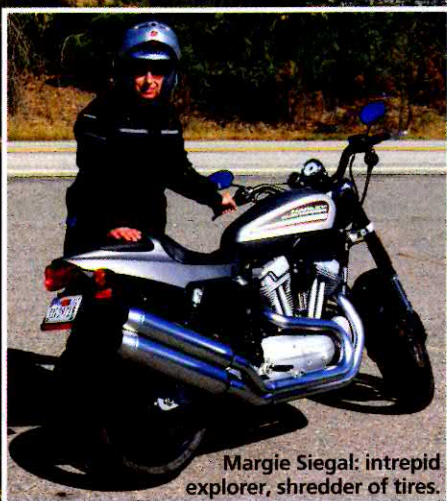


Flattracking The International Selkirk Loop

story and photos by Margie Siegal



Margie Siegal: intrepid explorer, shredder of tires.



"Did you see the bear?"

"There was a bear? Oh damn, I missed the bear."

We—twelve women motorcyclists—were enjoying the scenery and the good roads of the International Selkirk Loop as we wound through forests and past little towns, but the half grown black bear, climbing up the side of a ditch beside the road, was pretty special.

The twelve of us, from all over the United States and Europe, had been invited by Harley-Davidson and the Idaho Division of Tourism to sample the pleasures of the Selkirk Loop, one of 27 All American roads named in the Scenic Byways program and one of the top 10 scenic drives in the Northern Rockies. The Selkirk Loop is a series of two-laners that span Northern Idaho, Northeastern Washington State and eastern British Columbia, transiting along rivers and lakes, with excellent views of snow capped mountains. The roads are generally well paved and not too technical.

Harley had come up with twelve different V-twins, one for each of us, ranging from a Softail Fat Boy Lo to a VRSC V-Rod Muscle. We were introduced to our rides, including the XR 1200 I was to straddle, at Spokane's Davenport Hotel, built in 1914 and lavishly restored. Each room has a separate living room and a huge bathroom with a sunken tub. Despite the allure of what some have called the world's best mattress, we were all up at the crack of dawn and off to the Loop, about sixty miles northeast.

The pack was led by Diane Norton from the Idaho Department of Tourism. Diane has been riding for several

years, but the Dyna Fat Bob she straddled was a definite departure from her Sportster. Jennifer Gruber, Harley-Davidson Product Communications Manager, rode sweep, Carol Graham, the Selkirk Loop Executive Director, drove the sag wagon, and Todd Canavan from the Harley Fleet Center brought a truck and extra gas. The weather was good and spirits were high.

After what seemed like endless suburbia, we pulled into the vintage town of Newport on the Pend Oreille River and began our transit of the Loop. Highway 2 swung gently along the riverbank. This area was once explored by fur traders and mountain men, and signs celebrating their exploits sprout every so often along the road.

The Selkirk Loop features interesting side trips, and we explored several of these. The first one led a short distance off the main road to the Kootenai Falls. The falls are a quarter mile from the road, and the hike felt good after all the breakfast they fed us at the hotel. Randy Twells from *QuickThrottle* lingered on the bridge over the railroad tracks and took photos while *Cycle News'* Michelle Baird climbed on the huge boulders. I stared into the pools—there are supposed to be sturgeon here.

Eventually, I hiked back. The group was milling around at the side of the road and I was antsy to see what the XR 1200 would do. I'd been given the okay to ride to Bonner's Ferry by myself and didn't wait for anyone to change their mind. I dropped the clutch and the XR was out of there. Nice taut suspension, good, if slightly grabby brakes and very neutral handling made short work of the sweepers leading back off the loop and north to our evening destination.

Bonner's Ferry is another interesting village, with

some quirky architecture. We discovered that the trip organizers had set out to prove that not only does the Selkirk Loop feature great riding, there's also a lot of good food along the way. Papa Byrd's' Bistro served us an excellent dinner in what used to be a pizzeria. Genevieve Schmitt, publisher of *Women Riders Now*, an online magazine, took photos of both the food and the surprised faces of Anne Tattersall from the Netherlands and Michaela Fischer from Germany. They didn't expect the excellent microbrew.

We are once again up early for the longest leg of the trip. After crossing into Canada, our intrepid group set out to Crawford Bay, where the gentle curves of the road don't demand so much concentration that you can't notice the scenery and any bears that choose to make an appearance. The road ends at a ferry terminal. Kootenay Lake is huge, and there are no roads on the north end. A free ferry takes our bikes across to Balfour as we enjoy spectacular vistas. We saddle up again and ride north along the west shore of Kootenay Lake to the tiny town of Kaslo, home of a restored paddlewheel ferry. *Thunder Press'* Debbie MacDonald and *Keystone Press'* Pam Collins take the tour of the ferry as I lean on the rail overlooking the harbor and peoplewatch.

The weather starts deteriorating as we ride south from Kaslo. A projected group shot is interrupted by sprinkles and I wait as those with less waterproof outerwear make a beeline for Debbie's Street Glide, one of the few bikes on our trip with saddlebags, where their rain gear is stashed. I am wearing a Tourmaster Transition jacket and matching pants, and need no additional gear to stay dry. The mist turns into light rain, and continues as we head for Nelson and the venerable but cozy Hume Hotel, our stop for the evening. After what seems like an eon of mist and clouds, we arrive, chilled, damp and tired after fifty miles in the wet.

Sunday dawns with blue sky, and we leave the old fashioned comforts of the Hume Hotel for a scenic cruise along the headwaters of the Columbia River. After a wait at the border crossing, we take off down Routes 31 and 20 to Colville, Washington. The road is well paved, well banked and features some challenging twisties. It's hard not to go fast, but a red cow and her calf right next to the road serve as a reminder to slow it down.

That night's dinner is a surprise. A farmhouse in the middle of nowhere has been transformed into a gourmet eatery. The Lovitt Restaurant, run by Norman and Kristen



Six, two refugees from the Chicago restaurant wars, dished up spectacular cuisine for the most reasonable of prices. The wine list may be longer than your arm, but you will walk out with a full stomach and some green in your wallet. Kristin is an accomplished waitress—even with the baby in a carrier on her back!

On the last day of the trip, we were meandering back to Newport when we hit five miles of torn up road. Signs every 500 feet read "*Motorcyclists Use Extreme Caution*" and they weren't kidding. Harleys are not made for motocrossing, and we were all bouncing up and down, with a death grip on the bars, until we finally made it to actual pavement. We took a break in Newport to calm down, but we were dispirited by the approaching end of our excellent adventure, and the impending scatter of our wonderful group. I discovered homemade sticky buns at the Newport General Store, which helped to elevate the mood.

The Selkirk Loop is an undiscovered bit of North America. Roads are un-crowded, the locals are not overwhelmed with tourists, and excellent accommodations and food can be had for reasonable prices. My advice? Go north for your next road trip. ■