

EXPLORING THE PLANET, ONE ROAD AT A TIME

CYCLE WORLD'S

Motorcycle **TRAVEL** & **ADVENTURE**

2002

CHINA
NORWAY
COSTA RICA
MEXICO TO CANADA
SICILY
U.S.A.

ALSO:
STAYING DRY
IN THE WET

BOOKS
WE STRONGLY
RECOMMEND

TOOLS

FOR
THE
ROAD



U.S. \$5.95 Canada \$6.95
UK £4.95
2 6

03914



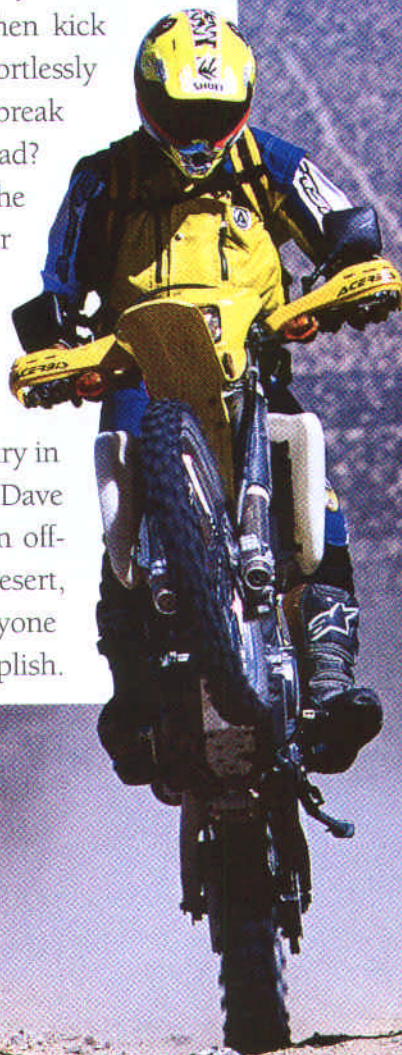
RETAILERS: DISPLAY UNTIL JULY 2, 2002

MEXICO TO CANADA THE HARD WAY

WHAT'S TOUGHER THAN 2500 MILES OF BAD ROAD?
HOW ABOUT 2500 MILES OF DIRT ROAD?

These days, riding a motorcycle from Mexico to Canada is about as difficult as falling out of bed. All you have to do is climb on any modern bike that's reasonably roadworthy, start at one border, then kick back and enjoy the scenery as the interstate highways effortlessly lead you to the other. If you try real hard, you might even break a sweat. ♡ But that's on the road. What about *off* the road? Wouldn't it be a fantastic adventure if you could ride all the way across this country, border-to-border, without ever turning a tire on pavement except for an occasional sprint to the closest gas station or restaurant? ♡ You'd think that would be impossible, what with all the land

