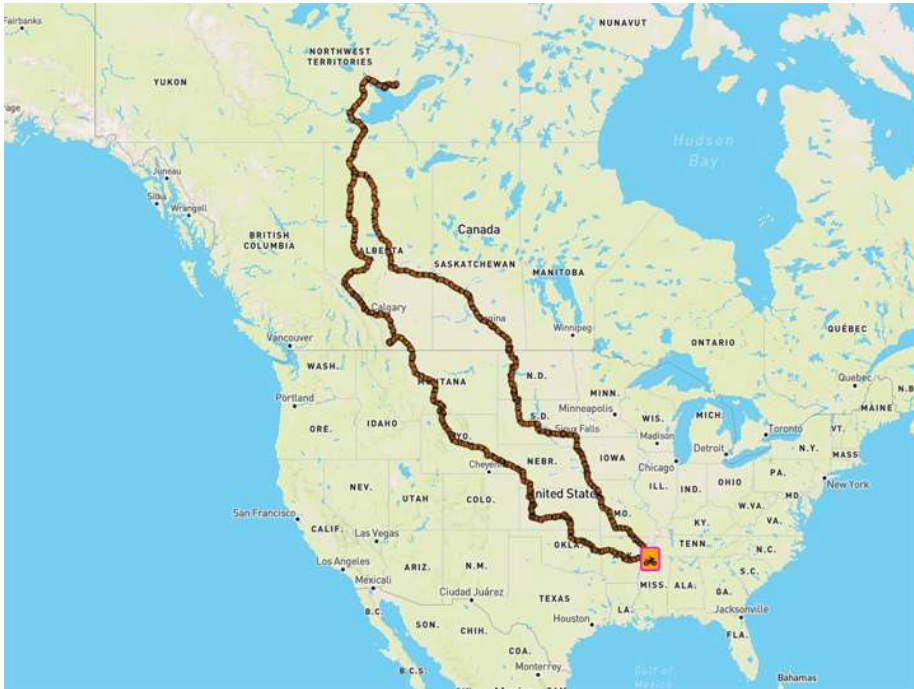


Yellowknife Lunch Run



7,000 Miles in 13 Days

Sometimes it doesn't take much of an excuse to go for a motorcycle ride. In this case, lunch was enough.

About six months earlier, well-known long-distance rider, Greg Rice, had planned an RTE—Ride to Eat—in Yellowknife, Northwest Territories, for June 24, 2026. The idea caught on, and more than 70 riders had signed up through Ride Master to make the trip to Yellowknife.

As soon as I heard about it, I knew I wanted to go. Yellowknife was in one of the few areas of Canada I hadn't ridden, and riding several thousand miles just to meet a bunch of long-distance riders for lunch sounded like my kind of trip.

Unfortunately, about a month before the RTE, Greg came down with a serious blood infection and

wasn't going to be able to make the ride he had organized.

I reached out to Greg and told him I would help any way I could. He had special Yellowknife RTE decals printed for everyone who made the trip, so he divided them between Nate Stueber and me and sent each of us half to carry north and hand out in Yellowknife.

Now I just had to get there.

Four Days to Yellowknife

There was one date I wasn't willing to sacrifice for the trip. June 18 was Karen's and my 48th wedding anniversary, and I wasn't going to miss spending that evening with her.

That meant I couldn't leave until the next morning.

No problem. Yellowknife was only four days away.

At least that's how a long-distance rider looks at it.

My plan was to leave Hernando early on June 19 and ride an Iron Butt Association SaddleSore 1000 to Pierre, the capital of South Dakota. That would accomplish two things: get a thousand miles behind me on the first day and move me north, away from the summer heat and into an area I hadn't ridden before.

Day two would be much easier. I wanted to ride North Dakota's Enchanted Highway and then continue to Estevan, Saskatchewan, just across the Canadian border.

Day three would be another serious mileage day—an IBA SaddleSore 1600K, the Canadian equivalent of a thousand-mile ride. I would complete the entire ride inside Canada, traveling from Estevan to High Level, Alberta.

Then day four would be an easier ride through the Northwest Territories and into Yellowknife.

Greg had also created a SpotWalla page for the RTE. Riders who chose to join the page could share their locations as they traveled, allowing everyone to watch the group make its way toward Yellowknife from different directions. It was pretty cool seeing riders scattered across the map, all headed toward the same destination for lunch.

If everything went according to plan, I'd arrive with an entire day to explore Yellowknife before the RTE.

Fortunately, everything went according to plan.

Northbound

At 4:01 a.m. on June 19, I was at the Circle K in Hernando with my starting receipt.

The first part of the ride was familiar territory. I crossed the northeast corner of Arkansas and rode through Springfield, Missouri, before continuing to Kansas City. From there I picked up I-29 north through Council Bluffs, Iowa, and Sioux Falls, South Dakota, before turning west.

