

The Eagle Times

Colorado FreeWheelers

May, 2005

NEXT MEETING
Thursday, May 19, 2005
Fay Myers Motorcycle World
7:00 pm

<http://www.msnusers.com/RHNWebPages/cfwhomepage.msnw>

Thumper's Corner

President, Pat McCombs

Some times I have been accused of living in the past to much.

Although I am not convinced that is a bad thing, I believe I have a good balance of both the past and the current times we live in. For those of you who know me well, YES, I am a flag waving, God & Country type of person. I am very proud to say that I love my country, and everything it stands for. With that said, I am wondering what a lot of folks are thinking about in this country today. You listen to folks talking in groups, and in their minds, that there is really a war going on outside the country in Iraq. Then you have the folks, who did not vote for the president, that think it is the in thing to show lots of disrespect for the Commander & Chief of the United States of America.

People today like to put the all the blame on either the Republicans or the Democrats for all of our problems in the United States today. I was amazed by a number of people I know, who did not even take the time to vote in the last Presidential election. How can you have a voice in your country, if you don't even make the effort to review the issues facing our county today, and then voting on those issues and people running

for the various offices. So many good American's have died to protect our right to vote, and a lot of folks discard it like yesterday's newspaper and trash. When someone tells me they did not take the time to vote, Yes, I get mad as hell.

I think, this may be one of the big reasons that I have always been drawn to the motorcycling community. They take a lot of pride in showing their support of the country they love and live in. They are great supporters of our troops who are stationed all over the world. They remember World War II and the disgrace we show our veterans who came home from their fighting in Viet Nam. They stand with great pride and support of whoever is their Commander & Chief. They fly their American flags on their bikes like it's a badge of honor. Most bikers I know, if you look at their riding apparel have some place on their jacket, vest, or on the bike an American flag showing. They take great pride in the country they love and honor.

I was on a ride some months ago with two friends Willy Taylor & Leah Kelley, and we had ridden down to see the Moving Viet Nam War Memorial in Castle Rock Colorado. I have never been so moved in my life, as I was on

that day, to see grown men & women on their knees with tears flowing from their eyes. If a person did not believe in God - Country - Flag, this would have been a great wake up call for them.

Writing this, made me revisit my motorcycling files that I have kept for the last forty years in my home. I pulled an old *Colorado Rider*, which was the publication put out by the Colorado Association of Motorcyclists each month for about ten years. Don "Spider" Council who was a staff member of this group, and a very good writer, had written an article for the February/March, 1991 issue of the *Colorado Rider*. This was a special "War Issue." Don, rest his soul, was as American as they come. He wore his feelings for his country in plain sight for everyone to see every day of his life. In January of 1991, on a very chilly twenty-nine degree day, twenty-seven hundred Colorado motorcyclists took a ride down Broadway to show their support of our troops and country. The article that follows was written by my friend Don and recalls that cold January morning. Don was a very good journalist, and if he was with us today, there would not be enough ink for him to use.

Tears

Don "Spider" Council - reprinted from Colorado Rider, February/March, 1991

I cried on Sunday. Last Wednesday, I got a call from my friend Thumper. "Spider-man, I'm going to ride from E470 and Broadway down to the Capitol in support of the troops. Ya wanta come?" My response was, of course an immediate, "Absolutely, Thump!" So on Sunday, my wife and I went on a ride with many other Colorado motorcyclists in support

of United States troops who face an insane despot in the Middle East. We rode in our car because my wife was sick, and because I worked too late on Saturday to pick up my bike from Lakewood Honda.

Generations of my family have fought in wars for the United States going back to WW-I. My grandfather, "Papa-Tom," was at his

angriest when he would see anti-war protesters on the TV. I can hear him now - "If them bastards want to spit on Ol' Glory, let 'em spit on it over in that damn Ve-it Naytum where they belong!"

I am a Viet Nam vet, and although I don't have any purple hearts, silver stars, etc., I

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Tears, *continued*

know the feeling of losing people who counted in that war. My father was one of the first to die over there. (The flag my mother got after his funeral rests on the wall of my office) my cousin, who was drafted the same time I received my notice, managed to come only slightly wounded physically, but so gravely wounded psychologically that he took his own life shortly after returning. Three high school friends came back wrapped in plastic.

My dad, a navy "Lifer" told me that when he was young, the best way to get a ride while hitch-hiking was to wear your uniform. But, I remember what it was like when I got home those many years ago. People, young and old, being shown spitting on the flag by the extremely liberal media; being derided as a "baby killer" on a bus to my home town by a pretty young hippie just because I was wearing my dress blues; being told I wasn't welcome in a student center at college because I wore my campaign ribbon on my hat.