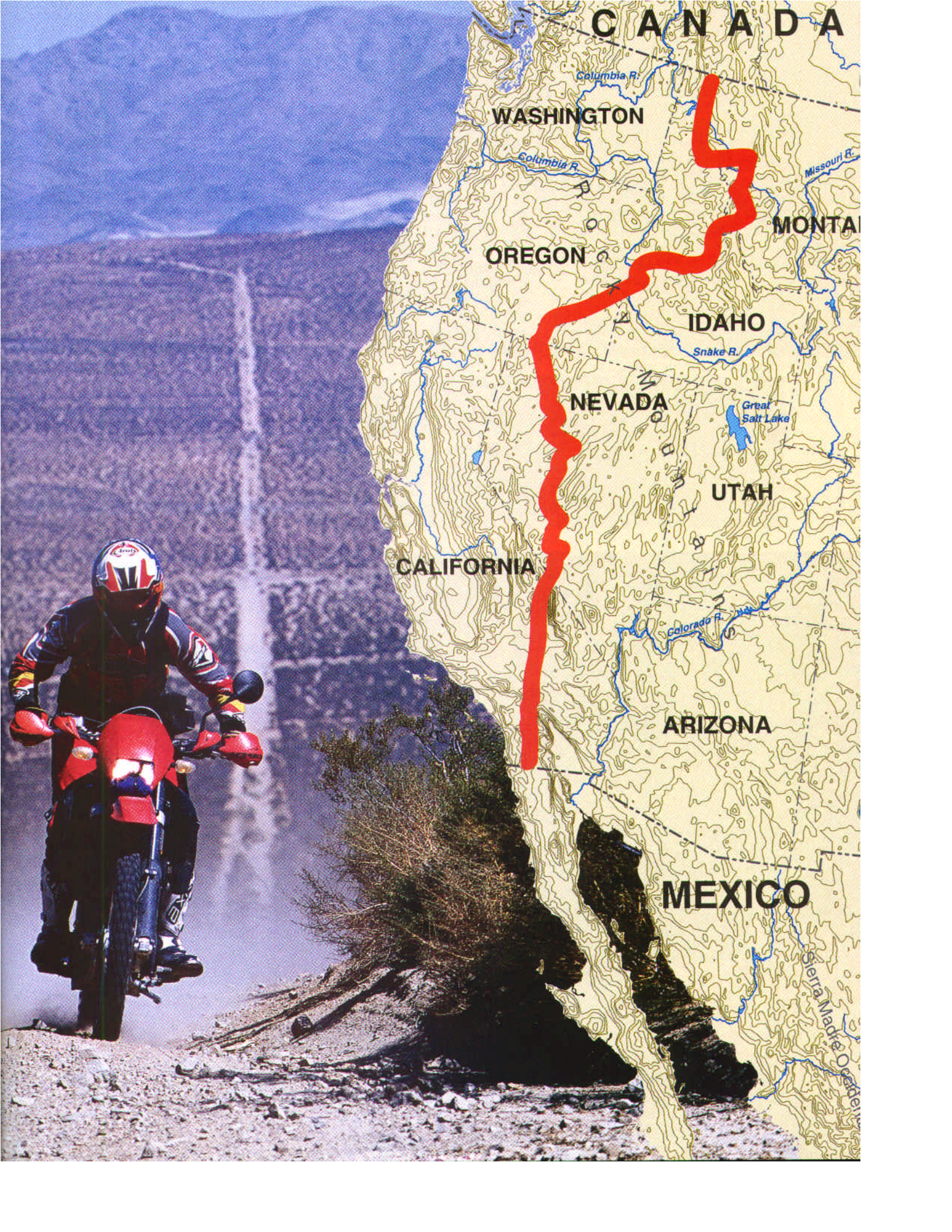
closures, housing developments and suburban sprawl that have sucked up so much open country in recent years. But not so. Thanks to Dave Hutchings of Mojave Adventures, an off-road tour company based in Palm Desert, California, it's an adventure that anyone with half-decent riding skills can accomplish.



By Jimmy Lewis

PHOTOS BY JEFF ALLEN
AND THE AUTHOR

 U.S.A.



CANADA

WASHINGTON

OREGON

IDAHO

NEVADA

UTAH

CALIFORNIA

ARIZONA

MEXICO

Columbia R.

Columbia R.

Missouri R.

Ssnake R.

Great Salt Lake

Colorado R.

Sierra Madre Occidental

All you need is enough money to pay for the trip and sufficient free time to do it.

This Mexico-to-Canada off-road trek was the dream of Hutchings and friend Jerry Counts, who together spent 10 years researching all the possible routes and linking them together legally with reliable gas stops. Hutchings did much of the exploratory work, and Counts—whose Countdown company makes roll-charts for enduros, dual-sport rides and other cross-country adventures—produced the charts. Hutchings then began offering the trip as part of his menu of guided off-road tours.

Originally, this border-to-border trip was run in one uninterrupted session, but it now is conducted in two separate segments: one in the spring, when the temperatures in the southern deserts are not so unbearable, and the other in the summer, after the snow has melted in the northern elevations and the temperatures there have become more livable. Hutchings decided to break up the ride into two legs because the window of opportunity to do it in one stint was just too narrow and unpredictable. Besides,

2500 miles in 13 straight days on a dirt-bike is more than most riders want—or can stand.

