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Days of Vie

(pronounced *Déjà vu*)

THE ILLUSION OF WASHINGTON STATE

Although I can't speak French, I am familiar with the term *déjà vu*, which refers to the feeling of already having experienced something when we're actually experiencing it for the first time. We've all had that feeling, and I certainly have felt this illusion before, but never has the feeling haunted me so much as in my trip through Washington state.

It all started—without my even being aware of it—on the first day's lunch stop in Leavenworth. We had just crossed the Northern Cascades from Puget Sound. It was gloomy and raining when we left the Seattle area, and as we ascended to the 4,000-foot Stevens Pass we climbed above the weather to discover the sun shining brightly on the clouds below.

WA thick coat of evergreen and pine trees envelope these Cascade Mountains just like the Rocky Mountains. Dropping down the forested eastern slope of the mountainside, I had no clue of what lay ahead—for all I knew these mini-Rockies continued forever, all the way to Idaho. But suddenly the road delivered me to an open flatland garnished with the small town of Leavenworth. It was obvious that the tree-covered mountains I had just ridden over were now behind me and something entirely different lay ahead.



Nothing like visiting a nice European village...in Washington? There's a little of everything, everywhere. And there's a lot of weather—wet and dry, warm and cold, sometimes hit-and-miss, sometimes all at once. When it comes to weather, Washington is no better nor worse than other parts of the country.



This isn't the wet side of Washington; it's the dry side just being wet. Proving that weather will be whether.

Leavenworth, which proclaims itself "Washington's Bavarian Village," is exactly as you would imagine—fashioned as a quaint little German town. Anyone who has traveled in Europe would no doubt have the feeling that they've been someplace just like this. That's what I felt.

After lunch we ventured out on a road along the Columbia River. A road that hugs a river always reminds me of the time I rode through Idaho along Highway 55 on the way to Calgary. I had never flirted with a river so long as on that Idaho trip, meandering through sweeping turns and crossing bridges from one side to the other. I'd also encountered roads like this in Colorado and Utah, too. I'd seen this before.

Then we arrived at Chelan, located at the very south end of Lake Chelan. Wait, I think I've been here, too. But no! I've never ridden in Washington state, so how could I have this feeling of having been here? That evening in Chelan the day's ride played and replayed in

my mind, reminding me of journeys in other places. I've never traveled in a state that made me think I was somewhere else until this trip through Washington. And that was just the beginning.

During each day's ride I had brief flashbacks—sporadic moments that took me back to another ride in another state—that made Washington feel somehow familiar, yet...different. I was getting the impression that it's as if the state tried to duplicate every part of America, not to copy it exactly, but instead, to put its own unique spin on it.

And it made me wonder, is the state of Washington simply an imitation of the rest of this country, or is it an enhanced—even perfected—version of the United States, in miniature? Before the week was over I would have an answer to my rhetorical wondering, or rather, a more relevant question.

The Unguided Tour

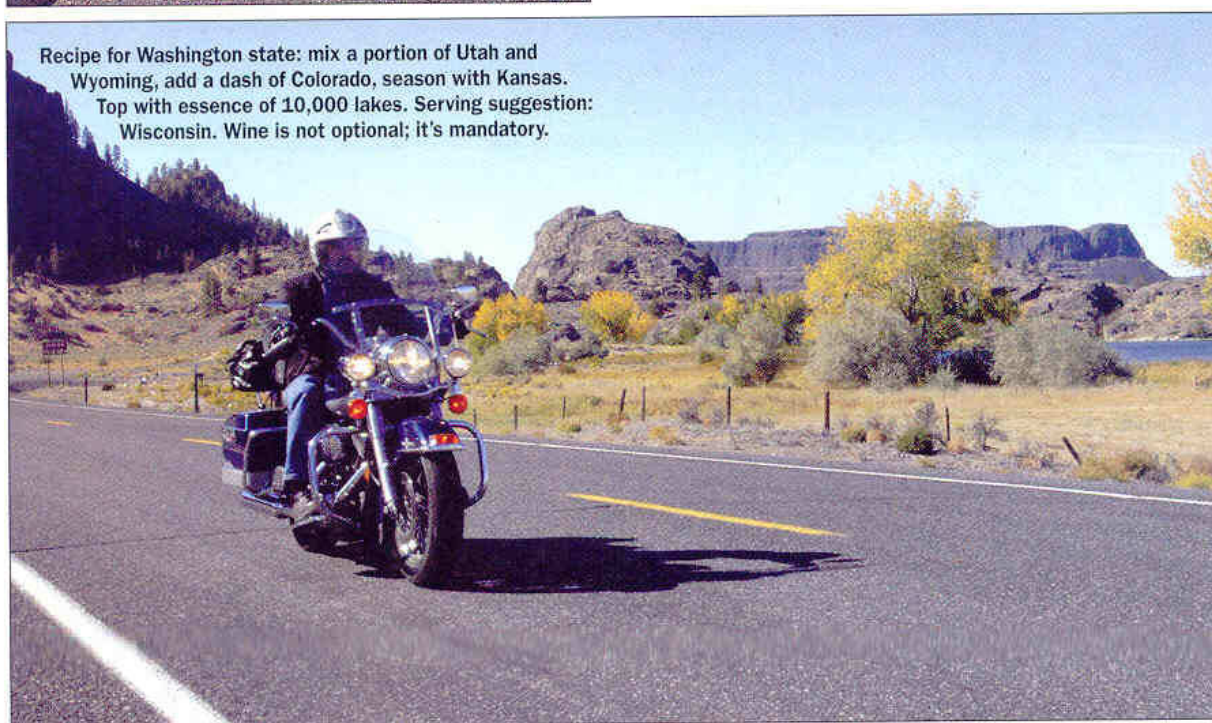
The Washington State Tourism Office arranged this five-day trip. The organization did an admirable job, with the help of Tom Mehren of Sound Rider, of arranging a route and setting up some very fine hotels. Tom's assignment was to loosely lead



