Sjef Vanderaa (105) **IBR 2017 Ride report.**

You can only ride your first IBR once!!

It all started in Jan 2016 when I entered my name in the lottery to compete in the 2017 “Iron Butt Rally”, the “toughest motorcycle long distance endurance rally in the world”. It is based on 11000 miles in 11 days.
Obviously leading up to this I had ridden many other rallies and certificate rides to be able to compete in this event.

In March of 2016 I received the e-mail that I was “lucky” enough to be drawn for the event and to compete in this insanity.
My preparation work started immediately with upgrading navigation systems, mapping computers, software and a like. Also motorcycle upgrades, prep rallies, check lists, and spare parts.

As the almost year and half of prep work went on, my preparations flowed quite well and I was able to arrange bike storage on completion of the rally, as I would not have enough time to drive home to return to work.

The rally would start and finish in Minneapolis, Minnesota. But beyond that no information was given.

Several months before the rally the 1st and 2nd checkpoint were made public to the riders and it was to be in Allen Texas near Dallas.
The dates were available to us so we knew then what the timeframes for the 1st, 2nd and 3rd leg were looking like. The first leg was from Monday morning to Wed eve, the second leg from Thurs morning to Sat eve, and the third (monster) leg was from Sun morning to Fri morning.

Fearless planning, Basecamp practice, spreadsheets, sunrise sunset sheets were made. And lots of speculation of what the rally would look like.

After a few more months the time was here, time to go. On Sunday just over a week prior to the rally I left home (Nova Scotia Canada) for Minneapolis. I had plenty of time and wanted to take it. I was in no rush and didn’t want to have the need to rush before the rally even started.

On my way!!!

The day I left even just as I passed Quebec City my bike was giving me problems, losing power and running very rough and erratic. I didn’t know what it was, but thought it was the non-lockable bung fill cap I had installed on the tank. Maybe the tank was drawing a vacuum. I pulled over got some gas and the problem went away.
I arrived in Minneapolis on Wed. and Mike Myren and his wife Joy, had invited me to stay with them before checking in to the hotel.

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On Thursday I had an appointment to get new tires installed and an oil change at a local dealership. That night I checked in to the start hotel to be prepared for Dale Warchild's pre tank inspection. It all went well but I required to put some anti slosh foam in my auxiliary tanks to comply with the rules. I was lucky enough to find a local racing shop that had some, and within 2 hours I had the thumbs up for my dual tanks.

On Sat. before the rally we all had our tech inspections and all was good.
Sun was a busy day with mandatory rookie meeting, rider meeting and the banquet.
During the afternoon posters were placed with the theme of the rally, creating lots of theories and speculation of the rally theme that Jeff Earls, a master of rally puzzle's, would have put together.

The information was finally revealed to us and the theme was "Roadside Safari" with 5 categories of animals. **A**ir, **L**and, **W**ater, **P**rehistoric and **M**ythical.
The bonus locations for the whole rally were given to us but only the point values for the first leg. Every bonus location was available for every rider. And in subsequent legs the point values would change for the bonuses. Different combinations, more complex for each leg were available in each leg with higher levels of multiplier options.

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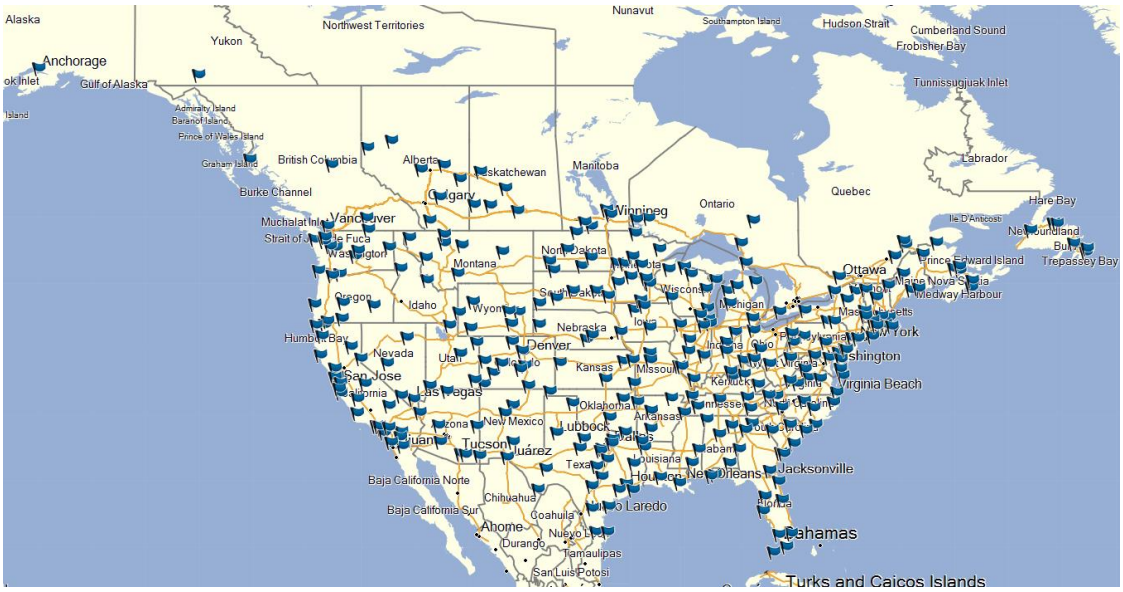