But I'm not one of them. I wanted to do it all at once. I also wanted to do it without an escort. I'm an accomplished off-road racer and navigator, if I may say so myself, having competed very successfully in dozens of top-level cross-country events, including the world-famous Dakar Rally. I didn't need anyone to hold my hand along the way.

This could have been a problem, but fortunately, I've known Dave Hutchings since I was a kid. With a little coercion, I was able to talk him and Counts into trusting me (barely) with the sacred route charts, as well as the even-more-cherished GPS track logs, so I could do the ride without their guidance.

One other potential hangup was time: There was no way I could come up with almost three straight weeks (including the drives to and from the start and finish points) of free time to do the ride. After a bit of scheming, I thought I could overcome that glitch by bumping up the daily riding schedule. It would involve

doubling the mileage on a few days, adding a little distance to others. That way, I could effectively squish the schedule to allow me to cover the route in just 10 days. Next thing I knew, there our group was at the Mexican border, ready to begin our adventure.

That group consisted of staff photographer Jeff Allen, who's also an excellent off-road rider; "San Felipe Bob" Surmon, one of my regular off-road riding buddies; and "Crazy Nate" Sciacqua (pronounced Sciacqua), who would drive the support motorhome. Since we sometimes would have to make short jaunts on public roads, dual-purpose bikes were mandatory. Although we planned to switch bikes occasionally, I would primarily ride a new Suzuki DR-Z400S (fitted with an IMS 4.2-gallon tank to extend its range), while Bob would pilot a KTM 640 LC4, and Jeff would be aboard my trusty old Honda XR400R, converted for dual-purpose duty with a Baja Designs kit. Nate would chase in my garage-equipped FunMover in case we came up short and needed a place to sleep or park for the night.





(Top) Apparently, there's no ammunition shortage in Trona, Calif. **(Above right)** Checking with the Border Patrol just north of Mexico.

We started on a Sunday afternoon in late September in Tecate, Baja California, Mexico. Well, sort of. We actually began the ride from the American side of the U.S.-Mexico boundary, not wanting to deal with the border-crossing hassles that had resulted from the 9-11 terrorist attacks a couple of weeks earlier. We used the first 40 miles as a shake-down cruise for the bikes, then spent a nice evening near Julian, California, in sleeping bags on the back of the FunMover.

Up at 6 a.m. the next morning, we decided to double up the day's mileage so we could get to Barstow, California, by dark. That involved a leisurely (yeah, right!) 300-mile run through the mountains separating the coastal regions from the desert. It took us through high altitudes and pine trees around Idyllwild, then dropped us down to the low desert near Borrego before heading through some incredible areas of high desert south of Big Bear. We wolfed down granola bars at gas stops and thought about having a taco in Pioneer Town, but the setting sun convinced us we needed to ride.

We straggled down into Rattlesnake Canyon and through some of the most

gigantic yucca trees I've ever seen. Just as it was getting dark, we made a bee-line to the Slash-X Café outside of Barstow. This popular dirtbiker hangout stayed open a bit late, at the request of Crazy Nate, just to feed a few wild adventurers rolling in at 9 p.m. The food was just as tasty as the trail pace had been brisk. And we still had to clean a few filters that night before hitting the hay.

We decided to start even earlier the next morning, like at the crack of dawn. A great plan when it heats up to 90 degrees before 10 a.m. By again adding a half-day's ride to the regular route, we'd put ourselves two days ahead of schedule and be well on the path to a nine- or 10-day cross-country timetable.

We rode through beautiful painted deserts that day, on some of the finest dirt roads in the Mojave. We zapped across the Red Mountain open riding area, through the Pinnacles and on to Trona, one of the smelliest towns in California. Along the way, we passed movie sets and filming locations that had been used for countless car commercials, and enough mining holes in the ground to make us wonder who would be weird enough to

We started on a Sunday afternoon in late September in Tecate, Baja California, Mexico. Well, sort of



dig them, let alone construct the desolate roads leading out to their remote locations. Those free-spirited souls had no idea that their routes would someday link Mexico to Canada on a modern-day pioneer route for motorcycle adventurers.