From the viewpoint across from Snoqualmie Falls, one of Washington's waterfalls gets in your face. The state even has its own Stonehenge. It may not have 10,000 lakes, but in Washington the water's great.



Recipe for Washington state: mix a portion of Utah and Wyoming, add a dash of Colorado, season with Kansas. Top with essence of 10,000 lakes. Serving suggestion: Wisconsin. Wine is not optional; it's mandatory.



the way, allowing us time to shoot photos and gather information to pass along to readers.

Our group of five motojournalists from various parts of the U.S.A. also included a fellow who came all the way from Holland for the tour, Nick van der Heijden. Nick provided some of the pictures used in this story, as well as his own unique viewpoint. It's always good to have people along who come from a completely different background; they help us see things we often miss.

We picked up our bikes from a no-name rental outfit that stocked well-used bikes with high mileage. Every one of the five rental bikes had one problem or another during the ride, including nearly bald front tires on two of them. After packing our gear on the bikes our tour guide raced off before we could assess the machines or make any adjustments.

My Road King needed some attention; the controls were askew and the clutch cable was not adjusted correctly, which made me glad I'd brought my trusty tool kit. A few hours into the ride it became so annoying that I stopped to fix things. It is amazing how a few simple adjustments can transform an ill-fitting machine into a more enjoyable ride. My advice is to rent

motorcycles from a well-known source, such as through the H.O.G. fly-and-ride program or a Harley dealership.

I was glad to have a Road King equipped with a rack and a windscreen. I piled all the motorcycle-related stuff in the hard bags—tools, rain suit and extra riding gear—and strapped on my waterproof Ortlieb bag that held all my street clothes, underwear and toiletries. That way when I arrived at a hotel, I could leave all the bike stuff locked in the bags and just grab the clothes bag. (See *The Art of Travel* on page 46 of this issue.)

Two States

They say there are two Washington states, the "dry side" and the "wet side." This, of course, refers to twin climate patterns. The areas that directly face the Pacific Ocean tend to be foggy, rainy and just plain wet; in fact, this area of Washington gets an annual average precipitation of some 40 or more inches, not to mention the high winds. Extending east of the Cascades are the plains—and to a certain extent the east side of the Olympic Peninsula—flat and dry with barely any rain.

Don't get the idea that this is black-and-white, like an on/off switch. That gross generalization cheats both the state and visitors of the real truth.

It's more like gradations. Interestingly, one local guy told me that the weather in Washington is much more pleasant than the typical perception of constant rain. He insisted that people who want to discourage other outsiders from moving there and overpopulating the state perpetuated this rainy stereotype.

I found evidence of this at breakfast one morning when I got into a conversation with a couple of guys who were on a business trip. They were from the Olympic Peninsula, a place called Sequim, pronounced "Squim" by the locals, and they told me that Sequim only gets a few inches of rain every year, while the rest of the Peninsula gets more than 40 inches. Apparently there are local weather patterns in various parts of Washington that bring mild

weather, contrary to the state's rainy stereotype.

It's true that the weather can change drastically in a few hours, which is probably a motorcyclists' most troublesome nuisance. In these kinds of conditions I've learned that it's good to dress in layers. It was chilly enough, even on the warmest days, to wear a bottom layer of lightweight long underwear, followed by street clothes and capped with suitable insulation. Of course that final layer was always close at hand in the saddlebag—the rain suit.