Once I reached South Dakota, however, this stopped being just a thousand-mile dash.

I wanted to see a couple of things along the way.



Corn Palace

My first stop was the Corn Palace in Mitchell. I've visited before, but the exterior changes from year to year, and I wanted to see how they had decorated it for America's 250th celebration.

It didn't disappoint.



Dignity

Farther west, I stopped in Chamberlain to see *Dignity*, the beautiful metal sculpture of a Lakota woman overlooking the Missouri River. At 50 feet tall, it's an impressive sight anytime, but stopping there also gave me a chance to appreciate where I was instead of simply watching the miles roll by.

Then it was back on the BMW and west toward Pierre.

By about 9:00 that evening, I rolled into South Dakota's capital and called it a day.

Hernando, Mississippi, to Pierre, South Dakota.

More than 1,000 miles.

I had reached SaddleSore territory.

And Yellowknife was getting closer.

The next morning I was up early and back on the road.

For this trip I was riding my BMW R1250 GSA with an auxiliary fuel tank mounted where the passenger seat would normally be. The extra fuel roughly doubles my range, which means fewer stops and more time putting miles behind me. On long-distance rides, that makes a huge difference.

By about 10:00 a.m., I had reached Regent, North Dakota.

The timing couldn't have been better.

I was about to ride the Enchanted Highway.

The Enchanted Highway



If you've never ridden this roadside attraction, put it on your list. Beginning near Regent and stretching for roughly 30 miles, the highway is dotted with enormous metal sculptures rising out of the North Dakota countryside. There are about eight major displays along

the route, and some of them are huge.

That morning, I practically had the highway to myself.

I rode up and over the rolling hills of North Dakota, stopping to enjoy the sculptures along the way. After the pace of the previous day's thousand-mile ride, it was exactly what I wanted—an opportunity to slow down, look around and simply enjoy being on the motorcycle.

As I continued north, I checked Greg's SpotWalla group page and could see that I wasn't the only one on the move. Riders were beginning their own treks toward Yellowknife from all over the country—some from as far away as Massachusetts, Florida and California.

Looking at the map, you could see riders scattered thousands of miles apart, each following their own route north. But we all had the same destination.

Yellowknife.

For lunch.

From there I continued north and west through North Dakota, eventually riding through the Fort Berthold Indian Reservation before turning toward the Canadian border and Estevan, Saskatchewan.

When I reached the border, I had an important question for the Canadian border officer.

"Where's a good place to eat?"

She recommended Jenny K's, a Chinese restaurant in Estevan.

That sounded pretty good to me. I was hungry.

But before I could eat, I needed one more receipt.

I hadn't planned it this way, but when I looked at the mileage and time, I realized what I had just done.

I had ridden 1,500 miles in less than 36 hours.

That qualified for an Iron Butt Association Bun Burner 1500.

Awesome!

What had started as a planned SaddleSore 1000 had unexpectedly continued into a Bun Burner 1500.



With that little bonus accomplished, I headed over to Jenny K's for the Chinese dinner the border officer had recommended. After a day on the road, I was ready for a good meal, and her recommendation was right on the money. Dinner was delicious.

From there, I headed to the Best Western and checked in for the night.

The hotel was familiar territory. I had stayed there almost exactly a year earlier at the end of my IBA Border-to-Border ride from Ciudad Juárez, Mexico. That ride had brought me north from the Mexican border to Canada.

Now, a year later, I was back at the same hotel—but this time Estevan wasn't the destination. It was just another stop along the way.

I was headed much farther north.

Yellowknife was still more than a thousand miles away.

A Thousand Miles of Rain

The next morning was going to be my Canadian 1600K.

I was up early and had my starting receipt in Estevan at 4:10 a.m. The plan was to ride more than 1,000 miles entirely within Canada and finish that evening in High Level, Alberta.

When I left Estevan, the weather was perfect.

That didn't last long.

As I approached Regina, the rain started. And it wasn't just raining—it was raining hard.

By the time I was riding toward Saskatoon, it was coming down even harder. Highway 16 couldn't drain the water away fast enough. The constant traffic of cars and trucks had created two slightly lower tracks in the concrete, and those tracks had turned into small streams running down my lane.

I tried to stay on the higher portions of the pavement and out of those streams as much as possible. At highway speeds, with that much standing water, I certainly didn't want to find out how easily the BMW could hydroplane.

The farther west I rode toward Edmonton, the worse it became.

A huge weather system had been slowly spinning over that part of Canada for several days. As I rode through Saskatchewan and Alberta, I could see the results everywhere. Fields along the highway were flooded, and the rain just kept coming.

Mile after mile.

Hour after hour.

At some point, I thought to myself,
What else am I going to do?

So I kept riding.

Of the roughly 1,000 miles I rode that day, close to 700 of them were in the rain.