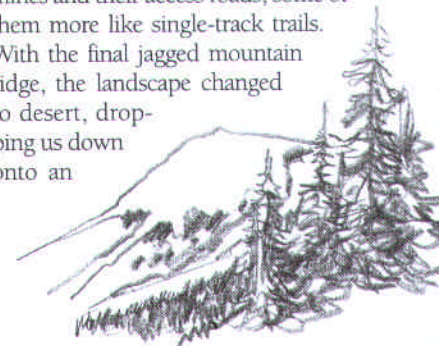
Keeping a rather quick tempo, we shot across Panamint Valley on the old Mule Train roads that used to haul silver to Los Angeles. Tough mules, they must have been. From there, we headed up through Darwin (no dancing tonight!), across to Cerro Gordo and along the top of the Southern White Mountains. The ride on this part of the route was incredible, with spectacular views whizzing past at an alarming rate.

So packed with early California history is this area that you'd need months to take it all in properly. Cerro Gordo and its thousand miles of tunnels allegedly built early Los Angeles with silver money, and the cable cars hauling salt out of Saline Valley show to what lengths man will go to move minerals.

We descended down another old mining road to the Owens Dry Lake Valley and into Lone Pine for the evening, arriving just at dark. A quick jump in the hotel pool, some fast grub, a little air-filter service and it was out like a light. We would be getting up with the sun tomorrow morning.

A hundred miles into the next day's ride, we stopped at the top of a mountain for a great view of the Sierras across the valley—and noticed a half-dollar-sized hole in the cases of the XR400. Uh-oh, I thought, this could be curtains for the Honda. But, with the help of an empty beer can, a little Quick Steel and a quart of oil donated back to the dinosaurs, we were on the trail again. Our immediate goal then was to meet up with the chase motorhome at the next opportunity for a little oil.

After replacing the XR400's missing 10w40, we soldiered on to Tonopah, cutting out of California through Deep Springs Valley into the high Piute Pines and scrub forests. This area is littered with mines and their access roads, some of them more like single-track trails. With the final jagged mountain ridge, the landscape changed to desert, dropping us down onto an

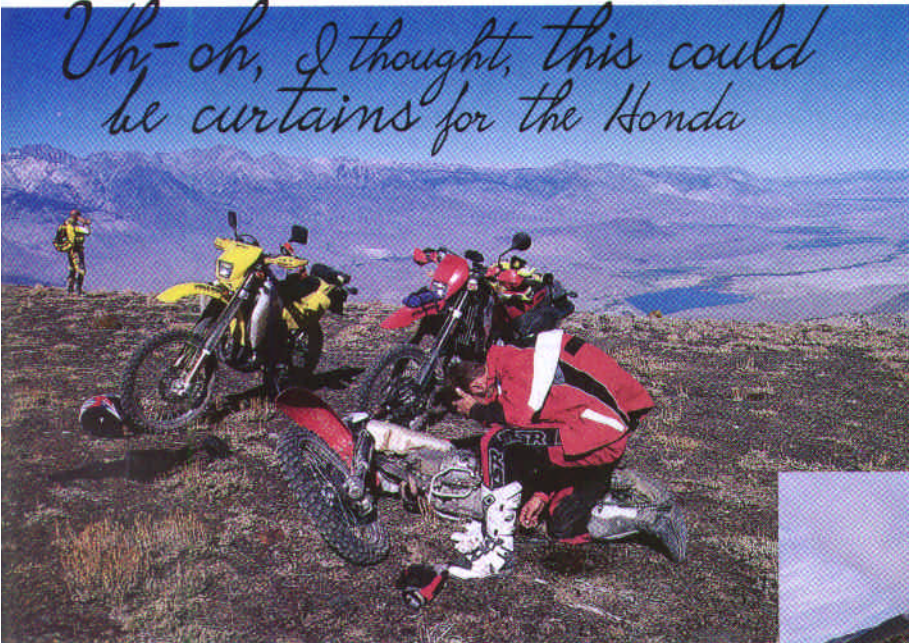




alkali flat and into sandy, sage-covered valley after valley, right into Tonopah, Home of the Stealth Bomber.

Tonopah was the halfway point of our ride, so we did a full maintenance routine on the bikes, including tires, oil, filters and a good once-over. Even our trailside case patch on the XR looked like it was going to hold. We got a good night's rest, knowing that from here to the Canadian border, the weather would be a bit colder.

