

Reach for the Quality!

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BMW rally, then the Golden Gate Bridge, and now heading home

By Rachel Sloan

Special to The Chronicle

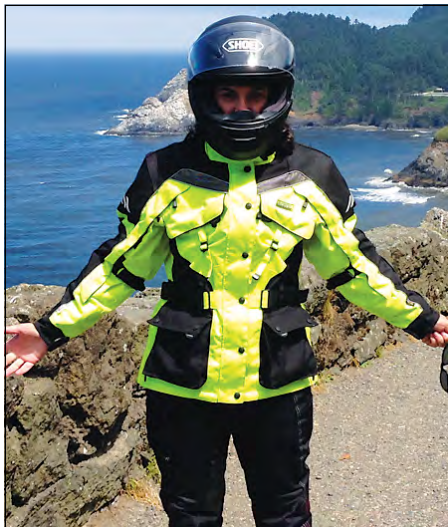
Editor's note: Rachel Sloan of Glens Falls, fulfilling a dream, is traveling cross-country by motorcycle, along with Mike Archambault of Hudson Falls and Rich Robinson from North Carolina. She's reporting to us along the way.

We stayed a number of days in Oregon with Mike's brother Jim, his wife Donna and their daughter Katie. They too were gracious hosts. It was great to see Mike reconnect with his brother Jim. You can see how much they care for one another and enjoy being in each other's company.

Our last day in Salem was the BMW Owners Rally, the impetus for the cross-country trip. Even though they are Harley riders, Rich and Mike joined me for the day. As soon as we entered the rally, something unexpected happened. I started to cry. It was such a release of emotion. The enormity of what we just did to make it to this point hit me all at once.

Needless to say, I was also wondering, how are we going to make it home?! I wiped away the tears and off we went to see the BMW bikes from across the world, chat with other BMW riders and check out all the vendors. We had a great time in Oregon. And we were ready to hit the road again. The next stop, San Francisco, which was at the top of Rich's list.

The lows and highs of Route 101



Rachel on the California coast, where the temperature went from 49 degrees to 107 degrees in the matter of hours. It was closer to 49 when this photo was taken.

The best way to get there — well, the most scenic way — was Route 101 South which runs the coast from Oregon to Santa Monica, Calif. Our most-talked-about part of this trip was going over the Golden Gate Bridge. For this part of our journey, Mike's brother Jim, who also rides a Harley, joined us for the next two days.

On our second day traveling Route 101, we experienced some highs and lows, literally. When we started at 6 a.m. it was 49 degrees. It was cold and we each had on every possible layer of clothing we brought. We traveled through such thick fog, I could barely see the red motorcycle lights in front of me. We passed two huge herds of elk, looked out on the Pacific Ocean and finally stopped for breakfast after a long and slow 100 miles. It took five cups of coffee to warm up and the chili egg special (which of course included potatoes and cheese), had

me feeling full and warm again.

At some point along the route, the weather changed dramatically and the temperature gauge read 107 degrees. That is a huge swing and it's really hard to ride in that type of heat. We were determined though. We had our eyes set on going over the Golden Gate Bridge to San Francisco.

Since I had the GPS, I was the lead rider on this part of the journey. The closer we got, the more nervous and anxious I became. San Francisco is a major U.S. city with a lot of people and way too many cars. The drivers are aggressive, the wind was howling and it is a really long bridge.

If you are reading these updates, you know I have this thing about the wind. I don't care for it. It is very challenging to ride with the wind throwing you left and right, forward and backward. And thousands of feet above the water, the wind is not very comforting right now.

Fear of bridge: 'You got this. Let's go.'

We stopped right before going over the bridge. Mike pulls up close to me and opens the visor on his helmet. I could see by the look in his eyes, he knew. He looks at me and says, "How are you doing? You got this. Let's go."

There is not much I actually remember about going over the bridge except two things: Keeping the throttle pressed, and Mike when he raised his arm in celebration for me and I am certain, for him, too.

Going over the Golden Gate bridge was a defining moment for me. I entered as a woman with uncertainty and anxiousness and exited a woman with certainty and courage. I like the Golden Gate Bridge.

Being in California is always special for me. I am usually here visiting with my twin sister Rory (who is the way cooler twin and an amazing woman). We are so close to where she lives and of all places where is she right now? She's in Glens Falls, staying in my home with her son Lucien, visiting her other son Satchel, at sleepaway camp



Mike Archambault of Hudson Falls with a giant redwood tree in Humboldt (Cal.) Redwoods State Park.

on Trout Lake in Diamond Point. Timing is everything.

I miss my family and friends. I was wondering when this would happen and it hit on day 20. So it was appropriate that we turned the corner today. The road signs now read East and North. This morning at breakfast, Rich was on the phone with his brother Robert. He urged us to ride the Tioga Pass, as it was the most breathtaking thing he has seen. Those are very compelling words. And as we just left one brother, Tioga Pass was a connection to another.

Tonight, we are in Mariposa, Calif. Tomorrow, we drive through Yosemite National Park via Tioga Pass then onward to the North Rim of the Grand Canyon. At least, that's the plan right now. We are on our journey back home.