

The Labrador Loop Adventure **A Tale of Two Brothers on A BMW and A Harley**

By
JR Brinsley and DR Brinsley, as told by DR

A three week ride seemed OK to me. After all, we were brothers in our mid sixties and both retired. Plus, we had not been on a real adventure together for years and it was time to get the adrenalin flowing in these veins.

So when JR sent me an email describing a motorcycle trip through the back roads of New England, Nova Scotia, Newfoundland, Labrador and Quebec, I pulled my Road Atlas out just to see how close to the Artic Circle a trip like this would take us. Armed with some Chamber of Commerce 800 numbers retrieved from the internet, I requested detailed maps and tourist booklets from each Province which were in the mail to my home in California within minutes.

Before I committed to a ride like this, I needed to know a little more about the geography, road conditions and weather in a part of the world that was foreign to me. I ride a Harley Davidson Heritage Softail which is in showroom condition (well almost) and I intend to keep it that way. JR rides a BMW GS 1150 model with lots of ground clearance and fork travel, so he would tend to ignore such trivia.

You see, there is only one road through Labrador at the far end of our loop and it is 900 miles of sand and gravel with mountain grades of up to 18 percent in a part of the world that can have wild swings in weather without warning. The rest of the 4700 mile ride would be a piece of cake on winding paved roads with ocean front views much of the way. That is the kind of riding the Harley is made for. I imagine sitting on a magic carpet while effortlessly floating through the countryside.

The Harley weighs in at 800 pounds plus 200 more for me and 200 more for clothes and camp gear making a total of about 1200 pounds. JR could shave about 400 pounds off the bike weight so he would be riding with about a third less weight. Admittedly I had not had the Harley on a lot of sand and gravel before, although in my younger days, I had done a lot of off road dirt biking. Were those skills still there and how much traction would the Harley's street tires have with all that weight on those mountain grades in a driving rain storm?

Clearly there was a lot to think about, but the more homework I did, the more excited I became about making this ride. JR and I had grown up in the Midwest sharing all manner of adventures through college and well into our family bearing years. Somehow we ended up putting roots down on opposite coasts with JR in

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Annapolis, Maryland and me in Sacramento. So the adventures were fewer now, but we would still conspire from time to time. JR had been trying to lure me back East to ride the Appalachian Mountains on the back roads of New England for years. This would be a chance to do that ride plus a whole lot of the eastern Canadian outback!

I don't know exactly when the "go" decision was made, but I had been resolving little issues like making sure one of my boys was available to house sit while I was on an extended absence from home base. By now the pre planning emails were flying back and forth across the country, check lists and all. I even got on the computer and constructed route maps with proposed stops at scenic points along the round trip from California, and amazingly, the route had started to firm up.

JR had been studying weather data with the conclusion that the best window to make this ride was the month of July. There would be four ferries involved and each of them strongly suggested reservations, even for motorcycles. So we settled on July 10th as our departure date from Annapolis, estimated arrival times at each ferry and made the reservations. We had settled on three weeks for the ride as ample time to do the back roads, avoiding "slab time" on major highways and hopefully allowing plenty of time to "stop and smell the roses". As it turned out, the ferry schedules actually drove our land progress since we did not want to take a chance on missing a ferry ride or on missing my lady friend's arrival at the Baltimore Airport on July 31st. After all, she was part of my travel plans for the return trip to California.

I arrived at JR's a day before our departure date of July 10th to unwind from my cross country sojourn and to ensure that between the two of us, we were in possession of all the essential clothing and equipment to "rough it" for the next three weeks. We were both equipped with cell phones and new water resistant digital cameras with 256 meg flash memory cards (300 pictures each) and back up batteries. JR had agreed to be navigator and had the latest GPS handheld and the map du jour under the clear plastic rain shield on his tank top bag.

It was finally time to hit the Interstates to get around Baltimore and head for the back roads in rural Pennsylvania. When we stopped for lunch that first day, I noticed that the Harley's drive belt was squeaking. Almost as soon as we hit the road again, we saw a Harley dealer just off the freeway. The lead mechanic listened to my concerns about the road ahead and set about adjusting the belt guard, checking tension, alignment and wear, and could find nothing wrong after 45 minutes. The suggestion was that the belt (or me) was used to the dry conditions in California, and squeaking in the humidity in this part of the country was not a real concern. I was relieved that we had it checked and put it out of my mind for the rest of the trip. The mechanic refused to bill me for his time and wished us a safe ride on our adventure. I think in his heart and soul, he wanted

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to join us on this ride. His was the first of many acts of human kindness along our journey.

Because of the threatening skies during the day, we had stopped at a hardware store and purchased a blue tarp which could be strung up over a picnic table to provide some semblance of shelter when needed. We had wisely started a routine that evening of protecting the gear that would not fit in the tent with waterproof bags and placing them under the picnic table.

Most all of the camp and cooking gear was JR's and he seemed well equipped. I had not previously done a trip on the Harley where I was "roughing it". The BMW even had a 12v electrical outlet (much like a cigar lighter in a car) that would power an air blower for our air mattresses. That first night we camped in drizzle which turned into increasingly serious rain. For some reason, JR's two year old tent decided to leak on the foot of my sleeping bag and puddle under my air mattress. Luckily not too much else got wet and we were learning what was working as we went.

We woke up to threatening skies and decided to rig for rain for the day. I found that I was not as well prepared for this trip as JR even though we had both put together and shared checklists of "must have" things via email. One thing that I did not have was a good system for protecting my luggage in rain conditions on the road - I had surmised that I would somehow use the Harley cover which was waterproof, but had not tried it out pre-trip. It would be somewhat bulky but theoretically could work. It doesn't generally rain in California during the riding season, so this part of the preparation for the trip did not get as much attention as it should have.