Finally, about 100 miles north of Edmonton, things began to change. The rain let up. The clouds slowly started breaking apart, and eventually the gray skies that had followed me most of the day gave way to sunshine.

What a welcome sight.

At 9:37 p.m. Mountain Time, I rolled into High Level, Alberta.

There hadn't been much sightseeing that day. Mostly I had seen rain, standing water, flooded fields and the highway in front of me.

But I had made it.

Estevan, Saskatchewan, to High Level, Alberta—more than 1,600 kilometers in a single day, all within Canada.

I had completed the SaddleSore 1600K portion of the ride.

And there was something else that made this one special.

I had ridden my SaddleSore 1600K on June 21—the summer solstice, the longest day of the year.

Considering where I was headed, that seemed appropriate.



The Northwest Territories

The next morning couldn't have been more different.

I woke to beautiful sunshine.

After spending most of the previous day riding through pouring rain, I finally had the kind of weather I had hoped for on this trip.

I headed north out of High Level toward the Northwest Territories, and before I even reached the territorial border, I had already spotted three black bears alongside the road.

Then came one of those moments I had been looking forward to since leaving Mississippi.

I crossed the 60th Parallel and entered the Northwest Territories.

Now it really felt like I was getting somewhere.

From there, I continued north through the Mackenzie Wood Bison Sanctuary. I wasn't sure what to expect from the road this far north, but I was pleasantly surprised. For the most part, it was a good paved highway—not much different from a state highway back home.

The surroundings were another matter.

This was wilderness.

The highway stretched ahead through seemingly endless forests, interrupted by areas that had been burned by wildfires—some recently and others years earlier. For much of the way, the road was surprisingly straight, cutting through an enormous landscape with very little around except trees, rock and wildlife.



And there were bison.

I probably saw a dozen wood bison along the way, and some of them were huge. Wood bison are larger than the plains bison most people are familiar with from places such as Yellowstone, and seeing them standing beside the highway from the seat of a motorcycle definitely gets your attention.



At one point I came across a small group in an area surrounded by burned trees. Several were rolling around in the dirt, kicking up dust.

My guess was that they were trying to get some relief from the black flies.

If so, I couldn't blame them. The black flies seemed to like that part of the country, too.

The farther north I traveled, the more remote everything felt. After the interstate riding of the first day and the relentless rain of the previous one, this was the part of the trip I had really come to experience.

Bears.

Bison.

Burned forests.

Miles and miles of northern wilderness.

And somewhere ahead of me was Yellowknife.

Arriving in Yellowknife

By about 2:00 that afternoon, I finally arrived.

Yellowknife, Northwest Territories.



When I checked Greg's SpotWalla group page, it appeared that I was the first of the riders to arrive. The same weather system that had given me nearly 700 miles of rain had slowed down many of the others making their way north.

Those dots that had been scattered across the map were getting closer

to Yellowknife, but for the moment, I was there first.



I had ridden from Hernando, Mississippi, to Yellowknife in four days, exactly as planned.

Well...almost exactly as planned.

When I looked back at my mileage and receipts, I realized I had done it again.

Without planning to, I had completed another Bun Burner 1500 along the way.

That gave me two unplanned Bun Burner 1500s on the trip before I had even attended the lunch I had ridden all this way for.

As I entered the Yellowknife area, one of the first things I noticed was the terrain. The ground looked completely different from what I was accustomed to seeing farther south. Instead of deep soil and vegetation everywhere, much of the landscape seemed to be built directly on exposed rock and

granite. There just didn't appear to be much dirt.

It gave Yellowknife a character all its own.

I headed toward the Super 8, where many of the other riders coming for Greg's RTE were staying.

The lunch wasn't until Wednesday.

I had made sure of that.

I hadn't ridden all the way to Yellowknife just to eat lunch and turn around.

I had an entire day to explore.

Yellowknife

Once I checked into the hotel, I got cleaned up and decided to check out Coyote's Steakhouse, the restaurant where the RTE would be held on Wednesday.

Since Greg wasn't going to be there, I thought I'd take the lead and make sure everything was ready for us.

Over the previous week, several riders had decided not to make the trip for various reasons. Life happens, right? Based on what I was seeing on the SpotWalla group page, it looked like we were probably going to have about 35 riders make it to Yellowknife.

So while I was eating dinner, I talked with the owner and told him to expect around 35 of us on Wednesday.

He seemed genuinely glad to hear that the RTE was really going to happen—and that the group would be that large. I got the impression that he had wondered whether anyone from the States was actually going to ride all the way to Yellowknife just to have lunch.

Apparently, he didn't know long-distance riders.

My dinner was great, and after four days of riding, it felt good to just sit there for a while, relax and enjoy a good meal.

After dinner, I got back on the BMW and rode around Yellowknife to get a feel for the city.