I remember a conversation with an admitted "draft-dodger" who hatefully stated that all the troops who fought and killed in southeast Asia should die over there themselves. (*I went to jail for assault over that one*) I remember my best friend's wife hugging the flag that draped a grunt top-sergeant's casket to her heart - her father. (*She later appeared on TV in Memphis in support of the men and women fighting in Viet Nam*)

Papa-Tom, I wish you could have been with me on Sunday. Carol & I left early because I couldn't hold back the tears. I don't cry much you see, and generally feel like a damn fool when I do. The lump in Thumper's throat was visible when he thanked everyone for coming - his voice noticeably cracking a number of times. It was too much for me.

There are at least two types of patriots today - the missiles which knock scud rockets out of the sky, and my brother and sister motorcyclists of Colorado. All you folks who were there, thanks. Finally I witnessed a gathering of people talking about war where I didn't want to attack, but to hug the participants instead. None of you noticed it, but you all got a hug from my heart anyway. Thumper, you're the best!!!

God Bless America - Bring the troops home safe - just as soon as the job gets done right!

Spider

I had a very hard time retyping the above article by my late friend, and about being the best. I am not sure about that part. It brought back some very strong memories of that cold January day. That same day, there were motorcycle war rallies held across the country. It was not a planned thing, but it just seemed to come together at one time across this great land of ours. I do know that the tears flowed from my eyes all the way to the Colorado State Capitol that day, and I was very proud to show the world how proud I was to be an American.

Is it time for another ride down Broadway? I'm not sure, but I do know, that a lot of folks in this great country of ours need a wake up call.

Thumper

Upcoming Rides

Twin Springs Ride

Sunday, May 21

Ride Leader: Frank Heinzel, 303-295-7137
Leave from: Fay Myers @ 8:00 am.

A ride to Pike's Peak Country. There are many attractions in and around Colorado Springs. You will be on your own most of the day to do as you wish.

May Dinner Ride

May 26

Ride Leaders: Bill & Becky Gillespie, 303-781-0032
Leave from: Fay Myers @ 6:30 pm.

A short ride for dinner on a Thursday night.

Canyonlands Ride

May 27-30

Ride Leaders: Bill & Becky Gillespie, 303-781-0032
Leave from: Village Inn (C470 & Broadway) @ 8:00am.

The pre-booked rooms are all gone now, but they still may have some openings. Call the numbers in the ride book and see. If they are booked, ask for a recommendation of another motel.

Steak Fry

June 4

Ride Leaders: Bob Norton, 303-973-9222
Leave from: Fay Myers @ 9:00 am.

A short ride followed by a cookout at Clement Park in Littleton.

RMVTA Visit Ride

June 9

Ride Leaders: Pat McCombs, 303-971-0568
Leave from: Village Inn (C470 & Broadway) @ 7:00pm.

Meet for dinner at 5:30 if you choose. We'll leave at 7pm and ride to Fay Myers for the RMVTA meeting that night.

Haunted Hotel Tour

June 12

Ride Leaders: Alan Hansher/Frank Heinzel, 303-295-7137
Leave from: Fay Myers @ 7:00 am.

A visit to four 'haunted' hotels in Fairplay, leadville, and Blackhawk.

Bonfils Group

A donation group has been set up in the club's name at Bonfils Blood Center. Those wishing to donate blood may designate the **Colorado FreeWheelers** as the group to credit.

Update on Sister

Editor's Note: As most of you know, Young Willingham's sister, Gloria was involved in a motorcycle accident last year. She was thrown into the Cache la Poudre. Rescue workers and search crews were unable to locate her in the days that followed. The following was received from Young on or about April 2, 2005.

It is with great relief, that I can advise you that the body of my sister, Gloria Nelson was recovered from the Poudre River this weekend.

I wish to thank the Colorado Freewheelers members for their prayers and ask them to keep up the good work for Paul.

Peace of the Lord to you and yours.

Sincerely, Young

Classifieds

1999 Gold Wing-SE with aprox. 50k miles, new alternator, floorboards, highway pegs, highway lights, 6 disc CD changer and receiver hitch. \$10,000 includes a color-matched Escapade cargo trailer. Contact Rhonda Becker, 303-877-0347.

