



Exploring Washington's Desert Country

by Jenny Smith

Nighthawk is one of America's least frequented border crossings. The postage stamp of officialdom is all but lost within the rolling grasslands, vineyards and orchards that demarcate the boundary between British Columbia and Washington State. On average, just 20 vehicles daily pass through the crossing, which means motorcyclists can expect a thorough interrogation from customs officers.

My riding buddy, Bob McCormick, and I are seasonal refugees from British

Columbia, fleeing the cool, wet spring weather of Canada's Pacific Northwest in favor of predictably dry and sunny skies on the eastern, lee side of the Cascade Mountains in Washington.

Getting here proved to be a trial, dodging seasonal potholes still awaiting highway maintenance crews, and shivering at snowflakes falling at 4,403-foot-high Allison Pass on the Crowsnest Highway. Bob's fingers became so cold, even with heated grips, that we made an emergency stop in the café at Manning Park Resort.



A map of the route taken, by Bill Tipton/compartmentmaps.com.

COORDINATOR:

Klaus Kreye
bmwrvi@shaw.ca

TREASURER & MEMBERSHIP:

Peter Juergensen
motonanny@icloud.com

NEWSLETTER EDITOR:

Roy Sweet
gordsboyroy@gmail.com

MAILING:

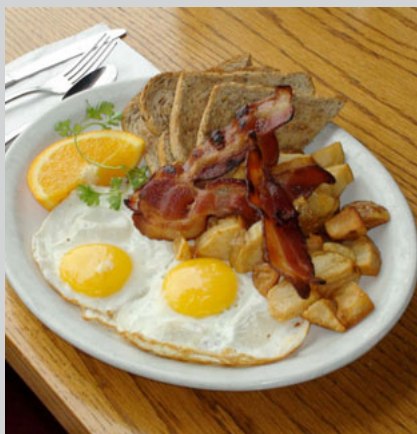
Bob Leitch
bleitch@telus.net

MAILING ADDRESS:

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

Next Breakfast/Brunch

Sunday, October 7



WHERE:

The Crooked Goose
4136 Wilkinson Road
Victoria, BC

WHEN:

9:30 am



Nighthawk Customs an experience



The U.S. border crossing at Nighthawk, Washington, receives just 20 cars per day on average, so you can expect some scrutiny.

Now, Nighthawk is the final impediment to our ride through the desert lands of Washington all the way to idyllic Bend, Oregon, with its craft breweries and trendy restaurants on the Deschutes River.

Approaching Nighthawk, we ride together to the customs check. Bad idea. The officer in the booth waves at Bob to stop while I proceed. "If you had doubts, you shouldn't have done it," he says grumpily.

He shouts to Bob to move his bike back because he might set off the security alarms.

Then he asks, "Are you transporting any food?"

"No," I confidently reply. He rifles through my bag and finds several year-old Clif bars. "Any 'other' food?" he continues, sarcastically.

And so it goes.

Directly ahead lie some of Washington's most scenic and least traveled back roads, creamy curves

that parallel the Similkameen River and whistle stops such as the 1860s mining boom town of Nighthawk in Okanogan County.

Motorcyclists riding from the coast often miss this area, taking the state's popular Route 20 through North Cascades National Park. The highway is not yet open for the season, and Nighthawk is our closest option not involving Seattle freeways.

We skirt the shores of Palmer Lake, a perfect cooling-off when the heat proves oppressive in summer, soaring above 100 degrees Fahrenheit. We ride through Loomis, a town struggling to reach a population of 200, then venture eastward to Tonasket on the banks of the Okanogan River, a productive salmon tributary of the heavily dammed Columbia River.



Washington State Route 155 runs alongside scenic Banks Lake, a 27-mile-long reservoir with a corrugated shoreline.



Yakima River Canyon Scenic Byway



Washington state's dry Okanogan region on the east side of the Cascade Mountains offers abundant scenery and little traffic.

I stop for gas, but keep the engine running on my 2005 Harley 883 Sportster, since it barely started last time. A local man suggests I ride south on U.S. Route 97 to Wenatchee—the region's biggest city—and buy a new battery.

Wenatchee, at the confluence of the Columbia and Wenatchee rivers, bills itself as the “apple capital of the world,” and celebrates its status with an apple blossom festival in late April to early May. The orchards are resplendent at this time of year.