Uh-oh, I thought, this could be curtains for the Honda



nearby military base. This would end up being the first day in which we had covered only the mileage prescribed by the roll charts; so,

despite having ridden at a leisurely pace, we arrived in early afternoon.

Shortly after a fine Mexican meal (we were trying to see how far to the north we could find a good chile relleno), we responded to the call of Fallon's casinos. Finding a good game of 25-cent craps, with an all-the-beer-you-can-drink-while-you-play rule, we made the most of our \$20 limits and walked back to the hotel in fine shape, rejuvenated and ready to continue the adventure.

We were back on double-time the next day, even though it didn't feel like it. On the southern segment of the ride, I had been over most parts of the route before, so I was more interested in riding fast than in checking out the scenery. But as we got farther north and away from familiar territory, I became much more of a tourist, content to slow down and take in the sights. I also was mapping out the area for my brain's internal GPS, looking for more routes to use on a future ride.



Fallon, Nevada, offered the intrepid travelers a wide variety of experiences, ranging from impressive geothermic displays to a fun night of 25¢ craps at the Bird Farm Bar & Casino.

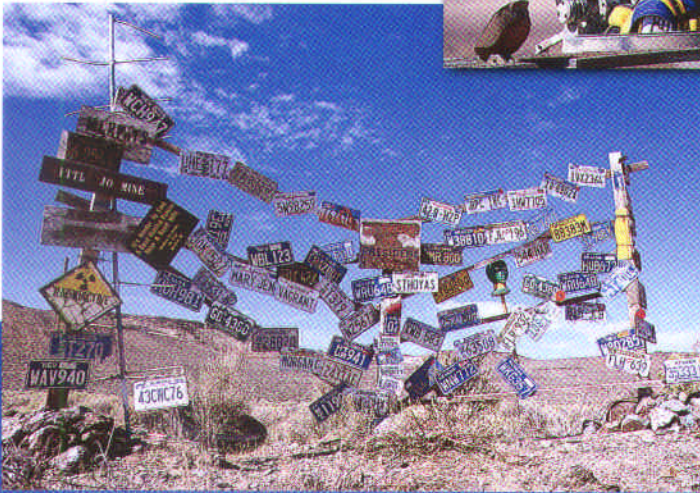


In front of us that morning was a treacherous, 40-mile desert that many pioneers had unsuccessfully tried to cross. On our motorized horses, it wasn't much of a feat to slice across this desert on the very trail many of them had taken. We covered the distance in only a couple of hours, reading the signs and monuments along the way. They told of hardships and grief, settlers dying of starvation and heat prostration, horses parched in the salt flats. Timing was everything back then; making the cross-



