



MOJACAR MOTORCYCLE TOURING CLUB

bulletin

A Club for Touring Motorcyclists founded by the late Ken Craven.
www.mojacarmtc.org.uk

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SECRETARIES BIT

There are still some members who have not renewed their subscriptions for the coming year. We hope you have not lost interest in what we do. If you cannot participate, it is surely inspiring to read about your friends and colleagues in the club who are still motorcycling. I have included a final reminder in the bulletin to those who have not renewed, if you have already sent your subscription on receipt of bulletin please ignore the request.

Paul Weston still has places available for Abergavenny. However, he does need to finalise with Mulberry House now how many rooms he requires. If you wish to go please contact Paul ASAP and send the application form with deposit.

Details of the weekend at Malvern Worcestershire are supplied by organiser Martin Heuter. He is laying on a tour of the Morgan Car factory for those who can arrive early on the Friday morning. See Martins article.

Alan Simister has written to me with details of his two events i.e. Kirkby and Coalport. Alan needs to know who is interested in either or both, an application form for each is attached. Alan says no money is required at present.

I shall be closing bookings by the end of November for the summer tour to Italy next year as I need to inform hotels of rooms required. We have 20 applicants at present. If you are still interested in joining please contact me by sending the application form with deposit. As many know, Lawrence Bransby did a "mammoth" tour to Eastern Europe this year. He went as far as the southern tip of Albania. He has written an abridged version of his experiences for the bulletin. I have attached this to the bulletin for some good reading during the winter period.

As this will be the final bulletin before Christmas, I wish all members a merry one and a happy and healthy new year and, as I always say - I thank all members who wrote articles on club events during this year. They are all so varied in style and hopefully make the bulletin interesting to all.

All correspondence on subjects other than events to:
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Tel No: 01491 838489
E mail ac_maidens68@hotmail.com
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A NOTE FROM KIT EVANS

John is still struggling to recover, his shoulder is proving to be a problem so, no riding or driving yet in view. Good news that Mulberry House is to be host to 4 peaks next year. Good luck with the events planned and safe riding to all the club members. Hope to see you all at Abergavenny next year.

Kit & John Evans.
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EVENTS FOR 2010 in Date order with details where available.

4 Peaks weekend based at Mulberry House Hostel (Ty'r Morwydd) Abergavenny. Date: 19th and 20th March. Organiser Paul Weston,.

As before the accommodation is in the hostel. The cost per night for B&B with dinner is £35.50; total cost for two nights £71 per person. Please complete the application slip and send £20 per person deposit made payable to P Weston. **I require the balance at the latest by 4th January 2010** (I have to pay the full bill by 1st February).

Kirkby Lonsdale – camping/B&B weekend. Date: 16th and 17th April. Organiser Alan Simister;

I have done a bit of canvassing since talking to Mike Lacey about a change of venue, the general view seems to be to stay in Kirkby and the campsite just out of town. The format will be similar to the past years. I have a new Saturday run already on the drawing board, depending on the depth of the snow. Kirkby is a very popular village for tourists, even as early as April, so if you are intending to B&B contact me soon for accommodation addresses and telephone nos; the same goes for the hardy

campers and caravaners. Take a look on the Woodclose Caravan Park website you might fancy sharing a wigwam!!!!!!

May Re-union weekend Lyme Regis – B&B/camping weekend. Date: 1st to 3rd May. Organiser Tony Maidens. Detail to follow.

Tour to Italy. Dates 5th to 20th June. Organisers Tony & Christine Maidens. Please see details in bulletin.

Bungay Suffolk – Camping/B&B weekend. Date: 9th and 10th July. Organisers Colin Purches & Colin Pegram. Detail to follow.

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Malvern Worcester – B&B/ camping weekend. Date: 13th to 15th August. Organiser Martin Heuter.

I can't give away the route - top secret,.... (I haven't done it yet) but, I can say it's going to take in the Malvern Hills, the countryside between Malvern, Worcester and up the Severn Valley, stopping in Bewdley (famous motorcycle haunt by the river). Beautiful views, scenery and roads.

I have made a booking for the Morgan Car Factory visitor centre for those who feel like stepping back in time (or leaving their cash).. As the centre doesn't do anything after Friday 12 noon a visit is for those who want to arrive early (i.e. Friday morning). Price to be confirmed (I think its £5 pp). Now - accommodation. I've found a hotel in Bromyard, a small market town, 15 minutes away from Malvern which is going to do us a deal - £30 per person per night sharing with secure parking, etc. etc. However, tough times for tourism, so they need to know whether or not we are coming and how many. I need to know by the end of January who wants to join us and the full amount (£60 per person) at the same time. I know this is an early commitment but it's a sign of the times. So please, send me a cheque and secure your place.

