



Bumping our way across Manitoba

By Geoff Stevenson

(Second of two instalments)

The train schedule meant that we had two complete days in Churchill; we suspected (correctly) this would be one day too many. However, we pulled on our warmest clothes, pulled toques down over our ears and set out to explore the town on foot.

The highlight was the community centre, built in 1976 and partly financed by your federal tax dollars. This was tens of thousands of square feet under a single roof and is the most important (and useful) building in town, especially over



Jorgen and Ernie try to stay warm while visiting Prince of Wales Fort in Churchill.

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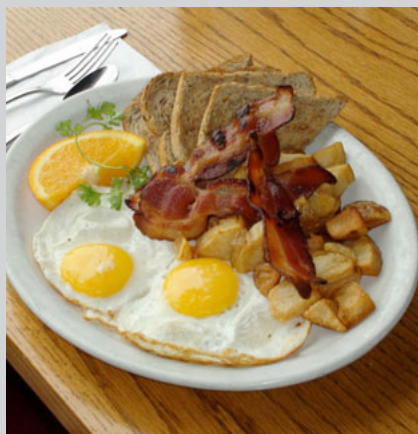
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Next Breakfast/Brunch

Saturday, November 2



WHERE:

Spitfire Bar & Grill
9681 Willindon Road
Sidney, BC

WHEN:

9:30 am at the restaurant



Churchill hosts an excellent Inuit museum



About 3,000 white beluga whales migrate to Churchill every summer to calve.

the Arctic winter.

It includes a school, movie theatre, gymnasium, town offices, medical centre, dentist's clinic, meeting rooms, bowling alley, swimming pool – and probably a few other assets we didn't discover.

There's also an excellent Inuit Museum close by, which includes hundreds of stone carvings, some of them exquisitely beautiful.

Incidentally, it's illegal to lock your car in Churchill – so that any vehicle can be used as a refuge if you spot a bear. I wondered how many keys were left in the ignition, too – and vaguely thought we might have “borrowed” a vehicle for a self-guided tour of the town.

No, Your Honor, I didn't go ahead with this.....

Soon we were ready for another 19-hour train ride (in fact, this one turned out to be a mere 17 hours). This time, heading south from Churchill, the train was only an hour late leaving, but we trundled along at the same pedestrian pace – and got precious little sleep for a second night.

We'd left our three bikes (covered and chained together) outside our hotel in Thompson and were relieved to find them waiting for us when we walked back from the VIA Rail station. We oiled chains, monitored oil levels and checked tire pressures and reckoned we

were ready for another 3,000km.

After catching up on most of our lost sleep at Thompson's Best Value Inn and Suites, we saddled up next morning and were on the road around 0700. It was raining and the highway construction just west of town was now muddy (and extremely slippery) in places.

But after what Ernie so aptly calls “a couple of tail wags,” we were soon back on terra firma and heading for The Pas. (Jorgen left us here, heading for Prince Albert to visit Dick in hospital and then riding home via Calgary and Vernon.)

A hundred-and-something years ago, The Pas was an important fur-trading post, with paddle wheelers connecting it with Winnipeg. But those days are in the rearview mirror now; we spent a forgettable night there (with the worst restaurant meal I've ever been served) and headed south to Swan River.

This road (Manitoba Highway 10) was highlighted on the map as a scenic highway. But it was clear that whoever had made this designation had never seen a scenic highway in, say, BC.

However, traffic was mercifully light and we made good time over the 233km to Tim's in Swan River for our favorite breakfast on the road: Hot cereal with berries and brown sugar and a coffee.

Now we turned west and



Lots of potholes test the travelers stamina



Thompson, MB., has one of the biggest nickel mining operations in the world. King Miner greeted as we rode into town

discovered two things: Manitoba roads can be awfully bumpy; and Manitoba road signs leave a lot to be desired. No, we didn't get lost, but it required careful attention to the map to figure out exactly where we needed to go. (I had a GPS, but used it only for navigation within big cities, mostly Calgary, where I stayed with friends).

Most of the time, there were no conventional signs, with directions (and mileage) to the next town. The Manitoba junction system (in this part of the province, anyway) was a single post with two small highway numbers and appropriate arrows. (I wondered how many riders/drivers had missed these inconspicuous signs all together and wound up in

Winnipeg before they realized their mistake).

Did we mention the bumps? For long stretches in Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba, there were frost heaves, potholes, tar snakes and thousands of other pavement patches. We used both sides of the road whenever possible to avoid the roughest sections (traffic was fortunately light in most areas), but I'd hate to have ridden some of these alleged highways in the dark.

Next overnight stop was in Humboldt, which needs no introduction to Canadians. It's a proud little town, with a moving tribute in a main street gallery to the hockey team members killed in that truck-bus crash in April, 2018.

After Humboldt came Kindersley, SK. Here, the economy, fueled by both agriculture and oil, seemed pretty healthy – and we were apprehensive about what we might pay for a hotel room.

