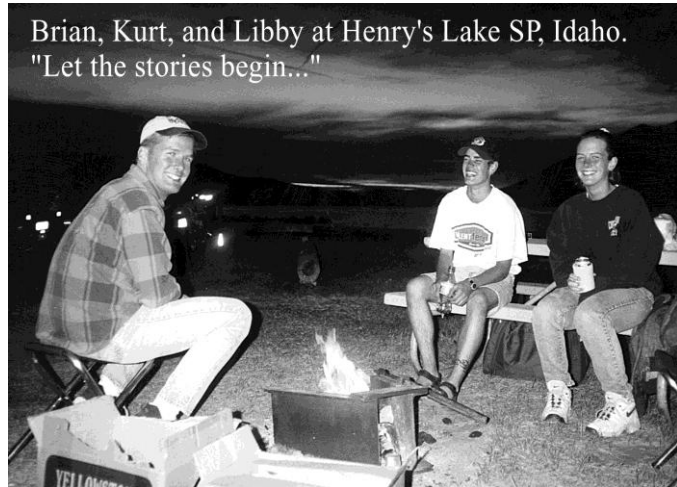


Dust for the Garden July 1997

"Before you leave, would you help me with one last thing?" "Sure, what's that?" my wife asks. "Help me roll the bike up onto the work platform." Noticing the anxiety in my expression, she grimaces at the task ahead. It scares me to roll a large bike up a ramp onto an 18-inch high work platform. But it's an annual



Brian, Kurt, and Libby at Henry's Lake SP, Idaho.
"Let the stories begin..."

thing, and despite our silent nervousness, we are actually getting pretty good at it. I open the garage door, setup the platform and ramp, and with a simultaneous push, up the narrow steel path the red beast rolls. In a panting voice I calmly say "now hold the bike while I centerstand it." With a bad back and little room to stand, it is definitely a precarious situation. My footing and balance secure, a big grunt is given. The bike settles into position as we give a sigh of relief. It will remain there until the spring thaw. We are both privately glad that it's over with for another year.

I begin removing the red plastic, looking closely at each piece, slowly running my fingers over the surface. I quietly wonder about all the air from various parts of the country that made contact with the red finish during the past year. Certainly some unfortunate bugs have left their mark. As the skin comes off, something quite unusual catches my attention. Dust! The bike is incredibly dirty under the plastic. Hum? I wonder where it came from? Where did I go this past summer allowing these dusty hitchhikers a ride back to Kansas? There is enough dirt to start a small garden! It most likely came from the trip to northern Montana taken in July with my son Brian, his friend Kurt and my daughter Libby.

The trip was conceived using e-mails and Delorme software. The exchange of ideas about where to travel, what roads to take, and where to camp

continued to nurture the reality of a trip; and finally pumped us up to where the anxiety became almost unbearable. The planning phase ended with gear carefully being loaded on the bikes. Getting all the equipment situated on the bike is an art, and requires skills learned mostly the hard way. The voices of the zippers, snaps, latches, buckles, and stretching straps added to the delight of packing for a trip. Finishing the job, the load of essentials was given a manly slap; just to make sure all was secure. Brian and I have a lot of experience with motorcycle camping, but Libby and Kurt are fairly new to this particular aspect of biking. Nevertheless, the stories had stirred their spirits, and that's all it really takes to at least try it. The Concours carried more than its share of gear because the other three rode sportbikes: a Yamaha FJ1200, a Honda CBR600F2, and a Honda VF700 Interceptor. Thus, I was nominated as their designated llama.

Too excited to sleep, and exactly on schedule, Libby and I rolled west from Wamego, Kansas into the cool of the predawn air. As the bikes established their rhythmic pulses, we settled down amongst our packs. Daylight found us about 200 miles down the road as western Kansas opened her arms of waving golden wheat to a couple of eager travelers. However, as the temperature rose to 98 degrees in the afternoon, our enthusiasm gauges read empty when we reached Denver. Pushing on, we landed in Laramie, WY. We were very hot and tired; energy and cheery moods were in short supply. Libby didn't argue about spending the first night in a motel, nor did I give her a chance.

The following afternoon we arrived at Brian's house near the foot of the Wasatch mountain range. After some last minute packing by these two "not quite ready" riders in Utah, it was time for the four of us, three bikes and one llama, to head north for some top notch exploration, peg scraping (not me), and great camping. We were excited, as the invigorating outdoors has long been something special to us. The echoing sounds of breaking twigs used to start the evening's campfire, the smell of the first whiff of smoke rising up through the trees, the feeling of warmth coming from the new-sprung flame, the free-flowing conversations; all of these sensory inputs provide a tremendous sense of adventure and well-being. We were indeed very fortunate adventurers. I could feel it; the wilderness gods were about to smile down on upon us.

