



# Chasing the Arizona winter sun

by Geoff Stevenson

Arizona in March sounded awfully tempting. But should we ride all the way or see whether two 650 V-Stroms (Wee Stroms) would fit in the box of a Ford F150?

Advance planning suggested we would almost certainly face snow going south (and perhaps coming home, too). A trial fitting showed that the two bikes would fit in Ernie Lalonde's truck with slightly more than an inch to spare. (The handlebars were very close and getting foot pegs and shift levers past parts of the box walls required care, but, in the end, the bikes rode



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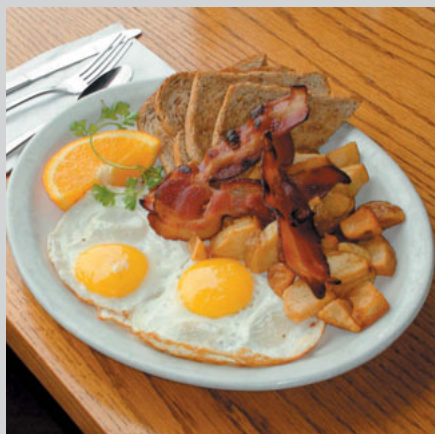
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## Next Breakfast/Brunch

### Saturday, May 3



## WHERE:

**Oak & Carriage**

3287 Cowichan Lake Road  
Duncan

## TIME:

9:30 am



# Trucking down to warmer climates

perfectly - even with the tailgate down).

So it was decided: We'd drive to Kingman, AZ, leave the truck there in a fenced compound at an RV park, ride around the Grand Canyon State (a.k.a. the Copper State) for two weeks and then drive home. We allowed seven days for the truck portion, but you could do it in four if you put in long days behind the wheel. (About 2,400 km each way).

Two days before we were set to leave, Snowqualmie Pass on I90 just east of Seattle was closed by a big dump of snow. Avalanche control was scheduled for the next few days (with intermittent closing of the road), so we decided to head due south down I5, then head east through Bakersfield and Barstow to Kingman, which is about a hundred miles southeast of Las Vegas. The original plan had been to drive to Seattle, take Interstate 90 to Ellensburg, then I84 to Twin Falls, ID., and down Highway 93 to Las Vegas and Kingman. We came home this way - but there are dozens of other possible routes.

Our first encounter with U.S. officialdom was not encouraging. When the border guard at the Peace Arch asked where we were going, Ernie replied calmly that we were "going to Arizona for three weeks." "You mean you'd like to enter the United States to go to Arizona?" the

officer replied. Ernie and I looked at each other in puzzlement - and both resisted any wisecrack.

After a little more social intercourse, the officer agreed that we could indeed enter his country. We thanked him deferentially and drove across the border.

Kingman sees itself as the Protector of Route 66. The first day's ride saw us heading east on the Mother Road (John Steinbeck's name for the highway, the route taken by millions of Americans from the eastern states seeking a new life, mostly in California, after the Depression) to spend our first night on two wheels in Flagstaff.

The development of the Interstate highway system in the early 1950s killed many roads like Route 66. Interstate 40, which runs east-west through Kingman, opened in 1984; Route 66 then slipped into obscurity until 1987, when Angel Delgadillo led the charge to preserve the Mother Road. (His gift shop and barber shop remain in Seligman).

Our first day's ride took us through Hackberry, with a well-visited general store - and the owner packing a pistol on his hip. Arizona has some of the most lax laws in the world around gun ownership; this liberal Canadian did a double take when he saw the piece behind the counter.

The store - like so many others on

Route 66 - featured a wide selection of licence plates, fridge magnets, beer mugs, coffee cups, key chains and tee shirts celebrating the road. I found the tee shirts mostly overpriced and underwhelming until we got to Oatman on our last day of riding. Here, they were on special for just \$4. I weakened and finally bought one; Ernie snapped up four. (The Hackberry store was offering a good-looking 1931 Ford Model A for \$14,000, but we couldn't quite figure how we could carry it on two V-Stroms.

