



My first planned tour to Vietnam in 2014 was scuppered by a health issue, so when I was offered the chance to tour northern Vietnam and support a very worthy charity, I jumped at the opportunity. The offer came from Australia from a friend I had met on my first European motorcycle tour. So, after many years of dreaming of visiting and riding there, my opportunity had arrived and the planning commenced.

Rally Indochina 2017 was

A tour to support the Blue Dragon Foundation for kids

by Conrad Moller

organized by Explore Indochina and Hoi An Motorbike Adventures, Digby Greenlaugh and Mark Whyndam. (both Australian ex-pats who have been living in Vietnam for the past 25 years).

After more than six months of planning and waiting, I finally settled back into my airplane seat on April 29 for my departure from YVR. Then came a 12 ½-hour flight to Taipei and a 5 hour layover there before a second flight to Hanoi.

Arrival and visa procedures went



Avis, my Minsk.

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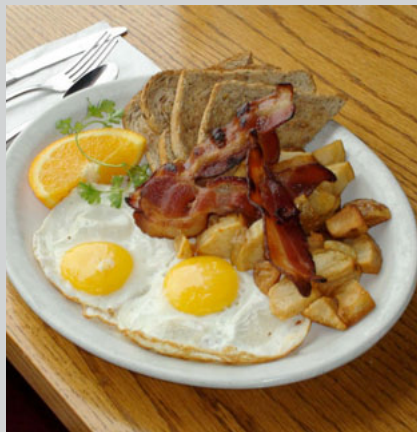
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Next Breakfast/Brunch

Saturday, August 5



WHERE:

Pioneer House Restaurant
4675 Trans Canada Highway
Duncan, BC

WHEN:

9:30 am at the restaurant



We're hitting the Ho Chi Minh Trail

well and after I found my driver I was whisked into the Old Quarter and my hotel. I was greeted with tea and smile and was soon under the duvet in my very nice but noisy room.

I planned my arrival for a week prior to the Rally so I could get used to the weather and traffic, recover from jet lag and get in a tour of Halong Bay. This turned out to be a very good plan as it took about four days after arrival to get a decent night's sleep and the tour of Halong Bay provided the much needed special interaction I was craving by that time.

Halong Bay is a must-see if you do get to that part of Vietnam: The water was calm and the sight of the small verdant islands jutting from the water is enchanting. But it is teeming with tourist-laden boats and is likely to become even more so, judging by the amount of construction going on there. I was told by our guide that much Chinese and offshore money was being spent to build luxury housing and entertainment venues.

The Rally tour commenced with a quick informal meet-and-greet in our hotel lobby, after which we were whisked via cyclo to the Blue Dragon Foundation headquarters to meet founder Michael

Brokowski and some of his staff. We toured the facilities there and were briefed on the foundation's work. Then it was off on foot to our



The sight of terraced rice paddies with crops in various stages is breath taking.

first dinner together in a great local restaurant.

Hanoi to Mai Chau

The next morning it was an early breakfast and be ready to depart the hotel at 0700 as they were taking us to Yen Nghia on the outskirts of the city and the Ho Chi Minh Trail Museum parking lot. There we would be introduced to our machines for the tour and would not have to negotiate the insane traffic through the centre of the city.

Assuming all the Minsks were the same, I chose number 02 and named it Avis (Avis was always number 2 after Hertz).

We were given time to quickly tour

the museum and then familiarize ourselves with our bikes. The Minsks had been re-engined with Honda scooter mills, which came with a four-down transmission shift pattern and pretty bad brakes. The last of the prep was to attend the briefing on how to ride and survive in Vietnam, to which we all paid very close attention. After departure photos, we finally found ourselves on the road, thumbs on horns and making our way through the chaos heading for Mai Chau.