So after the meal, and all available information gathered, off to the room and start putting the first leg together for the next morning.

Leg 1

On Monday morning, at 8 o'clock we were to be by our bikes for final odo checks. And at exactly 10 o'clock it was go time.

Right at that time, all my blue tooth connections quit and never got them working for the rally, it was a "quiet" 11 days to say the least.

Anyway, there was a lot of excitement, and a lot of spectators, supporters to see us off. Local police departments held traffic back for us to get going in all directions and off we were.

I planned a nice route West, to the group picture, N and S Dakota, Wyoming, Colorado, Kansas, Oklahoma and in to Texas to Allen the first checkpoint.

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Not far into the first leg and I found the problems with my bike popping back in to my life, and making riding extremely difficult. The bike was losing power, very poor throttle control, and from time to time bucking like a bronco. I wasn't sure if I was in a rally or a rodeo.
The problem was not consistent, but there definitely as time and distance progressed I started to identify a pattern. It all seemed to point to combustion or fuel mixture.
I enjoyed the scenery of my route, and definitely found places I must see again. But had to cut a few bonus locations out because of time loss, due to needing to stop for fuel more often and at one point I stopped at a small bike shop, where they couldn't do much for me. But I used their parking lot to pull the plastics off the bike, and pulled the air filter out and cleaned it. It "seemed" to solve the problem but was short lived. I kept struggling through, hoping to make it to checkpoint 1.

On Tuesday eve. I rode through Eastern Colorado and was heading towards a bonus location, but well on my way through some severe, extreme lightning and rain storms I did the math and figured out that there was nowhere to get a receipt for my rest bonus, or even a motel in the area before midnight. So decided that I had to let that one go, to find a place to stay and get my receipts. Unfortunately a lot of my focus went to keeping the bike going, scoring what I could and needed, and getting to check point.

I made it to check point 1 well in time, got scored, managed to get a couple strings for extra points and started to concentrate on what to do with the bike for leg 2, and how I would work my way through it.
Speaking with fellow riders, it seemed there were about 8 of us with fuel related problems.
Wendy Crocket was of great assistance, and related my problem directly to fuel and ethanol related contaminants. (After some thought this problem seems to go back to an earlier trip in the season to the Southern US).
She advised me on an additive for my second leg to clear this up.

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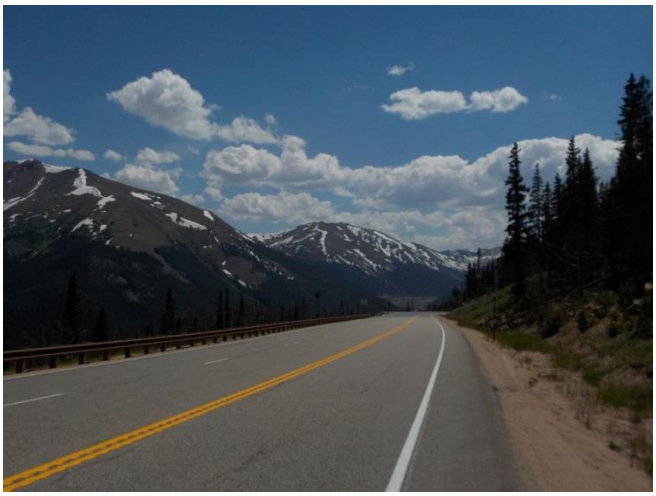
Just a couple of the bonus locations on leg 1



A scenic pic along the way in Colorado

Check point 1 arrival.