For Sale- 2000 Royal Enfield / Bullet 500 / Military Model, 2,080 miles, kick only, extra chrome, custom rear swing arm, 13" apes, dropped 2", piped & jetted, Bee-hive taillight, tool bag, solo seat, new chain, extended cables. One of a kind!! Perfect shape-Runs GREAT—NO joy rides \$4,000. o.b.o., Jason 303-929-1822 or 303-504-6369



Southwest Tour

by Bruce Waters

Bruce had spent some time in and around Tucson, Arizona and was now having a high time of it getting through El Paso. It was then he realized that the vast expanse of west Texas has few roads, thus few options of how to get to Big Bend National Park. Thus, he was forced to spend a couple of hours or so on I-10. As we left Bruce last time he was now riding south from the west Texas town of Van Horn trying to make the 74 miles to Marfa by sundown.

I figured Marfa was big enough to have a motel. I was partially right. Seeing not a shred of neon, I rode to all four edges of town looking for some sign of a motel but all I saw was a sign for the Hotel Paisano whatever that was.

It turned out to be something pretty neat. Back in the late 1920's some investors had built a fancy hotel in Marfa in anticipation of an oil boom that never came. It was nice enough that the cast and crew filming the movie *Giant* with James Dean and Elizabeth Taylor used it as their headquarters. It's now on the National Register of Historic Places. And just a bit more pricey than your standard Motel 6! I paid more for a steak dinner in the hotel restaurant than I did for my night's stay in El Paso. There was no phone or TV in the room, but a lot of rather upscale period stuff like a shorter than normal, but deep bathtub with a truly comfortable backrest in the bathroom. Man, but am I going to have a soak tonight!

45,807

-45,592

215 miles today (a short day)

Tuesday, November 23, 2004

Best night's sleep of the trip! But then it should be - it cost me double what I would usually pay. It's nice to be able to do things like that for myself occasionally without having to worry about how I'm going to pay for it.

The restaurant doesn't serve breakfast. Hmmmm. A maid mentions a place called Mike's and Carmen's Cafe. I'd seen Carmen's last night while looking for a motel, but I believe Mike's was abducted by aliens. I must have walked or ridden past it several times and still never saw it.

Anyway, I ended up at Carmen's Cafe just as another rider was getting off a new Honda ST1300. He looked like a friendly sort, and when he invited me to join him, I did. His name was Vince and he was the second Moto Guzzi owner I'd met on this trip! He was a local guy, a math teacher at the high school in Presidio. He offered several helpful suggestions about the roads and attrac-

tions in the area. He was headed up to Ft. Davis to ride around in the Davis Mountains and I was headed to Big Bend, so we parted when breakfast, a good but small chorizo and egg burrito with excellent sauce, was over.

Heading south out of Marfa toward Presidio, I've got a bit of wind out of the southwest to contend with. Nothing that cranking a few more electrons through the electric vest and the handgrips won't cure. Man, but am I getting soft in my old



Along El Camino del Rio with the Rio Grande and Mexico in the background.

age! By the time I reach Presidio, I'm more thankful of my helmet for its dust deflection capabilities than any other feature. The wind is blowing a gale and the omnipresent dust is going along for the ride.

And I have to fill up my tank and lube my chain in this!

All I can say about the fill up is I'm glad I have a fuel filter on this bike. I was able to pull around into the lee of the building to do the chain, but there was still a good bit of wind. Lost most of the dust though.

El Camino del Rio, also known as Texas Farm Road 170, from Presidio to Study Butte (*pronounced Stooddy*) is a hoot, and I saw almost as many motorcycles on it as cars. In November! It's what I call a roller coaster road - lots of sharp little ups and downs as it crosses little washes and arroyos joining with the Rio Grande. And the river is right there, and that's Mexico



A flood gauge along El Camino del Rio.



just on the other side, closer than my nearest neighbor at home. Several of these dips had a trickle of water running in them, indicative of the recent rains, which I have yet to have to ride in. Am I going to have to pay for this eventually?

Vince had told me three things about this road. One, that it was a great motorcycle road; two, to watch out for the tar that they had sprayed on the road in a construction zone just before Terlingua; and three, about Clay Henry III, the mayor of Lajitas.

Now, Clay Henry III is no ordinary mayor. First off he's a drunk. So? you say. Second, he's in a cage. (Right where most mayors should be...) And third, he's a goat. The beer drinking goat of Lajitas, Texas. He's owned by the manager of the Lajitas Trading Post, which has been here since the first white man wandered into the area or some such, and mostly he was just a sort of oddball tourist attraction, until enough people wrote him in on the ballot to elect him mayor. And like most politicians, once he's in office, you can't budge him with dynamite.