My luggage assembly consisted of two heavy duty leather saddle bags, a large compartmentalized leather piece that fit on the luggage rack behind the passenger back rest, a large heavy duty canvass bag sitting in the passenger seat, and a back pack on top. I had canvass straps with adjustable plastic snaps to hold everything tightly in place. I also carried two bungee cords for anything else that might crop up. With some practice along the way, I was able to secure the luggage in a few minutes. JR's luggage assembly consisted of two standard issue BMW fiberglass saddle bags, a tank top bag and sundry other individual bags (tent, sleeping bag, air mattress, clothes, back pack, etc,) all tied together with a system of cords and straps in a bundle on his luggage rack.

As luck would have it, the camp garbage guy was making his rounds just as I was contemplating the riding in the rain problem. His heavy duty 60 gallon bags were at least 4 mil thick and almost the perfect size to fit over my luggage, plus they would fold up small when not in use. I was able to talk him out of two of them with no problem. From then on, I could rig for wet riding with two bungee cords in less than a minute, while it took JR several minutes with his system of

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strings (cords) and tarp. Being a lifelong sailor, I think JR must have some sort of fetish about tying knots, or perhaps an aversion to bungee cords.

When we did a gas stop the next day, JR pulled out his calculator (what else does this engineering type have stowed away?) and did the mileage calculation's for both bikes. The Harley had averaged 45.7 mpg with a 200-225 range under these road conditions. The BMW had averaged 43.3 mpg with the same kind of range. We were both a bit surprised with that outcome. We were both carrying 1 quart containers of gas and oil for an unexpected emergency in the "outback". Gas stops on much of our trip would be 150 to 180 miles apart and we did not want to take any chances.

We rode in the rain most of the second day. It was beautiful country with gentle sweeping roads. The Catskill and Pocono mountain ranges are like the Blue Ridge Mountains in West Virginia. As we progress further north, the trees are changing to more evergreens. The towns are early 1900's in architecture. All of the homes along the roadside are clean and proud, many with decorations and colorful landscaping in their front yards. There is evidence of industry and jobs in the area. Elevations are running from 1000 to 2000 feet. Lunch was at a small Inn where the menu was written in English and Hebrew. We had passed lots of Hebrew summer camps. Some friendly folks at a neighboring table called the area the Jewish Alps. Most vacationers to these parts were probably from NYC.

We had agreed to a strategy of "card camping" in a motel whenever we were riding in or expecting rain. Tonight would be a motel. It really helps to get your gear dried out after a rainy day or night. Further into the trip, when we had done a few card camps based upon the prediction of rain overnight, JR seemed to want to do "make ups". That would be like we did a motel last night because we were expecting rain, and it did not rain. So the next time we were expecting rain, he wanted to camp out anyway to make up for the rainless night. I operated on more of a gut feel. If I was wet and soggy after a full day in driving rain, I did not want to set up camp in the rain or to ride wet the next day because my stuff did not get a chance to dry out.

JR and I were enjoying the back country roads, but we were starting to run into a time bind if we were going to make Bar Harbor, Maine and the ferry to Yarmouth, Nova Scotia at 8 AM on July 13th. So we gave up the back roads for a very long day on the slab at 75 to 80 mph. We checked into a motel at 9 PM about 30 miles away from the ferry and got some much needed shut eye before wake up at 5 AM. We were the third set of bikers in line and soon there would be about 50 bikers forming their own line to board the ferry.

The ferry was dubbed "The Cat" and was billed as North America's fastest international car ferry. It is actually a 320 foot long twin hulled catamaran with four 9,500 horsepower diesels capable of 55 miles per hour. Watching the incredible prop wash alone was worth the price of admission. The Cat could

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carry 900 passengers and 250 vehicles including busses and huge tractor trailer rigs. The Cat had two bars, two restaurants and a casino. We made the crossing to Yarmouth, NS in a little over three hours as compared to a traditional ferry crossing of 10 or more hours.

We rode ashore at a little after 11AM and took the Lighthouse trail out of Yarmouth, NS. taking lots of photos. The countryside was beautiful but foggy. As we were looking for a campground for the night, we happened across a small community group which was hosting a boiled lobster dinner as a fund raiser. They invited us to join them and were asking for a \$20 CD donation (roughly equivalent to \$14 US). Now, I love lobster from this part of the world and would have been willing to pay double or even more, so I thought we had really lucked out. At that point in our journey, we had not had time to convert our US currency, so we gave them \$20 US and got back \$6 CD in change. From a strictly monetary standpoint, we came out on the short end of that stick but they were a very friendly group of people. We decided to hit a local ATM at the next opportunity and to do business in \$\$ CD for the rest of our trip.

The next morning, I went to a local drug store to get some Neosporin Ointment, Band Aids and to replenish my shampoo. I had developed bad infections at the sides of my nails on the right thumb and index finger and the left index finger. The infections were painful and getting worse due to wearing gloves most of the time and the wet conditions. I could not find any small bottles of shampoo so I asked the pharmacist/owner if she had any small containers in the back. I explained we were on M/C tour and "small" was good. She could not find any small containers so she bought a big one for herself and went back into the pharmacy to pour a small bottle for me. She would not accept any money over my strenuous objections so I could only thank her profusely. It seems everywhere we have gone so far, that everyone is genuinely open and friendly, and it does not appear to be motivated by tourist money.

Our goal for the day was to get through Halifax heading for the northwest coast of NS. The roads were like the blacktop we are used to but uneven from the winter frost heaves and filled with ruts and pot holes, sometimes filled with tar and other material. All of the paved roads would be like this as we progressed further north. Both JR and I were loving the ride and made it a game to dodge the obstacles much like open field running is to a football player. The fog was rolling in so we decided to find an early campsite on the banks of a tidal river and watch the fog from the comfort of our folding camp chairs. The locals were timing their swimming to the tides so they use the ebb water which has been warmed by the sun before they got wet. The inflow from the Atlantic Artic current can chill your bones.

