



# Dishin' the Dirt on the Circle Tour

By Geoff Stevenson

The plan was to ride a number of logging roads in the Pemberton-Lillooet area. The weatherman suggested the second week of September would provide ideal weather, so we got our dirt bikes ready.

But should we ride all the way or load three bikes in a truck and trailer?

We opted for the truck (although



**The Circle Tour starts north of Whistler at Pemberton.**

## COORDINATOR:

Klaus Kreye  
[bmwrvi@shaw.ca](mailto:bmwrvi@shaw.ca)

## TREASURER & MEMBERSHIP:

Peter Juergensen  
[motonanny@telus.net](mailto:motonanny@telus.net)

## NEWSLETTER EDITOR:

Roy Sweet  
[victoriarides@gmail.com](mailto:victoriarides@gmail.com)

## MAILING:

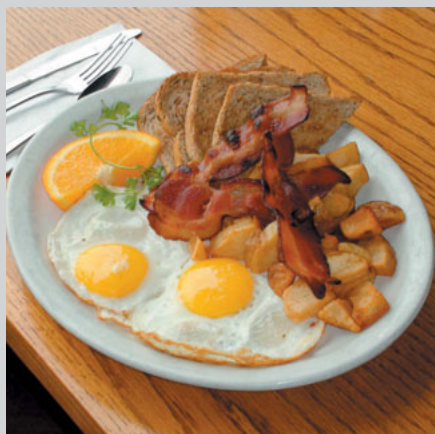
Bob Leitch  
[bleitch@telus.net](mailto:bleitch@telus.net)

## MAILING ADDRESS:

BMW Riders of Vancouver Island  
6-310 Goldstream Avenue  
Victoria BC V9B 2W3

## Next Breakfast/Brunch

### Sunday, October 5



## WHERE:

Chequered Flag  
2545 Millstream Road  
Langford

## WHEN:

9:30 am



## Early start to hit early Nanaimo Ferry



### ***Time for a water-and-granola-bar-break on the West Pavilion Road, between Lillooet and the Big Bar ferry across the Fraser.***

if I'd known how much we'd pay for the two ferries from Vancouver Island and back, I might have elected to ride all the way: With a reservation, the ferry cost \$181 each way).

Let's call it the Circle Tour. From Pemberton we rode to Bralorne, then to Lillooet and Lytton and back to Lillooet. Next, it was north to the Big Bar ferry and Clinton, then south to Lillooet, on to Seton Portage and, finally, back to Pemberton. Total distance, according to my odometer, was 898.9km., roughly 80% on gravel.

There were three of us for this ride: Your devoted correspondent, my longtime riding buddy Ernie

Lalonde and a new friend with lots of off-road experience, Joel Thompson, a retired shipwright. Joel had downloaded all our planned routes to his GPS - and then loaded them into Ernie's unit. In the backwoods with few road signs, this was a huge advantage (although not always, as you will discover later).

Joel rides a veritable rocketship of the dirt-bike world: A Husaberg 570. He has light weight (around 260 pounds), lots of horsepower, long-travel suspension (and, alas, the price tag to match).

Ernie and I were on more mundane mounts: Ernie has a Kawasaki KLX250S and I've just bought a

2014 Honda CRF250L, for which the ride would be a first serious test.

Packing a small dirt bike can be a challenge for a few days away from home. We all had Giant Loop soft saddlebags and found that they allowed us to carry two spare tubes for each bike and all the tools we thought we'd need, plus a few spare clothes in something like a kayak bag.

As it turned out, we had no flat tires, all three bikes ran perfectly, nobody went down and we found motels easily in four locations. (There had been some discussion of camping, but carrying a tent, bedroll and sleeping bag, plus food and cooking equipment is a serious challenge on a small bike without hard saddlebags - and, in my view, such bags just defeat the purpose: To keep the bike as light as possible).

We chose the 0830 Nanaimo-to-Horseshoe-Bay ferry on the Monday, which meant an early start from Victoria. We were in Mount Currie, 6km east of Pemberton on Highway 99, early afternoon and settled into the Hitching Post Motel (thanks for the accommodation tip, Rob Chapple).

