

# Goin' up the country

R. Fleck

1969

Streams of 70 MPH mechanical plankton seethe out from radio nurtured exhaust warmed ("...and the murk index rating today is a low lean keen 50...") metal sargasso sea. Detroit. FoMoCo Roto Moto get down town.

"Yeah...the people there are all ready to shoot even tho they don't know what for..."

Detroit—R. Crumb's furnace fantasy—recedes into a smudge over I-75's cornfield borders. But childhood flashes born of a vacation packed car bring ghosts of summers past all back home.

Scrunched down in the back seat of a '52 Plymouth between a catch-all kitchen stuff carton and a Scotch cooler full of tuna sandwiches and peaches, trading off comic books with my older brother all the way up August baked U.S. 27.

We always managed to hit the Michigan National Guard on the move up to Grayling, an endless dusty drab serpentine of growling trucks and jeeps damming up a half mile of creeping cars. Always, the old man would cuss everyone from Eisenhower on down, Sterling-Mossing it in and out of the convoy to the front, the old lady ashen-faced beside him.

But now the expressway seems cool, detached, not really in contact with its smoothly whooshing traffic, a north-bound motley caravan pointed at the "country." At noon, rest stops are deluged with station wagons, trailers, mobile homes, campers, all disgorging pilgrims of the pines.

There are few young people of 17 to 22 age. No long hair-more tennis ball headed kids, paunch-filled sport shirts and over 40's of washed out face and graying temple. Camping rigs are eyed closely, like cattle at a country fair.

"Yup, me and the little woman saved two years, even gave up bridge and bowlin', but she's sure a sweet one—1/4 ton pickup with a camper body. Hell, we've even got a TV and electric blankets."

Ah, wilderness.

The car-congested asphalt clears its two lane throat around Indian River, clear sailing up and over Big Mac ("Jesus, 7 miles long"). The upper peninsula pancakes along, pastel pink and blue motels and splitlog souvenir posts popping up all over. Bumper stickers pushing Mystery Spot, Sea Shell City ("aw Dad, pleeze can't we stop and see it, jus a liddle?") and Castle Rock ("The U.P.'s Highest Point!").

A few bikes are on the road, mostly BMW's, Trumpets, BSA's or the big Hondas, bearing grimacing riders crouched low over tank bound knapsacks, old ladies crowded up by highpiled luggage.

"Visit The Scenic Soo Locks," up and over again, above growling rapids and smooth canals. But this time the other side holds hassle. Surprise—the Canadian customs has metamorphosed, turned about face, inside out with a new look. Instead of aging officials, the booths are staffed with blue serge uniformed chicks.

Maybe they're friendly—the usual questions rattle out in clipped Canada twang. No change in styrene smile.

She has us pull over to pull out our two ancient outboards to register them so's we won't undermine Ontario's economy by black marketing them. After wrestling them out from the trunk's carefully packed bowels, my father unexpectedly provides some beautiful impromptu entertainment by woofing at every office-cop, that the Nazi's were rank amateurs in comparison and why the hell didn't they bug U.S. Steel and other thug-assed companies who steal Canada blind?

Leaving a stone-uptight bureau behind we glide thru the Sault, on to Trans-Continental Route 17 that seems to be all cut thru solid granite, like the crags had just been a road-builder's nuisance. Off on up to 129, a meandering twisty two-lane of aging tar macadam.

Highway cars have given way to more practical vehicles- pick ups, jeeps, campers, Bronco's, lots of VW's (high 16 inch -wheels, good clearance for rutted roads) trucks, more often well dust coated then washed.

The air turns fresh pine tang, cool and pure as a Baptist minister's 13 year old daughter. Pavement ends, the road narrows, "Next Gasoline 40 Miles" signs come up. Off again onto a gravel two track through birch and pine forest, going around curves that have you meeting your ass end going around. A lake sparkles indigo blue in early evening. Dead silence below the wind's murmur through pines.

Gone up country.

# fifth Estate

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