JR had had a devil of a time navigating through Halifax due to very poor signage, and stopped frequently to consult the GPS. We often found ourselves on residential streets with no sign of a highway. Finally a local advised us to go for

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a mile down a residential street, turn right and eventually we would find the highway again. We had to make minimum milestones each day or we would be in jeopardy of missing the next ferry to Newfoundland. Once again the ferry schedule was driving us to elongated days in the saddle and this day did not have a lot of "clicks" (kilometers) to show for it because of the stop and go in Halifax. JR was chef for the day and dinner in the campground was canned macaroni & cheese plus corned beef hash mixed together. Not a bad meal mind you, but I would not want a steady diet of it.

It rained hard all night and most everything was wet or damp. My side of the tent seems to consistently puddle water under the foot end of my air mattress, so the sleeping bag gets wet. JR writes it off to my somehow touching the inside of the tent thereby making it weep. I remember that the old WW II Army tents made of canvas were said to leak that way, but somehow one would think that the new materials of today would somehow eliminate those old time issues. At any rate, I did not think that further complaints were going to get me any sympathy. Funny how his side of the tent never leaked. We never switched sides, so we will never know for sure.....

It was still raining when we broke camp and it rained all day. We checked into a motel at 5PM in Port Hood, NS. It was time to dry out. JR had discovered a slit in his forward drive shaft boot a day earlier and wanted to do a field repair to keep the moisture, sand and gravel out of the works. Fortunately the GS drive shaft is dry, so loss of lubricant was not an issue. The tear was a little damp from the day's ride in the rain. JR fashioned a cover made from three wraps of heavy duty garbage bag (borrowed from my 4 mil luggage cover) and secured it under the existing screw down boot clamp.

The only bad thing about the rain cover for my luggage is that it looked like a garbage bag. It certainly was not the custom look for everything else on my rig. However, I justified it for two reasons: 1) it was very good at keeping everything dry and was strong enough to hold up at high speed after repeated use, and 2) If it was raining hard enough to have to use it, then everyone else should be preoccupied with their own issues and not notice it. I needed to make a note to dream up a classier fix.

We rode the beautiful Cabot Trail through Breton National Park and arrived at our ferry to Newfoundland well before its departure at 6 PM. The ferry ride is about 6.5 hours and JR had reserved a small cabin with two bunks so we could rest up and take a shower. We had a 12:30 AM wake up call and were off the ferry by 1 AM in the heavy fog. No sleeping in was allowed here since the ferry would turn around within the hour and head back to NS.

Visibility was 20 feet at best and we were on a gravel road. We did not have motel reservations and it did not take long to determine that the other ferry travelers had planned a little further ahead than us. There were no rooms

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available, even at the local B&B's. Armed with his trusty GPS, JR took on the task of finding a camp ground in the dense fog with another couple on a BMW tagging along. I was really happy with the head light and two "passing" lights on the Harley that night. We set up camp at 2 AM in the foggy cold and dark of night with a small flashlight clenched in my teeth. JR had a miner's light which he strapped to his head. What else does this guy have in his bag of tricks?

The first morning in Newfoundland was warmer and a sunny, blue sky day. Our new friends on the Beammer rode with us that morning and JR was pleased to have another enthusiast along to share stories. I was in another world on my Harley. Don't get me wrong here. I am perfectly ok riding with just about anything, including Goldwings. It is just that I might have been more excited if Perry and Jennifer were riding a Harley. We stopped at a M/C shop in the first big town and Perry got some special oil for his forks, which were leaking. I bought some leather gloves with big cuffs to keep the cold air on the outside of what ever I was wearing at the moment. It was starting to get chilly riding most of the time this far North.

JR and I stopped in Gros Morne National Park in the Lomond River campground. It's on a big fiord with beautiful lush green mountains shrouded in low hanging clouds. The campground attendant said it would rain tonight, so we rigged a blue tarp over our table again. We have now gone 1996 miles and are not even close to our halfway point. We waited for the rain to stop the next morning before breaking camp. We toured a visitor site in Gros Morne which indicated that the mountains we were seeing were part of the Appalachian chain. According to this display, in pre-historic times the super continent broke apart to form the Americas and Western Europe. The Appalachians were in existence at that time. The mountain chain begins in Tennessee, continues through the North East USA, into NF, and over to Wales and Scotland in the UK. So, in effect, our trip has been following the backbone of the Appalachians.

My finger infections were not getting any better and I decided to stop at a medical facility to get an antibiotic. I felt a little guilty about making the stop because I knew it would eat up precious time and we had been talking about picking up the pace. We wanted to be able to get to the Labrador ferry on Monday instead of Wednesday which would buy us two days ahead of schedule and more flexibility down the line for stops, bad weather or whatever.

However, I was glad to see the doctor since he lanced one finger and gave me a prescription for an antibiotic. He told me to keep the fingers clean and dry, which is hard to do on this kind of trip. All said and done, waiting for the Dr. and the prescription to get filled killed half a day. But then again, we were headed into the "outback" in Labrador and who knows what kind of medical help would be available? Within days on the antibiotic, the pain in the fingers was gone and they showed signs of healing. We were now wearing full leathers on most days due to the chill on the bike.

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I began noticing 10 x 10 ft growing plots of garden greens protected by a rudimentary fence alongside the road in the drainage ditch with some great regularity. I wondered if the locals (which had to be a very hardy sort of people to survive the long winters here) who lived in the surrounding woods, found the soil along the road to be better for growing than next to their domicile. We also saw thousands of 10" trees cut, some into firewood size, alongside the road, with dog sleds parked nearby for bringing the wood to the residence on top of the snow. Wood is apparently the only source of heat in the winter. It was hard to tell how each owner of a pile of wood marked his ownership – they all looked the same (no pun intended).

Everyday since starting out, we saw lots of bikers on the roads doing what we were doing. This was the vacation season after all. When there is an opportunity to chat, most of us are open to sharing stories of where they have been and what to see. It is like an underground newswire of sorts. The current story making the rounds was that three bikers (one in NS and two in NF) had lost their life in separate incidents in the last week by running into a Moose. All of the incidents were reported as happening after dark when the Moose are prone to darting out of the brush onto the road without warning. Moose are huge animals and not known for being overly bright. We thought it best to be in a cozy campsite watching the sunset rather than riding into the night. I also heard that the mosquitoes in Labrador are so big that they fly halfway out to meet the ferry.