Early payments may become a feature for future events, especially during peak season. This event is "slap bang" in the middle of the school holidays.

Hon Sec

Tour of Britain – Using Hostels. Dates: 3rd to 11th September. Organiser David Gilligan. Please see details in bulletin.

Autumn re-union and AGM weekend – B&B/camping. Date: 2nd and 3rd October. Organiser Tony Maidens. Detail to follow.

Winter Closer weekend Coalport – Using Hostel. Date: 22nd and 23rd October. Organiser Alan Simister;
The hostel is booked, no need for money yet. Lots to do and see, good pubs within walking distance, make that staggering for Mr Weston and an excellent hostel. There are only 4 DOUBLES AVAILABLE for couples, so its first come first served. If you intend to join us, let me know in plenty of time, it also insures that you have a bed. A run will be organised but I will be putting that out to tender nor being a native of the area.

SUMMER TOUR TO ITALY

The tour will take us through four countries and finish on the Mediterranean coast of Italy i.e. France, Germany, Austria and Italy. After crossing France and the Rhine our route takes us on a ride through rural southern Germany, we then continue our tour into Vorarlberg/Arlberg in Austria. After crossing the Finstermunzpass we enter Italy. Our route then continues over the Stelvio pass to eventually arrive at the lovely Lago D Iseo for a 3 night 2 day stay. We then ride on to and finish at the Mediterranean coast of Tuscany for a 2 night 1 day stay. Our mileage from the first night in France to our final destination is approximately 970 miles.

Our planned itinerary is as follows:

Saturday 5 June; Group meets at a hotel in Normandy France.

Sunday 6 June; Ride to a hotel in the French Ardenne

Monday 7 June; One night in a hotel in Alsace Loraine France.

Tuesday 8 June; Ride to Southern Germany for a one night stop.

Wednesday 9 June; Into Austria to base the group in or around St Anton for one night.

Thursday 9 June; Ride into Italy to Lago d' Iseo for a three night stay. This lake is one of the smaller Italian lakes. It is surrounded by mountains and has a mini mountain of its own in the form of the island of Monte Isola, a boat sails regularly from a pier not far from our hotel. On the east bank of the lake a road leads to the village of Cislano, here an extraordinary spire-like rock formation rises from the ground, each spire is topped by a boulder, these are considered to be one of the most strangest wonders in Lombardy known as "Fairies of the Forest". Our hotel is situated adjacent to the lake and is about a quarter of a mile from the nearest village centre. There is also a railway station about the same distance from the hotel.

Sunday 12. Continue on to finish at Lerici Tuscany on the Mediterranean coast for a 2 night stay.

Lerici sits on the edge of a beautiful bay, it has a pleasant beach overlooked by pastel coloured houses. It is overlooked by a medieval castle.

Tuesday 14 June group breaks up and folk find their own way home.

As I write this we are working on the overnight hotels; we hope to publish them soon. Costs - difficult one this - prices have increased in euro land. Assume at the moment that 1£ = 1€. If the pound increases in value during the booking process then costs will be cheaper. Work on £50 per person per night Dinner bed & breakfast. If you would like to join the tour please complete the attached form with a deposit of £55 per person and make payable to Mojacar Rally Account. Send completed form to our address shown on the form.

Note: The deposit payment includes a payment of £5 towards our administrative costs, any surplus will be refunded after the tour. **Tony & Christine Maidens.**

AUTUMN TOUR 2010 September 3rd - 11th

A nine day tour of Britain. Accommodation will be at Youth Hostels. The event will commence on Friday 3rd September near Padstow in Cornwall with a suggested route going through twelve of the National Parks and ending at Ilam in the Peak District on Saturday 11th September. Other hostels will be at Lydney, Tenby, Liverpool, Wastwater, Glencoe, Aviemore and Whitby. Average daily mileage 200.

The cost per participant will be about £200 for bed and breakfast. A deposit will be required on booking. I have been informed that the hostels are already taking bookings for September 2010 and therefore I would like to make reservations for participants by the end of November 2009. Following a request it may be possible to accommodate members who wish to do less than the full nine days.

For full details of the tour and a booking form please contact myself by phone, email or post. Peak, Derbyshire. SK22 3GA

Dave Gilligan

Bike Ride to Eastern Europe – 2009 –

Lawrence Bransby

As with my trip last year to Russia, I find it very difficult to compress a month's trip into a short article. I'll just select, I think, a few of the highlights and relate these in detail rather than a brief summary of the whole 6000 mile trip to the southern tip of Albania and back. If anyone is interested, our esteemed secretary has my full diary and I can email a copy to anyone – just ask:

I made my way along major roads across parts of France, Belgium, Holland and Germany to the Czech Republic where I slowed down and the real trip "began". Followed small roads over wooded hills to the town of Menlik just north of Prague and 200 miles from the Polish border. I have always wanted to visit the extermination camps in Poland so left the Czech Republic and headed into Poland to the town of Oswiecsm. I am not going to try to recreate what I saw or felt during this time; this sort of thing, I feel, can only be experienced and reflected upon personally. What sticks in the mind most, though, are the piles of children's shoes; the tatty suitcases marked still with the owners' names and addresses; the hair, some still plaited and tied up, cut off and bundled for industrial use; the iconic railway lines at Auschwitz-Birkenau where the cattle trucks were finally opened and "processing" began...

