



## The Magic of the Road

**I**n August, I stopped at Toymakers Café in Falls Village, Connecticut, for breakfast and a look-see at all the bikes that often gather there on Sunday mornings. Over coffee outside at a picnic table, I started a conversation with someone about motorcycle travel. Turned out this fellow was about to leave on an 11,000-plus mile motorcycle trip, visiting the National Parks in the Western US and Canada. As I'd just returned from a month of riding in many of the areas he was planning on traveling, I offered up my maps and some travel advice about my favorite roads.

Turns out Mr. National Parks is an ADVrider, and turns out he really didn't need my travel advice at all. It seems that between a nostalgic childhood trip, Internet research and ADVrider.com posts, he'd already loaded over 400 waypoints into his GPS and knew exactly where he was going. Every day. For five weeks. God bless him, he'd practically organized his trip down to the gas stop.

I chuckle remembering this because, with regard to motorcycle travel, I am the complete and total opposite. Oh, sure, I have a (vague) plan; my problem

unstructuredness of my motorbike travel provides an effective and insightful contrast to my everyday life. I return from my travels with a lot of ahas and usually many ideas about things I am willing to change.

After our encounter, I often tuned into Mr. National Parks' ADVrider.com thread and was continually amazed at his discipline, his good timing, his research. He was a faithful daily poster on his blog and did not disappoint his readers (most of whom were traveling vicariously through him via their cubicles). He posted good pictures. He offered minimalist packing advice to everyone that asked. He took pictures of scenery en route. Yet I found myself secretly cheering for him every time he had a chance encounter with someone, or a little glitch that made him rethink, redirect, which was, I think, twice.

He was cruising from preplanned waypoint to waypoint and almost always on schedule. I kept wondering where was the magic, that chance encounter at breakfast that turned his day upside down and caused him to ride roads that only the locals knew? That caused him to find that camping site down by the river that only a

**Part of why I like to no, need to — take off on the motorbike for extended periods is exactly for the purpose of getting away ...**

is sticking to it. I travel with paper maps, a GPS, and a mobile phone, as any prudent motorbike traveler does these days. But they all serve as an expanding point of reference that increases the radius of where I want to go. I also pack a tent and camping equipment so I am prepared for any eventuality — which usually happens. But it's people met, snippets of conversations had, and odd markers and/or fun-looking roads seen on maps that truly lead my journey.

I think, in part, why I like to no, need to — take off on the motorbike for extended periods is exactly for the purpose of getting away — away from the schedules, constraints, and structures of my "normal" life. So much of my home life is planned and organized and accountable to deadlines, it's quite liberating to be able to make my choices as I go along, to take advantage of inspiration or intuition, and follow beautiful roads, hunches, or just to take an extra hour to walk around a lake or nap in the sunshine. Perhaps that's why I don't do that much planning beforehand: I give myself over to the magic of the road.

I find on the road I have time to reflect, time to see how those structures in my life are both externally and internally created. Do I really have to be doing all those things I am doing? Do I really have to be so busy? The

few people had ever used? That lured him into a hidden canyon that a professional photographer might spend his whole life looking for? And then I wondered if he really needed them, those synchronistic encounters and navigational changes like I do when I travel?

He did, in fact, have a couple of those chance encounters. And he had collected a couple pieces of magic. But, again from my undisciplined point of view, I wondered how much more deeply he could have experienced the trip — maybe even made it a journey — had he taken the time to savor it a bit.

He says he had a great time. He saw brilliant sunrises, plenty of sunsets over majestic scenery, and he has plenty of stories to share. But it was all scheduled. And when he encountered poor weather? He traveled on. He got to see everything on his list and did it in certainly efficient and perhaps even record time. He says it was an epic journey for him, and it must have been, to ride 11,674 miles in 38 days.

We've had plenty of good laughs over a beer since his return, and it just shows that there are as many different types of journeys as there are travelers. I say go for your ride even if you have a compact time frame, but I suggest making a little space for the unexpected. It just might be the magic you're looking for. **RB**