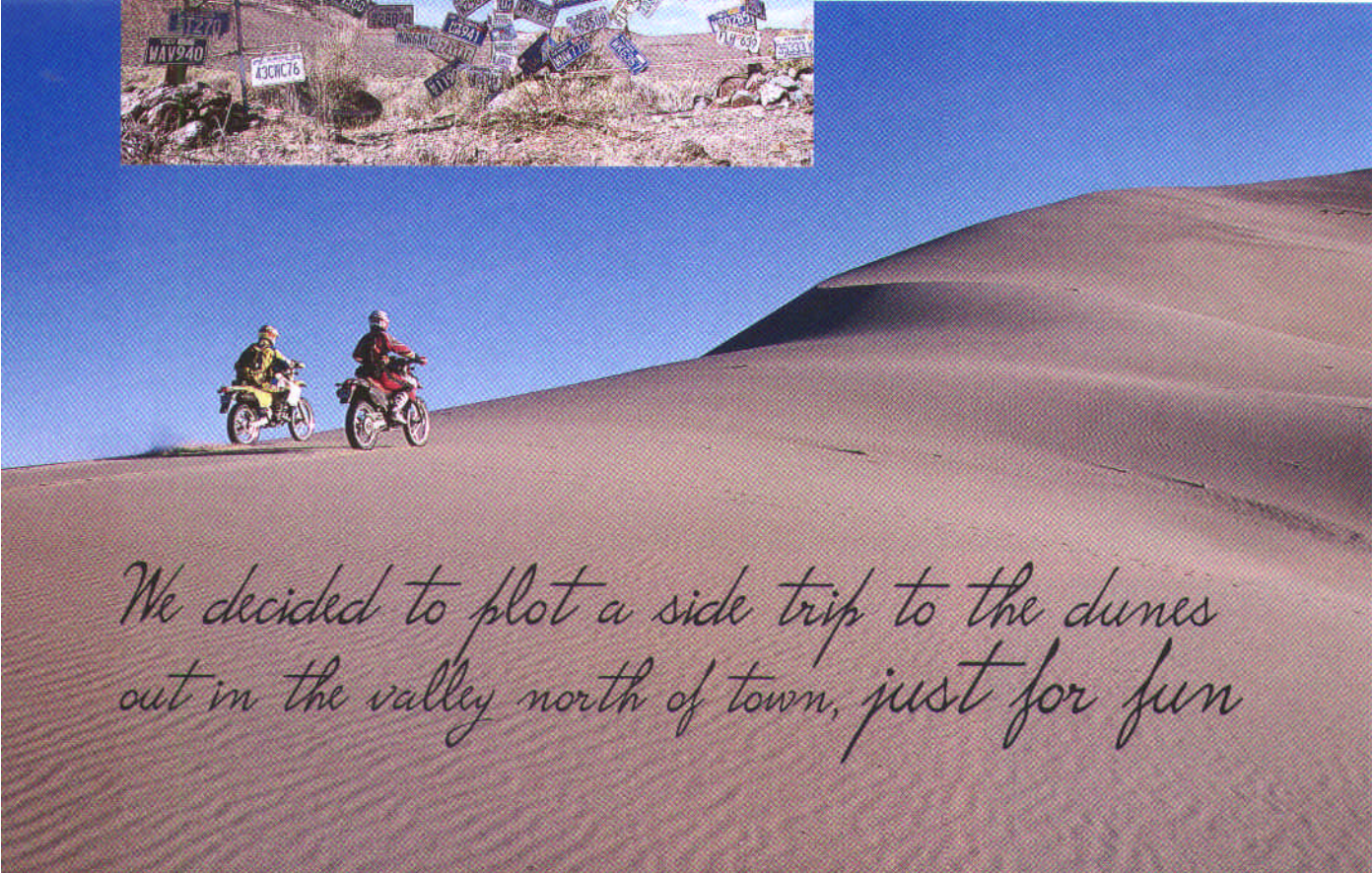
ing in time to beat winter usually meant the deadly heat of summer. It was cool when we crossed, but the snow was just a few days away in the mountains north of Carson City—and you've no doubt heard about the Donner Party, a famous late arrival.

We forged across I-80 and north into the Black Rock Desert, known mostly for speed records but land of so much more. Fast cars aside, we did a little land-speed running of our own before backing it down on the thick chott for fear of excess gas consumption—and of the no-mans-land ahead for 100 miles before our next night in Gerico on the Nevada-Idaho border.



The things you can find on an off-road ride in Nevada (clockwise, from top left): One of the many "art" displays on Guru Road. Checking out a lunch menu in Dabbs. Lewis plays tank commander at a deserted military test site. Playing on the sand dunes outside of Tonopah.

We decided to plot a side trip to the dunes out in the valley north of town, just for fun



There was no doubt the leg had been broken, and we were 50 miles from anywhere—and we didn't even know where anywhere was. Our cell phones didn't work, there wasn't another person for miles, and all we had was what we carried on our backs.

So, I had to put on my "Dr. Lewis" hat and fashion a splint out of three tree branches and a nylon tow strap. We then propped Bob onto the electric-start DR-Z, clicked it into gear and sent him down the road. Tough measures require tough guys, and Bob was a soldier. He rode 100 miles (mostly good dirt roads and a little pavement), dangling a makeshift splint and prop that kept his leg from dragging on the ground, all the way to the nearest hospital in Burns, Oregon.



