

WAY OUT WEST

RICHARD CROOKS WON OUR ROADTRIP-USA COMPETITION LAST YEAR, NABBING HIMSELF A BRILLIANT BIKING HOLIDAY ACROSS THE 'STATES IN THE PROCESS. AND AS FAR AS THE RIDING WAS CONCERNED, THERE CERTAINLY WAS GOLD IN THEM THAR HILLS...

Arizona



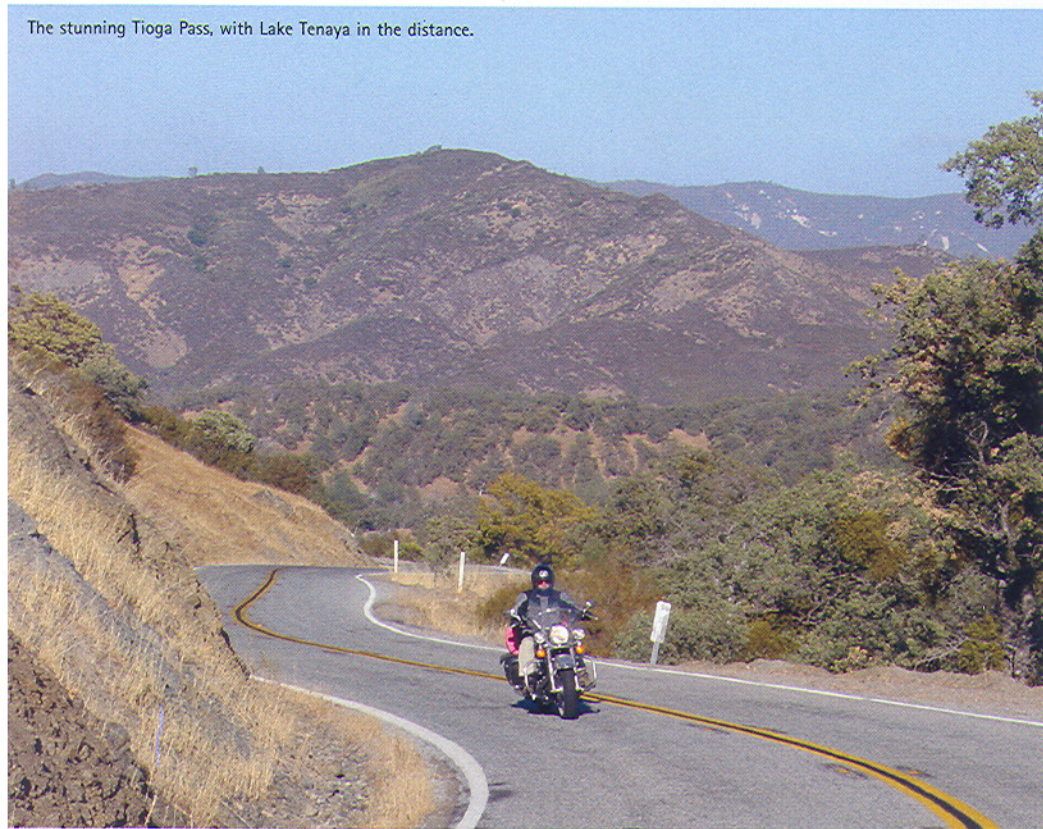
If you want to see the USA by bike, then Bend, Oregon - in the country's northwest, is a pretty good place to start. From here you can ride to the Canadian Rockies, the Pacific Coast, or travel down the midwest or to the southwest of this vast country.

By happy coincidence, it's also the base of Roadtrip-USA. They run a fleet

of different bikes, but for me a road trip through the 'States had to be on a Harley. And sure enough, no sooner than my brother Nick and I had arrived, we found a Road King complete with whitewall tyres and leather saddlebags parked outside our hotel. Nick had plumped for an STX1300 Pan Euro, and both bikes were immaculately prepared for the trip ahead.

'NEXT DAY, WE HEADED INTO IDAHO...IT'S ACTUALLY HALF THE SIZE OF FRANCE, WITH A POPULATION OF JUST 1.3 MILLION.'

The stunning Tioga Pass, with Lake Tenaya in the distance.



