

Stories from the Shed: *Around the world with a motorcycle in 1971*

Lloyd Akeroyd (2020)

- **Story-teller's cultural background:** Canadian-Australian
- **Categories:** Urban/Rural, Maritime, Recreation/Work, Coming of age, Travel
- This is a story of about 20 minutes telling, that describes what Lloyd got up to in his youth and that made him less insular in his world-view. It should resonate with readers who also set off to explore the world at different times, or rode motorbikes on tour.

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Around the world with a motorcycle in 1971

Lloyd Akeroyd

I was born in Canada, in 1945. My early years were spent in the Fraser Valley, inland from Vancouver on the west coast, where my father worked on various dairy farms. We moved house often as my father changed his place of work, and I changed primary school four times, sometimes in the same year. I only attended the whole year at the same school for two of my primary-school years. We were happy, and when you are young, that is what you remember. We didn't know we were poor. Everyone was in the same boat.

Lloyd in 1971



Lloyd in 2019



Despite my disruptions to schooling, I made it through school and went to Vancouver for university, Vancouver was a great place, where you could snow-ski on the mountains behind the city in the morning, and ski at the beach in the afternoon, and with one of our group having a home on the water, to prove that one could, we went water-skiing in February, pretty-much winter, and wearing wet-suits. Back then, we didn't know too much about those elusive creatures in the seas, Orca, or killer-whales, as they are also known. They were a curiosity and hardly ever seen. We didn't see them as a danger, but they had big, white teeth. The only one I have been close to was known to surf along-side a boat in its wake. I filmed it doing that.

I qualified as a Metallurgical Engineer, and took up a position at a molybdenite mine on a fjord at *Observatory Inlet*, where I had previously done a work placement as part of my study. I had three roles while there, starting in the field as a test-engineer, basically a dog's-body, moved to Shift-Foreman, and finishing as the Chief Chemist of the laboratory doing all the chemical analysis. I got that job mainly because the previous Chief Chemist had passed away and I was on-site and available. I knew nothing about the chemistry, but there were three other guys in that lab who did, and I listened and learned from them, so we got by.

The problem with working in that place was that it was one fjord away from the Canadian-Alaska border and was basically the end of the world, there were only two ways in and out of the place, by barge, or on an eight-seater amphibious float plane of a type known as a 'Grumman Goose'. They were made in the 1930s, and looked a little like a Catalina float plane, only smaller. If you needed something that was not available on-site, the message was that it would be "on the next barge", and when it would not arrive, 'It'll be on the next barge.' Often that message was just on repeat, because what you wanted would never turn up. If you were going in and out of the site, generally you would fly. I arrived on a Grumman Goose, and left, after a couple of years, the same way.

The thing about the place was that there was nothing else around, just forest and mountain wilderness, water, fjord, and the mine. It was all very remote, I was young, and I had no place to spend my money. I thought travel was a good idea. One of my friends had been around the world on P&O boats, and in 1971, I bought a P&O boat ticket, like today (2020) you can buy for aeroplanes, to travel around the world, and headed off.

The United States west coast and beyond

Twenty-nine days to the UK, down the west coast, during which we stopped at San Francisco, and did not get up to Haight-Ashbury where the 'flower' people – hippies – movement had begun, but a number of them were on the boat and many of us became friends and fellow travellers, meeting each other in various places on our world journeys. We also went to Long Beach, Acapulco, through the Panama Canal, and after a few stops more along the way, I eventually ended up in the United Kingdom, where, never owning one, but often riding one, I immediately bought a brand new 500cc T100C Triumph Trophy motorbike with scrambler pipes, and started off on a journey that took me through the UK and Europe.

The United Kingdom

I was with a girl I met on the boat, we started in London. The first destination was place called Perranporth, Cornwall where my grandmother's sister and husband had lived. They had passed away and I had to pick up some of their things, which being too big to fit on the motorbike, I posted back to the family in Canada. I did keep some things I didn't trust to the post, like three rings and little container to hold them. The rest went into a small leather suitcase and was mailed. I just got that case back last year as it has come to me as a memento of family that have passed.

