

TT West 2022 Conquered the Rockies Despite Rocky Weather

By Larry Brickner, Life Member

On the first day of TT West we were climbing the 11,000' summit of the Beartooth Highway in Montana when we spotted a small weather squall ahead. After stopping briefly to let the roadsters put their tops up, we soldiered on as it started to rain heavily while the temperature rapidly dropped 20 degrees to the 30s. Then the rain turned to rice-size sleet which covered the road with 3 inches of slush in a matter of minutes. Not good on TTs equipped with summer tires. We slowly made our way through the squall and about 10 minutes later we were on the other side of the storm which had switched back to rain. The only other time TT West has ever encountered unexpected frozen precipitation was also a first day drive through a freak early October snowstorm the Medicine Bow National Forest mountains west of Laramie Wyoming in 2016.

That first day of TT West 2022 featured three famous scenic highways; the Chief Joseph, the Beartooth, and the Beartooth Front. Of the three, the Beartooth is the most challenging with many hairpin turns sans guardrails. That we were able to travel these roads at all required a heroic repair effort by the Montana Department of Transportation as significant portions of these roads were wiped out in June in the floods that made national news by closing nearby Yellowstone National park. The northeast entrance to Yellowstone that is fed by the Beartooth Highway was still closed during our visit which meant that traffic was much lighter than usual which was good for us until we hit the squall.

Tuesday's drive from Bozeman to Whitefish Montana on the edge of Glacier National Park was a fun run with no problems. Wednesday featured another great road, the Going To The Sun Road in Glacier National Park. Again, weather was a factor in getting to drive the road at all since 80' snow drifts on that road were cleared only a few weeks before our arrival. Heavily traveled, this road is not an opportunity for challenging the twisties but rather enjoy the incredible scenery. Unfortunately for us, a substantial portion of the 6600' summit was socked in with fog but there were still plenty of beautiful vistas on either side to enjoy. Both the Beartooth and the Going To The Sun roads were constructed by the US Government Civilian Conservation Corps projects during the Great Depression of the 1930s.

Thursday took us to Libby Montana where we really enjoyed a lightly traveled little-known gem in the afternoon, the Yaak River Scenic Loop. Traveling clockwise from Libby, the road followed the Yaak River going north where we stopped at a nice waterfall for a scenic break. The road was mostly sweeping curves until we stopped in beautiful downtown Yaak (population 338 and two bars) for a comfort stop. The road south back to Libby was the surprise of the week, a real joy of 36 miles of constant tight turns and no traffic.

Friday made TT West history with our first trip to Canada. We were well prepared for the border crossing requirements of passports, COVID vaccination records, and entry of that information into the required ArriveCAN app. We chose to enter at the lightly used Kingsgate crossing and it only took a few minutes for each of our TTs to pass through immigration. The feature road of the day was route 93 through Canada's Kootenay National Park. It had moderate traffic with frequent passing lanes and had fantastic views of the stark rock-chiseled Canadian Rockies as we snaked our way through the valleys to

Banff. About a half hour from our arrival at Banff we encountered thunderstorms. Unfortunately, the rain would continue to dog us for most of the next 36 hours.

On our Saturday final day we took advantage of a 2 hour respite from the rain to begin our trip to the Ice Fields of Banff National Park via the Route 93 Ice Fields Parkway. The views of the Rockies were spectacular in spite of the drizzle and occasional clouds hiding the peaks. This road is notorious for speed enforcement (90 km/hr) although none was apparent during our drive, most likely due to the rain.

A unique feature that we saw frequently during the Friday and Saturday drives in Northern Montana and Alberta is the milky turquoise waters of the lakes and streams. Their origin goes back to the last Ice Age where the glaciers ground the underlying rocks to a powder as they slowly moved along. The resultant rock "flour" continues to be carried down streams to this day which explains the milky appearance, and when the sun hits the infused water you get the stunning green to blue turquoise color.

Several of us decided to explore the east side of the Canadian Rockies on our drive home on Sunday via the Route 40 Kananaskis Trail and finally enjoy the Rockies with clear weather. The vistas were spectacular. However, another "nature event" we encountered along the beautiful back roads of rolling farmland in Southern Alberta between the Rockies and the Canada/US border were lots of locusts. By the time we reached the border, the front of our cars and radiators were literally coated in locusts although we saw no large swarms. Our radiators were coated so thick with the insects that we cleaned them at a "wand wash" because of concern that engine cooling might be compromised.

Participation in this year's TT West was 16 cars. Most were Mk 3 models as the Mk 1 participants become fewer and fewer due to their age (the first Mk 1 TTs in the USA were the 2000 model year) and thus reliability. The car mix included four TTRS and a 2019 20'th Anniversary Edition roadster. You can view more photos and videos of TT West on our Facebook site [Facebook.com/GoToTTWest](https://www.facebook.com/GoToTTWest). The web site also has a link to join the mailing list if you are interested in joining us for future TT West events. Next year's event will be in the Southern region of the Western states with information and registration announced on our Facebook page as well as our web site www.TT-west.org by the end of 2022.