We finally tracked down Nate and met him at the hospital where Bob had been cast. We figured Bob had better get home, so we booked him a flight out of Boise, Idaho, then loaded him, the bikes and all of us into the motorhome and spent the night driving to the airport. All the while, I was on the phone, attempting to find a replacement rider to help us soldier the bikes on to the Canadian border.

With Bob totally bummed about not finishing the ride but safely on a plane headed south, we re-connected with the route where it crosses I-70 just north of Boise. Not only had we lost a half-day but, according to Hutchings, we missed "the best 100 miles of the ride." But, no big deal; there was plenty of other great riding to make up for it.

As good luck would have it, another of my racing friends, Jonah Street from Washington state, just happened to be

free for a few days and was looking to do some riding. We arranged to meet him halfway through the next day.

As we continued our journey north, trees and forests gradually replaced scrub and desert as the predominant landscape. We passed through Halfway, Oregon, or Half.com, the first dot-com city, but it seemed much more like a nice place to raise children than a tech wonderland. The shutdown of the logging industry in the area had prompted some drastic measures on the part of Halfway's city council, hence the unique name.

Passing over several more magnificent mountain ranges landed us right next to the Salmon River in all of its fall glory. At a nice little steakhouse, Nate, Jeff and I tossed back a few brews in memory of Bob's pain.

On the ride out of Salmon, we hit some of the few miles of the ride's single-track trails. We were expecting more, but a growing ATV population made the



"Dr. Lewis, Dr. Lewis, please report to the wilds of Idaho and jury-rig a makeshift leg splint."





Forest Service convert many of them into wider trails. Too bad, for about the only thing missing from this ride is more single-track. But, as Hutchings and Counts had told me before the ride, "There's plenty of it out there; you just don't get anywhere riding it."

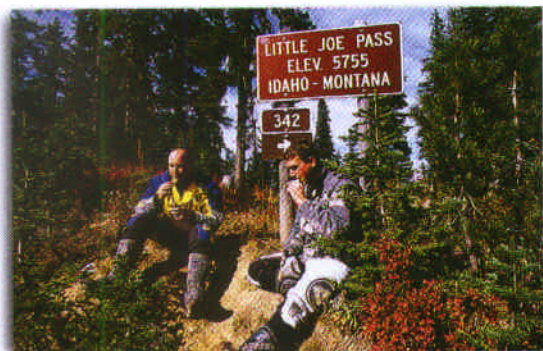
"Next time," I thought every time I passed a trailhead off the side of the jeep roads we usually were on. Around noon, we hooked up with Jonah and quickly hit a large portion of the Lewis & Clark trail as it crosses the Lolo pass just west of Montana. This corridor through a wilderness area is a prim-

pected from an approaching storm. It was a far cry from our first days of battling 100-degree heat in the deserts. Now the daily high was lucky to reach much more than 60 degrees.

In this area, the mountains are laced with roads and rivers, making navigation and use of the roadbook ever important. Gas stops are very few and far between, and roads that end at deep rivers are commonplace. But, thanks to Hutchings's thorough planning, old logging roads and jeep trails would connect just as our gas tanks would hit Reserve, with a small town or a city with a gas station just ahead. We were hoping to spot a moose along the way, but not this time. In fact, during our whole trip, we spotted very few animals. Must've been fall vacation for the wildlife.

Actually, we did encounter some moose, but only those on the labels of the Moose Drool Ale we enjoyed the night before our last day's ride. Weaning ourselves off Tecate cervesa and onto regional specialties like Moose Drool and Bayern Amber Lager (supposedly available only in Montana but we got it in Idaho), we were ready for the border the next day.