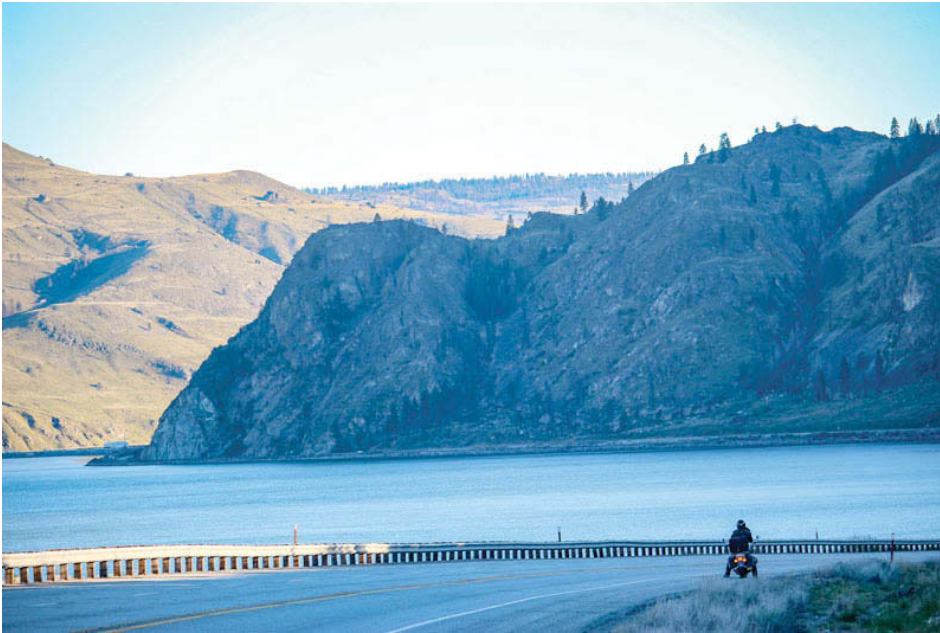
We find a motel room on Wenatchee Avenue next to Bob's Classic Brass & Brew—good food, lively atmosphere and a satisfactory selection of craft beers. In the morning, we visit the waterfront Pybus Public Market, which hosts a bustling market on Saturday mornings and Thursday afternoons throughout summer, as well as live music on Fridays at 7 p.m.

We feel adventurous leaving Wenatchee and follow U.S. Route 2 west, then south on U.S. 97 through Wenatchee National Forest. Mistake. We cross the line from desert to mountain and find ourselves riding through fog and rain just a couple of degrees above zero through 4,124-foot Blewett Pass.

Salvation awaits. We cross Interstate 90 on U.S. 97 and divert onto State Route 821 for the Yakima River Canyon Scenic Byway. This is one the sweetest 30-minute rides you could hope for—luxuriant river-hugging curves, volcanic basalt cliffs rising 2,000 feet and the sweet smell of sagebrush.



Gas scarce in the less populated areas



The Columbia River system is a frequent companion to motorcyclists riding through semi-arid Washington state.

At the canyon's end, a trucker flashes his lights. I slow down before approaching two parked police cars, then speed up just in time to get hammered by a third, unmarked vehicle coming my way. This site is a cash cow—be warned. Gas is also scarce in Washington's sparsely populated interior. Even the presence of a gas station is no guarantee you can buy some.

The Columbia River—fourth largest in the U.S., and the biggest to flow to the Pacific Ocean—is the dramatic demarcation between Washington and Oregon. State Route 14 on the Washington side is unforgettable: water sparkling in the late-afternoon sun, volcanic cliffs rising up and wind turbines winking from the canyon rim. The guidebook "Destination Highways, Washington," rates the 25-mile stretch from Lyle to Maryhill as the

most scenic in the region.

We choose to cross Sam Hill Memorial Bridge from Maryhill to Biggs Junction and continue south on U.S. 97. Note that the Hood River Bridge downstream charges a 75-cent cash toll for motorcycles. While all Oregon gas stations are full service, attendants invariably let riders fill their own tanks.

This area of Oregon soon emerges as the land of volcanoes. Several can be spotted with one sweep of the eye on the western horizon, and some, including Mount Bachelor and Mount Hood, double as ski resorts. The Newberry National Volcanic Monument is a popular tourist site in the region.

It is late afternoon by the time we ride into Bend, a city with a population of about 85,000 and named one of the "10 Best Beer

Cities in America." You'll pay dearly to stay downtown, but it's worth being within walking distance of the shops, restaurants and bars. McMenamins, a converted Catholic school, boasts lodging, a movie theatre, a pool, a brewery and a pub complete with street-side fire pits.

There never seems to be enough time to visit. The next day we head north, this time merging to the east side of the Columbia River along U.S. Route 2. The scenery ramps up at Coulee City, the first in a series of small, distinctive historic towns linked to the construction of the Grand Coulee Dam from 1933 to 1942.