A very worthwhile stop in northern NF is at L'Anse aux Meadows, the reconstructed site of the first Viking settlement in North America, circa 1000 AD. As JR and I had progressed further north, the landscape looked increasingly more hostile with many fewer and smaller windswept trees. But to the Vikings from Greenland with even fewer trees, this must have looked like a paradise. They had constructed large above ground huts with timber framing and covered them with thick cut sod and peat. They were communal living quarters with various outbuildings for the blacksmiths and carpenters to ply their trades. The park personnel were dressed in period clothing and their reenactment made the settlement come alive.

We were trying to maintain a pace 90 to 100 kph (60 mph) over roads which were quite bumpy. The Harley bottomed out several times even though I was doing my best to dodge around most of the hazards. The locals say the roads are hard to maintain due to extreme temperature changes from winter to summer. Tomorrow would be the ferry to Labrador.

In the campground that night, we met a couple from Ontario with a car full of kids and a pop-top camper trailer. They had just traveled the roads we were heading for, but in the opposite direction. Their camper's front was dented from the rocks thrown up on the Labrador road and they had had three flats on the small trailer wheels. They said that sometimes the road graders leave big piles of gravel in the center as they were working the road, but generally, the road was in decent

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shape. They knew of another car that had lost a windshield from thrown rocks from the big rigs that don't slow down. Things to ponder as I fell asleep that night.

We caught the St. Barbe ferry to Labrador the next morning. Even on this 30 mile trip, reservations do count. People with reservations went to the front of the line and loaded first and the rest were on a space available basis. The crossing was totally in the fog and for awhile it looked like we would get some heavy weather. We met a guy (Dan) on a new Suzuki 650 single dual sport from New Brunswick on a 2 week kitchen pass and he was planning to do the Labrador road. He had new tires and had prepared well for the trip. We were the only 3 bikes on the ferry and helped each other lash the bikes down for the crossing. We spent the crossing trading stories. There was nothing to see in the fog and we were grateful the ferry had a good radar.

Dan was planning a much faster time across Labrador than we were. He drove to Cartwright that night to be ready for the next day's night ferry to Goose Bay. The new road to Cartwright would be our first exposure to gravel, and would be my major decision point to continue through Labrador or to return to home base via pavement. It would be 200 miles of sand and gravel still under construction. Our reservations for the ferry were for two days later at the 7 PM departure. I wanted to ease into the gravel.

After the crossing, Dan went on his way and we explored the paved road South of St. Barbe into Quebec territory. That was a worth while excursion. The terrain on the North West shore of the Gulf of Labrador was like being on the moon, and not at all like what we found to the North on the way to Cartwright. The South coast was completely wind swept with no trees or significant vegetation, but with serious waterfalls and spectacular valleys. Since we arrived rather early in the day, we agreed to ride to Red Bay on the last of the paved roads and the start of the gravel section. There were no campgrounds in Red Bay.

We arrived in Red Bay just before a nature and local history center closed for the day and ask the staff where we should camp. They indicated that lots of campers used the local church's yard for camping, and that it would be perfectly alright for us to do the same. It was on a hill with a view of the sheltered harbor which was completely fogged in before we could get our camp set up. That evening was quite windy with a chill. We watched the fog roll in and out with each change in the wind. We walked down the hill to a restaurant for dinner.

The next morning we were up and packed early to get a start on the day. We had breakfast at the same restaurant and had to wait for the only gas station in town to open at 8 AM. The road from Red Bay to Cartwright was a different landscape with scrub trees and bushes over majestic headlands. On the way we passed a couple of pedal bikers working their way North.

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The first shot at riding the Harley on sand and gravel was pretty close to my best (worst) guess. I was constantly fighting the front tire to keep in whatever tire tracks you could find and to stay out of the loose sand. The loose stuff would mound two to three inches high in the shape of a triangle formed by the dually's on the big rigs. The loose stuff would affect the front tire by making it immediately try to turn into it, making for constant micro corrections and tension in the upper body. We had every imaginable condition today. First it was very dry and dusty so that when a big rig passed, you almost had to come to a complete stop off to the side to avoid the thrown rocks and to regain visibility from the dust cloud that lingered. Then a huge but short lived downpour occurred with the resulting slippery conditions. Then there were windy conditions with gusts of 20 – 30 mph making riding on the loose stuff tricky when you were in the middle of a correction in the opposite direction.

I unexpectedly encountered a 30 foot mud puddle and could not avoid it without going down, so I decided to try to ride it out. I suddenly was in two really wide fish tails both left and right with a succeeding three or four more in lesser degree and was ultimately successful in riding it out. What an adrenalin rush! I had three more of those before my first day was done. JR referred to those as "miraculous saves". He was behind me so I could not tell if he was having similar problems, and he was not talking. I could tell that he was pretty tired at the end of the day. From my dirt bike days of yesteryear, I would say that knobby tires would have performed much better, even on a heavy bike like the Harley. I definitely would not recommend street tires for extended rides on these roads. And I would not recommend riding two up. It was enough managing the extra dead weight of the luggage without having a passenger trying to help out with the balancing act. The ride was from 8:15 AM to 4:15 PM, or 8 hours for 200 miles. The bikes were so dirty that it was hard to tell what colors they were.

We made the ferry with time to spare. Ticketing was in a mobile trailer shack on the dock. It was not a problem getting space for two more bikes. However we were put on a wait list for a cabin for this 12 hour overnight ride up the West River to Goose Bay. We had caught up with Dan who was also waiting for the ferry and had a few beers on the dock to wash down the dust. We were the only three bikes on this boat also. My rear tire, which had very good tread on it before starting on this trip (8,763 total miles on it at this point, 2810 trip miles), is now almost completely bald. JR's front and rear tires which had closer to 20,000 miles were lacking most of their tread as well. We were told about a Yamaha dealer (Frenchie's) in Goose Bay that could fix anything. He was the only shop in town.

