

Since you seem to be keeping track of everyone (and doing a fine job of it, we might add), just thought we'd let you know we departed Maggie Valley, NC this morning and arrived in Marion, AR this afternoon (510 miles). Nothing exciting to report. Weather was excellent. It was clear and 64 degrees on departure, but unfortunately 93 degrees when we passed through Memphis into Arkansas. After a good night's rest, we have an easy two-lane trip of 261 miles to Branson, MO tomorrow.

The new Bushtec runs (follows?) great. We're now able to take more stuff than we can possibly use, wear, etc. Not sure if this is a good thing or not.

We made it out of Marion, AR on Tuesday, June 30. This was supposed to be an easy 261 mile trip to Branson, MO. After getting some recommendations from locals for the most scenic routing we decided on US 62 westbound from Hardy, AR. Also recommended was a restaurant called "The Front Porch" in Yellville (I'm not making this up), AR. In spite of two thunderstorm penetrations and the hassle of rain gear on-again, off-again, we made it into Branson in time for one evening show. Today, July 1, we are now seasoned Branson tourists, so we logged two shows. Tomorrow, July 2, we're off to Wing Ding. We still have money and credit cards, so we're still headed west.

We made it out of Branson, MO on July 2 as scheduled and headed via two-lane roads to Eureka Springs, AR for lunch. The town is really hilly and gave a new trailer owner all the challenges necessary to quickly find a level parking lot and not move until we were ready to leave. If you haven't heard of or previously visited Eureka Springs you should check it out and plan a stop if you're ever in the Branson, MO area. Like I said, it's really hilly, so my recommendation would be to park in the public parking lot and take the trolley. After spending way too much time in Eureka Springs, it was on the road again and on our way to Tulsa. We traveled via US 62 (much like the curvy NC roads) and AR 72. Somewhere along the way we took a wrong turn and ended up in front of the Walmart World Headquarters in Bentonville, AR. Anyway, we always wanted to see that (sure) and then proceeded back on course. I don't want to bore you with how many u-turns we made today (since you're already bored and no longer reading this) but let's just say there were several. Finally, we decided to find the Cherokee Turnpike and blast into Tulsa. As we closed in on Tulsa, we got our first dose of real heat - 99 degrees. 237 miles for the day.

On July 3, we found Wing Ding. Met up with Debbie, Dennis and friends and just had a relaxing day in the AIR-CONDITIONED exhibit hall. We went out to dinner that night and enjoyed a "cool" ride in the crisp 97 degree Oklahoma air. Glad it's starting to cool down. Happy 4th of July!

Well we left the Wing Ding and Tulsa, OK on Monday, July 6, at the crack of 8:00 a.m. The weather couldn't have been better. A cold front passed southeast through Oklahoma and left us with clear blue skies and temperatures in the 60's. After an uneventful 374 mile jaunt down I-40, we arrived at the Big Texan Motel and got ready for the evening

meal at the Big Texan Steakhouse (not a vegetarian friendly place). We passed on the free 72 oz. sirloin (provided that you eat it in one hour) and opted for a few nice filets. A nice evening and an easy day.

On Tuesday, July 7, we woke up early and departed Amarillo at 6:45 a.m. The weather was still great (61 degrees), so off we went to Santa Fe, NM. When we planned this trip we were very concerned about the hot temperatures crossing Oklahoma, Texas and New Mexico, but we really lucked out on the weather. Today we rolled into Santa Fe and the temperature never climbed above 75 degrees. We'll be exploring this area for three days and then on to Durango, Colorado.

We just spent three great days in the Santa Fe and Taos, New Mexico area. We explored every museum, Native American jewelry vendor, and restaurant in the area. The weather continues to be great, so with the trailer now filled with Native American jewelry, it was time to move on.

Once more, at the crack of 8:00 a.m. we headed northbound out of Santa Fe. We planned a brief stop at Ghost Ranch in Abiquiu, NM, but had more excitement there than expected. While looking at an outdoor Indian exhibit, we noticed that the "stuffed" snake about a foot from us looked very real. Then it started moving and proceeded to move away from us. Fortunately, it wasn't a rattler, but a fairly large bull snake, that is common to the area. Couldn't ask for a more realistic exhibit.