The first day of heading north was a fun day of riding, gassing up, gunning it too much, gassing up more and finally landing at Henry's Lake State Park in the NE corner of Idaho. It looked to be a beautiful evening for camping. We put the kickstands down in an open grassy area next to the beautiful tranquil lake. Moving like experienced campers, we unpacked our gear and pitched the tents. After getting the nights shelter set up, we took a shower, started the evening fire, and cooked dinner. Then to keep the chill off we poured Kentucky's finest into our coffee cups. We settled into an evening of watching the western sky go from a crisp mountain blue, to a beautiful rose and amber sunset. Silhouettes of the mountains reflected on the glassy lake, gently changing into pitch black. A peaceful breeze waltzed in from across the lake to dance with our fire. It was an infectious time to reminisce about past motorcycling adventures, and to fantasize about what lies ahead. While the stories became taller, Mother Nature decided to make her presence more apparent. The increasingly hostile wind coming in across the lake changed the tempo of the fire's dance from a soothing waltz to an overcharged polka. We quickly donned our riding gear again, and huddled closer to the rhythmic, orange-colored recipient of our gazes. As long as the tents didn't blow down, it would be great sleeping. And, it was indeed.

Rule number 21, or is it 22? "Don't let the person leading the pack do so unless they have vowed to pay attention to the map." The next morning, at the campground entrance, Brian & Kurt launched ahead of Libby and me. Looking as though we were watching a tennis match, we had lengthy delay waiting for the heavy traffic to clear. To avoid getting separated, we established a rule to never change a highway without waiting for the group to catch up. Sounded simple and bulletproof to me. Wrong! We were suppose to switch to Hwy 87 from Hwy 20 just a few miles north of where we camped. When Libby and I arrived at the planned junction, no Brian...no Kurt. "Where the hell are they!" I grumbled. I calmed myself with a flimsy concession. I know from personal experience that when you ignite the FJ1200 Brian was riding, it is very difficult to keep it pointed in the right direction, much less read your Delorme map. Following the "Peterson Rule" of how not to get lost, I concluded that they missed their turn and stayed on Highway 20 heading for West Yellowstone, MT. Had I guessed wrong, the whole trip would be ruined. Brian and I experienced several separations on previous motorcycle trips, and they are only funny in retrospect. I cussed Brian for 20 minutes, until I found his smiling face in West Yellowstone

munching on an Egg McMuffin. He said, "we were really hungry and there weren't any speed limits in Montana, so we pinned it!" I said nothing and maintained a stoic posture. Inside though, I was doing handstands in jubilation that the trip was still on!

After a tasteless breakfast in West Yellowstone, we continued the march northward. We encountered a very long stretch of rough, graveled road north of Ennis, MT. Some of the dust for my new imaginary garden must have come from this road. Plodding along, it didn't take long for my three riding companions to pass me. They were standing up on the pegs as they rode past the ol' man. Once we finally returned to pavement, we could let the bikes really stretch. Montana's lack of speed limits is a mixed blessing. It's comforting to know that you won't get a ticket, but a whole string of RV's doing 85 MPH is unnerving.

The next evening found us setting up camp near Seeley Lake, Montana where there is an abundance of excellent camping spots. We unpacked the bikes, then Brian & Kurt rode back to town for evening supplies while Libby and I set up camp. Upon returning they surprised us with beer, ice, thick T-bone steaks, and an upset lady ranger whose Forest Service Blazer screeched into our campsite. Before the dust cleared, she sprang from her truck, wanting the full attention of the two dudes that were trying to look innocent. Seems they were in too big of a hurry to get back to the site and broke the park speed limit just a bit. Once the ranger saw how harmless we really were (helps to have Libby smile), she eventually accepted our apologies and wished us a good evening. My three travelling companions listened dutifully to pappy's mini lecture on bikes, pipes, and the pristine wilderness. Enough speeches given, it was time to get the meat on the fire. Brian cleverly carved cooking utensils while the chipmunks hid in the bushes waiting and watching. The furry little voyeurs were hoping one of us hungry travelers would drop some of our beef or beans. It was great! Our miniature little audience thought so too as they were rewarded well.

