

BACKCOUNTRY

Byways

By Alisa Clickenger
Photos by Tony Huegel



Most folks dream of retiring and traveling around the United States seeing everything the country has to offer. SUVs became popular because people wanted a comfortable vehicle that carried the entire family plus loads of gear. The RV industry is bursting at the seams with people who quit their jobs and live a life of traveling between interesting places. Author, adventurer and Idaho Falls resident Tony Huegel didn't want to wait to retire to travel; instead he made it a career.

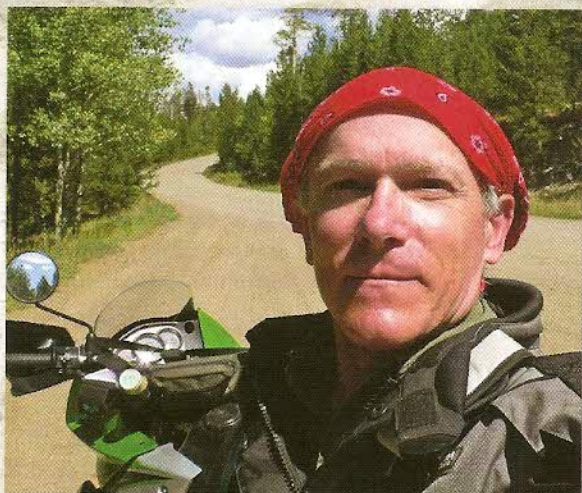
Huegel is the founder of Backcountry Byways LLC, a travel-planning and editorial-content providing company. He has authored seven guides, called the *Byways* books. The *Byways* books cover five western states: Idaho, Utah, Colorado, Washington, and California, for which he wrote three separate guides. Huegel and his wife moved to Idaho Falls from California in 1985.

Why would an adventurous and well-traveled soul like Huegel choose to live in Idaho Falls for the past thirty years? "It's where we found our place and raised our kids," says Huegel. "As long as I have lived here this place has never ceased to amaze me." Huegel affirms that it was a quality of life decision—he says that Idaho Falls offers a good pace of life.

The decision to begin exploring the backcountry, byways and wild places with his wife and children was a conscious one. It was a way to be in nature, spend time together, and be a hands-on type of father. "It was a probably among the greatest family adventures you could ever hope to have. It gave my kids lifetimes worth of memories. Memories they could get no other way," says the author.

Huegel is a former reporter at the Post Register newspaper. In fact, the Post Register was the original publisher of his *Back-country Byways* series. The company had never published books before, but saw the potential in Huegel's guides. The Post Register published the guides for a several years, and then sold the series to Wilderness Press of Berkeley, California.

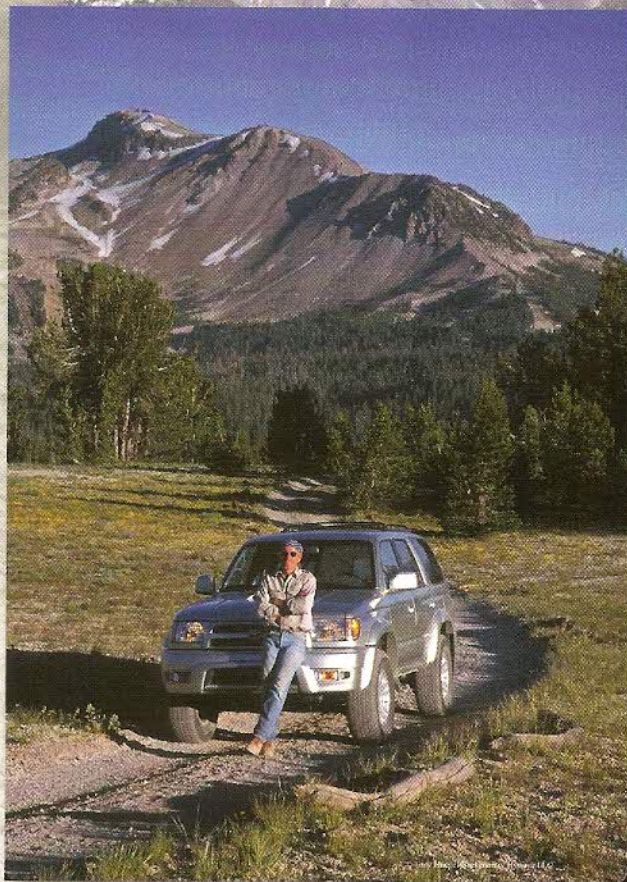
"Here you can uniquely string together long distance, total immersion routes through some of the most beautiful and unspoiled wildlands remaining in the lower 48 states."—Tony Huegel



Work on the series began in December 1992. "I've spent as long as four months at a stretch, chronicling the adventure roads of the American West, living out of vehicles provided by Toyota Motor Sales USA, which also was very supportive for many years," says Huegel. Huegel and his family have been featured on Idaho Public Television, in a PBS segment of *Outdoor Idaho*.

Yet his idea of exploring the back country started long before 1992. In the 1970's Huegel was avid backpacker, but found it increasingly difficult to travel on foot as his family expanded. Then he discovered, along with the rest of America, the modern SUV. "My Toyota 4Runner became what my backpack used to be, except that I could bring the whole family, the ice chest, the CD player, the air conditioning, and all the rest with me," laughs Huegel. "Then we could have the wild land experience from the comfort of our Toyota 4Runner."

In addition to writing for the Post Register, Huegel is the former publications editor at Idaho State University. He is a widely published magazine writer, having been published in *Road & Track Specials*, *National Geographic Adventure*, *Popular Mechanics Online* and other magazines. Special projects of his have included Readers Digest Books and Global Book Publishing (Australia).



After Huegel's children graduated from college he added two wheels to his adventure repertoire, and is now an avid dual sport motorcyclist. He's traveled over many of the same roads, and new ones, that he traversed with his family, only now with his eye on the needs of motorcyclists. Motorcycling has brought him full circle back to being in the wild and exploring the western spaces again post children. Leveraging his vast wealth of knowledge about western backcountry and byways, he is now creating custom itineraries for both motorcyclists and back country 4WD explorers.

The idea of creating custom itineraries was one that snuck up on him. In 2006 a large group of motorcycle riders from New Jersey contacted him about creating a custom route for them. They were using his books as a reference and planning their own trip when one of them decided they needed an expert, and reached out to him inquiring about a custom route for them through Idaho and Huegel agreed.

The group approached him again a couple years later asking for a second custom trip, and the route he developed was a 2,800-mile, six-state adventure route Huegel eventually coined 'Heart of the West'. The New Jersey men enjoyed a fantastic adventure then went home and