This ferry ride was clear with no fog and a little intermittent drizzle. We watched the ferry maneuver its way among the multitude of small islands and rocks that dot the Atlantic coast. That's where we saw 3 whales at a distance, and several icebergs further out to sea. We were successful in getting a cabin with 2 bunks and a hot shower. There was a lot of camaraderie in the ship's bar that night with

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loads of advice and interest in our trip. JR thinks I will be a Harley legend, but I think he is trying to pump me up for what lies ahead.

JR's navigation system, which includes his tank top bag with a clear plastic window on top allowing both the GPS and the map du jour to be seen while riding, is working very well. I suspect he is feeling under appreciated about his preparedness on this trip. With his tank bag in front and luggage to the rear, JR has very little room to move or shift his body either front or rear while riding. He also has a relatively hard saddle (compared to the soft leather on the Harley) and only the two small pegs for his feet (though he did try resting his feet on the horizontally opposed cylinders once). In contrast, I had a solid back rest with my luggage in the passenger seat and could move my upper body almost anywhere for a change in position. My footboards and road pegs allowed many combinations to shift legs, butt and feet around while riding. In short, JR's set up looked very uncomfortable for long rides like this one, but he did not complain. What is a Beamer enthusiast supposed to do?

Goose Bay is a mid sized town for these parts and is supportive of the military base which primarily does search and rescue operations. We rode off the ferry at 8 AM to a warm clime for, it seemed one of the first times in our trip. The locals say it was "hot" last week. Dan was still with us after last nights story telling and we found a great breakfast place called the Daybreak Café. Who could resist their Caribou steak and eggs with home made bread hot out of the oven? Frenchies was just down the street and the manager agreed that the Harley rear tire would probably not make the rest of the trip. Frenchie, the owner was off to Quebec picking up snowmobile and generator supplies for the winter months.

The manager found two tires in inventory that would fit the Harley, but they were softer rubber and weight rated below the Harley. That meant that riding these roads would still be iffy with the probable tread loss. So I asked him if he could find another Harley rated tire and have it flown in. He got on the phone and found a Harley rear tire in St. Johns, NF and made the arrangements to get it delivered to a charter air outfit for next morning delivery in Goose Bay. I had to pay for the tire with my credit card to the distant dealer in NF.

In the meantime, anticipating that I would buy one of his tires, the manager had previously had his mechanic pull the rear tire off the Harley. When we changed decisions, the mechanic had to re-install the tire so I could ride to the cabin for the night. The mechanic was very good natured about it and even gave the Harley a pressure wash so I could see some of the chrome! JR declined a similar wash offer since he wanted to ride the BMW proudly back to Annapolis with all of its dirt intact. JR had also decided that he would risk riding the BMW on the existing tires back to Annapolis and then buy two new ones and start fresh. That turned out to be a very costly decision both in terms of time and money.

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With some time to kill waiting for the tire, we visited the Labrador Heritage Foundation exhibit on the West River. Goose Bay had been a major terminus of the Hudson's Bay Co. The attendant explained the history of the struggle for ownership of the Labrador territory. Quebec had tried to annex all of Labrador excluding only a one mile strip along the coast line because of the history of fishing along the coast and close ties with NF. The matter went to the British Privy Council in London for a decision. The result was Labrador as it now stands as an independent province. Later when Quebec attempted to secede from Canada in the 1980's, they again tried to annex Labrador back to the 1 mile line from the coast. The seceding action was voted down and the current boundaries are the result.

The original inhabitants of Labrador were comprised of INNU (indians), INNUIT (eskamos), and later joined by French, British and Germans who worked at fishing or in the fur trade business. The INNU were trappers and fur traders and worked inland. The INNUIT were seagoing and were mostly after seals and whales. Their lifestyles and diets were very different even though they both lived in the same harsh winter conditions.

We settled in at the Goose Bay Inn which was nestled in thick lodge pole pines 20 to 30 feet high at the foot of a small ski resort. The mountains here are not high enough to provide a lot of vertical feet of drop, but the slopes are steep enough to get in some good skiing in the winter months. I spent my kick back time that evening at the cabin washing down and toweling both the Harley and my leathers which had gotten caked with dirt and mud. With less than a quarter of the sand and gravel behind us, I knew both the Harley and the leathers would get dirty again, but it made me feel good to see them shining again.

We are now in interior Labrador. We had heard about the freaky bugs here and came prepared with several brands of sprays and lotion repellants. We have been using Outdoor Sportsman bug dope which seems to keep the bugs at a tolerable orbiting distance. As we relaxed in our folding chairs barbequing the steaks we had picked up earlier, it was comforting to know that the cabin would provide safe haven that night should the skies open up once more.

The tire came in on schedule the next morning and we were ready to roll out by 11 AM. The total cost of airfreight and mounting the tire was \$49 CD! I could not believe it. I also learned that the tire comes with a yellow dot which lines up with the valve stem, so that there is no need to re-balance the wheel assembly. It worked great! We hit the gravel again feeling fully rested and ready to move on.

I felt the road was much more sandy than before with lots of loose stuff mounded from truck traffic in long stretches along the road. The strategy was to try riding in truck tire tracks and to keep the bike as close to straight up as possible in turns. The front tire wanted to wander continuously and required constant micro-corrections. As before, I tried to maintain a pace of about 45 mph which was in

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4th gear at about 2500 rpm's. I wanted to have some instant torque available if and when I might need it to power out of a skid. Overall the bike felt very unstable under these conditions and I kept trying to convince myself that, just like in the old dirt bike days, inertia was your best friend. However, this is a Harley and I am 63 and all the self-talk did was to give me something to do.