Vince told me some of this, but I discovered most of it when the manager came out and talked with me while I ate my sandwich on the porch (out of the wind.) Apparently, they charge a poll tax to vote for mayor and they use the money thusly raised for local projects. Right now, they're building a cafeteria for the school in Terlingua. This fellow said that Clay Henry III has been responsible for raising around \$30,000 for the good of the local community. How many other mayors could do as well?

As I was finishing up my lunch (a huge sandwich for a small price), I wandered over to chat with Hizzonner. There were actually two goats in the pen.

The other one must have been his secretary or intern or something. He didn't have much to say. Both of them were OK with the last corner of my sandwich, but the mayor took a distinct interest in my Gatorade. No, I didn't buy him a beer.

It was at the Lajitas Trading Post that I was seriously humbled about my traveling abilities. I was checking out an old cart or wagon that was on the porch of the trading post when a man and a woman rode up on mountain bikes all fitted out with panniers and camping gear, etc. They went inside to get lunch and when I finished my inspection of the cart, I began looking at their bikes. I was still doing this when the man came out, and I made some remark about how I had it easy compared to him. We talked for a bit, he in a thick European accent. It turned out that he and the woman had made three trips the full length of the North and South American continents over the past two years. They were heading to Mexico City to end their American tour and fly back to Germany. I was impressed, told them so, and came away from the encounter humbled about my touring abilities on my motorcycle, and reenergized that yes, some day I would do that kind of trip!

So refreshed in body and spirit, I hopped back on my bike and continued my eastward trek toward Big Bend. I was almost there.

Only \$5 for motorcyclists to get into the park. It'll cost you \$15 for four wheels. And many of the park roads are

nice motorcycling roads. I rode down to Rio Grande Village where the campground host put me in a nice semi-secluded spot. Set up the tent, wrote in this diary, and went to bed right about dark - 7:00 or so.

I knew going to bed that early, I'd have a bit of trouble sleeping, so I didn't worry about it. I had 12 hours or so ahead of me before it was light enough to see again, but I didn't have a lantern and I didn't want to just sit around in my "Stich" for a few hours. The moon was bright, just a day or so short of being full, but still not light enough to read or write by. There was a good bit of light and noise from the rest of the campground until later in the evening.

A couple of times when I woke up, the moon was bright overhead and right near Orion. When I woke up the last time right before dawn, it had set, so I knew dawn couldn't be more than a couple of hours away. I probably should have got up then and started packing, but I toughed it out and stayed in the sack.

45,994

45,807

187 miles (another short day)

Wednesday, November 24, 2004

The day before Thanksgiving. I'm supposed to be in Houston tonight. Not gonna happen. The last time I wake up there's a glow on the eastern horizon. Let's get moving! As I'm adjusting my chain, a dog walker asks me about my bike. He had an R-100 once. We chat for a bit. I load it up, fire it up and head for points east. But first I go into the Chisos

Basin. The Basin is the interior of an extinct volcano, which blew its top a few tens of thousands of years ago. There's a fine motorcycle road leading up and over the rim and down into this thing. It's the centerpiece of the park and the reason the river makes its huge bend. There's a lodge and a campground (full, of course) but for me, the major attraction is the road in and out. I enjoy it going out too.

I fill up at Panther Junction, since it's a loooooong way to the next gas. Then I head up US-385 toward Marathon. I'm tooling along when I see an awful lot of orange. Signs warning me to stop for Border Patrol inspection. OK, I understand. The experience left me with an even worse opinion of my government's efforts to 'protect me' than I'd had before, which was pretty near zero anyway. I was literally given the third degree by a very large uniformed human with a heavy Mexican accent. Questions about whether I'd been to Mexico, was I carrying guns or drugs or bombs, etc., etc. It got so ridiculous that I came 'that close' to saying in my best fake Mexican accent "Si, senior, I just got back from Mexico where I bought guns and drugs and bombs to overthrow the government of the United States!" But knowing that people like my large inquisitor are not programmed with either a sense of humor or the ability to take any grief, I held my tongue.

He did let me go without the full strip search, but for a while I was beginning to wonder. I now feel totally safe from terrorists knowing my tax money is being spent to give those rascally motorcyclists the third degree out in the middle of the desert.

There's not much in the way of breakfast in Marathon, but I buy a fried pie at a little bakery which suffices to hold me while I start east on US-90.