We rode into a modern Super 8 Motel just off the highway. There was a flurry of fingers over the computer keyboard as the deck clerk researched the best price he could offer us.

After a brief delay, he announced that his best price would be \$100, which seemed fine (and significantly cheaper than, say, Churchill). Then I realized what had taken so long: He'd been



Strong tailwinds aided to the gas mileage



Can we ever forget the tragedy of Humboldt's hockey heroes?

checking Expedia - and then matching their price.

We wondered whether this will become a trend. After all, hotels are far better off selling rooms directly for the Expedia price without paying whatever commission Expedia (or other booking agencies) charges them.

We had battled strong winds for several days across the prairies – and our gas mileage was all over the map. My 16-litre tank normally offers a safe range of around 320km. But, with a tailwind, I could get closer to 500km from a fillup.

Several gas stations we'd been relying on were closed on this trip and we soon learned to never pass a pump without topping off our tanks. This was after we were

running on fumes just east of Cranberry Portage, MB., not far from Flin Flon.

There, after battling a strong headwind, and stopping at two stations only to discover both were closed, I poured 15 litres into my shiny red tank! Both bikes returned similar gas mileage – I was on a Honda CB1100EX and Ernie rode his Triumph Bonneville 1200. (Both ran flawlessly).

We paid less than \$1 a litre for gasoline in Calgary, but mostly it was around \$1.20/litre in the three prairie provinces.

Neither of us needed a motel in Calgary, since Ernie stayed with his son and daughter-in-law and I bunked in with my old friend Gary Park. We met at a newspaper in New Zealand almost 60 years ago, he a young sports reporter and I a young editor. We came to Canada to work in 1968 and have been congratulating each other ever since.

Now we could say farewell to the flatlands and head for some more serious riding. But first there would be a modest diversion.

Ernie had never ridden Alberta Highway 40, from Kananaskis to Longview, Canada's highest paved road that tops out at just over 7,000 feet. So we headed north from Calgary and took the Trans Canada Highway west almost as far as Canmore before turning south on

Highway 40.

This is a wonderful piece of pavement and we were surrounded by high mountains on every hand. (We kept a careful eye out for wildlife, but this was a trip without any close shaves, although we noted several deer, a black bear, an otter with silky black fur and frequent hedgehogs as road kill during our 11 days of riding.)

Lunch this day was an excellent meal at the Little New York Deli in Longview, run by a Spanish-Canadian couple and their two children (until school returned, anyway). Who knew?

More good food was just down the road, too. We spent a night in Fernie and enjoyed an excellent meal at Nevado's on the main street. We'd eaten here on an earlier trip and were keen for a return engagement.

Nevado's doesn't open until 1700 on Friday nights, so we were lined up on the sidewalk with perhaps a dozen other patrons – which seemed a good omen. Ernie pronounced his ribs to be top class and my halibut was delicious (although it did seem a bit odd to have ridden 5,000km from Victoria to Fernie via Thompson to have halibut for dinner).

A number of dishes have an Argentinian flavor; this is a pretty serious eatery for a little town. Fernie is also a delightful town for



Improved roads marked the way home to BC



Prairie grain fields often stretch to the horizon. This is just west of Kindersley, SK.

walking, with dozens of lovingly-restored older buildings.

Some BC ski hills now do more business from mountain bikers in summer than skiers in winter. I don't know the finances of the Fernie ski hill, but it was clear that mountain biking was big business hereabouts. There are several bike

shops in town – some selling pedal bikes for more than the cost of a new 250cc dual sport motorbike.

The Calgary-Kananaskis-Longview-Fernie day was terrific riding – and the next day was just as good, as we crested Kootenay, Paulson and Amethyst Passes before stopping for the night in Keremeos.

We were going to break the trip in Osooyos, but this is no place for poor people in August. Rooms on the booking sites seemed to start around \$150 and go up – and it seemed clear there weren't many available.

So we rode another 40-odd minutes to sleepy little Keremeos and found a comfortable motel for \$100 (which included breakfast).

A four-hour ride next morning, including some delightful curves on the Hope-Princeton Highway, took us into Tsawwassen, onto a BC Ferry and home.

The wonderful Alberta and BC highways of the final three days of the trip mostly erased those bitter memories of the bumps in Saskatchewan and Manitoba.

Now we just had to roll up our sleeves and get the grime of our trusty steeds.

Club 2019 Event Schedule

Date	Event	Location
Saturday, November 2, 2019	Monthly Gathering	Spitfire Bar & Grill
Sunday, December 1, 2019	Monthly Gathering	1550's Pub
Wednesday, January 1, 2020	TROC	Island View Beach & Klaus' House
Saturday, January 4, 2020	Monthly Gathering	Cherries Breakfast Bistro

Interested in doing the monthly newsletter?

Our current editor is stepping away at the end of the year and the club is looking for someone who wants to take over the task. If you are interested please contact **Klaus Kreye at bmwrvi@shaw.ca**