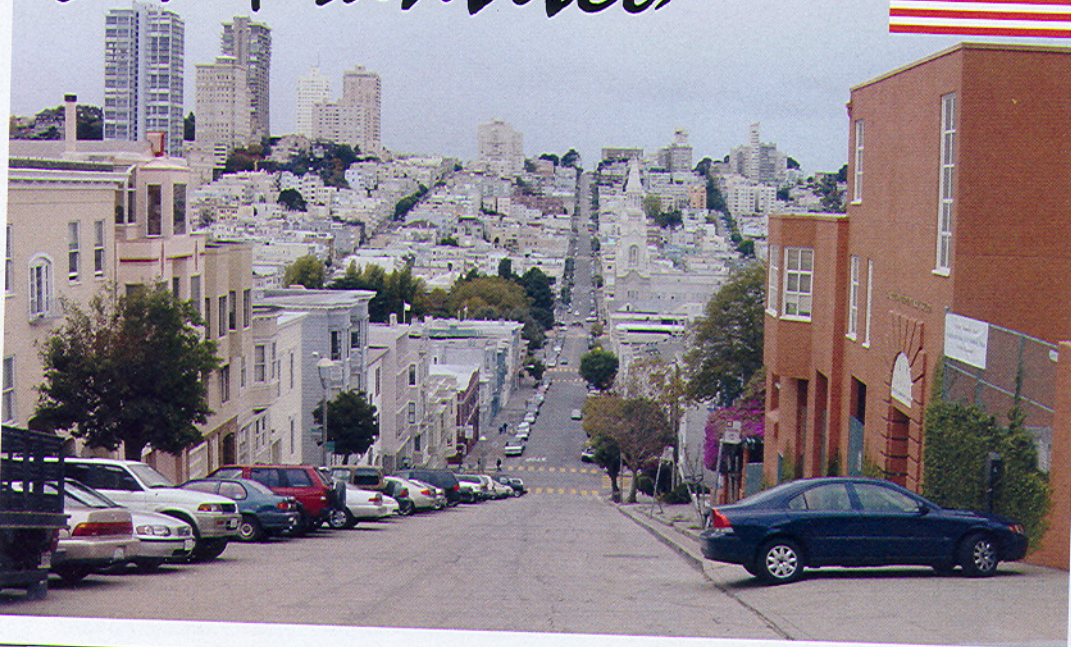
Idaho - autumnal splendour.

In fact, the whole trip looked well organised. We'd been exchanging emails with Scott Sargent of Roadtrip for many weeks.

Together we worked out an itinerary and Scott pre-booked five nights accommodation for us, at the busier places where it could be hard to find. And on that first morning, he spent two hours talking us through our route and marking the many maps he gave us with points of interest and good places to stop or eat.

As a parting shot, he advised us to call Roadtrip's Oregon rep Bonnie Thornburgh to check on road conditions

San Francisco



Don's a piece of living history himself.

bland, though it was a superb tool for covering bulk miles in comfort.

Not all American hotels have all mod cons, and while Lake Wallowa Lodge had no TV, Internet, radio or smoking, it did have a piano accompaniment at dinner, and it was just the place to unwind and see off the last of that hangover from Condon.

We passed the Sawtooth Mountain range and Sun Valley, where green manicured lawns contrasted with the barren brown hills beyond.

The landscape had changed from mountains to flat plains, and we made our way along one of those dead straight, open roads you can't help but think of when you imagine riding through America.

We passed Arco and the plain beyond famous for its nuclear research laboratories and wildlife research programme. We didn't see any two-headed coyotes, so I guess both must be doing okay...

if we were thinking of heading over the mountains - this was late September, and some of the high passes could still be closed by snow in October...

Our stop that first night on the road was Condon, but my memories of the place are hazy, apart from its fantastic small-town hospitality and some good dark beers.

Next day, we headed into Idaho, which is a good place for peace and quiet. It's actually half the size of France, with a population of just 1.3 million.

The roads were smooth with hardly any traffic, and as the poet said if you could get over the fact that the hills are covered with brown sagebrush and not green, this is beautiful country.

We were getting used to the bikes now too, the Harley surprising me with its competence as long as it was not hurried and you applied power through the corners. On the straights, I would certainly come to appreciate that cruise control.

By contrast, the Pan European felt decidedly top heavy and a bit



'...WE MET SOME
REAL COWBOYS
HERDING CATTLE
ALONG THE ROAD.'

Grande Ronde River, Utah.