One thing that struck us was that, in the UK, some twenty-five years after the end of World War II, people still spoke about the war as a fresh memory. They still talked about it, and

because we were on a motorbike, and during the war they travelled around on motorbikes, they related to us. People in the 40s and 50s would say, *“Oh yes, when we were getting about in the war, we used motorbikes, but we also had a sidecar.”*

Mainland Europe

Through Europe, Sylvia, my new travelling companion, had us riding two-up for the trip across to Norway, Sweden, Denmark, several other countries in Europe, and eventually ended up at the September ‘Oktoberfest’ in Munich. The bike was not particularly well set-up for touring, but we did it. We went up through Wales and to a place called Preston, near Manchester. One of the people I had worked with on the fjord was there visiting his parents, and I can remember making a trip with his parents to Manchester, a distance of forty-one miles. The planning had to start the previous evening, packed lunch, and with thermos full of coffee. We had a laugh about that. I didn’t see a football match, and did not miss it. Basically I don’t usually watch ice-hockey either. I didn’t play sport in school, and not ice-hockey. British Columbia doesn’t really get cold enough for kids to play ice-hockey outdoors. The same for skiing; I didn’t do it as a kid, so didn’t take an interest as an adult.

We caught the ferry from Newcastle to Bergen, and took the road over to Oslo. It was glorious country. The mountains so steep, the houses quite rare and painted bright colours, it’s quite picturesque. Back then, most of the Norwegians we met could speak some English, and stopped to speak with us. That was a bit of a surprise. But even in countries or meeting people who did not speak English, we managed to get by. Back then not nearly as many folk spoke English as do now.

When we got to Sweden, the highlight was that we were ‘free-camping’. That is, the law in Sweden says everybody has the right to camp wherever they want to for a night or two. We took advantage of that and camped by a beautiful lake. In the morning, a lovely lady who didn’t speak a word of English came up to us and invited us to her house for breakfast. I thought it was called, *‘frokost’*, but have since found that means lunch, so maybe it was lunch she gave us. She showed us pictures of her family. It was a lovely experience, and a memory I hold dear.

We moved on from Sweden down to Denmark, and stayed in the middle of Copenhagen, close to the oldest amusement park in Europe, Tivoli, that, when Walt Disney saw it, was reported to say, *‘Now I’ve seen the original Disneyland!’* He endeared himself to the Danes with that statement. But the thing I remember most about Copenhagen was going to the Carlsberg brewery and sampling the free beers so well that we decided it was unsafe for us to leave and had to go back to set up camp again and stay another night.

We rode out of Denmark through to Hamburg, in Germany, where we were stopped beside the road consulting a map when a car-driver noticed our Canadian flags on the bike and offered assistance. He was a German and had worked in Canada for a few years. He offered help, and then invited us home for a Canadian Barbeque-lunch. We were in our mid-twenties and he somewhere in his thirties. Little episodes like that, where people went out of their way to be helpful and offer hospitality stay in memory far longer than many other things about the trip. We went on down to The Netherlands to 'Den Haag', The Hague. The girl I was riding with, her mother was a war-bride and so she had lots relatives there we visited over a few days. I remember the roads had bike lanes and car lanes, and over fifty per cent of the people rode bicycles or mopeds. This was before the later fuel crisis, but petrol cost a lot more in Europe than Canada. We did the canal cruise in Amsterdam.

One of the things about riding a motorcycle is that you are very much in the environment, feeling the air, smelling it, and to some extent, being part of the countryside. It's a more free and relatable experience. Around the world I have stories for another time about what that is like in India and other places.

Looking back I am amazed how we organised things in those days. We had a plan to meet in Munich for *Oktoberfest*, and that brought together myself, Sylvia, the girl I was travelling with, and other people that had been on the boat coming out to England some months before, and with all of us travelling independently, it ended with around eight of us at the Beerfest. We did what one does at a beerfest - drinking and watching the *fräuleins*, in their traditional blouses and laced-up *dirndl* dresses, carrying six litres of beer in each hand without spilling, and wondering how they did it.