Flagstaff, with a population around 100,000, has some charming old buildings and we enjoyed walking



***Sedona, a vacation spot for the very well-to-do, reeks of money. But some of the public art is very good - and free.***





# Sedona Arizona is pretty in pink



***For the wealthy, this is the only real way to explore the red rocks of Sedona – in a pink jeep.***

around. There seemed to be young people everywhere (frequently with dogs). It reminded us a bit of, say, Banff, or Salt Spring Island in the 1960s. Two of the biggest buildings downtown were hostels.

Supper was excellent pub food (and a hoppy IPA) at the Beaver Street Brewery. Highly recommended.

Route 66 is a strange amalgam. Seligman is the most restored town - but much of it looked phony. The high point there for us was nothing to do with Route 66, but a chance encounter with a guy driving a custom six-door Ford F350 4x4.

It wasn't clear what the truck was used for (off-road expeditions, we

assumed). The owner allowed that it had cost "lots," but didn't seem too interested in chatting more. It was a serious piece of engineering, though, with a frame stretched probably three feet longer than the factory truck.

From Flagstaff (almost 7,000 feet above sea level and where we had frost on the bikes next morning), we headed south towards Sedona. Highway 89A runs through Oak Creek Canyon; it's a great ride, but very rough in places (presumably because of all those winter frosts).

Sedona reeks of money. On our Motel 6 budget, we didn't dream of staying, but we enjoyed a pleasant

walk around downtown. It's famous for its red-rock background; you could easily believe you were in Utah, not Arizona.

The main street featured a boutique called "Dahling (sic), It's You" and a tour company was extolling the virtues of its Pink Jeep Tours (there was a pink jeep parked next door). Numerous art galleries had individual pieces for \$10,000-plus - just like their competitors in, say, Palm Desert, CA., or Scottsdale, AZ.

We stopped for the night in Payson, which was as far in style from Sedona as, say, Oak Bay is from Prince Rupert.

As it turned out, we eventually spent three separate nights there as we criss-crossed the state. It's just a farming town with no apparent pretension to be anything else. We enjoyed affordable steaks at the Buffalo Steak House; this watering hole also featured some excellent Top Rock IPA and fiddle music on Sunday afternoons - with most of the patrons up and dancing. (Ernie invited me, but I declined).

From Payson we headed south and west, riding for a while along the shore of Lake Roosevelt, which was formed by a dam on the Salt River a hundred years ago and was then the biggest man-made lake in the U.S. (It's named for Teddy Roosevelt, of course, not FDR).



# Guns and beer make a holiday



***What would Tombstone be without a gunfight? Fortunately, this "victim" recovered quickly.***

We rode for what seemed hours through the northeast suburbs of Tucson (population around a million). Here, on the cheap desert land, new shopping centres stretch for miles. I lost count of the traffic lights.

The plan had been to spend the night in Three Points, west of Tucson, and then to head out in the morning to Kitt Peak Observatory. But when we rode into Three Points, not only was there no room at the inn, there was no inn. Seems it's just a dormitory suburb for the big city and doesn't have a single motel.

So we headed back to a Motel 8 on the west edge of Tucson and

rode back to the observatory next morning. It's almost 7,000 feet up and the twisty pavement would be ideal for two wheels - but for the 25mph speed limit.

The view of the surrounding countryside was, as promised, breathtaking. It's one of the world's largest observatories, with five or six big telescopes. We took a 10-storey elevator to the top of the building housing the biggest 'scope and reckoned we could see well into Mexico to the south.

We rode down at the prescribed speed limit (more or less) and headed for Arivaca, just a few miles from the Mexican border.

The cantina looked like a good bet for lunch. We ordered a burger apiece - and then we met Joe.

Lunch for Joe was three beers and four cigarettes - with two small bags of chips left over from our lunch. We invited him to join us and the stories started.

He lived close by on a ranch looking after his 80-something mother, was a Vietnam veteran, had been a professional skier (and ski hill manager) and had a bunch of Ducatis at a house in San Francisco.

Ernie was skeptical about the Ducats, but Joe rhymed off the model numbers and I suspect he was telling the truth. We were headed for Nogales and Highway 289 on the Arizona map seemed to offer a useful shortcut. The map showed perhaps six miles of gravel; little did we know!