I was surprised by its size. Yellowknife only has around 20,000 residents, but it seemed much larger than I expected. There were even several buildings that looked like miniature skyscrapers rising above the city. After riding through so much wilderness to get there, seeing a city like this sitting so far north wasn't quite what I had pictured.

One thing I had already noticed as I approached Yellowknife was the terrain. There seemed to be exposed rock everywhere and very little soil. Yellowknife sits on the Canadian Shield, an enormous area of ancient bedrock that underlies much of northern Canada.

That geology has also played a major role in Yellowknife's history. Gold discoveries helped build the city beginning in the 1930s, but decades later another discovery transformed the region again—diamonds. Diamond-bearing kimberlite was discovered northeast of Yellowknife in 1991, leading to the development of Canada's first diamond mines and helping Yellowknife earn the nickname “Diamond Capital of North America.”

Looking around at all that exposed rock, it was interesting to realize just how much the geology beneath

this remote northern city had shaped what Yellowknife would eventually become.

I rode around for a while taking it all in before heading back to the hotel. I wanted to get up early the next morning and see what was north of Yellowknife.

Exploring Yellowknife

The next morning I was up and on the road by 7:00 a.m. My plan was to ride Highway 4 all the way to the end, and I was hoping I'd see some wildlife along the way.

I didn't have to wait long.

Just outside the city limits, I pulled over beside a roadside trash bin to enter my route into the GPS. While I was messing with it, I happened to look up.

There was a young fox sitting just a few feet in front of me.

The strange thing was, it didn't seem to care that I was there. It was staring intently at something else.

I looked around and suddenly realized there were several young foxes scattered around the immediate area. Then I spotted an older fox crossing the road.

A minute or so later, the older fox came up out of the ditch carrying something in her mouth. I assumed she was the mother, and apparently the youngsters knew exactly what she was carrying.

Five or six young foxes immediately ran toward her.

She dropped whatever she had brought onto the road, and the youngsters scrambled and fought over their share of breakfast. Once each had gotten a piece, they

retreated to their own little neutral areas surrounding Momma and started eating.

The entire time, they couldn't have cared less about me.

They were focused on two things.

Breakfast and Momma.

What really caught my attention was their coloring. Some were red, some were black, and others appeared to be a mixture of red and black. I sat there for several minutes just watching the family.



I had left the hotel hoping to see wildlife.

I'd barely made it out of Yellowknife.

The End of Highway 4

Eventually, I left the fox family to finish breakfast and continued north.



It was approximately 40 miles to the end of Highway 4. The road wound through the rocky northern landscape, passing numerous small

lakes along the way. The farther I went, the more remote it became.

The last few miles turned to gravel. And then the highway simply ended at Tibbitt Lake.

That was it.

The end of Highway 4.

I spent a little time there enjoying the surroundings before turning the BMW around and heading back toward Yellowknife.

As I returned to town, I crossed paths with Kith Burkingstock and Nate Stueber, who were heading out to explore the same road I had just ridden.

I told them where I was headed next.

Buffalo Airways.



Buffalo Airways

Buffalo Airways was one place in Yellowknife I really wanted to visit.

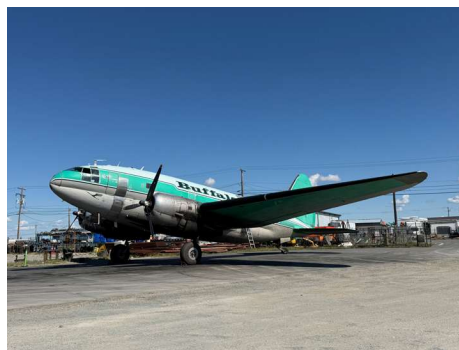
The company became well known through the television series *Ice Pilots NWT*, which followed its crews as they operated older aircraft throughout Canada's North, often in brutally cold winter conditions. They hauled critical cargo into remote communities while keeping an aging fleet of airplanes flying in an environment where temperatures could be well below zero.

As a retired aircraft mechanic, that fascinated me.

I spent 36 years working in commercial aviation maintenance, and I couldn't imagine what it must be like loading, flying and maintaining those airplanes through a Northwest Territories winter.

I rode over to the Buffalo Airways cargo terminal, which was located across the street from the secured portion of the airport.

That chain-link fence immediately meant something to me.



After spending my career working around airports, I knew the fence was there for a reason. Without the proper identification or clearance, you don't just wander through a gate onto an airport ramp.

So I went inside the cargo terminal and asked the lady behind the counter if it would be okay for me to take some photographs of their operation through the fence. I wanted them to know what I was doing before I started pointing a camera toward airplanes on the secured side of an airport.

She couldn't have been more welcoming.

"Go ahead and help yourself."

Then she told me they had another entrance just down the street where

I could visit the hangar, buy souvenirs and even take a tour.

Great!

I left the BMW parked at the cargo terminal and walked across the street to take some pictures through the chain-link fence.

After taking a few photographs, I started walking back across the street when the lady from the cargo terminal came outside and waved at me.

