

ADVENTURE HERMIT

The Quest to the West

For many, the road less traveled is as simple as veering off of the interstate and, for a long time, this was enough for me as well. But as time went on I began to seek out more and more remote routes and destinations. I am not sure exactly where this obsession of extreme points and way-way off the beaten path travel comes from but I have a theory. I know for instance I was conceived in Key West, FL most likely sometime in August of 1969. While



most of us don't like to imagine our parents getting physical, Olivia Newton-John Style; but I know this little bit of creation trivia because I was born in April of 1970 and 9 months earlier my folks were stationed at Boca Chica Key Naval Air Station. Perhaps this is what drove me to travel further and further west, away from the scene of that crime.

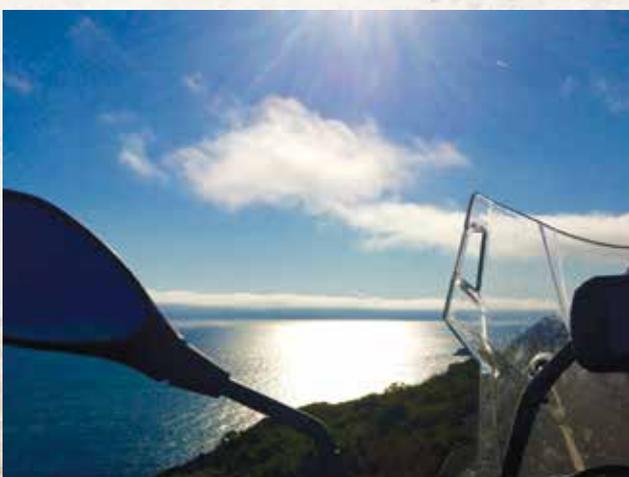
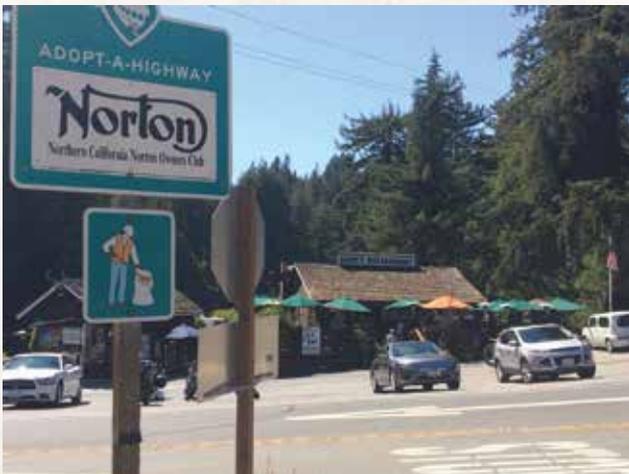
In an effort to uncover my motivation I have to go back to the summer of 2013. I returned to Connecticut where I was raised and hopped aboard my dad's Kawasaki KLR650 on route to Tennessee. From there, I traveled off-road, across the country to Oregon. "All in" it was about 2 months before I returned home to Colorado traversing through twenty-eight states and just over 9,600 miles. I traveled deep into the woods, over sand, dirt and rocks before ultimately arriving in Port Orford, Oregon. Which, I thought then was the place I was looking to find. On the way I had many amazing adventures, met truly wonderful people all while nursing a



broken right foot after a fateful decision to go bowling with some Aspens. When I arrived I truly believed I had reached the furthest point west in the contiguous United States, far from the point of my conception some 43 years earlier.

After a 6-week journey, my broken foot and I were thrilled to be overlooking the Pacific Ocean from our room at the Castaway by the Sea Motel. Sadly, I soon learned that I was not in fact at the furthest point west in the Contiguous U.S.





Port Orford is arguably the western most point to offer “inside” lodging, but it is not the furthest longitudinal point in the US. To add insult to injury, I learned, that the Compass Rose B&B a measly 2.1 miles north of my location was in fact .9 miles closer to the coastline. I had just crossed the country in epic fashion, but this revelation, left me feeling unfinished.

When I returned home a couple of weeks later, I set to work trying to discover how I had miscalculated my goal. It never occurred to me that there could be points further west. My focus had been on staying off road from coast to coast. Once I reintroduced pavement to the equation all sorts of places began to reveal themselves as more longitudinally western.

So a year later, I was once again heading west, this time with two relativity intact and unbroken feet to continue my quest. I traveled aboard my BMW f800 along Highway 50, the Loneliest Highway in America. After a quick

visit through Yosemite I headed to the famous biker-friendly Alice’s Restaurant in Redwood City, CA. The menu offered up motorcycle themed burgers and more. After inhaling a “Norton Burger” complete with Point Reyes Blue Cheese and Bacon, I headed down to Half-Moon Bay.

My goal was to ride the Pacific Coast Highway (PCH) all the way up to Cape Disappointment, WA. My modest calculations assured me that this was surely the furthest point west in the contiguous U.S. I clung to the coast in hopes of rolling over every possible western longitudinal line as I headed north, just in case. In Astoria, Oregon I crossed the 4.1-mile Megler Bridge before arriving in Point Ellice near Megler, Washington. A detour I had taken the previous year after visiting Port Orford, but did not realize that I was a paltry 15 miles from the, not easy to overlook 1700-acre Cape Disappointment state park. I had finally arrived at the furthest point west in the contiguous U.S.