Our early arrival gave us a chance to walk around Mount Currie - and discover both a distillery and a restaurant. The Goodlife Cafe was a modest business run by a guy and gal; after talking to them for



# Grey hair tour hits the distillery

a while, we agreed that we should support a local company and returned for supper. (The Cobb Salad we all chose was tasty food and fairly priced).

The Pemberton Distillery, around the block from the cafe, was busy entertaining a busload of grey- (and blue- and purple-) haired ladies of a certain age. They were mostly from the Vancouver area and seemed to be buying bottles with abandon.

Joel and I sampled the apple and pear brandy. I reckoned it would have powered my little Honda with ease.

As we headed back to the motel, it began to blow hard. I estimated some gusts were 25 knots (I'm a former sailor) and we worried that the weatherperson might have been wrong in forecasting a sunny and settled week. But in the morning, the wind had gone down, the weather system appeared to have been blown east - and that promising forecast was looking more accurate.

## Up the Hurley

Our first challenge was the Hurley Pass, to take us from Pemberton to Bralorne. It was originally known as Railroad Pass (it was apparently considered - then rejected - as a route for the railroad which now runs through D'Arcy, a few kilometres to the north).

The Hurley rises to around 4,500 feet. It's an active logging road and

we were a bit apprehensive about what this might mean. But the only loaded trucks we saw were on the pavement on Pemberton Meadows Road, which runs up the valley northwest from the town.

This is in the Lillooet River valley (the river empties into Harrison Lake and there's a dirt road right down the valley - but this ride would have to wait for another day).

The Hurley climbs steeply from the valley floor. The first few switchbacks were rocky - in part because the logging trucks, pulling hard up the hill or braking hard going down, tend to throw much of the loose gravel out of the corner,

often leaving just large, uneven rocks.

But you soon get used to this and we reached the summit in short order. We stopped a couple of times to admire (and photograph) the spectacular views of the Pemberton Valley far below.

It's 75km from Pemberton to Bralorne - although, in time, you might think it's a hundred years.

Bralorne is a mining town, with a history going back to the big B.C. gold rushes of the 1850s. In a seven-year period of the 1930s, the mines of the area produced \$370 million in gold.

The Bralorne mine operated



***The mighty Fraser, seen from perhaps a thousand feet above the river, on the West Pavilion Road.***



## Bralorne a step back into the past



***The Big Bar ferry crosses the Fraser to collect three dirt bikers from Victoria.***

from 1932 to 1971. But, with the recent sharp rise in the price of gold, mining resumed about 10 years ago. About 60 people work there now and the town is on the rebound.

Mind you, this is a relative rebound. Current population, according to the Welcome to Bralorne sign, is just 77 hardy souls. However, there's now a pub/restaurant, two motels and a coffee shop - and one gas pump (we paid \$1.66/litre for regular gas).

We arrived for lunch and met Sally and Bruce, owners of the pub and the Mines Motel, where we spent a quiet night, paying around \$105 for a comfortable room for three.

### **A town for sale**

Sally suggested we should visit Bradian and Kingdom Lake and so we set off after lunch.

Bradian, a suburb of Bralorne and within easy walking distance, was deserted for years. In 1997, Tom and Katherine Gutenberg bought it, replaced roofs on some of the 22 houses, and have recently accepted a tentative offer for the houses and the township's 50 acres.

Asking price was \$995,000, but it's not clear what the prospective purchaser has agreed to pay. (The Gutenbergs are believed to have paid around \$100,000).

All the houses we saw desperately

needed new paint and one wonders how much water damage there was inside before the roofing work was done.

"You'd have to do some work on the infrastructure and the plumbing, but it's all there," says realtor John Lovelace. Hmmmm.....

If the sale goes through, it would be interesting to return in a couple of years to see what's changed. My guess is that developing Bradian might be considerably more difficult than the new owner appreciates.