"There's Buffalo Joe!"



I turned around.

Coming through an opening chain-link gate in a small old pickup truck was Buffalo Joe McBryan himself.

I walked over and introduced myself. I told him I was a retired Delta aircraft mechanic and was interested in seeing his operation.

"No problem," he said. "Walk right in and help yourself to all the pictures you'd like to take."

I looked at the open gate and then back at him.

I asked if I needed to go around to the other entrance and go through security.

"No. Just go right through here."

Well, okay then!

Before he drove away, I asked if he'd mind taking a picture with me.

"Sure. Let me get out of the truck."

He climbed out, and I got a selfie with Buffalo Joe.

For someone I'd watched on television running this unusual aviation operation in one of the harshest environments in North America, he couldn't have been more down to earth.

Then I walked through the gate.



Behind the Fence

I made my way into the hangar, taking pictures as I went.

There were mechanics working inside, and nobody seemed particularly concerned that this motorcycle rider had suddenly appeared with a camera. Still, the aircraft mechanic in me started thinking that I probably ought to make sure everyone knew why I was there.

I walked over to one of the mechanics and explained that Buffalo Joe had let me through the gate and told me to help myself to pictures.

"Is there anything I need to do?"

He suggested I stop by the office and souvenir store. The lady there could give me a reflective safety vest to wear while I walked around the operation.

Now that sounded more like the airport world I knew.

I went into the office, and the lady found a safety vest for me. With my vest on, I was free to walk around the hangar and the immediate ramp area, looking at and photographing the airplanes.

For a retired aircraft mechanic, this was quite a treat.

When I was finished, I returned the vest, thanked everyone and walked back across the street to my BMW.

What a great experience.

They had treated me like a king.



Bush Pilots and LD Riders

By then, Kith and Nate were returning from their ride to the end of Highway 4, so I hooked up with them and we headed into Old Town Yellowknife to visit the Bush Pilots Monument.

Kith and Nate had joined up in Sioux City and ridden the rest of the way to Yellowknife together. Like me, they had each started their journey north on their own before their routes eventually came together.

It seemed like an appropriate stop for the three of us. Kith and Nate had also spent their careers in aviation, so naturally there was plenty for us to appreciate.

The monument sits high on the rocky terrain overlooking Old Town, and from the top we had a great view across Yellowknife and the surrounding water.

Afterward, we headed downtown for lunch.

We sat there catching up, comparing notes and talking about our rides north. Each of us had taken our own route and had our own stories about what it took to get to Yellowknife.

And more riders were arriving.



Bullock's Bistro

That evening, Dave Bullock suggested that several of us meet for dinner at Bullock's Bistro.

The restaurant was in a small, old cabin-style building and was known for its fish and chips. They offered several varieties of fresh fish, and I decided on the lake trout.

It was delicious.

In fact, it was the best fish and chips I'd ever had.

There were twelve of us sitting together that evening, and as good as the food was, the conversation was just as enjoyable. Everyone had an adventure to tell about getting to Yellowknife.

I happened to sit next to Ross Copas and his wife, Jean.

Ross had won the 1986 Iron Butt Rally (IBR), and Jean later rode with him in the 1999 IBR. Their adventures didn't stop there. Over the years, they had ridden motorcycles in more than 50 countries.



On the other side of me were Doug and Liz Jacobs, who had competed in the 2021 IBR. I really enjoyed visiting with them as well.

I couldn't have asked for better dinner companions. Sitting between Ross and Jean on one side and Doug and Liz on the other, there certainly wasn't a shortage of long-distance riding stories around that table.

They were all fascinating people, and I thoroughly enjoyed the conversation over dinner.

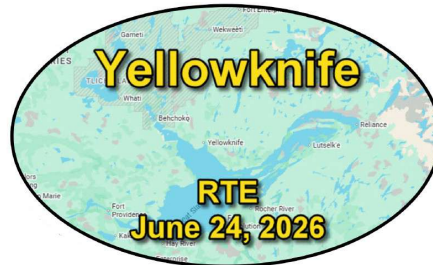
When I finally returned to the Super 8 that evening, the scene was quite different from when I had arrived.

The parking lot was filling up with motorcycles.

Those dots I'd been watching on the SpotWalla map for the past several days were no longer scattered across the continent.

They were arriving in Yellowknife.

Tomorrow, we were finally going to have lunch.



The Reason We Came

The next morning, I arrived at Coyote's Steakhouse well before lunch.

Since Greg couldn't be there, I wanted to set up a check-in spot so I could get an accurate count of everyone who had made the trip. Just as important, I wanted to make sure every rider received one of the special Yellowknife RTE decals Greg had printed and sent north with Nate Stueber and me.

Those decals were something Greg had planned for everyone who made the journey, and even though he couldn't be there to hand them out himself, I wanted to make sure everyone went home with one.

