

HEADIN' WEST



TOURING

A PERSONAL ODYSSEY

BY
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Ever so slowly I hoisted my frigid body off the bike. It was past two a.m. and I had been riding for over fourteen hours. Frozen and physically beat, I had finally reached my destination, the Clarkia Ranger station high in the mountains of northern Idaho.

For the last eight hours I had been dreaming of a good sleep followed by a good meal. Neither of these were destined to materialize however. When the station finally hove into view, the lights were on! At two a.m. there could be only one reason for that.

"Yeah, we have a fire up on Anthony Peak," the Fire Control Officer told me. "Your crew's going on the line at five."

This ended a journey which had started as a leisurely trip some forty days and 6,000 miles earlier — one which had led me from Michigan to California, up the coast to Washington, then inland to Idaho.

I guess I had never really believed I'd make it all the way. I weigh 180 pounds; my gear weighed forty — and my bike was a second-hand, 125 cc Honda. My equipment was rather primitive: Coleman one-burner, homemade tube tent, cheap

sleeping bag, etc. Most of it was carried in a cardboard box on an improvised wooden luggage rack.

Often enthusiasm overshadows sound judgement however, so on a May morning I left my home and headed southwest. That first day was beset with worries. Would I make it? What problems would I run into? In addition, I had to endure the Southwest Michigan traffic. (On a 125, the only thing you can do is endure it.)

Not giving much thought to where I'd spend the night, I ended up in the middle of Ft. Wayne, Indiana at sundown. There I splurged on a motel and was well-rested the next morning when the trip really started. To be precise, it started as I rode past the Ft. Wayne bread bakery. There is no better way to wake up and get a new outlook on the world than taking in the rich aroma of fresh-baked bread in the morning!

That first day, I really had trouble slowing down . . . figuratively, not literally. There's a certain state of mind necessary for enjoyable touring. It's so easy (in fact it's often a habit) to ignore your surroundings when driving; movement becomes an end in itself. It's not easy to

really see where you're going and notice what's happening around you. My stagnant university-student mind was being awakened. I forced myself to sit by the side of the road and do nothing but feel the wind, luxuriate in the warmth of the spring sunshine, and drink in the smells of the countryside. It was worth it.

That night found me in a National Forest campground near Martinsville, Indiana. Since it was well before the tourist season, the place was deserted. Camp went up easily after I finished inspecting the blooming tulip trees in the area.

It pays to know your equipment before you set out. My lack of familiarity with the stove caused me to be cooking supper until well after dark. In the Midwest "after dark" is mosquito-time. (In the spring it's often thunderstorm-time too, as I found out later that night.)

Most of the traveling between Ft. Wayne and Vincennes was on back roads — which constitute a completely different world than the main highways. Besides offering a unique collection of small towns, obscure historical sites, and relative solitude, backroads give you a chance — indeed they force you — to steer by dead reckoning. You never know what