

panniers – a dedicated tourer that would be perfect for the trip ahead. After familiarising me with the bike Scott took me over my route and suggested some places to stay, as I'd opted to make my own stops as I went instead of using Roadtrip's booking service.

I transferred my luggage to the panniers, grabbed the many detailed maps Roadtrip had provided, kitted up and hit the road, with Scott generously guiding me out of town to my date with adventure beyond.

Within minutes of leaving Bend the scenery was stunning, with my route taking me through the Cascade Mountains past snow-capped peaks and crystal-clear lakes, all bathed in warm, bright sunshine.

My first impressions of riding in America were very favourable. There was no traffic to speak of, and I think I saw three cars inside the first hour. I'd also expected dead straight roads stretching off to the horizon – how wrong that would prove to be! This first day took me to Crater Lake National Park, my first truly amazing sight and my first brush with the sheer friendliness of the American people.

As I was busy taking photographs of Crater Lake a family in a car pulled up to do much the same thing. The driver approached, offering to take a photo with me in the picture. I accepted, he detected my English accent and that was it – I had trouble getting away! They were so nice and seemed genuinely interested in the bike, my journey and me – and just about everyone I met was exactly the same.

On through more fantastic scenery I made my way southwest to an overnight stop at a town on the banks of the Rogue River. A good night's rest saw me awake refreshed to tackle day two, which was a good thing – that day my route took me along the Rogue River Canyon, then over high mountains, including a 10-mile diversion of unmade forest trails!

Once out of the hills I reached the Pacific coast and Highway 101. Unfortunately a thick coastal mist enveloped the shoreline for the whole 100-mile ride, including the area where the Giant Redwoods grow, but as I headed south into northern California and stopped for the night near the town of Arcata, I knew there would be plenty more fabulous sights in store.

The next day I awoke to more mist and headed inland along the Trinity River, but once up and out of the fog this ride was incredible. The scenery was stunning, the road both smooth

Arches National Park.



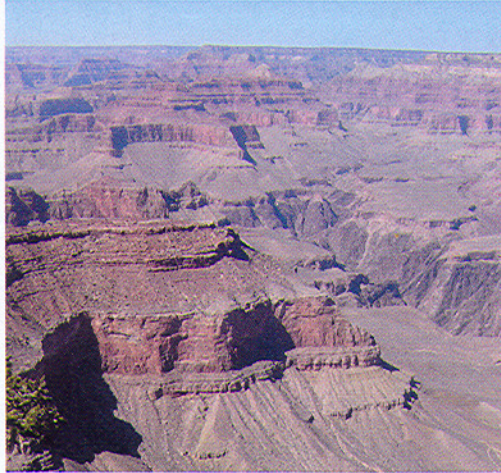
Hoover Dam.



Hells Canyon, overlooking the Oregon/Utah state line.



Grand Canyon - simply breathtaking.



Crater Lake National Park.



and deserted, and the Kawasaki took sweeping bend after sweeping bend in its stride – breathtaking!

Onwards and upwards I rode through Lassen Volcanic National Park, before heading south to Lake Tahoe. This was a very long day, some 430 miles, and with lots of photo opportunities in-between too. It was dark by the time I reached the lake, and I was thankful to find a reasonable hotel where I could turn in for an early night.

The following day I rode over Ebbetts Pass, almost 9,000ft high and nothing but tight mountain roads, until I reached Lake Alpine – a perfectly still oasis of tranquillity enjoyed only by myself and a couple of fishermen who'd cast their lines.

After savouring the stillness for a brief few moments it was on to Yosemite National Park, where I made the camera work overtime. Rocks shaped by glaciers and extensive pine forests provide a haven for wildlife in this park of unique natural beauty, though the bears left me alone that day – probably not such a bad thing...

The next day I set off for a complete change of scenery, Death Valley. The largest national park in the US, it's a sun-blasted, 130-mile long expanse of mountain, canyon and desert that was formed when a block of the earth's crust sank between parallel mountain ranges to 282ft below sea level. It was around 10.00am when I reached the Death Valley visitor centre, and it was already 98 degrees Fahrenheit – I obeyed the warnings and carried plenty of water.

Leaving this amazing landscape behind I set off for another – my next overnight stop falling in Las Vegas, Nevada. Walking 'The Strip' and catching a glimpse of the city that never sleeps, I spent several wide-eyed hours noting which hotel/casino outdid its neighbours in size and theme, the Venetian boasting a 'real' canal complete with gondolas, and the Mirage with its own erupting volcano, to name just a couple.

As darkness fell I was treated to the most incredible lighting spectacular I have ever seen, and the view from the top of the 1,150ft Stratosphere Tower was truly amazing, though I gave the roller coaster that surrounds it – on the outside – a miss. All this from the gambling legislation passed by the state of Nevada in 1931, and in the middle of the Mojave Desert at that!

Next morning took me via Lake Mead to one of the wonders of the civil engineering world, the Hoover Dam. The Nevada/Arizona state line



Time to burn some cash - Las Vegas: gambling capital of the world.