If I get organized, tomorrow I'll post "Lessons learned."

Lesson Learned

After a day of cleaning and sorting and storing my gear, armor, et al, and a day of the few honey-do's that were waiting for me, and afternoon naps, and early to bed, late to rise, AND two BICYCLE rides, the emotions of the tour are STARTING to fall into place, maybe. For now, here are my take-aways.

1. I can still tour and do enjoy it.
2. 7-8 hours of riding each day is PLENTY.
3. I really enjoyed the air conditioned motels at the end of each day's ride, and a café/bar. I wonder if I've lost my taste for camping.
4. On-road, the Honda PCX 150 did what I asked. 50-55 mph was at the top of her comfort zone. She would run at 60+, but the throttle was pinned, and she was down a cup of oil when I asked her to do that all day. The mountain climbs brought us down to 30-40 mph. But she never felt like she was straining. She ran as well at 10,000' as at 1000'. The fuel injection and electronic control module did their job just fine. I loved her agility, light weight, and reliability.
5. Although the PCX can handle Indiana dirt and climbs, the NM dirt roads I tried were mostly soft sand. I came very close to being stuck in a DRIVEWAY in Abiquiu. So, skipping the Great Divide Mountain Biking Route was a necessary, good decision – again. I really DID like the PCX's weight, agility, and the fact that I could flat foot her, and even paddle with my feet to keep me moving and up-right the one time things got dicey.
6. I was satisfied to close out the tour when I found that the direct route north to WY and MT was cut by a forest fire. Maybe I would have been happy with another week or two of touring, with a rest day each week. But I was getting tired of the motel life and a little lonely (Me? Lonely? Who would have ever thought it?)

What about the way forward? Based on what I just did/saw/felt, here are my thoughts.

1. Keep riding my Tour Easy bicycle every day. Build the daily distance up to ~25 miles and add a Saturday day-long ride (50-75 miles). Ride the Wabash River Century in August.
2. Ride my scooter down to Terra Haute, then shadow the bicycle Ride Across Indiana (July 17) to Richmond. Spend that Saturday night in a motel there and then ride diagonally across the state on Sunday. If you might be interested in joining me, let's talk.
3. Once the weather breaks, mid-Sept through late Oct, take a couple of scooter-camping trips: Friday after work, 60-100 miles to a state park: CAMP: Saturday 200-300 miles across the state to another state park: CAMP: Sunday 200 miles home. After doing this two or three times, I'll know if my gear and my heart are ready to camp.
4. If I still enjoy camping, then buy a ROKON Ranger. <https://www.rokon.com/>



The Ranger is street legal, 215 lb, can be flat footed and paddled, can do 30 mph on-road (like my old 50 cc Ruckus) and is a hell of a mountain goat. Follow the link and watch the videos. I'll have to order it and it'll take 3-5 weeks to arrive. But that's fine. It's great on snow too, so I can ride it all winter, getting to know it.

5. Find a way to HAUL it out to El Paso next May. If you are a jeep driver, and want to spend a week or two with me going up the Great Divide, let's talk. I'll cover your costs. If there are no takers, I can rent a van or a car and UHaul trailer.
6. I'm not going to ask the PCX to do another long on-road tour. It's just too much for her. She'll give me her all, but sooner or later (probably on some remote road), I'll kill her. Instead, I need a motorcycle that is designed for long distance, high-mileage, touring. My Honda CB500X would have worked, as will anything bigger and more comfortable than that. The Gold Wing, Harley, BMW all come to mind. But they are HEAVY, hard to move around, easy to drop and hard to pick up, and will crash when I lose balance at 70 mph for even a part of a second. (That's why I like the PCX.) Enter the Can-Am Spyder.



https://can-am.brp.com/spyder/?redirect=false&gclid=EAIaIQobChMI7Pi4zbf2wIVDLjACh2X0QI4EAAYASAAEgKqhPD_BwE

Right now it seems perfect. But, ...

7. I'll talk with the local Can-Am dealer, try a test ride. Then, see if I can find someone (in Chicago?) to rent one for a week-end. If that all works, after I've done enough dirt touring on the Rokon, I'll begin the negotiations at home about ANOTHER motorcycle (not to mention the \$).

Life's an adventure. There's ALWAYS a path forward, but, often not the one I had planned. That's when things really get interesting.