

Rachel's trio hits Cleveland & Great Lakes, headed to Iowa

By Rachel Sloan
Special to The Chronicle

Editor's note: Rachel Sloan of Glens Falls, fulfilling a dream, is traveling cross-country by motorcycle, along with Mike Archambault of Hudson Falls and another rider. She's reporting to us along the way.

Mike Archambault and I met at 7 a.m. on Tuesday, July 2, at Centennial Circle in Glens Falls for the official start of our Road Trip across the US of A.

It was wet outside but not raining. I was thankful that I was able to load up my gear and not have to do it in the rain. I was also thankful that we were able to ease into the trip without the rain.

A few hours in, it rained hard. It was my first downpour driving. I was also thankful that my special touring jacket and riding pants are waterproof.

We had about 300 miles in front of us and our first destination was Hazelton, Pa. We were meeting up with Rich Robinson, who had a longer trip from North Carolina. He left the day before, and had 600 miles to our meet-up in Hazelton, which seemed to be a central location for us. It was right near Interstate 80, the gateway to the west.

(By the way, Rich is 70 and is riding a Harley Davidson 2010 Ultra Classic Limited Edition with a six-gallon gas tank. Mike is 59 and is on a Harley Davidson 2010 Street Glide with a six-gallon tank. I'm 44, and I'm riding a 2012 BMW F650 GS with a 4.2-gallon tank.)

Rich made it there first, about two hours ahead of us. He was a sight for sore eyes when we pulled into the hotel parking lot around 5 p.m. This was my longest drive yet, my first time on a MAJOR Interstate (88 to 81 to 80), and my first major rain.



Rachel Sloan with Rich Robinson, center, and Hudson Falls' Mike Archambault, on the shore of Lake Huron. The three are making their way across the country, and hope to be in Salem, Oregon, on July 18 for the BMW Owners Motorcycle Rally.

I was exhausted and at the same time incredibly excited to be in Hazelton.

Rich suggested we head to Damon's restaurant (located in front of the hotel) before checking in and get a cold beer. YES, we had many beers and dinner, too. And the conversation started to flow.

We had to decide, where next? At our first meal together, we each brought something to share. Rich brought a map of the USA, Mike brought the *Harley's Owners Motorcycle Guide* and I brought *Motorcycle Journeys Across North America*.

We had spent so much time planning to get to this very moment. It was now time to discuss, what's next? We had no planned route, only places and people we wanted to visit and see.

We have time right now, something that I know will prove to be more valuable with each passing day. Our only commitment is to be in Salem, Oregon, on or near July 18th for the BMW Owners Motorcycle Rally.

We looked at the map and at each other and ordered another beer. This was going to be fun.

To Iowa, via the Great Lakes!

Rich's daughter lives in Iowa and it's been some time since he saw her last. She wasn't going to be home until Sunday night.

Where should we go? We opened the *Motorcycle Journey Across North America* and decided to see the Great Lakes and take this amazing back-road route. Rich and I had never been to the Great Lakes and it looked to be a beautiful ride through the country (no Interstates, which appealed to me). We all agreed that we'd probably never have the chance to do this again.

Over the next four days, we traveled more than 1,000 miles. We rode through the city of Cleveland on July 4th, which proved to be excellent timing because no one was there.

We saw Lake Erie and found Route 23,

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chronicle@loneoak.com
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which took us north along the coast of this great lake. We made it to Michigan and found our way to Lake Huron. On day 3, it hit me: "I am really on a Road Trip."

On day 4, in northern Michigan, people started to notice our New York and North Carolina license plates. It helped spark some great conversations. You know you have traveled far when all of the license plates around you are unfamiliar.

'Bonding with my motorcycle'

This ride has been exhilarating in so many ways. It's hard to capture it all and write about it. What has surprised me so far is the bonding I have had with my motorcycle. It sounds kind of weird, but if you ride, you know what I'm talking about.

There have been many situations that have come up that I have had to just trust the manufacturers of my motorcycle.

When you're riding, anything can come up. One moment you are in calm, sunny weather and the next you take a corner and 45 mile-an-hour winds are hitting you (at least that's what it felt like) or rain is pelting you and it's wet out there, or you're traveling 75 mph and taking a turn or you have to stop quickly.

And each time I park my bike, I keep asking myself, will the parking stand hold it? Yes, it will. You have to have trust. I will also share that the two gentlemen I am traveling with, I trust completely. How fortunate for me that I am with such experienced riders. I have learned a lot.

As I write this update (day 6, Sunday, July 7), we are on the S.S. *Badger* ferry, something the three of us have never done with our motorcycles. We are crossing Lake Michigan, which is so large you could mistake it for the ocean.

We loaded on in Ludington, Mich., and we are on our way to Manitowac, Wis. We will head south to Iowa to visit with Rich's daughter. Today has been a much-needed respite from the motorcycle. My body is tired, especially my arms and hands. When we get to the other side, we will be ready to continue our Road Trip.

If you have any questions or suggestions for us as we make our way across the country, you can send an e-mail to chronicle@loneoak.com. Thanks!