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Leg 2

Initially I had not planned to go East on the rally, but I knew I wanted to make the big leg, leg 3 West.
And I could see to make a nice route East on the 2nd leg once we were given our package at 4:00 AM on Thurs. Again I put a nice leg together with good bonus locations (I thought), in some nice areas. Leaving Allen Tx, travelling NE through Arkansas, Kentucky, Tennessee, N Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana and back to Allen Tx.
Not long after I departed on this leg, as I expected the bike was starting to act up. And as soon as business hours opened I stopped and got a few cans of the additive Wendy advised me of. Within 50 km the bike started to smooth out and run better. I did however consume quite a bit of the additive as I pretty much ran a tank of fuel and ½ can of additive non-stop to keep things somewhat steady and driveable. The ride overall on this leg was a bit more comfortable but still needed to keep the tanks full (so, many stops).
My bonus strings in this leg were also a bit more difficult to obtain, but that seemed to be more the rider's choice of routing and planning than anything else. The highlight of this leg was the time spent in the Appalachian range and Smokie's, where I always enjoy my riding including the "Tail of the Dragon".

The tough times in this leg were again dealing with the bike and the mental stress that brings, and a massive high wind and rain storm in Alabama, where by the sounds of it a number of riders got caught in.
The wind and rain was so intense, that tractor trailers, campers, cars and a like either pulled over or simply stopped on the highway. I had pulled over and tried to shield myself a bit behind my windshield but it really didn't do anything. My boots still filled up and overflowed. The heat in the South was also incredible with temperatures up to 42 - 45 deg C. Hydration and cooling by ice was non-stop. Overall so far I felt 50/50 about the two legs. Happy with the route of leg 1, not so much about the bike. Slightly less happy with my planning on leg 2, but the bike worked a little better.
On my way in to checkpoint 2, I decided to go in just a little earlier, get scored right away. As my plan was to pull the tank off the bike, dump the fuel out and replace my fuel pump, of which I happen to have a spare with me. I was lucky that an IBR spectator had a 5 Gl bucket in his service van, he willingly offered and sacrificed to me to dispose of my fuel. I was hoping this was the end of my motorcycle woes. I finished the job at about 23:00, get some sleep. 03:30 comes around quick for the rider meet and package for Leg 3.

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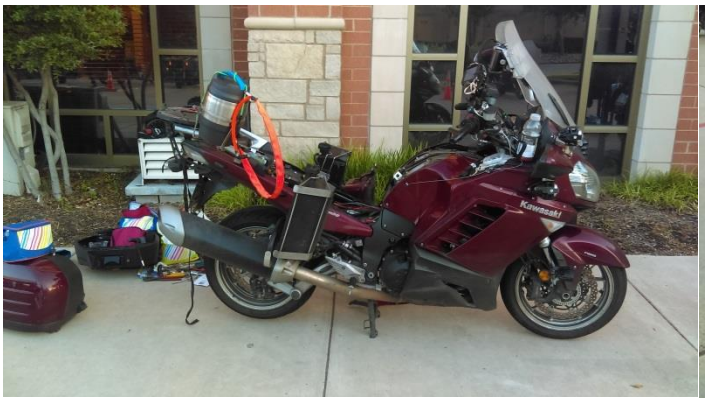

Leg 3

Feeling totally confident about my repair job, and lessons learned from both legs in regards to routing, and "string theory" I felt good about going to the rider meet at 04:00 and receive my package for the final but biggest leg.
As I said I already pre-determined in my brain that I wanted to go West, so right or wrong I never even looked at bonuses East of the Minneapolis / Allen line.
My brain went West and that was it! As most riders by now, I built my strings which now were a combination of 5 locations in the form of a poker "Full House", where the big points were the last of the string to gain the 4x multiplier for the points of that location.
I left the barn at about 06:30 and knew right away, my bike was good, problem solved. I was a happy camper and was in a good mood to start the next 5 days. I knew that point and position wise, I was a bit behind the eight ball but still in decent form. And the route I had selected seemed like a solid 2nd half for me.
My route took me straight West from Allen Tx. to New Mexico, Arizona, California north to Oregon, Washington crossing Idaho to Northern Montana, N Dakota, back to Minneapolis.
The scenery along this route was absolutely spectacular, a lot of it especially in California covered State and National parks with the roads to myself (must go back). The highlight of this leg was simply the whole leg, the route, the scenery, the bike performance. Just an outstanding 5 days.

During this leg again, it came to light numbers of times the cunning genius of route master Jeff Earls, and how for any potential string or combo you would want to design, the "hurdles" and complexities you would have to go through to accomplish the task.
A few of us found that out the hard way travelling the "shortcut" from the Bigfoot museum to the Bigfoot trap. Which part of it was an extreme gravel path through the mountains of about 15km long. This path on average might have been 2 meters wide and cliff up on one side, cliff down on the other, with twist and turns, wash outs and whatever it could throw at you (not exactly Kawasaki Concours country, wish I had my DRZ 400 for that part).