Then the motorcycles started arriving.

And they kept arriving.

I couldn't believe it.

Over the previous week, several riders who had originally planned to attend had dropped out for one reason or another. Life happens, right? Based on the SpotWalla page, I had told the owner of Coyote's

Steakhouse to expect around 35 riders.

We ended up with 48.

We filled the entire restaurant!

Some riders who had signed up through Ride Master didn't make it, but others who hadn't signed up decided to make the trip anyway.

Forty-eight riders had traveled from all over the United States and Canada to meet in Yellowknife for lunch.

It was awesome!

Unfortunately, not everyone had made it there without trouble.

I received word that two riders had been involved in accidents on their way north. Jimmy Gafford from Tennessee had an accident in Wisconsin and wouldn't be able to make it to Yellowknife.

Alex Alpert had almost made it.

He was within about 60 miles of Yellowknife when he lost control after hitting a patch of gravel on Highway 3. His motorcycle was totaled, and Alex was pretty banged up.

But Alex still made it to lunch!

When he walked into Coyote's with his right arm in a sling, he looked amazingly well considering what had happened. His hand and wrist were going to require major surgery when he returned home to Massachusetts, but there he was.

He had come all that way for the RTE, and somehow he still managed to be there.

A Few Special Awards

Bill Siersma had found three unique Northwest Territories license plates

at a local shop in Yellowknife and came up with a great idea for them. He asked me to send one to Greg Rice, give the banged-up plate to Alex Alpert, and present the third to whoever had ridden the farthest to attend the RTE.

Fortunately, Alex was standing right there, so I was able to present his plate to him in person.

The long-distance plate went to Ignacio Merani, who had ridden all the way from Miami.

Everyone seemed to enjoy our little presentation.



Then I thought we needed to do something for the guy responsible for bringing all of us together in the first place.

Greg.

I wanted a picture of everyone at the RTE that we could send to him.

For the first picture, everyone smiled nicely for the camera.

Then we took another one.

This time, all 48 riders gave Greg the Iron Butt salute.

The middle finger.

Among long-distance riders, the Iron Butt salute is an ongoing joke and a somewhat twisted sign of affection.

I knew Greg would appreciate the love!

48 Riders. One Lunch.

The rest of the lunch was exactly what an RTE is supposed to be.



People ate, laughed and shared stories about their adventures getting to Yellowknife. Everyone had taken a different route. Some had ridden together, while others had traveled thousands of miles alone. There had been rain, gravel, wildlife, mechanical challenges and, unfortunately, a couple of accidents.

But for those few hours, 48 of us were sitting together inside Coyote's Steakhouse in Yellowknife.

Six months earlier, it had simply been an idea Greg Rice had for a Ride to Eat.

Now the restaurant was full.

The SpotWalla dots had become faces, motorcycles and stories.

And the guy who had organized the whole thing was hundreds of miles away recovering from a serious illness.

Greg couldn't be there.

But his RTE certainly happened.

The following morning, most of us would begin heading our separate ways home.

The Trip Home

After lunch, I talked with Matt Wise about his plans for the ride home to Texas.

Originally, Matt had planned to leave Yellowknife and continue north to Tuktoyaktuk and the Arctic Ocean. Unfortunately, the weather forecast wasn't looking very good, so he decided against it.

That left him without much of a plan.

I told him what I had in mind.

I wasn't in any hurry to get home. My plan was to ride south through Alberta, take the Icefields Parkway from Jasper to Banff, and then head toward Red Lodge, Montana, and Beartooth Pass. From there, I'd just work my way toward home and enjoy the ride.

Matt thought that sounded like a pretty good plan.

"Mind if I join you?"

Absolutely.

I'm glad he did.

South Again

The following morning, Matt, I and Gerry Arel left Yellowknife around 7:00 a.m. and headed south.



We had a nice ride down the Mackenzie Highway toward High Level, Alberta. Along the way, we stopped at Twin Falls Gorge. The view was awesome! We continued on to High Level, where we stopped for the night. Gerry had reservations at a different hotel, so we parted ways.

Kerri Lundy had been watching the SpotWalla group page and noticed that Matt and I were staying at the same hotel. She contacted us and suggested getting together for dinner with Dr. E. Lee Nelson. Dale Ronfeldt joined us as well.

That turned into a really enjoyable evening.

One of the neat things about the long-distance riding community is that you may recognize someone's name or face from different events, rallies or rides without ever really getting the opportunity to know them.

Dinner gave us that opportunity.

We sat around talking and getting to know one another.

And naturally, most of the conversation eventually came back to long-distance motorcycles and riding.

Imagine that!

The next morning, Matt and I continued south toward Hinton, Alberta, just outside Jasper. Hotel prices there were considerably less expensive than staying closer to Jasper, so it made a good stopping point.

And the rain was back.