Unfortunately my experience also included the formidable exercise of reporting to the German police that someone had broken into my tent and stolen all my camera gear, getting the official report, and forwarding it to my insurance company. That was when I found the insurer had taken my money but not actually written the policy. But, in due course, they did pay, and sent me my money to replace the camera in the next port of call, which turned out to be Cape Town.

From Munich, Sylvia went her own way, and I teamed up with another Canadian bloke travelling on a BMW motorbike and rode back as far as Brussels where he had a job. One of the highlights of the trip was riding into the Grand Place in Brussels at ten o'clock at night and seeing all the fourteenth century buildings flood lit. The central place is where all the medieval guild halls are, with gilded gold leaf around them reflecting all the lights. It was such a stunning sight I just about fell off the bike trying to see it all at the same time.

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Southern Africa

From there I made my way back to the UK, down to Southampton and back onto a boat. I found that I could put the bike back onto the boat for a very small fee, essentially as hand luggage, and took off for South Africa. Apartheid was absolutely in full swing. One had to know the signs to know what public bench seat one could sit on. 'Net-blank' was 'whites only' and 'Nie Blank' was 'non-whites'. The advice was, "If you are riding and hit someone, just drop down a gear and ride on, particularly in the homelands." The thought was that there would be consequences if you stopped, so best not to stop. As a place, South Africa was a really nice place; as a system, it was corrupt. It was bad, just wrong; but scenery-wise, which is what I was interested in, it was just great.

It's a bit different now, but 'back in the day', the whites had 'hot and cold running servants' who had few rights. When I unloaded the bike in Cape Town, the local automobile club gave everybody bringing in a vehicle two gallons of petrol, which was exactly what a full tank on my Triumph held. So I immediately took off to explore southern Africa, and spent two months doing that. I rode the 'Garden Route' which basically follows the coast around to Durban and is very picturesque. From Durban I went up through Zululand and passed, in the distance, the intriguing Drakensberg Mountains, with their many steeply-sloped volcanic peaks, like dragon spines. Many years later I was to visit the Drakensberg's themselves, and the high towns with an average elevation of around 1100 metres to be the highest 'country' in the world. I went then using a Kombi van, but not this trip.

I met up with people I had met previously on the boat, and by that time they had formed other friendships and I was able to do a trip with one of those people to Kruger National Park, Mozambique for Christmas, then back to Johannesburg. When I got back there the



first guy I met was an Aussie who had a job driving trucks to Zambia, so I hitched a ride in a Diamond-T Reo, carrying thirty-five tons of structural steel up through Zimbabwe, we stopped the night in Bulawayo for New Year's Eve, then onto Victoria Falls for New Year. In those days, it wasn't possible if you had been to South Africa to go across into Zambia, so I was left in Victoria Falls wandering about looking at the gorge, until my lift returned from Zambia. We took the prime-mover off the trailer and went for a tour in the Hwange National park. That was a bit of an unusual vehicle to tour in, but we managed just fine, before returning to the trailer to

continue the return trip. We then drove back to Johannesburg. In a suburb of Johannesburg there is a small park known as Krugersdorp, we had an experience with a baboon. We were in a VW beetle with our windows open, looking at a troop of baboon, in a flash, a big baboon with big flashing teeth, was through the window and into the back seat. Luckily it was a small park, and the keeper came over and quickly got us out of the car, then the baboon out of the car

Then there was the time I was riding across what was called the '*Kleine Karoo*', the 'Small Karoo' desert. The *Kleine Karoo* was very flat and featureless, with few reference points to estimate speed, like the Nullabor in Australia, and I suspected my bike had a problem when my speedometer could not show me going above fifty-five miles per hour, no matter how much I increased the throttle, even going to the limit, which should have been ninety-five miles per hour. I finally found the bike indeed had a fault. The speedo was out of calibration, so I crossed the *Kleine Karoo* in somewhat faster time than I probably should have.

