

# 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.

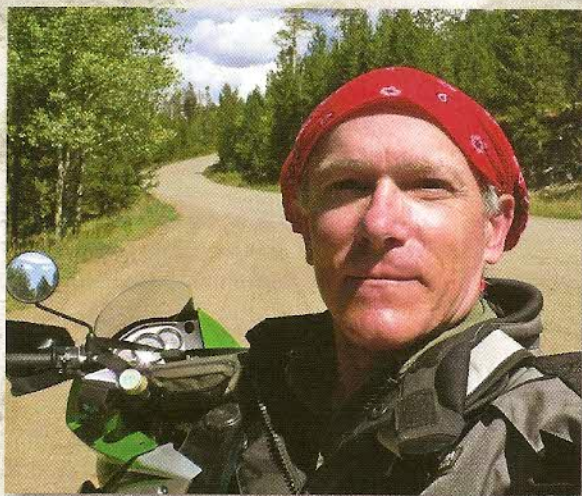
Why would an adventurous and well-traveled soul like Huegel choose to live in Idaho Falls for the past thirty years? "It's where we found our place and raised our kids," says Huegel. "As long as I have lived here this place has never ceased to amaze me." Huegel affirms that it was a quality of life decision—he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



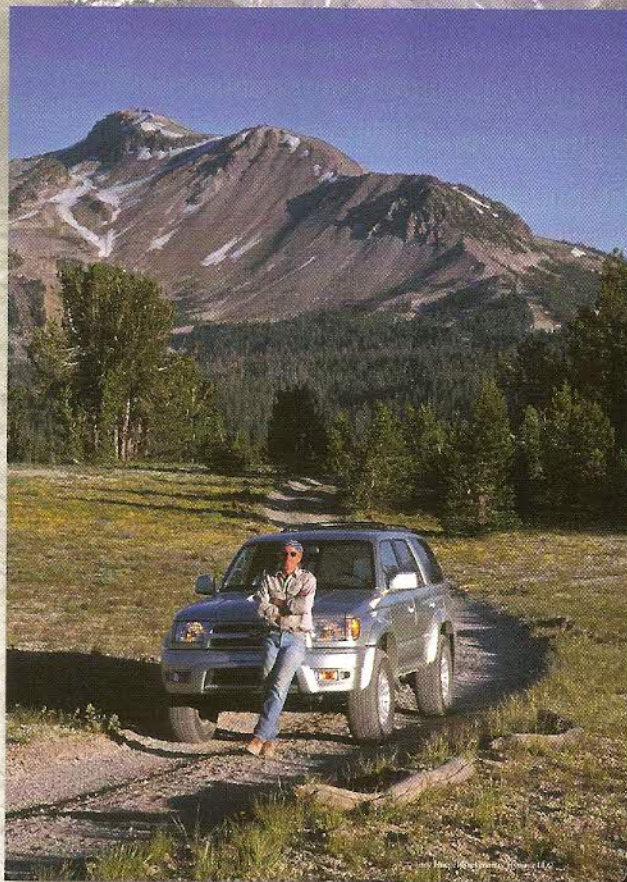
**"Here you can uniquely string together long distance, total immersion routes through some of the most beautiful and unspoiled wildlands remaining in the lower 48 states."—Tony Huegel**



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





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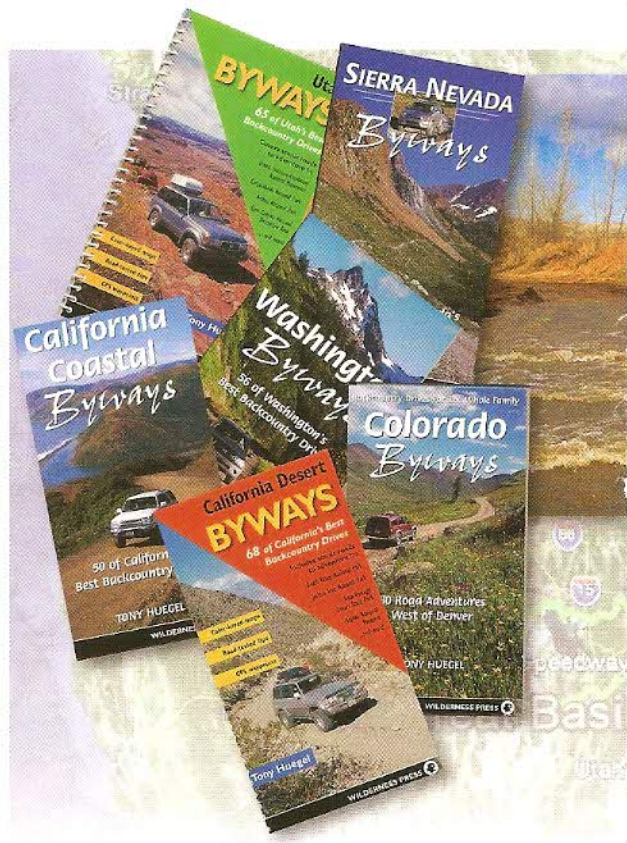
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told their friends about the trip. They posted on the internet motorcycling adventure forums, word spread, and a new business was born.