In fact, that huge weather system that had been rotating around Edmonton when I rode north was apparently still hanging around.

Still spinning.

Still raining.

I couldn't imagine how much rain the Edmonton area had received by then.

Matt and I had a nice dinner and settled into the hotel for the evening.

The Icefields Parkway



The next morning was still wet when we headed toward Jasper.

We turned south onto the Icefields Parkway, and before long the rain finally stopped. The clouds remained, but at least we weren't riding through another downpour.

The Icefields Parkway is one of the most beautiful motorcycle rides through the Canadian Rockies.

I had ridden it several times before, and on previous trips I'd seen moose, bears, mountain goats and Rocky Mountain bighorn sheep along the way. This time, probably because of the weather, the wildlife wasn't cooperating.

But the scenery certainly was.

Mountains surrounded us as the highway wound south through the Canadian Rockies. Even beneath an overcast sky, the views didn't disappoint.



Matt and I were both riding BMW GS Adventure motorcycles, and we stopped several times along the way for pictures.

There was no reason to hurry.

After reaching Banff, we continued south toward Pincher Creek, Alberta, as we worked our way

toward the U.S. border, Red Lodge and Beartooth Pass.

That evening, Matt and I stopped at No Excuses Tavern in Pincher Creek and enjoyed a beer.

By then, I was getting to know my new riding partner pretty well.

Matt was a serious long-distance rider. He had once ridden an incredible 45,000 miles in 45 days.

He was also an aircraft mechanic and had made his career in aviation.

Two long-distance riders.

Two BMW GS Adventures.

And two aircraft mechanics.

No wonder we were getting along.

Beartooth Had Other Plans

The next morning, we crossed back into the United States at Sweetgrass, Montana, and continued south through the state until we reached Red Lodge.

Our plan was to ride Beartooth Pass the following morning.

While we were eating dinner, Karen sent me a message about the weather on Beartooth.

Matt had received some information, too.

A snowstorm had hit the mountains, and the highway department was closing Beartooth Pass at 5:00 that afternoon.

It would remain closed the following day.

What?

The weather in Red Lodge was beautiful!

But apparently things were considerably different a few thousand feet above us.

There wasn't much we could do about it. Beartooth Pass was out.

The following morning, I rode around the mountain instead.

And what a ride it was.

The sun was shining as I headed south on Highway 72, but when I looked back toward Beartooth Pass, a dark cloud was still hanging over the mountain.

It was almost hard to believe there was a snowstorm up there.

I later learned that Beartooth had received a considerable amount of snow.

In late June.

Unbelievable!



We Keep Meeting Up

I had gotten an earlier start than Matt that morning and stopped for breakfast in Thermopolis, Wyoming.

I had just finished eating when Matt walked through the door.

Apparently, he'd gotten an early start, too.

Great!

I joined him, and after breakfast we continued east through Wyoming and Nebraska before eventually making our way south to Colby, Kansas.

I told Matt about my plan for the following morning.

I wanted to stop at Monument Rocks.

Matt had been there before and told me he'd gotten some great photographs at sunrise.

Now that sounded like a good idea.

Sunrise it was.



Sunrise at Monument Rocks

I was up early the next morning and headed toward Monument Rocks.

Getting there required about seven miles of gravel road, but that wasn't much of a concern.

I had the bike for it.

I arrived well before sunrise, parked the BMW and spent a few minutes walking around in the darkness.

As dawn began to break, a couple of pronghorn antelope wandered nearby. Apparently, they weren't expecting to find me standing there either, because they seemed just as startled to see me as I was to see them.

Then the sun began to appear over the horizon.

What a place to watch a sunrise.

The massive rock formations slowly emerged from the darkness as the morning light spread across the Kansas prairie.

Matt had been right.

It was a perfect place for a photo op.

Cattle Country

From Monument Rocks, I headed toward Dodge City.

But I had another sightseeing mission along the way.

Cattle feedlots.



I had heard about some of the enormous feedlots in western

Kansas and wanted to see them for myself.

I wasn't disappointed.

They were huge!

I stopped at one and asked if I could walk around and take some pictures.

Let's just say they weren't quite as accommodating as Buffalo Airways.

They did, however, tell me about one of their sister feedlots about 20 miles down the road where I could get a good view from the roadside.

That worked for me.

I headed there next and got the pictures I wanted.

Then I continued toward Dodge City, where I found a scenic pull-off overlooking another enormous cattle feedlot.

For some people, touring cattle feedlots probably wouldn't rank very high on their vacation itinerary.

For me, it was different.

I grew up on a cattle farm in Indiana.

I thoroughly enjoyed my cattle feedlot tour.

That's a Grain Elevator

My next destination was Hutchinson, Kansas, to see one of the largest grain elevators in the world.

It was impressive.



The facility had a capacity measured in the millions of bushels of grain, and the sheer size of the operation was difficult to appreciate until I rode around it.