Then the road conditions shifted to rutted, potholed and washboard with no sand in sight. It was so rough in places that I had to slow the Harley to 5-10 mph to keep from getting beat to death. On several occasions, I tried to pick the pace back up to 45 mph to see if I could "float" over it but immediately started bottoming out the Harley. Rather than have the bike start to disintegrate on me out in the middle of nowhere, I felt it was more prudent to slow the pace.

At about every 100 kilometer stretch along the road, there is a road grader dedicated to maintaining a 10 kilometer stretch each day. At first I began to curse their appearance because it meant more and deeper piles of loose stuff to fight until the truck traffic was able to get it disbursed. But then when you get to the really rough and potholed roads and slow to 5-10 mph, you find yourself wondering where the road graders are today. Strange stuff your mind ponders. We got into Churchill Falls at 5 PM after 6 hours and 183 miles from Goose Bay. The traffic had been light and we only saw about 12 cars, 6 pick ups and two tractor trailer rigs all afternoon.

Churchill Falls is clearly a one company town dedicated to running the Hydro Project. All of the residences looked to be corrugated aluminum Quonset huts painted in pastel colors. The central facilities were all under one roof; including a restaurant, post office, library, groceries, lodging, etc. The posters in this building were offering assistance to folks with health related problems - from cabin fever during the winter? Winters here must be brutal. Every long term parking lot had four foot high posts at the front of each stall with 110v outlets for plugging in your car/truck engine heater. The locals had electrical cords protruding through their grills. Since this is a Company town based on Hydro electricity, I guess the Company picked up the tab.

Outside the (only hotel and restaurant) we met 3 bikers going the other way. Two were on BMW oil head R-bikes (road versions), and the third was on an aged and thoroughly worn Kawasaki 4. They reported a lot of dancing around on the gravel, but none had any serious mishaps. If those bikes could make it, any bike can.

After checking around, we camped on an asphalt parking lot outside the local sports arena. There were two pick-ups with cab over campers from Vancouver Is. already there. They had just come from the Goose Bay ferry and were heading to Labrador City the next day. The two were very hospitable couples in their 60's out on an extended trip. A patrol car stopped by while we were setting up, chatted about our trip, and warned us that the city dump was just over the hill.

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There were some troublesome bears around and they had had to kill one the night before. We hauled our food and cooking gear up on a line that night.

JR fixed his canned specialty of macaroni & cheese and corned beef hash for dinner. He proudly offered the concoction to our new found friends, who in turn offered us generous portions of their homemade chili. I was very grateful for their generosity. We all had a great time telling stories that night and it was good to be able to relax from the rigors of the day. Our new friends were up early as we were, and they brought us freshly brewed coffee while we were all breaking camp.

I thought that the road to Lab City was often better than the leg to Churchill Falls. However, there were some seriously bumpy sections giving me a fit on the Harley and I slowed to less than 30 mph. Going slow on the GS was also beating up on JR so he picked up his pace to 70 - 80 kph. The GS's suspension with the long travel absorbed the bumps and the going became much smoother for him. The GS was still dancing around, but the bumps disappeared. So JR developed a strategy of hanging way back, waiting until I had a good lead on him, and then catching up. JR used that approach most of the way to Labrador City.

We had lunch along side the road in a small clearing near a brook. We kicked back some and explored the local woods. A short walk into the woods made it very clear how difficult it must have been to do the initial exploration of this area. The small pines are very dense, and nothing is smooth between them. While the forest floor appears smooth, it is really a very spongy moss between basketball sized boulders. Sometimes the space between boulders was filled with water under the moss. This is probably where all the bugs come from. This area must generate a lot of peat. The Viking huts in NF were constructed of peat and sod.

The vibrations from the extremely rough road had caused a second nut/bolt on the Harley's windshield to let go and it began to rattle furiously. I stopped long enough to borrow a nut/bolt from another location on the windshield to hold the vibration down to a minimum. We stopped at an auto parts store in Labrador City to buy some replacement nuts/bolts. There was a young heavy equipment operator in the store at the same time and when he heard the clerk's price for a tube of Loctite, he offered his own from the back of his pick up truck. He chatted us up a bunch about our trip.

The skies looked threatening for the evening so we agreed to card camp in Labrador City. It did rain all night and we packed up in the rain the next morning. JR's Army surplus poncho, his good friend in many adventures over 50 yrs is now somewhere back along the road. It apparently vibrated loose and we didn't notice it falling off. Hopefully it will find a good home and some more adventures.

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JR's rear tire was getting seriously bald. The Labrador City run may have done it in. We were riding in the rain again and were expecting a 60 mile stretch of asphalt after an initial section of gravel. It was getting cold and we kept trying different combinations of riding gear to stay dry and warm without overheating. The Quebec map of this section does not accurately indicate the pavement types and distances.. It turned out that the pavement was only about 20 miles at best and then we hit really thick loose stuff in the driving rain. My windshield and prescription glasses had worked well for me up to this point, but not in the driving rain with very muddy conditions. My glasses would tend to fog and the dirty water spots on both the windshield and glasses reduced visibility to a minimum. JR wore a full faced helmet and did not look through his windshield, so his visibility was a minimum of 50% better. In retrospect, I could have brought a snap on full faced clear plastic visor which may have helped with the visibility problem and still allow me to wear the open faced helmet I prefer.

I almost lost the Harley in spin outs a couple of times and was able to recover both times. Then I was rounding a sharp curve to the right and the front tire encountered mounding sand (which I could not see) and the bike immediately pitched hard to the left. There was about 30 feet of road to the left side of the curve and then a 20-30 foot embankment down to boulders. Thankfully there was no opposing traffic in these weather conditions. There was no way to stop the bike before going over the embankment, so I wrenched the handle bars hard right and powered on to induce a dirt bike like skid to the right. The resulting skid was about 30 feet long coming to about 3 feet from the left burm of the road. The right foot board and rear brake master cylinder created their own 20 foot groove in the sand and the rear tire was buried up to the spokes in the sand. The engine had died because I did not have the strength left to pull in the clutch. I could have gotten off the bike without putting down the kick stand but instead just sat there for about five minutes to let the pounding in my chest subside. JR took pictures of the skid marks, but they don't tell the real story. I took my prescription glasses off after that incident and frequently peered over the top or to the side of the windshield to get a clear view of the road condition immediately in front of the bike. The eyes would sting a bit from the rain, but it permitted me to continue on at a reduced pace until the rain let up at about 3-4 PM.

