

Getting Started: Notes On One's First Bike Trip

Packing your crap...

The first few days of travel and dealing with the straps, soft duffels and bags will teach you if your setup is good for you. The idea is to have things secure, semi-easy to get to, and not too much of a problem to remove or re-load. If it takes twenty minutes every morning to load everything when you are wanting to get going, and twenty minutes at night to unload when you are tired and just want to be done it's frustrating.

At least one pack should be easily opened at gas stations or on a roadside, without untying everything else. Into this should go rain gloves, a sweater, a wind shirt, a hat, and anything that you might need handy for varying weather conditions. And if you buy an extra banana or water bottle at a gas stop, it's nice to have enough available space for it there, too.

Soft bags and duffels are great, but nothing strapped onto the back of your bike is going to be as easy to deal with as hard pannier bags or boxes in terms of speed and convenience. Conversely, no hard bags are as light, simple and compact (and safe if you crash...) as soft bags and duffels. That's the compromise.

Writing journals...

There are two ways I've kept daily logs. If I am carrying a computer, I try to type a few notes in the evening or morning. Usually not more than the basics: Day, Date, Miles, Location, Weather and anything interesting I experienced or thought about. Some people like to keep exhaustive and detailed expense records, road and turn notations, bike maintenance records and meteorological information. Not me.

If something broke on my bike, I'll note it, and the circumstances involved in fixing it. If I experienced cold, wet or had headwinds, I'll note those things. Perfect weather, too. Later I can fill in descriptions of briefly noted occurrences and scenes from memory, if I want to. If I am traveling light, I use a little notebook and a space pen. No smaller than 6" x 9" and always bound on the left side. Same things recorded as in the computer, but longhand.

It's interesting to note the way one's handwriting changes during the course of a trip. If it is your first-ever on a motorcycle (or on a new-to-you motorcycle), it will be especially good to capture your feelings and ideas. You can only do anything for the first time once. Years from now you may find yourself looking back, and you'll have some idea of the situations you were in, and what you experienced. Some may be embarrassing, but it will bring back the memories and smiles.

The kinds of memories any journal brings back are completely different than the kinds of things a photograph captures. A journal holds what you were thinking, on that day. It helps me to write for some imagined reader: anyone you care about is good. Someone to whom you'd want to share with, and who cares about you, is the best.

Keeping lists of things to do, post-trip...

The other thing to keep in the trip notes is a record of things about your motorcycle and kit to pay attention to later. For example, list little easily forgotten items like:

- replace lost ear plug bag
- file off rough edge by seat bar
- shorten rear view mirror stem
- buy toothpaste

This sort of a list is best kept separately from the daily notes, located above the daily entries in a computer text file, or on a separate page of a written journal.

A personal perspective on this stuff...

I'm just trying to figure these things out the best I can, for myself. I always have a list of things needed on my bike, stuff I'd like to fix, upgrade or otherwise address. My personal Aerostich gear seems to work best after it's a little more worn out and beat up. I go from one day to the next just messing around, and juggling too many things in not enough time. That's why it always feels so good to finally be rolling away into the horizon... toward somewhere. Time to think, time to wonder, time to ride. (...And if you are heading out into the back country far from everywhere, don't forget to take along one of these little trowels, page 38, and some TP.)

—Mr. Subjective, July 2006