Kingdom Lake Provincial Park was just down a paved road, on the way to Gold Bridge. The lake was stunning in the bright sunlight and the dirt road into the campground easy riding.

Later that afternoon, we rode around Downton Lake and Gun Lake and checked out the town of Gold Bridge (not much to check out), before riding back to the pub in Bralorne for supper and an ale or two.

Next morning, in Bralorne, there was frost on the seat of my Honda. But we rode out for Lillooet under a cloudless sky and the temperature was soon rising.

The road to Lillooet, 115km away, is roughly half pavement and half gravel. It's a busy route for logging trucks; we found it was often best to stop, let the truck roar by, brace for the inevitable dust shower and then



## Big Bar Ferry limited to two vehicles

ride on. (Just like Alaska).

From Lillooet, we rode Highway 12 to Lytton (paved), then took the reaction ferry across the Fraser and rode back to Lillooet on Spencer Road, along the west side of the river. This was the only section I wouldn't repeat: The road was a glorified goat track in places, with lots of blind corners - and long dropoffs to the valley below.

The real challenge in these conditions is always the left-hand corners (especially the blind ones). Because the gravel is thrown out to the right, you are often riding in thick gravel out there - and only marginally in control.

We wondered about hugging the left side of the road, right against the hill, in these cases - on the theory that anyone on four wheels encountering you in the corner would swing out from the inside to give you room. We never resolved this issue - and, as it turned out, there was no traffic of any kind in the blind corners.

Day 3 was to be our major ride of the trip: North from Lillooet on the West Pavilion Road to the Big Bar ferry; across the Fraser again; around the rolling ranchland east of Clinton; past the aquamarine Big Bar Lake and south to Clinton for the night.

This was 200km in all - perhaps a couple hours on the pavement, but almost seven hours of steady

riding on our dirt bikes in these conditions. The good news? No traffic. (In the first five hours, we met two vehicles - both with plenty of room for us to pass safely).

We knew the Big Bar ferry was supposed to be closed for an hour from noon to 1 p.m. When we rode down the steep and narrow track to river level, the ferry was on the east side with nobody aboard. It was 1148 by my trusty Timex, and, assuming the ferry was running on government time, it looked as if we might be in for quite a delay.

So we took another swig of cold water, opened some granola bars, and steeled ourselves to wait. Around noon, there was suddenly

activity on the far bank and a guy we hoped was the captain, started walking towards the ferry.

The crossing takes only a few minutes and we were soon riding aboard (down a steep ramp that looked nothing like Swartz Bay - and then up a sharp slope onto the ferry deck). There's room for two cars or pickups, but we had the boat to ourselves.

A reaction ferry is tethered to an overhead cable with four or five wires. These allow the skipper to angle the ferry rudders into the current (I reckoned it was around 10 knots here). The rudders harness the power of the water and the overhead cable keeps everything on



***The summer sun has bleached the grasslands of the South Chilcotin, west of Clinton.***



## Summer sun dries out the landscape

course in the strong water.

Apparently, if the ferry is unable to run in winter weather, passengers can cross in a cage on the overhead cable.

We rode by huge irrigated hay fields on the east side and were soon up on the range land of the Southern Chilcotin. This is beautiful, rolling country and - where there's no irrigation - parched golden brown by the summer sun.

*Watch for the conclusion to the Dirt Circle in next month's edition of the Beemer Reader.*

***The spectacular colors of Lake Seton are impressive as you ride down Mission Mountain into Seton Portage.***

## AGM

The Annual General Meeting will be held at the VI Rangers Clubhouse off Luxton Road on Saturday, October 18. The meeting will start at 4:30 pm with pizza being served at 6:00 pm. Anyone with possible subjects for discussion or additions to next year's event schedule should email Bob Leitch at [bleitch@telus.net](mailto:bleitch@telus.net)

## Club 2014 Event Schedule

Date	Event	Location
Sunday, October 5, 2014	Monthly Gathering	Chequered Flag
Saturday, October 18, 2014	Annual Meeting & Pizza	VI Rangers, Luxton Road - 4:30 pm
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