I figure I can make Dryden, 20 miles east of Sanderson, before I need gas, but at the last minute I turn around and get gas in Sanderson. Maybe it was the sign that advised, "Next services 121 miles" that had something to do with it.

Sure enough, Dryden was a ghost town, or nearly so, and Langtry wasn't much better. I ran into another Border Patrol checkpoint along in here, but they let me go with minimal questioning.

Along in here, I began spotting remnants of old US-90 off to my left. It mostly seemed to follow the railroad track. I'd spot bridges over some of the creeks and rivers and pavement in a few places. Looks like it might make a passable dual sport ride if you could get permission from the current owner - TXDot?



Boquillas del Carmen mountains, Mexico, the stunning backdrop to Big Bend National Park.

There was an interesting bridge over Devil's River where it's been dammed to form Amistead Int'l Reservoir. I ate a late lunch at a Luby's in Del Rio, which is actually quite a sizable little place, then continued onward. I was planning to take off at Brackettville and try a few Hill Country motorcycling roads, so I filled up again there. But that idea was quashed when there was a big "Road Closed 18 Miles Ahead" sign right outside of town. *Unprintable words here!* I had to go at least as far as Uvalde before I could turn off and there goes my only chance at camping across the road from the motorcycle museum. I'll bet it's related to flooding. As I turned around and rode on east toward Uvalde, I noticed that it was getting late and knew that I would run out of daylight soon, so I just pressed on toward San Antonio. I ended up at a little family run motel in Sabinal right between the railroad tracks and the highway. Can I pick 'em or what?

46,384

45,994

390 miles (a decent day's ride)

Thursday, November 25, 2004 - Thanksgiving Day

I don't know if it was the rooster farm across the tracks, the westbound freight train, or the highway traffic that actually woke me, but they were all going full blast by the time I came up out of the fog and realized I was awake. It was still dark, though. A peek outside revealed Venus shining brightly just over the roof of the building next door. I checked my watch. I'd had a good 7-plus hours of sleep. It was close enough to sunrise that by the time I got everything packed and loaded and ready to go, I'd be able to see. I got dressed.

There was a nice glow in the eastern sky as I accelerated out of the motel parking lot and headed into the light toward San Antonio.

I started looking for a place to get some breakfast and soon spotted Sammie's which had a bunch of pickup trucks parked out front. They had huge pancakes - a short stack filled me up thoroughly. I thanked the waitress for working on Thanksgiving Day in a way most any waitress could understand.

Once I took care of those necessities, it was mostly just a morning of grinding out miles on the interstate. Except for a very full river at Columbus (the Colorado, I think) and obvious evidence of flooding at several other crossings (Guadalupe, San Bernard, and Brazos) it was a fairly uneventful ride.

Checking the map, it looked like SH-6 and FM-1960 around the northwest side of Houston should get me where I wanted to go without too much traffic and congestion, but it was not to be. FM used to stand for Farm to Market. Now it stands for First to the Mall. Twenty miles of strip malls. How could you buy all that stuff?

Anyway, I survived and pulled into my sister's with my usual outstanding timing. I had just enough time to get out of my riding gear and clean up a bit before sitting down to Thanksgiving dinner with the family.

It was delicious, of course, and everybody was glad to see me. Soon, my niece Stephanie's boyfriend Wes showed up on a Honda 600 RR. Beautiful bike; just about due for a rear tire.

46,668

46,384

284 miles

But the day wasn't over. After Thanksgiving dinner, my brother Brian drove Mother, Daddy and me down to their home, then he took his truck on further to his house. I spent the night with Mother and Daddy. Unlike most times, they cooled the house off, and I slept great.

Friday, November 26, 2004

Even with the late night, I woke fairly early, but the sun was already up. Good breakfast and conversation with the parents, then I borrowed Daddy's truck and drove down to Brian's to visit with him. He's considering moving somewhere else and might come up to Colorado to visit and check it out. We discussed options and places he might be interested in.

We were supposed to meet Mother and Daddy at a restaurant just up the road at 12:30 for lunch, but we ran a little late. It was good, though. I got crawfish etouffe at least once on this trip!

So then, back to Mother and Daddy's for more conversation, then just about 4:30, Sarah showed up and took me back up to her house. I'd spend the night there and leave for home in the morning. I like the ride of her Honda Pilot, but it's definitely a full-sized vehicle.

We watched some football, talked and grazed on Thanksgiving leftovers, then I packed what I could and hit the hay. Zero miles today.