After our snake encounter it was back on the bike. Following lunch in Pagosa Springs, CO, we zoomed into Durango, CO. An easy 237 mile day with great weather and gorgeous scenery. Tomorrow we relax and ride the train to Silverton, CO and the next day we explore Mesa Verde. We haven't missed a meal and we can't find any rain. Clear blue skies, low humidity and moderate temperatures. It doesn't get much better than this. On Monday, we head for Moab, UT.

Day 14

Well, we've been on the road two weeks now and we're still speaking to each other. After spending all day (literally - seven hours) yesterday riding on the Durango - Silverton Railroad, we got back on the bike today to explore Mesa Verde and the Four Corners area. It was the usual clear blue sky 70 degree departure for us and off to Mesa Verde, a mere 40 miles away. For those unfamiliar with Mesa Verde, it's a national park with over 4,500 archeological sites, including 600 cliff dwellings. For motorcyclists, it's a steep 15 mile climb uphill to the visitors center. The road uphill is not exactly "The Dragon" but it does have some serious switchback turns and the penalty for leaving the road is a rapid descent of several thousand feet. Some places have guardrails (at least a foot tall) and some places don't. We pay attention to the road, enjoy the view and zip right on up there. After watching "the movie" (pretty much a requirement at all National Parks) and exploring two different cliff dwellings, we find lunch at the park restaurant. We get a window seat with about a 100 mile view. Not bad! After that, we try for a third cliff dwelling on a completely different mesa, but run out of time, since the road closes at 4:00 p.m. Now it's off to the Four Corners. We got really close a couple of years ago, but the couple we were traveling with wanted to go in a different direction, so we never made it.

Anyway, here we are heading westbound and nothing can stop us now. The weather is still pretty decent, only in the 80's and we're enjoying the scenery. Suddenly, the ever popular "Road Construction Ahead" sign appears and we're riding on a rough (fortunately hard-packed) dirt road. This goes on for about five miles and then we're back on smooth pavement. We may have only lost one or two fillings.

Now it starts to get hot. We've got all sorts of "hot gear" back at the hotel, but who needed it today for a ride in the mountains? Cool ties and cool vests would be welcome, but we're not going to have them today. In a matter of minutes we go from 86 degrees to 98 degrees. We've been blessed with pretty moderate temperatures for our entire trip and now we're in the blazing sun and not enjoying it. Fortunately, the Four Corners national monument finally comes into view and we're there. Now I've heard the stories about this place being in BFE, and of course had to see for myself. Trust me folks, it's in BFE! So we park the bike, next to all the other idiots, that have ventured out into the middle of the desert on motorcycles to have their picture taken standing simultaneously in four states. The biker behind me asks me if I will take his picture with his cell phone. I say sure, as long as he takes a picture of Judy and me with our camera. So we get our pictures, venture over to the Navajo vendor folks, and what else, buy more jewelry. I tell them Judy is part Cherokee, but we still don't get a discount.

After consuming gallons of water and applying quarts of suntan lotion, the ride back is uneventful, except for Judy's scolding for us not being properly prepared for the 98 degree heat. Who knew? I promise to do better tomorrow. In fact, due to some thunderstorms that passed through ahead of us, the temperature drops to 73 degrees as we approach Durango and now we're "freezing." Go figure.

Another "exciting" 190 miles for us today and tomorrow it's off to Moab, UT and some more National Parks.

Today was supposed to be an easy day; a mere 200 miles or so from Durango, CO to Moab, UT. Well, we started out of Durango at 8:15 and the weather was just gorgeous. It was about 70 degrees and the temperature began to drop a bit as we started our ascent into the mountains. Perfect riding weather. Our planned route was on US 550 northbound to Silverton, CO, then on to Ouray, CO, followed by a left turn westbound at Ridgway, CO. What could be difficult about that? This wasn't the shortest way to Moab, but a route recommended by a friend. He described it as "scenic", it was; "mountainous," it was. Hell, what he didn't tell me was that it was downright scary! Now let me tell ya, I've ridden a bunch of mountain roads all over this great country. I take flatlanders that have never ridden mountain roads up into western North Carolina and manage to bring most of them back in one piece. But, these Colorado mountain roads are something else. I did the no guardrail thing yesterday, and that doesn't bug me too much, but today, heck, we're up at 11,000 feet going around hairpin turns with no guardrails, no road shoulder, reverse banking (obviously for drainage) and consequently, absolutely no room for error. Well, anyway, we lived through our first leg to Silverton and actually got to enjoy the scenery. Maybe we just need to spend more time riding in Colorado.