My tire pressure sensors were giving me "low pressure alarms" while they were in the trunk of my bike!! I had them removed from the wheels on a tire change, as they were acting up as well. The gravel road shook the bike enough to activate them.

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But the route also provided views of mountain lakes, waterfalls, long range mountain views that were just spectacular. This leg felt better because there seem to be a little less pressure, since there was no checkpoints left to meet other than the finish. Just me, bike, bonuses and clock.

But make no mistake, to make the strings work, you had to work, and work hard for them.

Unfortunately by reaching for this big string ending by the big foot trap in Oregon, I lost out on a rest bonus that cost me almost 4000 points. But that's how it goes. On day 10 we had another group photo, which was another big pointer and string finisher for most who were there.

Then most riders started to work their way towards the barn, and picking up some more bonuses on the way. I came in at about 03:30 in the morning and scoring started at 05:00.

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A few pics of the bonus locations of leg 3

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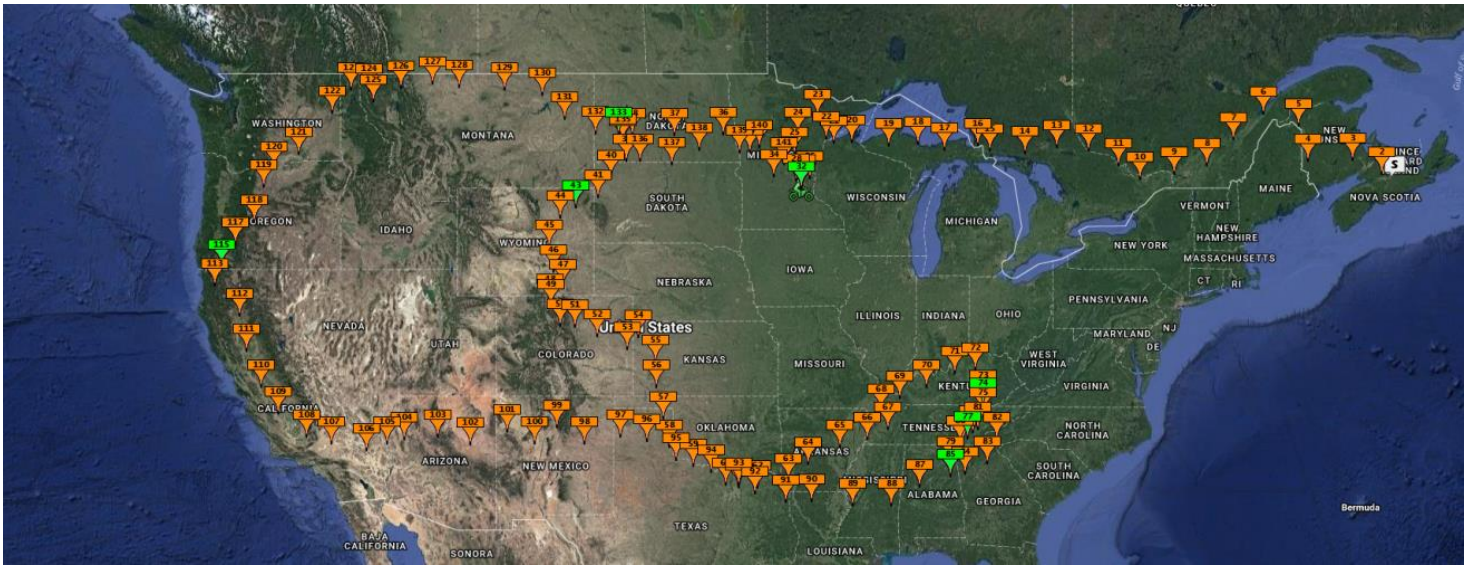
A Canadian in Canadian (River) New Mexico, had to take a pic!

I was extremely pleased with my finish. I would have liked to have finished a little higher, but by that time I had already almost forgotten the struggles with the bike in the first two legs, some of the bonuses I had to give up and my lost rest bonus. Lessons learned for the next time.



The ride from home (Nova Scotia) to the start in Minneapolis
Leg 1 from Minneapolis to Allen Tx. West.
Leg 2 East to the Smokie's and back to Allen.
Leg 3 West to California, and back to Minneapolis.

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Finisher's Banquet.

This was truly an experience of a lifetime; remember **you can only ride your first IBR once!**

My colleges at work were tracking me, and were ready for my return at work.

The organisation is absolutely second to none. Jeff, Mike, Lisa, all the staff, scorers, scouts and volunteers were just amazing.
As was said in the opening comments before the rally, it takes almost a volunteer for each rider to make this event happen. And I can see why. This is a world class event.

All of the rally details are available on this site. http://ibr.wvi.com/