Saturday, November 27, 2004

Beautiful clear blue sky when I woke. Sarah's other daughter, my niece Rebecca, had arrived in the night and came down to join Sarah and me at

breakfast. I hadn't seen her in years. She's studying nursing in San Antonio. We had a medical conversation to go with our breakfast, but I managed to keep everything down.

Steve, Sarah's husband, also put in an appearance just before I left, but Jennifer and Stephanie slept in. The bike would have probably run better had I remembered to turn on the gas, but I limped away from the house on what was left in the carburetor float bowls.

Once I remembered how to ride a motorcycle again, the morning went smoothly, although I had to stop for gas almost immediately. The wind also became a factor, and pretty soon I was fighting one coming off my starboard bow that I'd estimate in the 25-35 mph range. It was also gusty and there were trees and hedges as well as open areas, so that I was fighting a constantly changing opponent.

Apparently, 70 mph into the teeth of this thing wasn't enough for one guy who passed from two cars back and needed about half my lane to complete his pass to avoid a head-on crash with an oncoming car. He earned the first ever mono-digital salute I'd given any driver so far on this trip. We were both lucky. I had my hands full keeping my bike in one lane against that gusting wind, and I was just lucky to be over in the right hand wheel track at the time he was using the left. And of course I caught him shortly without speeding up when he came upon the tail end of the queue I'd noticed ahead before he even passed me. I talked with some other riders at a gas stop. They were having trouble with the wind too.

I stopped just west of Waco, still on SH-6 for some barbecue, then onward into the gale. Still beautiful weather except for the wind. This is right in the area of Crawford, TX. not that that means anything, but this is where I saw the cheapest gasoline of the trip. Less than \$2.00 per gallon for premium. What a shame I'd already filled up.

About Iredale, flashing yellow lights and a guy with a red flag waved us all over and we sat for a while trying to figure out what was happening. No police that I could see, only the flashing yellows on some "oversize load" escorts. Enough of this. Back to Iredale, a road that didn't show on my map, FR-216. Narrow, curved, paved - fun, but slow. But going in approximately the right direction. Eventually it degenerated into gravel with potholes, but spit me out onto SH-220 which I took south to Hico and at that point, back onto SH-6.

I crossed over I-20 at Eastland just

before sunset, and stopped for the night at a Budget Host where I met a fellow motorcyclist from Aspen Highlands, in Colorado. I lubed and adjusted my chain. That thing is seriously worn, and I still have hundreds of miles to go before I'm home. Maybe I should have changed chain and sprockets before this trip. Had salty chicken marsala at a newly opened Italian restaurant across the highway from the motel.

47,012

46,668

344 windy miles today

Sunday, November 28, 2004

I awoke on my own at 5:15. The Weather Channel had advised that today would be my worst day of the trip back. I should expect rain and cold. Let's see, should I get up and check the situation, or lie here and stay warm for a while longer? I expect to be able to eat breakfast close, and I can ride that far in the dark. Somebody starts a diesel, and it no longer makes sense to lie in the bed and doze.

Forecast for this morning suggests a little wind in a line from Abilene to Wichita Falls, and snow beginning about the Colorado state line, but basically a decent day to ride. Better than I'd gone to bed with.

Seein' as how it's Sunday, I'm concerned about finding food and gas in some of these small towns. So I begin my day, still before dawn, with a full complement of dead dinosaurs from the ubiquitous Exxon across the street. Sure enough, the only restaurant open at this exit is a McDonald's. I haven't sunk that far, nor was I that hungry.

Nothing open in Eastland proper in the way of cafes or restaurants but right before the edge of town was an Allsup's convenience store, another omnipresent feature of small Texas towns. I got a roll of some sort and a carton of milk, and stared talking with the lady behind the counter. Turned out we had gone to the same junior high school. We didn't know each other, but it's a small world nonetheless.

Just as I was leaving town, I noticed that I had failed to plug in. I pulled off on a short curved piece of the old roadway where they had straightened the curve out for the new part, but left this short piece of old road in place. It was made out of brick! I'd seen brick streets in towns before, but this was the first highway I'd seen made out of the material.

I wasn't yet into high gear pulling away from this stop before the wind nailed me, and it never once let up all day long. I was fighting to stay in a wheel

track, but in general having no trouble keeping it in my lane. And as rural as this area was, there wasn't much traffic to cause me any problems if I failed.