Back to Cape Town, and back onto a ship to proceed across the Indian Ocean to Australia.

Australia

I spent a couple of weeks in Sydney recovering from an infection I picked up on the boat. One of the girls I met on the boat decided she would take me home and let her mother look after me for a few days. When you are young and travelling, you meet people, and invitations to visit each other get shared, and people turn up on your doorstep to renew old acquaintances. You say, "*Here is my address, come see me.*" Most people don't, but I did. I've still got the address book.

The parents of the guy I went with to Victoria Falls in Africa lived in Sydney. I went to stay with them for a couple of weeks. That's when I learned about Australia. On the news there were people being interviewed while swatting flies, Melbourne was being flooded, and other places had fires and drought, all at the same time.

I then headed north to Cairns in the middle of the wet season. When I got to Townsville I thought it was a bit of a dump because I didn't realise they were recovering from a cyclone some three weeks earlier. I discovered the wet season while going on to Cairns. It rained about 7 inches every day I was there, and flooded the roads. That is when I learned about CRC. I rode through a bit of flooded road, the bike stopped, a car was driving past and they passed a can of CRC out the window and said, "*Spray it with that.*" It started again, and I was off, but I didn't know what the can was, so I couldn't buy it. It was only when I came to live here I eventually found out what it was. Years later I started a car that got a wet system

driving through a puddle in Western Australia and mightily impressed my sister-in-law with my skills.

This current trip, however, I also met up with my cousin who was living in Cairns and working as a nurse at the time.

I headed back down to Sydney to pick up my mail, then on down through The Snowy Mountains and Jindabyne, out to around Lakes Entrance, then to Melbourne, got there at Easter, and found that while Easter was not a big deal in Canada, it was in Australia. A friend I met in London, and who heard I was going to Australia, had told me that “When I was in Melbourne, visit this lady,” so I did. I contacted her, and she told me I was arriving on Easter Thursday and she was going away camping with her boyfriend for the break, but I could have her apartment for the long week-end. I did that, visited the Art Gallery, learned about the strange way Melbournians cross roads using hook-turns, then motored on along the Great Ocean Road, up to Mount Gambier, then stayed on a property with family of someone I met on the boat, and they took me up to Adelaide.

New Zealand

I then went back to Sydney, put the bike on a boat again, and took it to New Zealand. I rode the bike from tip to tip in New Zealand. Along the way I met a Maori fellow, Val Irwin, and motored the length of the South Island with him, and then on to the top of North Island where, in a youth hostel on the Ninety Mile Beach, met a lady, Sue, who would eventually become my wife.

Back to North America

Sue did her own travelling before we met again in Canada. Lots of fellow travellers visited me for a while. She stayed.

She ended up staying in Canada as a ‘landed immigrant’. This had recent implications when Canada revised their travel permits for visitors to Canada. Being a ‘landed immigrant’, she didn’t qualify for the new visa, since she was already a permanent resident, despite not having lived in Canada since 1973. The simplest thing was to renounce her permanent resident status and visit as a non-resident.

However, coming back to this story, I put the bike back on a boat and took off for San Francisco, and rode it up the west coast back to Canada.

Rounding off the story of this trip, about four years ago, I went back to *Observatory Inlet* and the old mine site I started from. I chartered a flight and we landed in the inlet, then found I was not welcome in the town. The mine had closed in the seventies, opened again in the eighties, and closed again later. It was sold, 'lock, stock and barrel', to an Indian entrepreneur. He owned the entire town, so it was now basically 'private', so when we walked up the dock and saw some of the place looking familiar, we were immediately picked up by security and unsentimentally marched back to the plane and told to leave.

I reflected that I had left on my journey as a naïve young North American person with an insular view of the world, and through exposure to many people and places, become far more expansive and nuanced in my understandings. Then I found changes had also occurred at 'home'. The world had also moved on.

3443 words

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