Then the thunderstorms came. They're supposed to come in the afternoon, but today they came at 10:30 a.m. We waited about an hour for them to pass and then proceed northbound to Ouray. The sky was still threatening, but by some miracle, it doesn't rain on us. Again, it's more of the "no guardrail", no shoulder, not anything but a several

thousand foot drop. We pay attention and stay on the road. We remind ourselves that this is supposed to be fun and then begin to enjoy the spectacular scenery. Colorado is a beautiful state. There are pine trees everywhere and you can smell them. It smells like Christmas to me. We make the left turn at Ridgway (just northeast of Telluride) and it should be easy from here. Sure.

After a great lunch in Norwood, CO, it's almost time to cross the Utah border. The GPS tells me the state line is up ahead. What it doesn't tell me is that they are replacing the nicely paved road with "the gravel road from hell." Also, the GPS doesn't tell me that "the gravel road from hell" goes up a mountain with all the usual switchbacks, etc. Anyway, after 20 miles of this, we are still in one piece and now descending into Hell, oops, I mean Moab, UT. The damn temperature is 101 degrees! Where did this come from? Thirty minutes later, we're in our motel room with the air on high. We may come out tomorrow. Maybe early in the morning.

Day 16 started well; we overslept. We must have needed the rest. Anyway, we awoke at 8:15 and our friends Dave and Mary were coming over to pick us up in their big AIR-CONDITIONED truck at 8:30. The weather forecast was for 103 degrees with hotter temperatures later in the week. We called them and rescheduled for 9:30 a.m. The truck was a welcome site as it was already in the high 80's by 9:30 a.m. Dave and Mary know the Arches National Park like the back of their hand. They're RV folks that spend the summer hiking out in the southwest to avoid the Florida (heat?) (hurricanes?); hell, I don't know, we were just glad to get experienced tour guides for one day and an air-conditioned vehicle. The Arches tour was fabulous. We took pictures of everything and got back in the vehicle before suffering heat stroke. We watched the movie, bought the t-shirt and the refrigerator magnet. The Arches tour was complete.

On Day 17 we were on our own. Dave and Mary were repositioning their RV to the Bryce Canyon National Park area. We'll catch up with them in a few days. We got up early and rode out to Canyonlands National Park. Again, very picturesque. There are about five places to ride to for sightseeing inside the park. We head for the Mesa Arch which involves a short half-mile hike to actually get to the arch. We ride there and follow the trail. We're at the arch and have it all to ourselves. We take a lot of photos, paying particular attention not to fall over the cliff which is a several thousand foot drop. I can't believe they just let people walk on up there without any fencing or other protection. The National Park Service must not have any working relationship with OSHA.

After two hours in Canyonlands, we've got enough pictures to bore all our old friends and perhaps a few new ones. There's a lot of red rocks out there and we've got pictures of them all. It's noon, it's a mere 93 degrees in Moab, so we can't let the rest of the day go to waste. Judy wants to do laundry and I want to ride to Monticello, UT (the nearest Honda dealer) for an oil change. We do that and it turns out to be a pretty productive afternoon. I try out my new "cool vest" and my old "cool tie" on the ride to Monticello and they work pretty good. The temperature rises to 100, but it doesn't bother me. Hey, were ready to hit the road again tomorrow for Torrey, UT. Bring on that heat; we're ready! 225 easy miles today.

Well, we're on the road again at the crack of 8:30. It's a nice morning, but Moab's forecast is for 103, so we head westbound for higher country. After crossing the San Rafael desert (I know, I can't believe we're riding out here either) we start climbing to higher ground

and cooler temperatures. We arrive in Capitol Reef National Park around noon and it's more red rocks and even some tan and gray rocks. We watch the movie, take some more pictures of rocks and head into Torrey, UT, our destination for the night.

The innkeepers at Torrey Pines Bed and Breakfast welcome us and tempt us with an impromptu happy hour, but we've got to ride out of their uphill gravel driveway later, so we settle for diet Coke. Torrey Pines is pretty nice and the owners recommend a gourmet (no kidding) restaurant in town that has a very unique menu. We survive the climb up the gravel driveway and enjoy eggplant tamales and guacamole salmon. Different and good. We survive the drive back down the gravel driveway and now enjoy happy hour. One more run up the gravel tomorrow and we'll be ready for the next Goldwing hill climb. Tomorrow it's on to higher ground in Tropic, UT and Bryce Canyon National Park (more rocks). 186 easy miles today.