Or so I had thought. It would be another few months before I actually recognized and acknowledged my miscalculation.

At this point, the more geographically astute readers may be asking themselves, "How does someone with access to the Internet and who has ridden 10,000 miles across the country make such massive miscalculations?" Well, bear with me and all will soon be revealed.

Ignorant to my "failure" I pitched a tent along the Pacific Ocean at Cape Disappointment State Park. After sharing my night with an incredibly curious family of raccoons I once again headed home to Colorado. I attribute my mistake to a healthy sense of denial. Deep down I believe I wanted to keep getting it wrong. What better excuse to maintain a yearly sojourn to the left coast?

Californians may argue that Mendocino Point is the furthest location west. I have been there twice and while it is beautiful it maxes out at W124° 24' 34.2 longitude. Then again, Oregonians have been know to claim Cape Blanco's W124° 33' 50.3989 longitude as being the absolute most western point. Sure, on a state level they can make these claims but not across the entire country. I am looking for nothing less than the furthest contiguous point west.

Fast forward to 2015. The f800 has been sold and replaced by a BMW r1200GS. The goal? Ride up the remainder of the Pacific Coast Highway before veering off even further west, towards the Makah Indian Reservation. According to my most recent calculations, I cannot get any further northwest in the contiguous U.S. so it seems like a reasonable

destination. After hammering out to McCall, Idaho to visit friends, I meander west along the Snake River through Hell's Canyon on on-route to Walla Walla, Washington. I spent a day trekking portions of the Lewis and Clark Trail before taking a multiday break in Portland, Oregon for a few well-deserved beers and great food. When I continue on, rather than heading northwest I go northeast. Knowing I had missed my western goal on two previous attempts, I figure, as long as I am out here again, I should indulge my curiosity and do some sightseeing at Mount Saint Helens and Mount Rainier. The road up Mount Rainier definitely qualifies in the top 5 of all paved roads I have ever ridden. I end my day in Enumclaw, Washington, named after a nearby mountain. I eat at the flawlessly traditional Café Europa Restaurant. Mom, the owner, cooks everything from scratch as the kids help with the table service. Traditional Polish beers round out an amazing meal of pirogues, schnitzel, spatzle and red cabbage. When the waiter reveals to me that the town name means "Thundering Noise" I can just imagine a legion of Harley's rolling through town, but I suspect it was named more for the storms that come over the mountain.

In the morning I am finally ready to continue my way up the coast. The folks at the "Kettle" due me no favors serving a breakfast fit for 2 with left overs to spare. The chicken fried steak is amazing but I can only eat a quarter of it. As for the complementary homemade cookies they keep dropping off, despite my protests, well they end up wrapped in a napkin for later. I opt for the Tacoma route towards Aberdeen, and hold my breath, as I get closer to the dreaded I5, south of



Seattle. Fortunately, I am on it for less than 30 miles and in just over 3 hours I am pointed due North on the 101 towards Olympic National Park.

I'm in no rush since my entire route around the Olympic Peninsula is less than 300 miles. I enjoy hiking through the rain forest and walking down to several beaches, even safely passing through the vampire laden Forks, Washington. I finally arrive at the Makah Indian Reservation. Navigating from a good old-fashioned paper map, it seems I can truly ride no further northwest. I park the bike and after a short 30-minute walk on a trail impeccably maintained by the reservation, I arrive at the Cape Flattery Light House overlook. As I look across the Strait of Juan De Fuca, the international boundary between the US and the "The Great White North" I wonder if there is any possibility of accessing the 20-acre Tatoosh Island. At ½ mile off the US coastline it is officially the northwestern most lighthouse on the west coast of the contiguous United States. The islands "west-of-me" location taunts me as I watch speedboats wiz between the mainland and the namesake of Chief Tatooshe. However, because it is not contiguous I feel I can accept my position at approximately W124° 42' 52 longitude as close enough to the furthest point west in the contiguous U.S. I smile take one more photo of the lighthouse and return to my bike.

Perhaps the knowledge of being conceived at the furthest-incorporated point southeast in the contiguous United States has been has driven me all the years to seek out the northwestern most point. Perhaps I am subconsciously trying to erase the image of my semi-clad, long since divorced parents joining giblets. Then again, it is probably just an excuse for yet another epic ride. Regardless, I am always up for being wrong and heading back out on the road!

Epilogue:

Well shoot! Since my visit west, I have made a new discovery. Apparently, a short 1-hour ride to the south of Cape Flattery is Cape Alva, Washington. Located at 124° 44' 11.8" W, it is approximately 5 seconds of longitude, or about 360-feet further west during high tide than Cape Flattery. Yes, Flattery is further from Key West. And yes, what's five seconds among friends? Insert your own conception joke there. In the interest of science it looks like I have no choice but to return to the West Coast in 2016! I apologize in advance to my wife and kids. Darn my miscalculations!