The fire slowly lowered its reach into the cool night air. The conversations slowed down as the crackling embers subdued our thoughts. It was time to go into the tent, a flimsily covered special place unlike any other. The thin layer of rip-stop nylon separated me from all that was uninvited. My imagination was much more powerful than the fine cloth, and more dangerous

than all the creatures, so mind games reassured me that all was well beyond the thin walls. Finding a slight depression to park my butt in, I rolled my leathers to make a nice pillow. Leaving my socks on to keep the tootsies warm, I slipped into the bag, wiggled around to get comfortable, and then just listened. The sounds of the wilderness were awesome. The drops of moisture from the trees hit the tent roof with a melody composed only by Nature. Little animals (I hoped they're little) scurried around the campsite looking for leftovers. The fire said goodnight with a "pop"; slowly cooling down and falling into a sleep of it's own. I listened until there was no one there, only the sounds. The next time the forest spoke, it was morning.

Glacier National Park, our planned destination was absolutely beautiful. However, great adventures are not in the destination, but in the journey. After a day of exploring the park, and a pit stop in Canada, it was time for a good night's rest. Tomorrow we would travel onward.

While searching for a camping spot, my riding buddies stayed in town to buy goodies for the night. The "*good camping spot*" instructions I picked up from the locals took me to a beautiful stream about 6 miles south of Salmon, Idaho. Boy this was going to be great! I took off my helmet and walked down by the crystal clear stream looking for the best place to stake a claim. Pleasant dreams over! Even over the sound of the rippling water I could hear the ominous buzz of the "attack fighters" coming in. The swarming mosquitoes had been waiting all season for some Kansas fed beef. This wasn't going to work, as I was not about to set up camp while being eaten alive. Brian and I did that once in Ontario, Canada, and other than being an easy way to lose weight via anemia, it's no fun. It was on the way back to town that I spotted an obscure sign saying something about some kind of Hot Springs. "We'll try this instead," I said to myself.

With the left blinker flashing, and a quick glance in the mirror to see that my band of adventurers were following suit, I down shifted at the "Hot Springs" sign and turned. Although the road was very narrow, it was paved. Sitting upright to peek over the bug-splattered windshield, the sign ahead reported that the campground was 3 miles. "It will be a breeze to go check this place out if the road stays this good" I said to myself. It better be quick though, as it was fairly warm, and my fellow travelers had beer and ice strapped on their bikes. After about a mile, the road turned to gravel; but it

was still pretty decent, and we could move along quickly. The next sign said 2 miles to go. As we gained altitude, I had fantasies of drinking a cool beer next to a sparkling mountain spring, while hoping the flying carnivores were going to be more manageable (less hungry) up here than down by that stream.

We came to the proverbial fork in the road. The sign beckoned us to the left. As we passed under the arched gateway, the sign said our hot springs campground was just one more mile. But, as we cleared the gate the road changed for the worse. I thought to myself "how bad could the road get?" It turned out to be a stupid question. I shifted down to get more pulling power as I watched Brian bounce around on the rocks. It was time to get up on the pegs; I couldn't keep my butt on the seat anyway. Brian was kicking up dust and rocks as throaty grunts and groans came from the bowels of that old FJ. He continued to bounce and maneuvered up the rocky hill, and it wasn't long before only dust left evidence that someone was in fact still moving in front of me. My radiator fan clicked on and the heat gauge strained to see itself in the right mirror. I was now sure there would be no campground up this goat trail. Fast becoming hot and irritable, I agonized about our predicament. My mind shifted to Libby as I looked in my clouded mirror. Just as I feared, she wasn't back there. The trail was too steep and narrow to turn around, so I roared onward, keeping the RPM up and proceeding until I couldn't go any further. I stewed and fumed as we climbed, having visions of unloading on the person that put those "Hot Springs Campground" signs up! Fortunately for me though, there probably wouldn't be anybody up there to attack. How far could a mile be? I couldn't see anything except Brian's gritty cloud; the dust that found it's way to my garage.

A silhouette of what looked like an old rundown barn appeared over the crest of the ridge. As the bike grunted, groaned, and danced it's way up the trail, more old buildings became visible. "Gosh, this looks more like an abandoned farmstead than a campground for weary travelers," I said aloud in my steamy helmet. Old rusty vehicles, various pieces of machinery, run-down buildings, and just general junk loomed everywhere.