Well we haven't been too successful getting an internet connection out here in the boonies, but we have one now, but also a rapidly depleting computer battery. So here goes, we hope.

Day 19. Torrey, UT to Tropic, UT. Went via Utah Scenic Route 12. Very nice road with altitudes of 10,000 plus. Grand Staircase - Escalante National Monument borders the route. Arrived Bryce Point Bed and Breakfast. Easy, scenic 110 miles. Temperatures cool at altitude.

Day 20. Friends Dave and Mary pick us up in the air-conditioned pickup truck. A nice day exploring Bryce Canyon National Park. Absolutely gorgeous scenery. No miles on the Goldwing.

Day 21. Depart Tropic, UT at 7:30 a.m. for Grand Canyon North Rim. Stop to explore Zion National Park along the way. We're early (9:30 a.m.) so we do beat some tourists through the front gate. Everywhere we go a bus load of Chinese folks is behind us. I think they're following us or have stolen our planned itinerary. Fortunately, we always beat them to the restroom and the buffet line. There are no Asians or Europeans on those continents. They are all in the U.S. national parks. We wind our way out of Zion and notice the bike's temperature gauge is moving upward. This is the first time the gauge has moved during the entire trip. Thought maybe there was a coolant problem, but it headed back down after leaving Zion and getting some air flowing.

We arrive in Kanab, UT for lunch and it's 100 degrees. We break out the cool vests and cool ties and wear them to the Grand Canyon. They work just great. An easy check-in at the Grand Canyon North Rim Lodge followed by a great dinner that evening. Miles today

Day 22. We hike (walk ?) around several trails on the Grand Canyon North Rim. Weather is great - about 75 degrees. We ride the bike out to Angel's Window and hike a little more. If you have a fear of height, this would be a good place to cure that. The trails go out to points where the drop-off is almost two miles - unbelievable views. Tomorrow we start our return. We'll head north to avoid the heat and then east. We've looked at a lot of rocks, spent too much money, and had a lot of fun. It's time to head home. Miles today - only 50. Miles tomorrow - lots!

Day 23. Regrettably, it was time to begin the trip home. We departed the Grand Canyon North Rim on Tuesday, July 21 at 6:50 a.m. (we can't believe it either). As with most of our trip, the weather could not have been better. It was in the mid 50's, so jackets, foot warmers "on" and knee warmers "on" were the proper gear and bike control settings. Our plan was to head north to I-70 and proceed east to avoid the stifling hot weather still persistent in Arizona, New Mexico, Texas and Oklahoma. For the most, the plan worked. We went up US 89 to I-70 and the temperature never went above 80. The State of Utah even gave us a break and did not make us ride "the gravel road from Hell" today. About lunch time, we reached Green River, Utah and the Utah temperatures we remembered showed up. It was 100 degrees! After a lunch break, we donned our "cool vests" and "cool ties" and proceeded down I-70. With the wind deflected from the Baker Air Wings it was like air-conditioning. The Goldwing temperature indicator said "100" but we actually felt pretty good. Our destination for the night was Grand Junction, CO and we made it there feeling fairly cool. Caulk one up for some new-fangled riding gear. Miles for the day - an easy 465.

Day 24. We departed Grand Junction, CO at 7:00 a.m. It was about 60 degrees with clear blue sky. As we proceeded eastbound on I-70, we couldn't believe the scenery. We followed the Colorado River and kept climbing upward through some really gorgeous country. I always thought the scenery and curves on I-40 north of Maggie Valley, NC were picturesque (and they are) but this scenery was unbelievable for riding on an Interstate. Snow in the mountains, ski lifts, pine trees galore - Wow! When we went through the Vail Pass we were at 10,300 feet with a temperature of 53 degrees. Pretty chilly for mid-July. This is a good time to talk about the Goldwing performance (experienced folks can sign off now - if you already haven't). Man, I can't believe the performance. Here we are riding up a mountain, two-up, towing a trailer and the tractor trailers we're passing look like a picket fence. Yep, we're blasting up there at 75 mph and only the native mountain folks in the four-wheel drive trucks are giving us a run for our money. They look at those Florida plates and can't believe the way we're flying up and down the mountains. Anyway, we stop in Vail and get some regular gas for \$2.85 per gallon. This is definitely the high rent district. Even the Wendy's attached to the gas station looks like a Swiss Chalet. We make it out of the mountains and into Kansas. We vow to return to Colorado for further exploration. Report on Kansas - flat and brown. We vow to keep moving east (quickly). We spend the night in Hays, KS. Looks like a nice little town. Miles for the day - 601.

