



with me, but felt certain that, like so many others, he would cancel. I was wrong. That night around the fire John committed to the trip and the plan again started to evolve. Now John and I would leave on the 3rd of July at 3pm and meet Carl in Glacier on the 8th and be back home Sunday after the rally.

After one more meeting to discuss the route, John and I planned our departure. Before we left, my GS let me know she needed one more trip to the shop for a left front fork seal, the first non-maintenance thing to go wrong with the bike in 38,600 miles. She gave me a little warning with a puddle on the garage floor, but I ignored that and rode her to the shop, only to get covered in fork oil on the 92-mile journey to Heritage BMW of McKeesport, Pennsylvania. Craig's staff met me at the door, took the bike, and had it back to me in less than an hour knowing I was headed on a big journey in a few days.

The only thing left to do now was wait until Tuesday and hit the open road. I have to admit I was nervous planning to set out for such a long time without my wife and without knowing where I was going, what I would run into, or if I could find campsites, food and fuel. I knew I had a proven bike and my equipment was top notch, so that was not a concern. The concern was could I do this, did I have it in me? I was glad to have John with me even though we barely knew each other. I would find out later his reasons for wanting to undertake such a journey and we became pretty good friends. I knew small things would come up, but in the end it would be worth having someone with whom to ride and camp.

Our journey started out with perfect weather on July 3rd, as we made our way from our first campsite in Ohio, then on to Indiana, Illinois, Wisconsin, into Minnesota, and finally South Dakota. We learned each other's riding styles,



established a good speed, and started looking forward to what was ahead of us in the coming days. Our plan now was to see as much as we could, get to the coast, meet Carl in Glacier, and then meet C.J. at the Aerostitch factory in Duluth the day before the rally. We would then roll four GSs into West Bend after the ride of a lifetime.

We arrived in the Badlands on the 5th and made camp after a tough day of riding in 104-degree temperatures and with 1,600 miles under our belts in two and a half days. John and I talked a little and decided to slow the trip down a bit. We knew if we did this we would not make the coast but we would not have a "drive by" vacation. My dream of riding coast to coast had now been altered by the beauty of our new plan, "The National Parks Tour." I was fine with it, but a little disappointed we would not make the coast.

Around the fire that night, John disclosed that he had almost lost his life four years earlier at age 50 when he had a heart attack. I would have never guessed it and John said that since that episode he started to live again. He got healthy and was living out some of his dreams. After that, the trip and our decision-making got better; we did not push so hard and we stopped to see things whenever we wanted. We rode on through the Badlands, Black Hills, Mount Rushmore, and Crazy Horse, across Route 16 and into Wyoming, up through Gillette and into Sheridan on routes 14 and 16. Later on the 6th we were rewarded with a trip up into Big Horn Pass, and what a reward it was: cool 72-degree weather, great roads, snow,

and scenery that compares to Alaska. John and I were revived and excited—we were taking the road less traveled.

That night as we rolled into Cody after the high of Bighorn Pass, the weather was taking a turn for the worse. We had covered almost 2,000 miles, three nights camping, and we were tired. For the first time on the trip I was beginning to feel a little fear. The GS was planted firmly beneath me, but the wind was catapulting objects across the road. Peering out the right side of my helmet after a long day I saw what I thought might be funnel clouds. Being from the east, I just didn't know and they were not. I was tired, missing my wife, and worried where we would stay that night and what we would encounter. We had been looking for a place to camp since Bighorn Pass and were having no luck for the first time. After getting into Cody and realizing we were in a really nice tourist town, we opted to take the last room we could find at a Holiday Inn, to stay out of the storm. It was looking bad, but ended up not even raining. A cheeseburger and a few Corona's that night changed the mood and we were ready for Yellowstone in the morning.

The ride to Yellowstone's east entrance, the scenery, the animals and the overall sense of being in Yellowstone and the Grand Teton National Park was what I was looking for on this trip. I felt we had accomplished something special. The east entrance was under construction, so we got to GS the first eight miles into the park. We rode most of the roads in Yellowstone and then went into the Grand Tetons before returning to Yellowstone to camp at Tower Falls. All day we had been