



An all-American honeymoon

Words and images: Tom Broadway • BMW R1200GSA

Sat in a chic café in Buenos Aires I notice that people are looking at us with intrigue. Perhaps it is the fact that we have just arrived into this cosmopolitan city on a tatty looking motorbike, slightly grubby from camping the past three nights, without a shower, and without a mirror. As we smile at our puzzled on-lookers and drink our fancy lattes we realise that we have been riding for nearly eight months, and our 25,000 mile adventure will soon be at an end. It is a time of reflection and contemplation on what has been a life-changing trip for us both. I am thinking about the roads we have travelled, the places we have seen and above all the people we have met. The kindness of strangers, the excitement of overland travel and the realisation that the world is not as scary as you think.

We had been married for three months before boarding the plane bound for Alaska. We arrived in the middle of the summer (in the cold and rain), and set about unpacking the skilfully assembled Motofreight crate. My heart was beating faster than usual as we waved goodbye to the Fedex depot and rode out onto the highway. I felt excitement and fear in equal proportion. The past two years of saving and planning had all been for this moment, and even the rain could not dampen the overwhelming feeling of the adventure to come.

In just a few days we were over the Top of The World Highway and out of Alaska into the Yukon Canada. We began to relax into the flow of it all, and as we did, the rain clouds left us alone for just a few hours. The clearer skies revealed the sheer scale of this place, it was immense. The feeling of complete isolation on our motorbike was a new feeling for us both and one we had to adjust to, for we were not adventure bikers, nor hardened overlanders, we were just a couple that loved to travel, to explore, and using our motorbike to enable this, just made perfect sense.

As we nervously wild-camped our way south through Canada and back into the USA, just two weeks had past and we had covered over 2,000 miles. Wild camping was a necessary move to keep things on budget as the Brexit vote had cost our trip dearly. We were happy but the bike felt too heavy and we had already dropped it a couple of times; once in front of a bus



full of German tourists. Their shock at seeing a BMW lay in the dirt had them all run over to give us a helping hand. I was left asking myself why we had packed so much? A question that I am sure every rider has asked themselves at some point. That night we had a sort out and disposed of nearly 10kg of useless kit. It felt liberating to get on a streamlined and well balanced bike at last.

The USA had offered us a soft entry into the world of overland travel. It had been welcoming, relaxed and of course English speaking. We had been welcomed into strangers' homes but left with new friends. We had camped with wi-fi connections and hot showers. We were greeted by smiling and over-the-top customer service. Riding over the border into Baja California we expected it to be different and I hoped for more adventure. We found it.

Lifting the bike for the seventh time in an hour, after covering less than 5kms in the blistering heat, I was beginning to long for the ease of our American road trip, just a few miles north. The sand was new to me and I was out of my comfort zone. With limited water and 45kms to ride to the tarmac, we were both learning a lot about our resolve and determination. Lorna would opt to walk the deeper sections as I paddled with my feet to try and stay upright. At the time it was not fun, in fact it had felt like the hardest day of our trip, but now we wouldn't change it. We loved it and loathed it in equal measure, but we did it, and without a single crossed word. We were learning and growing as a team and it felt good. We had mastered picking up a fully loaded 1200GS Adventure without having to remove any luggage and that felt great too. As we got to the tarmac we both high-fived, something that would become our signature greeting to each other after the challenges of the terrain.

After a 16-hour ferry ride we were ready to tackle the Mexican mainland, a place that so many people had warned us about. What we encountered were great roads, great food, friendly people and even friendly cops. We had worried unnecessarily about this wonderful country. We crossed it in two weeks and even a bout of food poisoning was not enough to put us off this beautiful and diverse nation.

What followed Mexico was the chaos of Central America, an area of land smaller than France but with seven independent countries within it. The humidity rose and the standards of driving fell. The smokey trucks left our faces black and the bureaucracy of the borders left our patience worn thin. The isolation of Canada and the Baja felt a million miles away as we navigated our way to Panama and our sailboat to Colombia.

Colourful Colombia and was yet another wonderful surprise; our parents had feared our journey through this once dangerous place. To their surprise it would go down as the most friendly country we visited, as the darker times are resigned to the past and a brighter future was clear to see. The towns of Colombia were full of life and soul, cowboys still rode their





horses around the town squares as market stalls sold wonderful street food. A wrong turn and the only time of over reliance on GPS had us cross through a jungle path that we were sure was once a route for the cartels. We fell a lot and I had to traverse two small rivers. It was exhilarating to put it mildly.

We crossed into Ecuador longing to stay longer but we still had a long road ahead of us as we passed over the Equator and into the southern hemisphere. The borders felt easy in comparison to Central America and as we entered Peru we were both so accustomed to the process it felt like second nature. The mountains of Peru offered us a chance to explore away from the main road. What we found were amazing sights, people and culture. We also found Brett, an American on a Kawasaki, who would become a travelling partner and (we're sure) life-long friend to us both. We wild-camped with Brett and shared our adventures.

A near miss with a herd of Alpacas had left us both very conscious of our mortality as we left two skid marks on the tarmac, a reminder of ever-present dangers.

The floating villages of Lake Titicaca welcomed us into Bolivia as we rode south towards the world famous Salar De Uyuni. Bolivia remains the poorest country on the continent and it also felt the most remote. Petrol was difficult to come by and the roads were set to challenge us more than ever. Combine this with altitude and extreme cold at night, Bolivia was the country where we really felt ourselves become accustomed to our new overland life. We embraced the challenges with relative ease and we began to feel different to the backpackers that we met in Uyuni. Were we, in fact, becoming adventure motorcyclists?

The Atacama Desert in Chile, reputedly the driest place on earth was traversed by our longest day of the trip, 772 miles and 13 hours – Lorna even began to read her Kindle on the back. To date she has finished all of the Harry Potter series, from the pillion seat!







Into Patagonia where rain and the extreme wind returned, meaning I would ride at 45 degrees to the road and yet be travelling in a straight line. The ripio would shake our bones and make our teeth rattle. The bike was showing signs of ill health too, a recurring oil leak from a fall in Colombia and a leaking rear shock to name just a couple of its ailments, so reaching the bottom of the world in Ushuaia was not the moment I had envisaged. I had expected emotion, celebration and good times, but instead we were underwhelmed by the touristy town and the expense of it all. With the obligatory photo taken we hit Ruta 3 north and rode to sunnier climes and to this very cafe in Buenos Aires, over 2,000 miles to the north.

Sat here in the café, as I look through the window and note each scratch, dent and scuff on our bike, I recall the story of each one. I notice the black tape holding a teaspoon, fashioned into a splint on my clutch lever; the missing valve cover guard that is still somewhere in the Colombian jungle; the small hole in my seat caused by the heel of my boot. I stare at the mass of stickers on a battered pannier, affixed with no particular order or grace. Yes it looks tired, dirty and even mistreated but it also screams adventure, hardship and it is a testament to our achievement. I have loved this big GS on the highway and loathed it in deep sand. I have longed for something different, but vowed never to ride anything else. As I look through the glass, I know one thing is for sure, it will be a part of our new marriage for years to come ♦



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