Joe had a 1980s Honda CR500 two-stroke, heavily modified. It now sported a Suzuki swing arm; this extended the wheelbase by 2 1/2in and, he said, markedly improved handling. It probably weighed 285 pounds; our V-Stroms, with bulging saddlebags and top boxes, are almost twice as heavy.

He offered to guide us - after first warning us to look out for Border Patrol trucks sliding around the next corner on the wrong side of the road - and we accepted.

Turned out he wanted to stop every few minutes for another smoke, so





# Mt. Graham 9,212 feet

this gave us a chance to catch up. The narrow road was very rough in places and my bike's suspension was regularly overwhelmed. But we persevered for close to 25 miles through several sections of rocks the size of softballs and a few water crossings (fortunately both short and shallow) and got to Nogales in one piece.

Joe turned out to be a skilled rider. I wondered how good he'd have been without his liquid lunch.

Downtown Nogales is, oddly, just a quasi-shopping centre in the heart of the city. Lots of empty stores, too; indeed, our impression of much of rural Arizona was of an economy that has not yet recovered from the Crash of 2008 - a view confirmed by talking to a number of merchants.

One of the neatest towns we saw was Bisbee, a former mining hub. It has a number of lovingly-restored red stone buildings, with a brewery downtown, an excellent museum, several restaurants and coffee shops and a good variety of places to stay.

We could have taken a guided tour of the long-ago-closed underground mine (mostly copper), but settled for a quick inspection of the open pit mine just south of town, now also abandoned.

Later, we rode north on Highway 191 through the biggest open-pit mine in the U.S. just north

of Clifton. This hole (still being worked) looked as if it could swallow most of Victoria with ease.

Hardly anyone tours Arizona without visiting Tombstone. We were no exception, but wisely got there early in the morning, so we could walk around for a couple of hours before the temperature got into the high 70s.

Of course, we went to a gunfight (we had a choice of five or six, it seemed). Of course, the bad guy was "killed." But we watched the action with a welcome roof over our heads blocking the sun - and, in the end, all the victims seemed to have miraculously recovered.

Soon we were in Patagonia. Who knew? I'd never heard of Patagonia, AZ., but it was a clean little town and we enjoyed breakfast at Mercedes' Cafe. Our timing was perfect, too: When we walked in, the waitress explained that the cook was also the town's school bus driver and might not be in the kitchen for another hour or so.

But as she was warning us about a possible wait for food, the driver/cook walked in and breakfast was on our table soon after. Tasty, too.

The Gadsden Hotel in Douglas is on the National Register of Historic Places and we rode there for breakfast. The lobby features columns of solid Italian marble, but it has clearly seen better days - and, given the sluggish economy



hereabouts, it was hard to imagine visitors flooding in.

North of Douglas, we rode for a day through rolling ranchland. Where there was irrigation, there were big hay fields (mostly alfalfa), but without water, this seemed pretty unproductive land.

Safford accommodated us for two nights. This allowed a ride up Mount Graham. The road was paved, but there was plenty of sand and grit left over from the winter, and we took it easy (and lost count of the switchbacks).

At the end of the pavement, the road was closed. According to Ernie's GPS, we were now at 9,212 feet. The road on the other side of the gate continued as a dirt track and we're both interested in coming back with dirt bikes to ride farther. Apparently there's a hiking trail beyond the dirt road; it supposedly goes along the top of Mount Graham (10,720 feet) with what are presumably great views.  
*(To be continued)*



Sunday May 11th 2014

# MOTHERS DAY RIDE

All motorcycles welcome  
Meet for lunch at 1:00pm

  
*The Oak and Carriage*  
3287 Cowichan Lake Road  
Duncan, BC (250) 746-4144  
*Neighbourhood Pub*

\$2.00 from every meal purchased will be donated to charity  
Plus all the ladies will receive a "treat" and gift bag!

Please bring a loaded gift card from any major grocery store and donate on-site  
\$5 or more, everything helps!