Even after the how-to-survive briefing, the first exposure to traffic was sensory overload and a very trying exercise in spatial awareness and calculation of closest points of approach to every moving obstacle



Old bones soothed by a fine meal



The village markets were usually well stocked with plenty of meat and produce. The vendor is waving her homemade wand to ward off the swarms of flies.

on the road. With the low speed and paying attention to only what is ahead of your beam it IS possible to survive; however, it's pretty stressful for those of us who know the rules of the road and learned to ride in more regulated countries.

After about 35km of mayhem, we turned off the main route. Now there was much less traffic and we rode to lunch feeling more relaxed.

After lunch we were directed to our first country road. This was generally bereft of opposing traffic, but now the dangers became more organic, in the form of cows, oxen, pigs, chickens, dogs – and children. The temperature also began to rise and by the time we reached our destination, despite my Camelbak I was over-heated and in dire need of rehydration.

Our first night's accommodations

were magnificent, with large rooms, wooden bathtubs and outstanding mountain views with the rice fields in the valley below. The cold beer and the pool were also a nice touch. After a rest and some rehydration, we were driven



A fine meal at our home stay but sitting on the floor was uncomfortable for my and other old bones and joints.

to town in electric carts via a very circuitous route to take our dinner at one of the local guest houses.

This was our first local meal complete with local hooch which is generally a rice wine, presented in recycled water bottles and flavoured with just about anything from botanicals to snake parts. (All guaranteed to make reproductive parts perform better and improve lovemaking stamina). I did try some on a couple of occasions and I swear it is really used brake fluid. The return trip to the hotel was much more direct and the streets were littered with sleeping dogs.

Mai Chau to Phu Yen

Upon leaving Mai Chau our route took us north into Son La province where we started riding the mountain roads and encountered our first rain. We stopped to don wet gear, but the rain soon turned



Small selection limits hotel choices

torrential, so we stopped to shelter at a shop with an overhang and entertained the locals who love to see the big Urals. We were told that there were larger displacement bikes sneaking into the country but 125cc was still the legal size limit.

Shortly after the rain stopped and departing our shelter we turned onto route 43, a country road with little traffic. Pulling off the road after a couple of hours we had our first roadside picnic lunch with a view. Next stop was at Ben Pha Van Yen to catch a ferry across the Son Po reservoir. Arriving at the other side we still had 35 km to travel to Phu Yen but despite the ingesting a generous amount of Tylenol earlier, my butt was still protesting any further travel.

We arrived at the Hong Long Hotel in Phu Yen at 5:30 p.m. This hotel was quite basic, but we were informed the only other hotel in town was the crowbar hotel. My bed was large enough and hard enough to slaughter an ox on, but there was air con, a shower and the usual set of rules that included dire warnings against gambling or entertaining prostitutes.

Phu Yen to Mu Chan Chai

On the steps of the hotel the next morning as day three started, I was greeted by some sad-looking lads who had fallen under the spell of the local poison proffered at dinner last evening and had apparently had a late night. However, after a

breakfast of Pho and no coffee, we were underway, the day looking like it might be a scorcher. After an hour's ride we stopped for a much needed and very good coffee speedily produced by a young lady operating her small roadside stand.

Today's ride was 184 km over some well engineered roads with elevations in the clouds. As my butt was being tortured by the Minsk seat I was grateful when we finally entered Mu Chang Chai and then on to our home stay.

This was my first homestay, but I found it quite acceptable. We were required to remove our footwear before taking our gear to our small spaces, which had a sleeping pad on the floor and a mossy net. Pretty

spartan stuff. The four spaces in my area all had sliding doors for some privacy. Toilets and shower were communal.

That evening we ate in the larger living space seated on the floor. This was not an easy achievement for about half of us due to older joints and bones. However, the food was good and the entertainment was even better as Martyn was challenged by our driver to eat one of the local treats, a duck egg with a half form embryo. Martyn took the challenge and earned about a million dong for the Blue Dragon. We were sent to bed with Mark's promise of a full English breakfast in the morning.