I stopped for several pictures and then headed toward Wichita to see another massive grain-storage complex—the DeBruce facility.

Again, the scale was almost impossible to comprehend.

Growing up in Indiana, I remembered plenty of trips to the local grain elevators in Fairmount and Matthews.

Those elevators had seemed big to me then.

Not anymore.

Standing beside these massive Kansas facilities put an entirely different meaning to the words "grain elevator."

For me, this was something worth seeing.

The Last Night on the Road
From Wichita, I continued toward Tulsa.

Karen had already picked out a barbecue place for me there.

Daddy B's BBQ.

Once again, she didn't disappoint.

I enjoyed a good barbecue dinner before getting back on the BMW and continuing to Fort Smith, Arkansas, where I stopped for my final night on the road.

The following morning, I had one last ride to make.

Hernando.

I rolled into home before noon.

What a great trip!

A Long Way for Lunch

Thirteen days.

About 7,000 miles.

And it all started because Greg Rice decided it would be a good idea to have lunch in Yellowknife.

Looking back, it's amazing how much was packed into those thirteen days.

I left Hernando the morning after Karen's and my 48th wedding anniversary with a four-day plan to reach Yellowknife. Along the way, I reached the 1,000-mile mark in Pierre, satisfying the mileage requirement for my planned SaddleSore 1000. But the ride wasn't finished. I continued the following day through North Dakota's Enchanted Highway and into Canada, ultimately turning that same ride into an unplanned Bun Burner 1500.

Then came the rain.

Nearly 700 miles of it as I rode from Estevan, Saskatchewan, to High Level, Alberta. Along the way, I

completed the SaddleSore 1600K portion of what would ultimately become my second unplanned Bun Burner 1500. I reached High Level on June 21, the summer solstice and longest day of the year.

The following morning brought sunshine, bears, wood bison and my first ride into the Northwest Territories.

Four days after leaving Mississippi, I was in Yellowknife.

Two Bun Burner 1500s.

Neither one planned.

Sometimes you just have to love the way a trip works out.

But the Iron Butt rides weren't what made this trip special.

I watched a family of foxes have breakfast beside the road. I rode Highway 4 until there wasn't any more Highway 4 to ride. I stood among the exposed rock of the Canadian Shield and learned how mining helped shape a remote northern city into the Diamond Capital of North America.

Then there was Buffalo Airways.

As a retired aircraft mechanic, getting to meet Buffalo Joe, walk through the gate and wander around his operation taking pictures was something I'll never forget.

And, of course, there was the reason I had ridden all that way in the first place.

Lunch.

Greg couldn't make the RTE he had organized because of his illness, but 48 riders did.

Forty-eight!

We filled Coyote's Steakhouse.

Riders had traveled thousands of miles from different directions just to sit down together for a meal in Yellowknife. Nate and I handed out the special decals Greg had sent with us. We shared stories, laughed, presented a few special license plates and made sure Greg received photographic evidence of just how much his fellow long-distance riders loved him.

Complete with 48 Iron Butt salutes.

Then everyone started heading their separate ways. That's when another part of the adventure began.

Matt Wise joined me for the ride south, and what started as two riders sharing a route turned into a great friendship. We rode the Icefields Parkway through the Canadian Rockies, shared meals and stories, and discovered we had more than motorcycles in common. We were both long-distance riders, both riding BMW GS Adventures, and both aircraft mechanics.

Our plan to ride Beartooth Pass was stopped by a snowstorm.

In late June.

Of course it was.

So we rode around the mountain instead.

By then, I wasn't in any hurry.

I watched the sun rise over Monument Rocks in Kansas. I toured enormous cattle feedlots that reminded me of growing up on a cattle farm in Indiana. I rode around massive Kansas grain elevators that made the ones I remembered from Fairmount and Matthews look tiny.

Karen even managed to steer me toward a good barbecue dinner in Tulsa before my final night on the road.

The next morning, I rode the last few hundred miles back to Hernando and was home before noon.

Thirteen days after I left.

When Greg first announced the RTE, Yellowknife interested me because it was in one of the few areas of Canada I had never ridden.

That was reason enough to go.

But once again, the motorcycle reminded me that the destination is only part of the story.

The real memories came from everything in between—the rain and sunshine, bears and bison, foxes and pronghorns, mountains and prairie, airplanes and cattle, old friends and new ones, and all those unexpected moments that you could never put on an itinerary.

Seven thousand miles for lunch?

Yeah.

I'd do it again.

What I didn't know as I pulled into my driveway that morning was that

another adventure was already waiting for me.

Exactly one month later, on August 1, I would be sitting on another motorcycle in Woodstock, Illinois, preparing to start the 11,000-mile Hoka Hey Motorcycle Challenge.

At that moment, I didn't even know I would be riding it.

I thought I had just finished my big motorcycle adventure for the summer.

I had no idea what was coming next.