Rain or not, traffic seemed non-existent and road-cluttering vehicles seldom appeared on backroads. The two-lane highways we rode nearly always seemed deserted. Often I'd ride for miles before a car passed the other way, and sometimes I couldn't see any traffic

from horizon to horizon, which caused a mixture of joy and anxiety. Joy that I had the roads to myself; anxiety in the feeling that I was alone out here, with no relief in sight should something bad happen. Which it never did.

Along the 260 between Connell and Lyons Ferry I had ridden for many miles before finally coming on a lonely farm truck. This road skirts ranches and farms that were trying very hard to be flat, but Washington's terrain would not allow it. The rocky grasslands seemed like a lumpy Nebraska farmland sprinkled with boulders.

Highway 260 is perfectly engineered for motorcycle travel, with a flawless pavement surface from shoulder to shoulder. I could make a case for visiting Washington just for this riding experience. This was one road that never gave me that *déjà vu* feeling, it was that unique.

The 260 led to the small town of Starbuck, which was about the size of one city block. There were homes in little Starbuck that seemed like tracings of a Midwest farm town, which

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motorcycle travel,
with a flawless pavement surface from
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reminded me of small towns in Wisconsin. The eastern plains hinted at Midwest farms. Even the farm cows, modeling Wisconsin's common Herefords, are usually of a unique Swiss breed.

Apple Wine, Anyone?

The food that I most associated with Washington is, of course, the apple. So I expected lots of apple cider, apple dumplings, apple, this and apple that, and especially apple pie. Imagine my dismay when I found few restaurants offering apple pie. On the other hand, everywhere we went there was wine tasting and wine vineyards and wine this-and-that.

Seems that there are now more than 200 vintners in Washington state, and wine has become a major marketing focus. Make that an obsession, because our dinner stops inevitably involved invitations to try the wine. Waitresses who couldn't

manage to set the table correctly were seemingly experts on wine. Waiters were appalled when I didn't inspect the wine menu and question the year of the Merlot. "Do you have apple pie?" I would ask. "No, but try our cherry pie and some wine."

Of course all during the trip I engaged in my favorite biking ritual: talking to locals. It was in a small diner on the outskirts of Stabler that I

learned of a local ordinance making it a crime to kill a Bigfoot. The penalty is a \$10,000 fine or five years in jail, and Skamania County is the only county in the country with such an ordinance. Now that's worth knowing.

Picture Pinnacle

Thursday was our big chance to scale Mount St. Helens on the way to our overnight stop on Mount Rainier.

MAP BY ROBERT LAMARCHE





When I had flown into Seattle from the south I'd seen a whiff of smoke rising from Mt. St. Helens, so I was anxious to visit this infamous mountain.

The skies were darkly overcast as I headed out in the morning from Stevenson along the Columbia River, and a sprinkle began pelted the Road King's windscreen. By noon it was raining steadily, and by the time I caught up to the rest of the group and stopped for a late lunch we were drenched.

Naturally, with just about zero visibility and walls of water cascading from the skies, none of us got any pictures of the mountains. When we pulled into the ski resort in Paradise, we could barely see the trees on the other side of the parking lot, much less the peak of the mountain 10,000 feet above us.

On the last day, Friday, we woke to pouring rain, packed our bikes in the rain, well, you get the idea. My camera was stuffed deep inside a saddlebag, wrapped cozily in plastic bags. How it must ache to miss exposing itself to beautiful mountain scenery, hiding in the mist.

When I ride in the rain I always have to remind myself that this isn't the first time, so don't be concerned, just ride. Remember that trip through Yosemite? And the ride to Arizona

that ended in Barstow? How about that ride to York, Pennsylvania, without rain gear? Here in Washington, even the rain reminded me of Utah, Kansas, Wisconsin, Tennessee.

As my trip drew to an end, as these feelings of *déjà vu* persisted, a thought occurred to me: Washington seemed to reflect the United States, only it was compressed and distilled, like an entire continent that's condensed, yet enhanced. And I kept repeating, "This reminds me of...except it's different."

Although Washington—at least from my personal experience—reminded me of other parts of this country, I imagined that if the first motorcycle trip I'd ever taken was through Washington state, then wouldn't the rest of the United States remind me of Washington? Could it be that this is not a copy of anything, that instead perhaps an almighty creator conceived Washington first, then reverse-engineered the rest of this country? That's one of the great things about riding a Harley: on any one ride, everyone has a different experience. ☺



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