

runs through the middle of the dam, and as I traced its periphery I crossed from Pacific to Mountain Time. From here I rode eastwards to the town of Kingman and the historic Route 66.

Commissioned in 1926, Route 66 was 2,448 miles long, linking Chicago in the east to Los Angeles in the west, crossing eight states and three time zones. It was decommissioned to daily traffic in 1985, replaced by interstate highways, and although many parts have disappeared completely my Roadtrip maps still found me a section from Kingman to the Grand Canyon that still allowed me to 'get my kicks'.

Words can never do justice to the Grand Canyon, where the Colorado River has carved an immense chasm through this arid land over several million years. I decided that I just had to do a helicopter flight and parted with about £90 for the most amazing 45 minutes of my life, where I witnessed the Canyon in all its splendour at a brain-frying altitude of 100ft.

The next morning took me northeast and into Monument Valley on the Arizona/Utah border, where these incredible rock formations of red sandstone have provided the backdrop for many an American Western. An un-surfaced toll road passes through Monument Valley, the toll payable to the Navajo Indian Nation, but it looked a little daunting until I spotted a couple of Gold Wing riders coming out. They told me it was a little rough in places but generally okay, so off I went on another adventure, where I loved every mile.

After rising from my hotel in the town of Moab I rode the short distance to Arches National Park, where water, ice, extreme temperatures and underground salt movements are responsible for the incredible landscape of sculpted rock. More than 2,000 natural arches are to be found here, ranging from three to 300ft across.

Heading north I rode up to the ski resort of Park City, through still more stunning scenery and over twisty, sometimes unmade roads, finally making my way down to Salt Lake City for this, my 11th night. The following day was long - over 400 miles - but took me past the Bonneville Salt Flats, home to all those world speed record attempts. It was probably a good thing that recent rain precluded me from having a stab at them myself...

From the salt flats I crossed back into Nevada and turned north once again up into Idaho. It was a windy and not particularly scenic ride

through Nevada, and I was pleased to reach the ski resort of Ketchum. An enjoyable evening was spent in a local bar, the natives being friendly and the steak sandwiches the biggest and tastiest I've sampled in a long time.

From Ketchum I headed northwest through the Sawtooth National Recreational Area for a lunch stop in Cascade, Idaho. Temperatures had started to fall as I had ridden north and the roads had been a little icy over the Sawtooth Range. I picked up the Snake River and Hells Canyon, then carried on to Joseph, Oregon for my penultimate night's stop. This particular ride was fantastic. I was at one with the machine and there was no traffic to impede progress, just the odd deer or chipmunk to keep me on my toes.

My last day proved to be just as memorable as any of the others, mainly thanks to the weather. I awoke early to a wet morning, the only one of the trip. Scott had advised me of two possibilities to get back to Bend, depending on conditions. Fine weather would suit a ride over the Blue Mountains; otherwise I could take a more sensible option around them.

Well the rain had stopped so I headed for the hills, but 50 miles later the rain turned to sleet, and once I'd climbed higher, snow. What would Scott say if I dropped his bike on my last day? Thankfully my descent passed without incident, which was just as well as I hadn't seen another vehicle in over two hours of riding.

I headed east to complete my circular tour of the American southwest along another fabulous stretch of road, arriving back in Bend tired but extremely happy - having visited six states, eight national parks and covered 4,071 miles. Scott welcomed me back, I unloaded the bike and then cleaned it - well, it was the least I could do after coating it with two weeks of road grime.

The bike had been great - reliable, economical, comfortable and practical, and perfect for the tour I'd just completed. The organisation, itinerary and general helpfulness and friendliness of Roadtrip-USA team had also been superb, and Scott had done everything he could to put me at ease, despite the intensive itinerary.

I was on a high after this trip, a high that took several weeks and much boring of friends, family and work colleagues to suppress. America is a motorcycle touring dream come true, and thanks to Roadtrip-USA I'd lived that dream to the full. ■

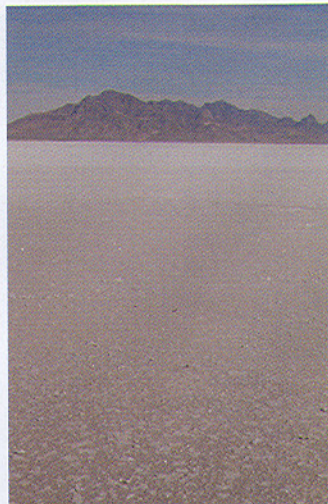
Slip-sliding away - things turn chilly over the Blue Mountains.



Approaching Tioga Pass, Yosemite National Park.



Rob won our Roadtrip-USA competition last year - why not put yourself in with a chance this year? That's right, Roadtrip-USA and MSL have teamed up once again to give you a chance to tour the 'States on a trip of a lifetime; turn to page 12 for full details.



Bonneville Salt Flats.