We didn't have computer service on Day 25, so there was no report. Just as well, it was a day that started pretty well, but challenged our endurance as the day wore on. We got our usual early morning start and cool clear weather to begin the day. Our plan was to depart Hays, KS and arrive in Mount Vernon, IL in time for dinner. Everything went well until we passed St. Louis and arrived in Illinois. From the twelve years we lived in Illinois, we should have remembered the two Illinois seasons - winter and "road construction." As we passed St. Louis, we got stuck on I-64 where the two normal lanes are now one abnormal lane with the usual road rage inspiring merge at the end. After an hour, we finally got our turn to merge and traffic rolled along quickly. We had a vision of a great dinner in Mount Vernon. No sooner did we get up to highway speed, the traffic slowed and came to a complete halt. What now? We scanned the CB channels and heard the truckers talking

about an overturned truck "on fire" up ahead and the fact that the highway would be closed for hours. By this time, cars and trucks were finding a way to cross over to the opposite lane and reverse course to an alternate route. We listened to the trucks, followed them and worked our way around the accident scene. We made it into Mount Vernon about 8:00 p.m. for our great (but late) evening meal. A full 636 long miles today. Day 26 was our last day of this trip. We weren't up quite as early due to the long day before. The GPS showed only 500 miles to Maggie Valley, so this would be an "easy" day. Weather was good. Temperatures were cool. We got the Goldwing up to cruise speed, set the cruise control and "enjoyed" the same 364 songs on the IPOD that we've been listening to for 26 days. We've really got to get some new music. Nine hours later, we were in our driveway in Maggie Valley, NC. Trip complete!

Summary/Observations:

1. We rode 5,630 miles in 26 days. We visited 13 states and 7 national parks. We weren't trying to break any distance records, just have a nice time and see a lot of the country we hadn't seen before. We were able to do that. Some days we rode; some days we didn't. When we felt we had to move along we did it. We covered 2,222 miles the last four days of our trip. When you point the Goldwing in the direction of "home", it knows how to get there.
2. We had never pulled a trailer before. Our impression is that the Bushtec is a very good trailer, but we have no basis of comparison. As the manufacturer says - "you don't know it's behind you" and it's true. We're very pleased with the purchase and particularly the way it follows the bike on winding mountain roads.
3. The Goldwing is a great touring bike. Plenty of power - smooth, quiet, efficient, comfortable. It does everything you could ask for in a two-wheeled vehicle.
4. We were blessed with unbelievably good weather. If someone told me they were planning a trip into the Southwest in July, I'd think they were nuts. But with Wing Ding in Oklahoma, we figured we go there and then we'd give it a shot. We could always head north. Cold fronts came through on two occasions and allowed us to travel comfortably after they passed through. If you can travel across Oklahoma, Texas and New Mexico in July and not have the temperature above 80, you're lucky. We were lucky on our major travel days! We weren't so lucky on a few afternoons in Utah, but the cool vests made those days tolerable.
5. We enjoyed Wing Ding. We'd never been before and we saw a lot of interesting stuff. We particularly enjoyed test driving the Trikes. The way we see it is you either own a trike now or some day you're gonna own a trike. We might as well get familiar with them. We did and it was a lot of fun terrorizing the few remaining pedestrians in the parking lot on the last morning.
6. If you're not a very experienced mountain rider, don't make Colorado your first mountain riding experience. There is no room for error on some of their mountain roads. Practice up in some state like North Carolina where they have guardrails and shoulders on the side of the road. If you make a mistake in NC you'll learn from the experience. Colorado is a beautiful state, but it doesn't give you a second chance if you leave the road.
7. Utah is an interesting and scenic state, but their summer road construction program is a real challenge for motorcyclists. We logged a lot of miles on gravel and dirt roads that were supposed to be Utah "highways." Stay out of Utah if you're not comfortable riding

on mountain gravel roads.

8. It's a great country. Get out there and see it!

Charlie & Judy Nolan