

Slow Fruition

By Jim Scott

I will admit off the top that I have a set of headphones on with AC-DC in concert roaring, so if this goes astray, I plead corruption by good ol' Aussie rockers. After all, they did come up with Fosters...which reminds me, it might be time for just-one-more.

I am easily led off the edge sometimes. It doesn't take a lot to make me want to try something. So one day back in 2010, my lovely companion and I were found in a little burg called Paoli, WI. It's sort of a crossroads where artists, ice cream vendors, gallery owners, restaurateurs, and cycle riders come together. The lady mentioned above was in her favorite place to gather gifts for weddings and showers and self (They ship!) while I lingered in the street next to our steed, making myself friendly and available to chat. As luck would have it, a friendly couple wheeled up next to me and we commenced to communicate in biker-babble. A few moments later, my better-half came strolling over looking at the fist full of charge receipts, and we made intros all around. Seems they were returning from a trip around Lake Michigan. This was the third of the five Lakes that they have navigated and the stories got us planning.

Our winter was taken up gathering maps and meshing vacations to go around the big and cold Lake Superior. Then a PSA test in the fall put a halt to it all and the focus changed to a fight with cancer. Unrelated, but equally troublesome, a major case of problematic digestive ailments that hit the pretty pride of my life cut us down. No lake this year...but...health returned following surgeries etc. and the plan germinated once again.

It was a really cold St. Patrick's Day in 2014 when I asked my buddy Doug (Doctor Doug to some...not me! Don't want my doctor to know all my bad habits.) if he'd like to ride the Lake. Trip on! We shot out of Saukville, WI about noon on a Thursday. We high-balled the slab up to northwest Wisconsin past Chippewa Falls without stopping for a Leinenkugel's at the brewery, but pulling off at a burg called Minong, slightly south of Duluth/Superior. It was late July and the shadows were looking a lot like deer crossing. We found a nice looking motel with nobody home, but a note on the door, with a phone number, yielded a response. A quick call and the nice lady came rolling up with the kids she had just taken to the ice cream parlor. We got the room and an excellent recommendation for dinner at the Longbranch Saloon down town. Good grub and drinks while closed-circuit TV watched our rides.

Off we went in a cold morning to get into the land of those-who-stayed-with-the-queen. When we stopped outside of Duluth to gather a map and chat with the lady at the tourist booth, we got some good info about what to look for and what to look out for. We speculated as to whether she might be angling for a seat on the back to break the monotony of a roadside stand no one seemed to stop at. Riding up the Minnesota shore line exposed us to a myriad of opportunities to buy passes into the countless vista access points. We elected to frequent the free ones, along with a lot of other folks who were smart enough to save their funds for fine dining. Split Rock lighthouse and a ride on Bob Dylan's Highway 61 into a very cold Grand Marais, MN was pretty cool. We crossed into Canada at a place called Grand Portage, but not until we called from the States to make a reservation at a place outside of Nipigon, Ontario. Being cheap, we didn't want to call from inside of Canada and waste libation funds on an international cell phone call. So, into no-man's land we road. When we got to Nipigon, we shared a patio with a company party hosted by an East Indian family who didn't seem to give a crap what, or where, their kids were, or what they were doing. We did. Enough of this. Down the road we went to our reserved abode at the famous Jackfish Lake Cabins and lodging. Well, maybe not really famous. The sheets were clean and the outdoor faucet knobs worked in the shower. They even have a working phone booth in the parking lot. The mosquitoes were pretty bad, so we didn't sit out and watch neighbors get hammered before their fishing trip. We were gone in the morning before they were and road into Marathon for some breakfast. Turned out to be another adventure.

A Vietnamese family served up something and we decided to get back to the scenery. We found a couple of Royal Canada's finest walking around and perusing our rides. A nice chat and we were back into the hardwoods, hills, cool, and bicyclists on some sort of punishing trek which I just don't understand in the middle of no-where-but-bear-country. Along the whole shore line we saw only one person in the water. He was bathing. Must have had a bad funk. It is a beautiful land and as we came out of the hills and descended into Sault Ste. Marie, the contrast of wilderness and civilization started to sink in. Especially when we crossed into the States.

Back at Grand Portage, I followed Doug through the questions and the customs people. They asked me what my license number was. Damned if I knew. She asked me what my purpose for travel was. Then she wanted to know what my relationship with Doug was. I said we hunted, rode, and golfed

together, but we argued a lot about politics because he was a damned liberal. She smiled and said I should have a nice ride. Going back into the USA, I knew my license number, where I was born, and I had nothing to declare...Sir. And we road for three miles past people waiting to cross into where we had come from...very slowly. What a scene.

Finally back in the land of my birth, even though it was Lower Michigan, we faced a dilemma. It was the middle of the afternoon and we could easily put another 100 miles behind us, but it would have been into the approaching rain heading at us. So when we exited I-75 at State 26, we went east instead of west. There it was. A motel across from a restaurant. We pulled into the motel. \$48.00 a night. For both. Doug asked to see the room first. I stayed with the bikes. He came back thumbs up. They told us to park the cycles under the covered walk way to keep them dry. Never had that offer at the Radisson.

The trip to the restaurant was different. No liquor license, but the cute little waitress with the big...ah, smile, did tell us about a bar down the road that served good burgers. Off we went, but we topped off the tanks before we found Jack Pines Bar & Grill. While I was pumping, Doug came out all smiles. "Mother lode! It's a liquor store too!" A couple of giant beers to wash down the Bushnell's and we were back to the waitress with the big...smile. Great walleye fish too. Polished off the refreshments and slept through the rain.

We busted out early for the last leg. Had breakfast looking through the fog at what was supposed to be a great view of Lake Michigan. Out there somewhere. Couldn't see it until we got right next to it at Manistique and then we rode out of the weather. Good thing too, because I probably would not have seen the deer that ran in front of me in time to lock it down. Only suffered a scratch across my front fender from a dragging hoof. Doug thought for sure that I suffered the loss of a perfectly good pair of skivvies. Actually happened so fast, I didn't have time to wreck them.

From there, we made it home and enjoyed a libation in celebration. I would do it again, but in the fall for the color. The people were a lot nicer than I expected. Prior visits left me thinking they didn't like much about Yanks except our money. We didn't leave much of that. Under \$200.00 total for three nights on the road. Maybe it's the cycles. Maybe things have changed. To my friend who says "F#*% the queen"; yah, maybe you're right, but I say that about a lot of our own leaders. Good to be home anyway.

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