

To Anchorage, Sept 3, 2008



Well, the overpriced Valdez motel room was okay until the morning when it became a sweatbox and the thermostat didn't respond to the helm. Maybe they expect guests to leave early. The light rain had continued through the night and it was still raining in the morning, with a low ceiling and low visibility. You could still see the shadows of the mountains. I loaded the bike in the wet, but since it wasn't pouring I didn't mind. It just meant that my back of the bike clothes dryer was out of commission for the day. In

spite of all my whining, I can't complain about the hotel because of the location. It was easy to shoot pictures of the water front and to find a place to eat, as well as the terminal. The hotel did cost almost as much as the ferry ticket.

Both the wifi and the continental breakfast were disappointing. The wifi was more cooperative in the morning and with constant coaxing, I could upload some files. I was happy, since I had made it to Valdez. I'm glad I asked directions at the desk to the gas station, since the operational one was hidden on a side street. The one on the main street as you entered town was out of business, apparently. More conversations with locals at the pump. The gas station seems to be the point of social contact in Alaska, which is fine by me.



The ferry terminal was nice and modern and clean, filled with informational placards and a nice wall relief. The girl at the counter was

full of positive energy and from what I overheard, rode a motorcycle, too. While waiting to load I talked to a girl who worked on the ferry and she said that the new high speed ferries don't go near the glacier, only the old slow ones, and this late in the season they had moved to another location. Oh well, with this weather probably couldn't have seen anything anyway. The ferry ride itself was a thrill. The ferry was a high tech catamaran



that can hit 32 knots and it felt like it. Furnishings were new and nice and there was even a section with little desks, lights, and power outlets. These were convenient for using a laptop and you could see both sides of the windows from that section by swiveling back and forth in the chair. The cafeteria was adequate. Basic items such as sandwiches were cheap but desserts and special coffee drinks such as espresso (they had an automated machine!) were expensive.

Did get to see some seals along the way, but I left my binoculars below in the bike. Still, though, you could see them with the naked eye. The high speed ferry took only three hours to make the trip, and actually it was scenic around Whittier. There was also a lot more around Whittier than I remembered or the guide book mentioned. I didn't get a chance to get any good shots of the ferry as they hurried us out of the loading yard, and I realized why everyone was in a rush to get on the road.

If we hurried, we could make the Whittier tunnel. I was the last in my batch to get into the tunnel before they paused to air it, and it was a good thing since I only did 18 mph vs. the speed limit of 25 mph. On a bike, you had to balance on the concrete blocks between the train rails, which were wet and slippery. I had to keep reminding myself to let the bike guide itself, like in the



gravel, and not try to force it. At the end of the tunnel you had to get out of the way and you couldn't hang around to take pictures of the entrance from close range. Another one of those crazy security things.

It was still raining, but as I went up the sound the weather cleared and I stopped at a couple of places to take photos, since it was beautiful as the sun came out, although very windy. I even brought out my DSLR for some shots. On the bike and on the ferry to Haines I'd mainly been using the Olympus since it's waterproof and shockproof. I banged up the Pentax pretty badly on the Whittier ferry when I tried to stand up from the desk with the camera around my neck. I noticed that the bike was jerking when I shifted and I checked during one of my stops-sure enough the chain had stretched way out. I was able to tighten it, but the stretching was not a good sign, along with it being too tight back when I was coming up I-5 in northern California. I also used up one of my cans of chain lube, which made me realize that I needed to resupply. A can was lasting about 2,000 miles.

The ride into Anchorage became very enjoyable and I wished that I had time to stop at some of the elaborate wildlife informational areas; maybe I should have. You could see the tracks in some places. Twenty years ago I rode a flat car with the R100S on those tracks, I think. I'll have to check is there is another set. Mom and Dad must have ridden the



train to Whittier the year before I did, back in 1987. I don't know if they stayed in Anchorage.

Arriving in Anchorage after about 60 miles from Whittier was a big shock. It was suddenly like being in L.A. again. The road turned into a freeway for a while, although it eventually turned back into a surface street. My first stop was to adjust my chain and pull out my laptop to check on the location of the REI which I had saved as a PDF. I was able to read the page just as it started raining again. The storm had followed me from Whittier. At the REI I looked really out of place with my motorcycling outfit and multiple layers. I found some mountaineering gloves that looked like they might work, expedition socks, and some XL size gaiters. The ones I had brought with me had turned out to be a really good idea to help keep my ankles and feet warm and dry, but they constricted my calves-I have fat calves-and made them cold, a problem I remembered from telemarking when I still used leather boots. The new ones felt like they would let my calves breathe.

In the parking lot an REI employee told me about an annual ride they have to Dawson City and gave me some info on the weather. I forgot to ask him about motorcycle shops but I got a second chance when I saw a white haired gentleman loading his GS BMW. He also did the Dawson ride and gave me some more information. The road is dirt from Chicken to the border. On the Canadian side it's a combination of dirt and paved. The summer has been dry, but very cold, and the rains have just started. It can turn very nasty up in Fairbanks and Dawson very quickly. I can probably make it from Fairbanks to Dawson in one day. He also told me about the Yamaha dealer. I went there next and it was closed, but I looked up the hours. I asked some guys across the street in some kind of annex about Suzuki dealers and they told that there are two in town.

I realized that I didn't have a PDF page for the hostel. I decided I might as well go to McDonalds and have dinner and look up the hostel in Frommers again. Fortunately the McDonalds had AT&T wifi, which is free for me since I have AT&T DSL. I looked up the hostel location as well as the Suzuki dealerships, and did some more uploading. Not a bad wifi connection, but it did keep dropping on multiple file transfers, which wasn't surprising. I guess I'm going back to that McDonalds a few more times.

I thought tomorrow was going to be a museum day, but it looks like I'm going to spend at least part of it looking for a Suzuki dealer. I at least need the chain lube, and maybe I can get them to install a chain. It'll be embarrassing to explain my weird sprocket combination. I can imagine the cost to change both of them. I'm really beating up my credit cards.