About 10 mi before Gagnon, $\frac{3}{4}$'s of the tread came off the GS's rear tire exposing the threads at 50 mph in the driving rain. JR reported a big ruckus when it happened and the bike got really loose with tremendous whacking sounds. At first he thought the drive shaft had thrown a U-joint and was smacking around in the rear swing arm. JR pulled in the clutch and slowed to the side of the road. JR looked at the rear of the GS and didn't see anything obvious like loose lug bolts, oil, or other stuff running out. He tried moving forward again and it moved with a little bit of wobble. He started moving up the road about a mile at 30 mph to where I had stopped. We pushed the GS up on the center kickstand and immediately saw the tread separation problem. Amazingly the tire was still

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holding air. We decided to ride slowly with minimum power to the next indicated town of Gagnon.

When we got there, the town had disappeared, buildings and all. There was only a one mile long stretch of pavement with curbs and gutters remaining. There was no sign of life except for a couple of truck campers who were out fishing. Then we saw a sign indicating that this was an "Ancient City". Later someone told us that some years before, the city had just closed down and all of the buildings were dismantled or moved. All that remained was the road and curbs in the middle of nowhere. Spooky!

While we were stopped along the road, a father and son on enduro bikes from North Carolina happened by and stopped. They had planned to meet the Goose Bay ferry, but didn't know that it ran only once per day on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays. They had learned this in Labrador City and decided to turn around rather than wait for the next departure. They had tire repair kits, but nothing to help with this tire problem. They did offer some heavy duty fastening ties to help keep the tire on the rim, should it come to that. They wouldn't take any payment for the ties they gave us and we wished them well on their ride.

We decided to see how far the threads would take us. If the tire blew out, I could always strap it on the Harley and ride ahead until I found a replacement. JR had the camp gear and could hang out for a day or two if necessary. JR ran the GS at 30 mph at minimum power, taking pains to insure that the tire never spun on the rocks. Amazingly, we limped on another 50-60 miles to Relias Gabriel and a gas stop. This gas stop seemed to service all the trucks working the road between Baie Comeau and Labrador City. We are now in the heart of Northern Quebec and the only language here is French.

Rick was one of the truckers who had passed us limping along the road a few minutes earlier and had stopped for his dinner in the restaurant at the gas stop. He was proficient in English. He indicated that the owner, who happened to be a gal, spoke some broken English and she had a satellite telephone. The idea was that she could contact the motorcycle shops in Baie Comeau on our behalf. Since they were all French speaking, the owner could translate our needs to determine if they had a tire to fit the GS. If the dealer could get the tire to his dispatch center, he offered to bring it by on his next day run to Labrador City. Rick was a good customer of the restaurant and helped to persuade the owner to help us out. She agreed to the plan, but wanted \$3.50 CD per minute to cover her costs for the phone and JR would have to pay with his credit card for the tire.

JR got the necessary numbers off the tire, communicated enough so the owner understood what was needed, and she made the calls. Of course on each call, she was put on hold while the sales clerk went into the back room to check inventory. On the 4th try at calling motorcycle shops (and \$85 in phone charges later) an acceptable tire was located. JR paid up front with his credit card, and

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the bike shop agreed to take the tire to Rick's Baie Comeau dispatch location. Then, it was all up to faith that this would work.

The owner offered to let us camp just off the back of their parking lot. We settled in, set up camp and had a dinner of shepherds pie at the restaurant. Fortunately the restaurant also had cold beers. That night, it seemed like everyone enjoyed themselves. One of the road workers that hung out here during the week drove a grader like those that had been giving us so much grief with the piles of gravel. Our experiences must have been a welcome break in their routine. We used a lot of sign language to communicate that evening.

Later that evening a dual sport bike (BMW 650) from New Brunswick rolled into the gas stop. He spoke good English and set up his tent close to ours. He had come off the Goose Bay ferry on Wednesday and moved on a lot faster than we had. It seemed that this spot is the center for the local trucking activity. There was gas (regular only) and diesel hoses, a maintenance shed, and a few primitive cabins. No high test gasoline was available from St. Barbie to Baie Comeau. The Harley did not seem to mind the regular gas(85 octane) but the GS would start pinging under load.

JR had a BMW tool kit and fortunately, the rear tire is held on by only four lug bolts. The next morning, we had the problem of how to get the tire off the rim. We found that a boat trailer tongue jack with three men's weight would break the bead seal and pop the tire off the rim. The BMW tool kit had enough tools which could serve as tire irons. We got the tire off without damaging the aluminum rim. As the time rolled past noon, we were getting antsy about the tire delivery. JR spent his time getting everything ready for the remaining trip, including patching the new found hole in his air mattress. I tried my hand at fishing in the lake which was only 100 yards from our tent with no success. The bugs are a nuisance while waiting around, particularly when the wind drops. We have the right bug dope so they don't land, but they are constantly hovering right in front of your eyes, looking for an opening in your defenses.

We are in the beautiful forests which surround the Manicoagan crater. It was caused by a huge meteor impact 200 million years ago. This beauty has been the norm. We are riding through dark green pine forests and mountains of 1500 - 2500 ft elevation. The road runs straight up and down the mountains with no switchbacks. The grades are generally posted at each downhill stretch and ranged from 6% to 18%. Menacing clouds keep rolling in from the West. Fortunately, most (but not all) pass over with out dumping on us. Weather seems particularly unstable up here.