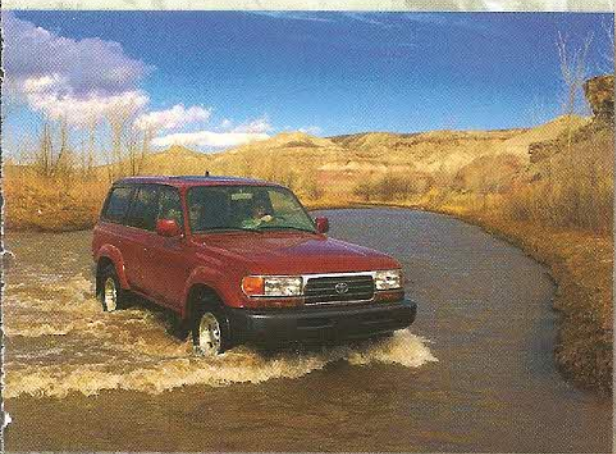
Demand for custom itineraries has been extraordinary, and it makes sense. When a person only has one or two weeks of vacation, they want to ensure they have a good trip. Hiring Huegel to customize a route based on individual travel desires guarantees that travelers will see local points of interest, stay in the type of accommodations they prefer, get routed by the amenities they desire, and not run into any glitches along the way.

Call Huegel a one-man Idaho tourism committee. Patrons have come through Idaho Falls from all across North America, and his number of international clients is growing. Huegel has now developed scores of total-immersion, long-distance wildland travel routes for clients coming from all over the world.

"The unique appeal that the Inter-Mountain West has, particularly the greater Northern Rockies, is the vast expanses of publicly owned wildlands. 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. Here you are able to totally immerse yourself in a very unique way in the wildland experience for days and days on end."

Huegel is proud to feature his home town on his itineraries. Idaho Falls is an ideal base for travelers to start their adventures because it's easy to fly in to, it has a wide variety of services, plus a central location to all western states. Huegel has also made arrangements with a few local





South Pass  
Big Empty

White Mountains  
Rocky Mountains

Kansas

hotels so that travelers can leave cars, trailers, and other bulky items at "base" in Idaho Falls.

And for motorcycle travelers, Ben's Quality Cycle and Repair shop is a bonus. Ben's shop has a reputation as a place where motorcycle travelers can get quality work done on their machines, and traveling bikers will often ride way out of their way to visit his shop. Ben also receives, stores and return ships motorcycles for travelers who ship their bikes in advance of their arrival. He'll unpack motorcycles, service them, and make sure they are ready for the adventure ahead.

Huegel now plans out routes for 4WD aficionados, motorcycle adventurers, businesses, print and digital publications, travel groups and corporate entities. "Initially I had my standard routes, but people started wanting tweaks and adjustments to accommodate their time limitations, their vacation schedules, their skill levels and their interests. So I just started doing more and more custom routing for people who had special requests. Now that's become most of what I do," says Huegel.

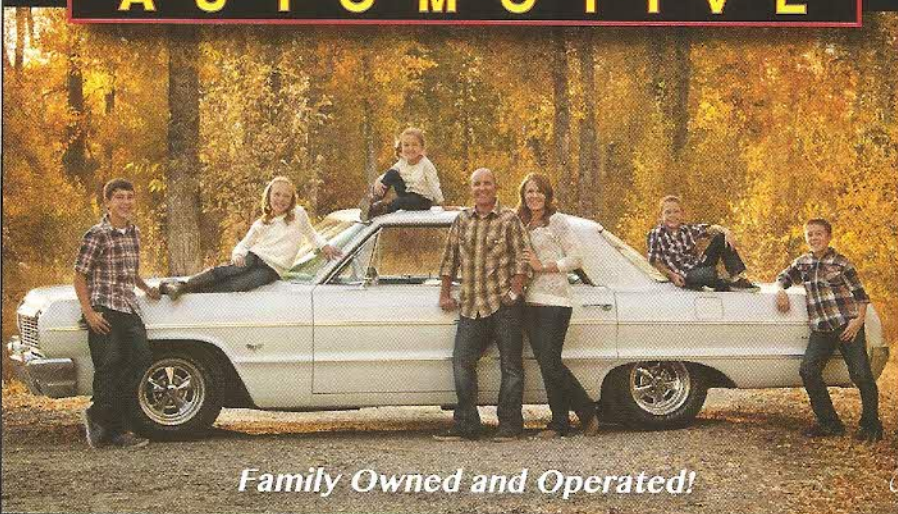
Huegel credits his wanderlust and love of the wild places to his Tom Sawyer-like childhood. He has raised his own children with the same sense of wonder and adventure and love of nature that he has. It's fitting, then, that he is now passing that passion on to others beyond his immediate family one vacation at a time. **IFL**

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