That last day's route was fairly short, but its highlight was a run through the Ruby Ridge area made infamous



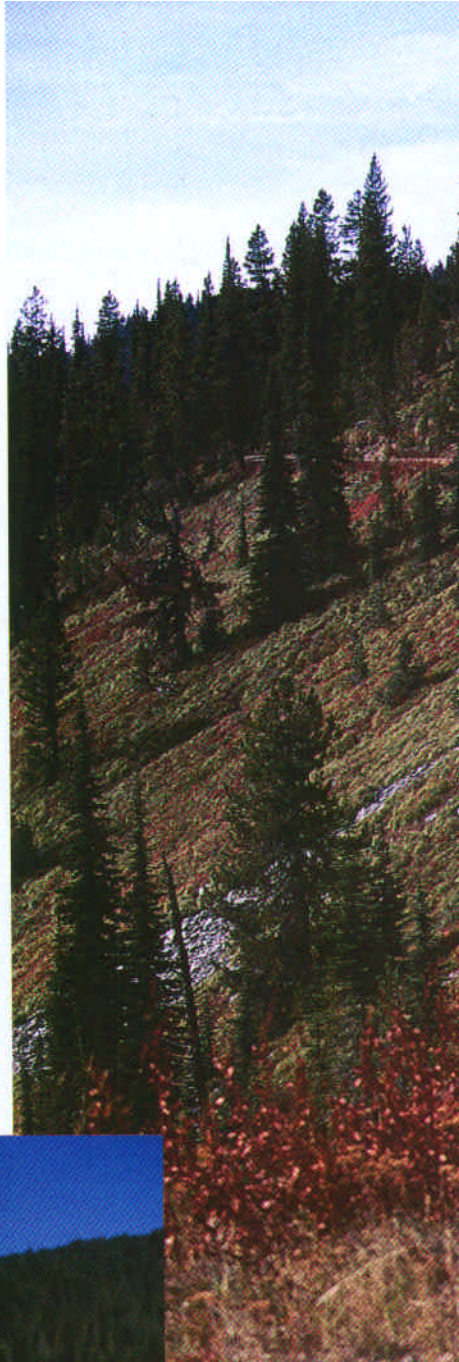
itive road along the top of the very ridge that pioneers followed. It's marked by signs that explain the plights of the expedition, but in a mere 20 minutes of dirt-bike riding, you cover a day's worth of misery suffered by the party. How do Indian attacks, freezing feet and having to eat candles sound? Looking at the terrain just off the road indicated just how hearty these men were—not to mention that they had no idea what lay ahead!

For the second-to-last night of our adventure, we stopped at the Lochsa Lodge on the Lochsa River. A fire had burned the main lodge, and although a giant log cabin was being built to replace it, we stayed in smaller cabins that the blaze had missed.

The last two days of the ride crisscrossed along the Idaho and Montana border, through the lush forests that were getting ready for the first snow ex-



Amidst the pine trees on a two-track road just short of the Canadian border, the 2500-mile journey is almost at an end. Thanks to a variety of navigational equipment, including roll charts, maps and a GPS receiver, getting lost was never a serious consideration.





by the FBI and a few tax-evading militia types several years back. After riding through the area, I think we should have just left them out there and saved the feds some money. Beautiful place, but a little cold for this California boy.

We finally reached the Canadian border, but not without one last hole-in-the-case episode involving Jeff and the DR-Z. While he was on the Suzuki and bounding down a trail strewn with boulders about 10 miles from the finish, a rock reached out and poked a nice-sized hole in the cases. After stuffing an earplug in the opening, Jeff was back on the road again and ready to snap the ride's last photos as we rolled up to the border.

Much to my satisfaction, I had accomplished exactly what I set out to do: ride from Mexico to Canada, almost entirely off-road, without falling down or getting significantly lost. Oh, yeah, I also had to get a story out of it.

Jeff, meanwhile, just wanted to complete the ride, which he did in fine form, a couple of punctured engine cases notwithstanding. Bob is a titanium rod richer than he was at the start, still vowing to finish the ride someday. Jonah wants to ride the route backwards after his three days in the north. And every time I see the photos, I want to go back and do it again.

Next time, though, I'll do it just a little bit slower. +

MOJAVE ADVENTURES' MEXICO 2 CANADA RIDE

FIRST LEG: Mexico to Fallon
First week of May

SECOND LEG: Fallon to Canada
Last week in July

PRICE: \$1950
for the entire
trip

INCLUDES: route
roll charts,
hotels, a ban-
quet at the end
of each leg,
bike trans-
portation back
to Southern
California.

MOJAVE
ADVENTURES
760/251-2477
madhutch@aol.com

COUNTDOWN
818/348-8381
countdown@district37ama.org