I rode for what seemed like a long time, and decided to stop and see if I was anywhere near US-287. I stopped and pulled out my map and was astonished to see how little territory I had actually crossed. Well, I knew this wasn't going to be easy. Somewhere along in here, I saw my first and only dead armadillo of the trip, usually a staple of the roadkill in Texas. Must be the late season. I also saw two live coyotes and numerous dead deer.

I kept riding, working my way north and west. West Texas and the Panhandle is just not a very great place to ride a motorcycle as far as I'm concerned, and it being cold, very windy and overcast didn't help my mood much. I kept telling myself that however miserable it was now, it would get a lot more miserable once the rain started, so I'd better make as much time as I could while I had dry roads.

My goal for today was to make Amarillo by noon. I didn't quite make it, but I did get there around 1:00 P.M., surprising after my slow start. I lubed and adjusted my chain (Pleeeeze just give me another 500 miles or so!) fed myself, gassed up and was ready to go in about an hour.

By now, it was cold enough that I had all my cold weather stuff on, including an extra pair of socks and my fleece bottoms. Still dry, although the wind had not let up one whit.

I crossed over into New Mexico while it was still light, but it started getting dark soon after I gassed up for the last time today in Clayton. I had decided on a route taking me west into New Mexico as far as Raton then over Raton Pass. I figured I didn't want to deal with one of Colorado's eastern plains blizzards, which was probably what was going on out there, and this way I could go as far as weather and my eyes would let me. I was in a line of cars, so I could see a bit more than just what my headlight illuminated and the pavement was still dry. Let's keep going.

I saw the first snowflakes flickering through the beam of my headlight about the same time I saw the lights for Raton. It was just a shower, though, so after stopping in Raton to make sure my taillight was still operating, (it was) I decided to press on over Raton pass, figuring it would be much worse tomorrow after the storm hit.

This was already my longest day of

the trip, surpassing even the second day when I rode from Pagosa Springs almost to Phoenix. It was also after dark, but I reasoned that however bad it was, it was only going to get worse once it started snowing. The more miles I put behind me on dry roads, the better. The folly in my calculations became apparent soon after cresting Raton Pass. The south approach to the pass, warmed by the sun all day, was still dry. The north side was another story.

The snow was thick and it was sticking to the road. Cars began slowing down, both lanes filled and soon, we were all doing about 30. There really wasn't any place for me to get out of this, so I just concentrated on keeping the rubber on the road and rode all 14 miles down to Trinidad. There was a motel at the first exit, and I took a room, the happiest I'd been to find one in a long time. Even if the Raiders did beat the Broncos that night.

47,591

47,012

579 miles (longest day of the trip)

Monday, November 29, 2004

Last night's ride down the north side of Raton Pass in the snow and slick roads was scary enough that I slept late. I was awakened by the backup alarm of a loader that was clearing the motel parking lot. Good curtains in this room - I thought it was still dark until I peeked out a corner of the window.

It was still snowing, although not heavily, and the parking lot did need scraping. What little traffic was on the interstate was still crawling. I wasn't going anywhere today. Firing up the Weather Channel confirmed that. Winter storm advisory for this whole area until tonight.

The first thing I did was go to the front desk and get my room for another night. Then I availed myself of their free 'toast bar.' The next thing I had to do was get the number for my dentist in Salida and cancel my appointment for tomorrow. I was not going to be in Salida by 10:00 A.M. Tuesday.

The plows continued to work on the interstate, and a fellow with an old Jeep continued to swipe at the motel parking lot for a while. The Weather Channel continued to show pictures of gridlock in Denver and dented cars elsewhere in the state. By late morning, my light breakfast had left me famished, so I bundled up and walked to the nearest restaurant. By the time I was finished and walking back, a good bit of melting had occurred. The sky still spit flakes from time to time, but with no more accumula-

tion.

I moved the bike into the sun once it appeared from behind the clouds. It didn't stay out, but played hide and seek and hopefully warmed the bike a degree or two. I also used this opportunity to once again adjust and lube the chain. This thing is totally worn out. Please just hold together for another 120 miles.

Basically, I just stayed in the room, read, worked on my diary and kept an eye on the Weather Channel. Hopefully tomorrow will be more conducive to riding. It's dark by 5:00, so I need to leave as soon as practical tomorrow. Check out is at 11:00, and I hope to be gone an hour earlier. Getting out of this parking lot may be the hardest part. That or the last mile and a half to my house. Zero miles again today, same motel room as last night.