All proceeds go directly to 



Special thanks  
Island BMW - SG Power - Steve Drane Harley Davidson - Acton Motorcycles - Savage Cycles - Adrenalin Motorcycle Coop - Vi Honda - Spunkys Motorcycles  
Town of Duncan - Shell Canada - Segg Lumber

## Celebrate Mothers Day and help out the Women's Transition House

Meet for lunch Sunday, May 11  
at 1:00 pm in Duncan at the Oak  
and Carriage Pub. \$2 from every  
lunch purchased will be donated  
to the Victoria Women's Transition

House. Also they are asking all  
riders to bring loaded gift cards for  
any grocery store, Thriftys etc, to  
be donated the Victoria Womens  
Transition House.

**Victoria riders... meet at the Shell Station at 2892 Trans Canada  
Highway and Spencer Road for free coffee and donuts from  
11:30 until you depart for the ride to Duncan at 12:00 noon.**

## BCCOM MLA Ride Thursday, May 1

As the big kickoff to promote  
May as Motorcycle Awareness  
Month, on Thursday, May 1, 2014,  
the British Columbia Coalition  
of Motorcyclists (BCCOM) is  
presenting the 23rd Annual  
MLA Ride.

The MLA Ride is a motorcycle  
ride to the Legislature Buildings  
in Victoria to bring Members of  
the Legislative Assembly and their  
constituents together to discuss  
various issues relating  
to motorcycle safety, education  
and awareness.

The ride leaves at 9:00 am from  
the Tsawwassen ferry terminal,  
meets up with the island riders  
at Mayfair Mall on Blanshard  
Street in Victoria at 11:00 am and  
then proceeds to the Legislature  
Buildings to take the MLAs for a  
ride on their lunch hour and let  
them experience firsthand the  
thrill of motorcycling.

## Motorcycle Stuff For Sale

**Corbin seats  
2006-12 1200GS/GSA**

front and passenger  
front is black/ lite grey trim,  
rear is black

**\$400 - less than 1/2 price!**

[msherkin@telus.net](mailto:msherkin@telus.net)  
or 250 858 9483



# Club 2014 Event Schedule

Date	Event	Location
Thursday, May 1, 2014	Annual BCCOM MLA Ride	Victoria
Saturday, May 3, 2014	Monthly Gathering	Oak & Carriage, Duncan
Friday, May 9, 2014	BMW Demo Ride	Island BMW
Sunday, May 18, 2014	Monthly Ride	Saltaire Pub / Ladysmith
May 23 - 26, 2014	49er Rally	Mariposa, California
Saturday, June 7, 2014	Monthly Gathering	Qualicum Beach Memorial Golf Club
Sunday, June 1, 2014	Motorcycle Ride to Live	Fountain Tire, Langford
June 12 - 15, 2014	Chief Joseph Rally	John Day, Oregon
Saturday, June 14, 2014	Ride & Camp	Duffy Loop / Lillooet
July 4 - 6, 2014	Rocky Bow Lunatic Fringe Rally	Cochrane, Alberta
Saturday, July 5, 2014	Monthly Gathering	Saltspring Island
Sunday, July 20, 2014	Ride to Brunch	TBD
July 24 - 27, 2014	BMWMOA National Rally	St. Paul, Minnesota
July 24 - 27, 2014	Cascade Country Rendezvous	Republic, Washington
August 1 - 2, 2014	Blues Festival	Port Townsend
August 2 - 4, 2014	Up Island Event	Port MacNeill
August 7 - 10, 2014	38th Stanley Stomp Rally	Grandjean, ID
August 14- 17, 2014	Hotsprings Rally	Nakusp, BC
August 6, 2014	4th Vintage (pre-85) Motorcycle Show and Swapmeet	Western Speedway
Sunday, August 24, 2014	Club BBQ	Chez Conrad's
Saturday, September 6, 2014	Monthly Gathering	Pioneer House Duncan
Sunday, September 21, 2014	Monthly Ride	Port Renfrew / Cowichan loop
Sunday, September 28, 2014	33rd Annual "Oyster Run" Motorcycle Rally	Anacortes, WA
Sunday, October 5, 2014	Monthly Gathering	Chequered Flag
October	Annual Meeting	TBD
Saturday, November 1, 2014	Monthly Gathering	Log House Pub
Sunday, December 7, 2014	Monthly Gathering	Chequered Flag
Thursday, January 1, 2015	TROC	Island View Beach
Saturday, January 3, 2015	Monthly Gathering	Log House Pub