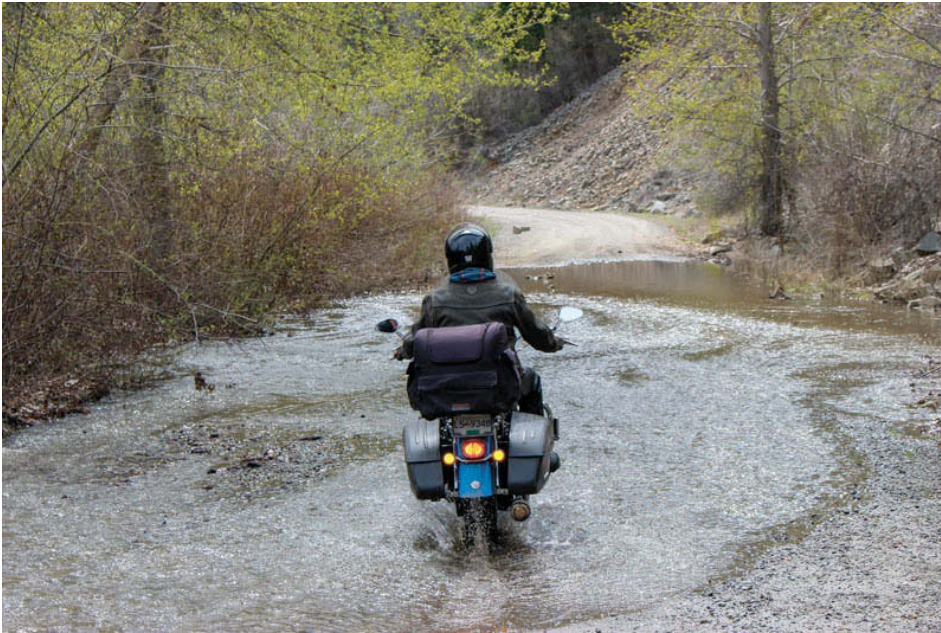
Close to dusk we take State Route 155 northward alongside achingly beautiful Banks Lake, a 27-mile reservoir with a corrugated shoreline, intimate bays and volcanic rock cliffs. We arrive at Electric City just in time to secure the last room in the only motel, which is unseasonably busy due to a weekend fishing derby.

There is designated motorcycle parking outside the Electric City Bar and Grill, which serves up some of the best bad-for-you burgers and deep-fried food. The karaoke singing is also surprisingly good, performed by locals who obviously take pride in their pipes.

Everyone likes to seek out the small, intimate roads when traveling, but maps can be deceiving. Heading north, we divert from Route 97 north of Omak and work our way toward Conconully, a backwoods town of about 200. One gravel route leads us uphill and into



Snow and water mark the last day



Bob McCormick bravely rides his 2005 Harley Road King Custom through a road washout near Conconully, Washington.

snow. Another isn't much better: we traverse patches of water until—mere feet from good road again—we encounter a creek flowing across the road. This is serious business.

I nervously ride through the first portion, then walk the last segment through deeper water and across a

gravel ledge.

Bob is a trooper. Despite his much bigger and heavier 2005 Road King Custom, he, too, rides the first stretch. Minutes pass while we analyze all the possibilities, only to conclude he should forgo the final stretch and ride back

rather than risk bottoming out and ruinous consequences. We meet at a Tonasket diner, then finish off the final stretch to the Canadian border at Osoyoos, gateway to the Canadian Okanagan (with a different spelling).

As we ride west on Highway 3, dark clouds gather over the Cascades and turn to a torrential onslaught for the final 90 minutes to Vancouver. We steel ourselves and take the punishment, more than willing to pay the price for an early season escape to some of the most remote and spectacular highways in the Pacific Northwest.

Annual General Meeting
Saturday, October 20
SVI Rangers Hall
3498 Luxton Road, Victoria
4:30 pm
We are always looking for feedback, ride suggestions and we're looking for a webmaster.

Club 2018 / 2019 Event Schedule

Date	Event	Location
Sunday, October 7, 2018	Monthly Gathering	The Crooked Goose
TBD October, 2018	Island BMW Octoberfest	Island BMW
Saturday, October 20, 2018	Annual General Meeting	SVI Rangers Hall
Saturday, November 3, 2018	Monthly Gathering	Spitfire Grill
Sunday, December 2, 2018	Monthly Gathering	1550's Pub
Tuesday, January 1, 2019	TROC	Island View Beach & Bob's House
Saturday, January 5, 2019	Monthly Gathering	Cherries Breakfast Bistro