Tuesday, November 30, 2004

I wasn't planning to go out bright and early this morning, so it was after 7:00 before I rolled out of bed. One of the first things I did was pull the bike out and stick it right in front of the heater for my room. I had noticed there was a bit of warm air coming out and I reasoned any at all might warm the engine a bit. Temperatures were in the single digits overnight in Trinidad according to the television. I finally got everything loaded and ready to go by about 9:45.

It took three tries at the starter before I managed to get a self-sustaining thump going. The parking lot was icy in spots and bare in others. I tried to aim for the bare spots. I got down the slope to the road without mishap, but the road wasn't plowed. Traffic had compacted it into hard pack complete with ruts. I was doing OK until I touched the rear brake to turn into the truck stop to get gas. The rear wheel locked and I went down instantly. Since I was going so slowly and slid once I was down, I wasn't hurt and the only damage to the bike was to the mechanism that holds the left bag onto the bike.

I was unloading everything so I could lift the bike up when several guys drove up in a CDOT maintenance truck. They ascertained that I was OK, then turned around and used the truck to shield me from the non-existent traffic. The road didn't appear to go any further than the motel, and I was the last one out that day.

I was just getting ready to lift when a State Trooper showed up. Now these people as a rule are prohibited from having a sense of humor, so I wasn't overjoyed at his appearance. However, he must have slipped by the anti-sense-of-

humor checkers, and once he figured out that I wasn't hurt, both he and the maintenance men helped me get the bike up and my stuff off the road and into the truck stop parking lot. Eventually, everybody left without me getting a ticket. I spent a little time fixing my saddlebag mount and reloading everything.

I cautiously rode over to the pumps discovering that not only hadn't CDOT left, they'd gained a snowplow while I was reloading. I filled the bike, then rode over to the nearest place I could see that looked like it was open, had decent food and was in the direction of the freeway on-ramp. All the streets in town were snow packed, so I didn't want to spend any more time on them than I had to.

I breakfasted on a Subway sandwich. A guy with a bunch of fellow workmen asked if he could sit with me. Turned out he had a Springer Softtail. Mostly he seemed to be trying to figure out whether I was totally insane or just a little dumber than average. Eventually, he left when the rest of his bunch did. I finished a chapter in my book and my breakfast and started north on I-25.

If not the worst wind on the trip, it was at least right up there with the stuff from Marfa to Big Bend. And about 20 degrees Fahrenheit or so, too! I had it all on, the vest cranked up almost all the way, and the handgrips on high. That kept me warm except for my toes.

The state patrolman had tried to talk me out of taking SH-69 home. He said that it was usually not as well plowed as US-50. I decided to at least check it out, so I got off at Walsenburg. He was right. The combination of huge icy patches and the strong wind turned me around before I'd gone five miles.

So, back to the interstate and ride on up to Pueblo. I stopped in Pueblo to eat lunch and warm up. Just west of Pueblo, the ground was bare - no snow. Cool! But by the time I reached Canon City, it was back.

I filled up in Canon City, then started on the final leg. US-50 continued to be clear. When I first moved into my new house, somebody told me Fremont County kept Copper Gulch Road clear better than the state kept US-50. They lied. It was a sheet of ice.

I got 14 or 15 of the 20 miles to my house under my belt before my front wheel caught in a rut, and I went down for the second time today. Hard.

I had just started unloading everything when I heard a car coming. I waved them down so that they wouldn't hit me, since I was just past a curve. They missed

me and stopped to help. I got everything up and out of the way, noting that I'd tweaked a left front turn signal and the bar-end weight on that side as well as twisting the mirror a bit. This wasn't going to work.

I slowly rode as far as a park-n-ride, about another mile. There, I parked and started walking. I was able to flag down the third car that passed and the guy took me almost all the way home. I walked the last quarter mile. I had arrived, but my bike hadn't.

I fired up the truck and drove back down to the bike. I unloaded everything except the broken left bag and loaded it into the truck. I got stuck at the bottom of the hill on the track that leads to my house. I was able to get one tire chain on before running out of light and heat. One chain, of course, didn't cut it, but it did allow me to get off the road and out of people's way. I left the truck there overnight. Final mileage on the bike down at the park-n-ride was 47,761.

Wednesday, December 1, 2004

It took me basically all day to shovel out my driveway, get down to the truck, get the other tire chain installed, make a couple of runs up the road breaking trail, then dig the trailer out and go get the bike. But now I'm home. So is the bike and truck and all my stuff. A rather strange ending to a motorcycle trip, but I still enjoyed it. Total mileage for the whole deal:

47,761

44,069

3,692 Total miles for the trip



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