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The Chronicle

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Lone Oak Publishing Co., Inc., P.O. Box 153, Glens Falls, NY 12801 • 518.792.1126 • chronicle@loneoak.com

Yellowstone, Mt. Rushmore, Rachel's trio rides to Oregon

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 Rich Robinson from North Carolina. She's reporting to us along the way.

Wisconsin, Iowa, Minnesota, South Dakota, Wyoming, Montana, Idaho, Washington, and Oregon...we have been busy.

I keep pinching myself to make sure I'm really here and not dreaming. In the last update, we disembarked from the ferry and made our way to Milwaukee. I had never been there before and remember it as the home of *Laverne & Shirley*.

We stayed at a hotel on the Milwaukee River and started to plan our route to Iowa to visit with Rich's daughter. It was great to meet her and her husband, and they were fabulous hosts. Having a home-cooked meal was a treat, as it's very challenging to eat well on the road.

In the last two weeks, I have eaten more meat, potatoes and bread than I have in the last year. (Oh, and the beer has been kind of delicious, too.) I have put on quite a few pounds and that's the way it goes. I will address it when I get back.

I have never been to many of the states on our list. We did a mixture of Interstates and back roads. And it's true what they say about Iowa — the roads seem to never end. They are the longest I have ever seen, coupled with endless rows of corn and soybeans. It makes sense the speed limit is 75 mph.

Farms, rolling hills, then Yellowstone

Each state has its own energy and style. I really liked Wisconsin. It had a lot of farms



From left: Rich Robinson, Mike Archambault and Rachel Sloan at a tourist stop near Mount Rushmore.

(which were meticulously maintained) and reminded me of Washington County, except it was much larger.

The rolling hills were higher and deeper and the farms longer and wider. They had a variety of crops, and cheese was sold in every place we stopped. I didn't have any, though. Maybe I was too full from the potatoes and bread from breakfast.

As we headed to Wyoming, Rich suggested a route through Yellowstone National Park. None of us had ever been. We took our time and fully breathed in this national treasure. It's America's first national park with the world's largest collection of geysers, most notably Old Faithful.

We were in awe and stopped many places to take pictures. We even stopped for an afternoon nap. As we exited through the North Entrance of the park, we entered Montana and stayed the night in Livingston.

I had dreamed of being in a cabin in the open valley with brilliant stars warmed by a roaring campfire and a horseback ride. As I pinched myself, I realized it was not in the cards for us that night. All we could find was a two-star motel and a laundromat within walking distance. We really needed to do laundry.

We did have a big Montana cigar while the clothes got cleaned. And while we didn't get to see the stars that night, it was the

most memorable laundry I have ever done.

Spontaneous dip in Clearwater River

The next day we cruised into Idaho and found the exquisite Route 12 west, The Northwest Passage. This was made famous by Lewis and Clark when they were commissioned by President Jefferson to find the link between the Missouri and Columbia Rivers through the unexplored Rocky Mountains.

For us, it was 200 miles of curves and straightaways (no stop signs or traffic lights) that followed the Clearwater River (a motorcyclist's dream road). It's a must for any traveler going west. It was here I said to myself, "you have arrived." My heart and spirit were wide open and free.

I pulled over around 3 p.m. for a break from the sun and heat. We all needed the break badly. We had been following this clear and gorgeous sparkling river for hours. We all saw the fly fishermen, the campers and the kayakers along the way.

When we stopped, Mike crossed the road and led the way down the embankment to the river. He wanted to touch the clear cold sparkling water and splash some on his face. And then just like that, we all couldn't help ourselves. It was a spur of the moment thing and we all jumped in with our clothes on. We figured we would air dry on our motorcycles. And we did!

We ended this day with 461 miles (my personal best) and we stayed in Lewiston, Idaho. Of all the places we have visited so far, Idaho has spoken to me the most, which surprised me. Probably because it wasn't on my radar and the ride today was more beautiful than I ever imagined. I will go back to Idaho one day and camp by the Clearwater River.

We have traveled more than 2,500 miles and I have seen my odometer pass 3,000, 4,000, and now 5,000 miles. Our daily rides range from 250 to 461 miles a day — it all depends on where we are and what we are seeing.

Badlands and Mount Rushmore

We rode 430 miles when we passed through the spectacular Badlands National Park in South Dakota and through the Black Hills on the way to Mount Rushmore. This was a must stop on the trip for me. I envisioned taking a beautiful picture



Rachel in Idaho, which she said was "more beautiful than I ever imagined."

of the three of us with this gorgeous memorial in the background. And like all things on the motorcycle, you go with the flow. We had already driven more than 300 miles, it was 93 degrees and we were getting tired.

On your way up the winding mountain road to the memorial, there seems to be only one lookout (a place to pull your car out of the road to view the memorial). When we stopped to take our picture, the sun was positioned in such a way that it darkened us and Rushmore. We drove further up the mountain and there was a long line to enter the park and on this very hot day, I made the call to skip it.

We continued driving and came upon the "profile lookout," which is aptly named because all you see is the profile of George Washington. I took that picture and later that day, we found a fun picture board cutout that enabled us to have our picture taken just like we were standing with the presidents.

I keep experiencing many firsts on the motorcycle, like reaching 90 mph, getting pelted with hail (fortunately it was brief), riding in 100-degree temperatures, and facing winds that feel like they will pick me up and take me away.

Of all the experiences thus far, the wind I do not like. On our way into Portland via Route 84 West, I experienced white-knuckled driving. I chanted "Om" for well over an hour and made it through. Mike and Rich were impressed and shared that they were inspired by my driving. I thanked them for saying so and also shared with them that I will never take that route again.

We have arrived a bit early in Oregon so I decided to take a night and spend it with my old college roommate, Carmen. She cooked us a feast for kings and queens and I have cherished the time to reconnect and catch up. She is simply great.

The guys have continued on to Salem to stay with Mike's brother. I will see them tomorrow after our appointments for a special service on our bikes. I am looking forward to seeing them again and continuing our road trip.



At Yellowstone National Park, Yellowstone Lake in the background.