

WORTH EVERY MOMENT

The Memories, Roads And People Of A Cross-Country Trip **By Rashmi Tambe**

In the summer of 2009, I decided to follow in the footsteps of my heroes, the Van Buren sisters and Bessie Stringfield, and rode my motorcycle across North America.

In the world of modern roads and technology, my journey was in no way fraught with the kinds of challenges and dangers that Adeline and Augusta Van Buren experienced in 1916, or Bessie Stringfield faced decades later. The outward face of travel had changed greatly—roads were paved and safe, help was just a phone call away, and motorcycles were a lot less likely to break down.

Yet, there were so many things that were still unchanged. It was still the same fantastic country they rode through—more developed and explored, yes, but still unknown and mysterious to me. While they rode Indians or Harley-Davidsons and I rode a modern sportbike, we were still on machines that weren't very much more than a frame with two wheels and an engine, exposed and vulnerable in very similar ways.

In addition, they rode in a time when being a woman riding alone meant being a bit of a curiosity, much as it is now. The people I met were different, yet the same—kind, curious, helpful, generous and every one willing to share his or her own wistful dreams of adventure with a complete stranger.

My ride saw me meandering through New England, where farmhouses and covered bridges brought back imagery of Rip Van Winkle-esque childhood storybooks. I rode down the coast of Maine, seeing the historic cities of Boston, New York and Philadelphia for the first time. I returned to the Midwest, where I went to college many years ago. I rode the M22 along the coast of Lake Michigan, crossing the Mackinac Bridge into the Upper Peninsula.

I rode through the Great Plains and Big Sky country, going against the tide of motorcyclists leaving Sturgis in South Dakota. I enjoyed the stark contrast of the lush, pine-covered Black Hills mountains and the Badlands. I saw Devil's Tower and Yellowstone in Wyoming, and enjoyed the raw, untamed beauty of Montana. And before I knew it, I was headed home to Washington and my home city of Seattle—old and familiar, but also new and fascinating after having been away for so long and experiencing so much.

As a motorcyclist, it was the experience of a lifetime. Being able to ride through so many different terrains and iconic roads was like a dream come true. There were times when I questioned the sanity of what I was doing, especially when caught in pouring rain, or smothering in traffic, heat and humidity. Then there were days of riding in glorious sunshine, under an impossibly blue sky, amid a

sea of green trees on a single gray road twisting off into the distance—and I'd remember exactly why I was there.

I'll always carry with me the memories of all the places I saw, the roads I rode and the wonderful people I had the good fortune to meet: A BMW rider in Maine was kind enough to give me shelter for a night after I was trapped in torrential rains and couldn't find affordable lodging anywhere in the city. An old Korean War veteran Harley rider in New Hampshire took my picture with his bike and showed me his medals. A crazy kid from Ohio who was doing his own solo cross-country ride on a Honda 919, pulling a gigantic trailer. The biker boys from Rhinelander, Wis., were just out on a Sunday ride. Crusty old bikers were riding back from Sturgis. I met so many people out on the road, who I chatted with over cups of gas-station coffee.

As far as summers go, this one will forever remain in my memory as one where I lived life fully and intensely. And I can't wait to see what new adventures the future holds.

Follow Rashmi Tambe's riding adventures on-line at www.Red-Baroness.net.



Photo: Cory Paris Photography