I roared up the last part of the hill and saw Brian stopped next to what seemed to be an old man in ragged, dirty clothes. This was undoubtedly the end of the road. The oasis envisioned failed to match the reality of what laid

before me. I pulled the panting bike next to Brian, and with my dirty, sweaty glove, turned the key off. All was quiet except for the whirling of the radiator fan, spinning feverishly to cool the bike down. Frankly, I needed a fan also; nevertheless I tried to compose myself. "Where's the campground?" I asked the old man while trying to clear dust from my throat? The stranger waved his arms outwardly indicating that we were in it. I couldn't believe what he was suggesting. "Where will we pitch our tents?" He motioned again in a similar fashion. He wasn't doing much talking; just a lot of motioning. The few words he did say suggested he wasn't from Idaho, or from this country for that matter. What a mess! I wondered where Libby and Kurt were? She had most likely dumped the bike. "Poor little girl", my heart muttered. This will probably be the last trip ever to be taken with good old dad.

While standing there with Brian in mutual disgust and exhaustion, we could hear the moan of overworked, panting bikes grinding their way up the hill. Soon they popped over the ridge and came to a stop next to us. While the cooked bikes ticked in the high desert air, the melting ice created little valleys down through the dust, covering everything that was once shiny and beautiful. The beer was explosive now after going through a shaking more severe than an Ace Hardware paint shaker. Libby had stalled her bike out and Kurt came to her rescue. They exchanged bikes somewhere back down the path because the CBR had a lower seat height and made it easier for Libby to maneuver the rough trail. Kurt was a hero in my eyes, as I didn't know how I would have ever traveled back down that path to rescue Libby.

I wondered if the old man lived up here? We seemed to be in the middle of absolute nowhere! Just then a lady, about mid 40's in age with sandy-blond hair, came out of a log cabin. Focusing on the ground, she walked quietly past us heading towards the old barn-looking building. Well, there were at least two humans up here. Though not great communicators, one gestures well, and the other is very focused.

I gazed around and noticed what looked like an actual refrigerator on the porch of the cabin. In a desperate mood, I became bold. "Do you care if we put our ice and beer in your ice box?" He reluctantly mumbled that it would be okay. Remembering that this was at least his idea of a campground; I inquired as to how much it would cost us. He responded immediately, "\$20".

Thinking that was pretty steep considering that people can't even get up here, I asked, "how would we clean up? Is there a shower or at least running water?" He pointed to the barn saying that the hot springs fed a pool next to the building. "You will enjoy a most relaxing evening in the 117 degree water," he said with a broken accent. Since there were no signs of previous campfires, I asked if we could build a fire near our tents. Again, he reluctantly said yes as long as we didn't burn the place down. This didn't look like the type of place that would be insured. Besides, how in the hell would you ever get a fire truck up that road? I reached into my wallet and handed him a \$20 bill. He immediately came back saying "\$22 with sales tax." Sure! I'll bet the state of Idaho knows you're up here, I thought. I gave him two more dollars.

Even though we had entered the gates of a bad dream, things actually started to fall in place. The weird scene was so out of the ordinary that it provided ample food for our tired and speculative minds. Did the bugs know something we didn't? The pesky flying bloodsuckers seemed to favor the river to this strange place in the foothills. However, heaven can be strangely disguised. While we setup camp, we make frequent trips to the porch for cold beer; the conversations began to flow easier between the old man and us. It turned out that the run-down building the woman walked towards was a turn-of-the-century hotel. Apparently people came up here to stay and enjoy the hot springs. The tiny cabin, with a refrigerator on the porch and small red lights coming from camcorders pointing out each of the windows, was home to this strange man and woman. They scrounged their meager existence by selling passages into the pool. They moved to this run down oasis 3 years ago with a dream to restore the old hotel into what it once was. I thought to myself; you might want to start with the road. Later when the woman returned to the porch of the cabin, I attempted to strike up a conversation. I commented to her, "you have an unusual place here; where are you from?" Staring at the ground, she uttered with a broken accent, "Moscow."

Wow! My excitement carried me on; "Where is he from," nodding towards what I presumed was her husband? She did not answer. "How did you get from Moscow all the way up here on the side of this mountain?" "He came to Moscow to get me," she responded, this time making eye contact. She had a sparkle in her eyes that went well with her weathered cheeks, but

nonetheless, I could tell by her expression that the questioning was over. She told me just enough to make my curiosity salivate, and with another downward glance, I was relegated to just wondering what kind of a story she could have told. Actually I felt humbled. I consider myself fairly well traveled (225,000 miles on just a motorcycle), but where I've been and what I've done probably pales in comparison to her life and journeys.

