



Have Bike, Will Travel

## **The Bolivian Road of Death**

by **Alisa Clickenger** on July 16, 2010 at 03:58AM

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"What is that road called again?" Mom asked. "Um, the locals call it the Yungas Road," I told her. No point in telling her it was internationally known as the "Bolivian Road of Death." "I'm riding better now since my broken hand has started to heal and I hear it is really scenic" I told her. "Besides, will be riding with some locals," I reassured her.

The Bolivian Road of Death earned that name from the large number of annual fatalities along its forty-three mile course. Precipitous cliffs, a single narrow lane, hairpin bends, a lack of guardrails, and the prior large amount of truck traffic all contributed to the road's fatal reputation. Add rain, fog, and high-altitude mountain-mists and breathtaking scenery to the mix, and I was irresistibly drawn.

The Road of Death was once the main highway between La Paz and Coroico, Bolivia, but the truth is about five years ago a by-pass was constructed and most of the traffic takes the alternate route. However, that doesn't stop hordes of pedal bikers and motor bikers, from seeking their thrills riding the altiplano and rainforest road. With 2000 foot drop-offs and a gravel base, there is still plenty of danger for us adrenaline junkies.



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I was lucky enough to meet up with some local motorcyclists who decided to take a day off of work to ride with me. They picked me up at my hotel, and led me to the beginning of the Yungas Road. Most importantly, they stopped at the beginning of the road and let me digest the warning sign: Uphill traffic has the right-of-way, meaning we did not, and that passing takes place on the left, meaning on the outside - closest to the edge.

As we descended in elevation, the mists cleared and we were able to see more than fifty feet in front of us. I think I actually preferred riding in the mists, because they hid the sheer drop-offs. The road itself was not that difficult—it was a single lane with a good gravel base. At times the cliffs barely accommodated the single lane, and the numerous crosses were a constant reminder of the stakes of our game.

Even though I had no close calls, I breathed a sigh of relief when we reached the bottom where the gravel widened out. Mentally I was exhausted from the intense concentration, and physically I was spent as much from my tense posture as nursing my **recently-broken hand**. I opted for the bypass road on the way back to La Paz, and when I logged into my email that night I was busted. I'd forgotten that Mom followed my Spot® Tracker, and witnessed my entire journey.

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### About The Author

Alisa Clickenger (aka MotoAdventureGal) is riding her dream. Calling it her "Year of Motorcycle Vagabonding," she's quit her job, has rented out her home and business, and is riding through Latin America in the name of freedom and adventure. You can follow Alisa's adventures from the road her column, *Have Bike, Will Travel*, which runs weekly on RumBum.com.