Mu Chang Chai to Tuan Giao – 142Km

The next morning we were all up early due to some time challenged roosters and Mark held good on full English, minus the cold toast, which was quickly devoured by all. Today coffee was available with breakfast. Along with the bacon and eggs, this made for some happy faces.

While readying his bike for the day, John discovered a flat rear tire. This gave our two mechanics the chance to showcase their skill, swiftly and efficiently concluding the repair in under 10 minutes.

We departed just after 0800 under overcast skies and experienced a great ride all the way to Tuan



A quick Pho breakfast before departing Tuan Giao.



Seeing the children a highlight of trip



The children of the Blue Dragon sponsored school after meeting, playing and the presentation of gifts for them.

Giao. There were lots of stops to capture the outstanding scenery and have lunch on the roadside. We encountered some very fresh pavement near a new dam facility and then kilometres of fresh chip seal. The hotel this evening was filthy and run down but considering what I had observed people living in during today's ride I could hardly complain.

Tuan Giao to Sin Ho – 162Km

Today's departure was even earlier at 0700 so we could grab a bowl of Pho in town and arrive in a timely manner at the Blue Dragon-sponsored kindergarten in Muong Mun and meet the children and teachers. This was a great

experience to see some of the kids our fund raising was helping.

Peter and Jenny brought soccer balls which were quickly inflated and used in some games with the children. They performed some songs for us and we reciprocated by singing some tunes for them.

The clouds had departed and the temperature was rising by the time we got underway from the school, then the skies turned black and just as Digby decided it was time to don wet gear, the heavens opened with a torrential downpour. We were lucky enough to have stopped right outside a shop with an overhanging roof we could push our bikes under. We purchased buns, coffee

and played pool in the games room located under the shop until the rain subsided and we could once again get on our way.

The roads turned quite slick after the rain and while giving way to a truck, Adam slipped and stuffed his Ural into the left front wheel of the truck. Luck was with him and he was not hurt other than to bounce his face off the triple tree. The Ural didn't fare as well with the forks being bent aft a couple of inches.

We carried on and the mechanics applied some crowbar love to the machine to make it rideable. Mark gave his machine to Adam and he rode in the van. The bike was picked up in Pa Ham and taken away for repairs and we carried on our way to Sin Ho. The remainder of the ride provided outstanding views and great roads with lots of twisties.

We arrived in Sin Ho a little later than usual to find our hotel, which, despite being a bit on the grungy side, provided Red Bull and noodle bowls on the side board. We took dinner at the hotel that night, local fare that proved quite tasty. However, the local demon hooch provided proved to be a catalyst that encouraged some of our younger riders to sink a few more lagers and entertain the locals with a little Karaoke.

Watch for the conclusion of Conrad's ride in Vietnam in the September issue of the Reader.



FOR SALE



Origo Saddle Bags, brand new, never been used - still has shop tags. These are nice firm bags with many straps and each bag has a pouch with a rain cover. \$95. Contact Klaus Kreye **250-474-9777** (evenings only) or bmwrvi@shaw.ca

Two Bag Liners, near new and a **CEE Bailey Windscreen** for an RT. Contact Bob Leach at **250-893-1099**.

K&N Oil Filter KN 164 for 2012 R1200RT (may fit others) I found two of them in my storage and they will not fit my new RT. Great price. Contact Chris Jones at **250-592-4311**.

Club 2017 Event Schedule

Date	Event	Location
Sunday, July 30, 2017	Classic Vintage Motorcycle Show	Western Speedway
Saturday, August 5, 2017	Monthly Gathering	Pioneer House Duncan
TBD August 2017	Victoria Classic Motorcycle Show	Western Speedway
Thursday - Sunday, August 10 - 13, 2017	43rd Stanley Stomp Rally	Grandjean, Idaho
Thursday - Sunday, August 17 - 20, 2017	Hotsprings Rally	Nakusp, BC
Sunday, August 27, 2017	Club BBQ	Gail & Randy's Place