The Idaho sun dipped below the peaks that shadowed the Salmon River as the cloudless sky turned rose-colored silhouettes to black. The tents were up, the bikes resting, dinner was over, pots and pans air drying, and the fire was self-governing. We prepared to try that promising hot spring water. Brian and I didn't bring swimming trunks, and not wanting wet jockey shorts hanging off the back of the bikes the next day (not cool), we timidly waited until the dark was certain. Leaving the warmth of the fire, we took our towels and headed into the cool night air towards the old spa. Standing at the edge of the steamy mysterious abyss, I slipped out of my moccasins, dropped my towel, and stepped into the black unknown. Submitting to that dark pool was an experience unlike any other, the air so cool, the water so warm, the skies so black, the watchful Idaho stars so bright. We were in HEAVEN! I wondered how a situation could go from so bad to so good, as the moans and groans of ecstasy echoed from the confines of the rock walls. You can't plan to find places like this; instead they find you. Special experiences are cleverly hidden in the ordinary, in the things and spaces we avoid. However, motorcycling unexplainably brings me to these seemingly ordinary, yet very special places. Serendipity had paid me a visit while passing through Idaho.

Their snorting jarred me from a deep sleep. I listened carefully as I sluggishly realized that only my ever-protective layer of rip-stop nylon protected me from what sounded like horses. Sleeping bag unzipped, and then the window rainfly, the beautiful wild creatures silhouetted the sunlight beaming into our tent. "Good morning my friends—what brings you to this unusual time and place?" As I unzipped the entry flap to the tent, my newfound acquaintances slowly trotted off towards the ridge of the hill, then disappeared. Free! Wild! Yes!

We slid back down the treacherous path; with back tires grabbing desperately along the way, we eventually reached the smooth blacktop.

"Whew!" Smooth roads! Punch it! It's a beautiful morning! Almost immediately it was apparent that something was wrong. Every motorcycling cornering skill ever learned disappeared as I tried to hold a line on the twisty ride down the Salmon River canyon. But it wasn't just me; we were all weaving like a bunch of neophytes. My whole body felt like spongy rubber, as if all my internal systems were bogged down in thick gear oil. I think we stayed in HEAVEN a little too long last night. Safety beckons that we slow down and take it easy. Having fun in this great little canyon would just have to wait for some other time.

Tummies talking, we rolled off our wrists and eased into in a quiet little town along the river for the day's first food. Little "burgs" create a unique opportunity to not only eat a good breakfast, but to reflect on a much slower pace of life. The unhurried tempo provided the conditions required for reflection, kind of a symbiotic relationship. Though the people were few, they were the genuine articles. Small towns are not places to mask yourself because your neighbors and friends can see through the persona. These little places have a way of stripping away pretense, of cleansing the spirit of personality. Yes, the middle of nowhere holds a special spot in my psychic. In spite of modern society's definition of progress, perhaps they are further advanced because they know solitude, because they hear the wild horses snort, because they light up when the Idaho stars beam down as they enter the black warm waters of a mysterious hot springs.

Bikes and paunches filled, the unknown calling, we rolled. What a beautiful day we had on tap. Idaho opened up, letting us stretch our legs. We passed cars as if we had someplace to go and they didn't. Life is wild, yet dangerous in the wide-open spaces at triple digit speeds. What a paradox, small towns and triple digit speeds! We backed off a couple of notches to ensure we got home to our families in one piece.

Brian's house in Utah would appear in our views shortly after lunch. We could rest up for a few hours before we made our launch back to Kansas. Libby was particularly tired, partly because the Interceptor is not comfortable for long trips, but mostly because she couldn't resist staying up half the night and howling at the moon. Kids!

Libby wasn't a happy camper when I announced that naptime was over. "Time to roll little girl, we have about 300 miles to get where we will spend the night." It was a grueling afternoon and evening trying to get to our appointed destination, but we finally made it by 10:30 that night. Not a word was spoken as we immediately hit the beds, falling comatose. The next day after 709 miles and about 12hrs on the road we did the same thing again, but this time we were home.

After we were settled and rested for a few days, I learned that there was a phantom rider on the trip. Cupid was his name; bows and arrows were his game. The chubby little cherub fired a romantic love-dart into Kurt and Libby far enough that they have yet to dislodge it. I wondered why Libby kept smiling a lot. Now I knew.

With the help of the air compressor, rags, and Q-Tips, this now special dust is separated from its carrier. It will eventually land somewhere in my garage, or around the house and yard. By itself, it has no meaning or significance. Yet when combined with recollections of last summer, it becomes the soil for a very rich garden of adventure memories. Even though this story goes on and on in my head, I now need to finish the task of servicing the bike. When the spring thaw arrives, I want to be ready, ready to find some more dust for my special garden.

Dave Peterson
COG # 486
Wamego, KS
dpeterso@mail.kansas.net