Rick finally pulled up in his big rig at 2:30 PM and had the GS tire in the cab. JR gave him \$40 US as a token of our appreciation. We were both getting pretty antsy and the weather was looking threatening again. We borrowed dish soap from the café and were able to get the new tire mounted without any trouble. The

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maintenance shed had an air hose, and the tubeless tire seated perfectly. Just after the tire was back on the bike it started to rain heavily.

We finished packing and left in heavy rain. The rain got quite intense with thunder, lightning, and periods of pea sized hail. We stopped along side the road whenever the visibility got too bad. I was having trouble with my glasses and the windshield fogging up. The rain was cold and we got soaked. The rain was so heavy at times that I doubt windshield wipers on very high speed would keep up. As a matter of fact we did not see more than one or two cars trying to move through the rain. I remember standing on the road on an 18% grade and watching the road material wash downhill in the tire ruts. Our rain suits were not designed for this kind of condition and we got thoroughly soaked through. My heavy duty leather coat did keep my upper body dry. I had no other apparel options available to throw at this kind of weather.

At Manic-5, a big Hydro dam, we finally got to the end of the gravel and the rain thankfully stopped. We were both wet and cold. We rode to the next gas stop and were able to get a room in a company dorm facility. The restaurant and gas pump were closed but the night supervisor was able to put us up for the evening. The rooms did not have keys. The restaurant was open for breakfast at 6 AM and was like a big school cafeteria. There was a camp ground out back.

The road from Manic-5 to Baie Comeau was 90 klicks of curvy and rolling asphalt road. It was a good ride for a biker, but hard on cars and trucks. We had been warned of aggressive truckers over this section, but didn't experience any. We started out expecting a good clear day, but then, the rain started up again. The rain had gotten really heavy as we approached Baie Comeau and when we got to the St Lawrence Seaway, the fog started getting really thick as well. I was again having visibility problems and trying to keep JR's profile in view at 60 mph so that we did not get separated. I finally got to a point where I could barely make out the center line and the outer edge of the road. I pulled over to the side and stowed my glasses once again to hopefully improve visibility.

Thankfully we took refuge under a gas island overhang and went inside MacDonalds for lunch and to wait out the rain. There were a dozen other bikers that had the same idea. The next town was 90 klicks south and the rain was not letting up. Even though it was early in the day, my pants and boots were soaked through, I was cold from the fog and the visibility was poor so we got a motel room in Forestville, Quebec. I had to con the manager out of a hair dryer in sign language and it ran continuously for 5 hours trying to dry out boots, gloves, clothes, etc. It is sort of amusing how the innkeepers don't have any language problems when you are checking in and paying for your room, but if you want anything more, it means getting out the paper and pencil to draw a picture.

We were up and at it early the next morning in blue skies to try and make up for the distance we had lost yesterday. I had noticed that JR's tail and stop lights

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were not working in those fog and rain conditions and with the traffic on your tail at 60 mph, that is not a good thing. We stopped at the first auto parts store we encountered and investigated the problem. Fortunately, JR (who else?) had a multi-meter in his tool kit. The bulb tested good. JR scraped the contacts in the socket and on the bulb and we were back in business. Don't want your lights out on the slab or in weather like we've been having. Now being a Harley rider, I would never have thought to bring a multi-meter and it was not on any of the checklists we had shared earlier. I guess Beamer enthusiasts need to be extra well prepared.

The road follows the St. Lawrence River south to Quebec City before it turns inland. It runs close to the gulf, over headlands, small tributaries, and through many small towns. Clearly, this is a major vacation land for the nearby cities of Quebec and Montreal. It is beautiful with thick pine forests, noisy streams, lakes everywhere, and glacial outcroppings. Riding along the St Lawrence was another kind of challenge. It was cold and windy and we were in full leathers to stay warm. The wind was such that it would buffet you from the front and both sides with out warning. You would be in a 60 mph sweeping turn to the right and a 60 mph gust would hit your left side forcing an immediate severe correction. Then just as swiftly, the gust would be from the opposite side. This went on for many miles until we got inland from the St. Lawrence Seaway. And I had thought that once I got back on pavement, the Harley would go on cruise control and take me home on that magic carpet.

We rode hard for six non stop hours on the slab after the lunch break trying to make the US border in Vermont and find a nearby campground. The campground was on a beautiful lake. The manager proudly informed us that an angler had taken a 25 pound trout with an 8 inch girth the day before – estimated to be 25 years old! I conned him out of a few pieces of firewood for a small camp fire that night. We did not have time to smell the roses or to use my fishing gear that I had packed these 4,000 plus miles, but a camp fire and some scotch would have to do. Vermont is absolutely beautiful and the air seems so fresh. It was the first time without wearing full leathers all day for many days. Dinner was pork & beans plus the remaining hard sausage and cheese from lunch mixed in. It turned out ok and camp was cool. It sprinkled a little but didn't RAIN.

We were both ready to head for the barn and were picking more direct routes now. Two more days of riding the slab and one more night in the tent would put us at home base and some needed kick back time. Both of our bikes had served us well with no major mishaps other than wearing out the rear tires. Our kick back time the next day turned into a pressure wash and polish day on both bikes. It turned out that the driving rain that we had encountered so often had removed all of the dirt and mud that JR was so proud of and left only a normal road scum in its place. Both the BMW and the Harley shined up like new with hardly a nick from the harsh conditions we had encountered.

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It was agreed that three weeks was not enough for a trip like this, especially with the weather conditions we encountered. JR's original estimates for the loop as we rode it was in the neighborhood of 3200 – 3500 miles. Yet our odometers showed closer to 4700 miles when we got back to home base. Most of the discrepancy was not due to our side trips since we ended up with very little time to smell the roses, but more likely due to the constant curves and vertical rise and fall of the roads that no cartographer can accurately capture on paper.

It was an absolutely beautiful ride through unforgettable gentle mountains. I could never tire of the scenery or the friendliness of the people we had encountered along our journey. While the weather was a bit hard on us at times, its harshness has faded and the unforgettable memories of our adventure will long remain.