At last I escaped the urban sprawl of Southern Poland, turned south-east and began the long climb high into the Tatra Mountains of western Slovakia following small roads and crossing two more mountain ranges before descending onto the flat lands close to the Hungarian border. Part saline "desert", the Great Plain is the forerunner of the Ukrainian steppes, a seemingly endless expanse of dusty flat land. Hungary is quite clearly poor; the roads are in very bad repair with quite a few nasty potholes awaiting the unwary and large sections, especially around corners, breaking up. The villages and towns were depressingly similar: sprawls of unimaginatively designed buildings and poor people's houses with little fields of vegetables and maize to help put food on the table. I am sorry my route across

Hungary caused me to miss much of the beauty of the country - the Danube basin and historical Budapest, but these fell well south of my planned route. Then on to the Romanian border after taking a trip off the road and onto the salt plain with a hot wind like an open oven door blowing on me.

First impressions of Romania: friendly and efficient border officials; modern hotels and businesses juxtaposed with crumbling soviet-style apartment blocks and rusting derelict factories just outside town; women hoeing in fields; the foul stench of cigarette smoke in bars and restaurants; an old woman lifting her skirt, pulling down her pants and peeing behind a tree just off the main street of town; motorcyclists riding without helmets; bright pink, blue, green and orange-painted houses; bucket and rope wells in most gardens and on the side of the road in all villages; Romany families in horse-drawn carts; old toothless women in black with bowed legs and head scarves making their slow way along the side of the road; a woman breast feeding in the street; temperature of 34 C at 8 pm in the town centre; very old pre WW2 trams trundling heavily along worn rails... Very much a picture of a country shrugging off its image of the poor cousin of Europe.

Continuing with my aim of trying to get off the main roads as often as possible, I turned onto a dirt track, lifted my visor so I could smell the wood smoke and the cow dung, hear the challenge of a flock of geese in a village who tried to dominate the road, passed peasant women queuing to draw water from a communal tap and a woman herding her 3 cows along the road and, finally, although I didn't really feel like coffee in the heat and that early in the morning, stopped at a small café to join a group of men already on their first beer (I assume) and umpteenth cigarette of the day. Later I tried to take a photograph of a Romany family on their horse-drawn cart and was faced with an immediate and orchestrated chorus of begging, patting stomachs and thrusting hands towards mouths by dad, mum and all the children at the same time!

At midday I took the road heading up into the mountains of Transylvania. It was good to get off the wind-swept, dusty plains and climb up a very potholed snaking road into the forests but the legendary Transylvania itself was rather a let down for me: I found it very dirty, the river which the road followed for most of the way was clogged with litter, the local forest dwellers live in a certain degree of squalor and make a living through logging by hand and dragging the cut trees out of the woods with horses. Juxtaposed with this is a burgeoning tourist industry with new hotels under construction all over the place – the dirt, litter and brash attempts to attract the tourist dollar I found an unpleasant combination so I passed through quickly and descended the escarpment on the other side with only a few stops. Heavy rain lashed the region all night accompanied by violent claps of thunder and I woke many times to listen from the cosiness of my bed. The following day I tackled a section of the Carpathian Mountains, following a small track I had discovered on the map heading in the right direction which turned out every bit as good as I hoped it would be. I rode for nearly 8 hours, covering only 170 miles because, as in most mountainous countries, the road follows the natural path of the river and this had

flooded, causing quite a lot of damage to an already bad road. The first 20 miles took me four hours with a lot of slippery mud and construction gangs with heavy machinery trying to make repairs. I then missed a turn-off and ended up on a long detour which, in the end, led me through some absolutely beautiful forest tracks and then along a winding road which made its way down the other side of the mountain range following the path of a very angry looking river Jiu in spate after the rains. Once out of the mountains, I turned onto a small road in shocking state of disrepair (at times the tarred surface simply gave way completely and became dirt for a while) making for some exciting riding. I finally found a very pleasant place to camp off the road and alongside the river about 30 miles short of Ramnicu Valcea.

The following day I completed the 100 miles to Bucharest in the rain in 3 hours because the bike was due for a service. Snarled in traffic, I employed the services of a willing taxi driver to lead me through the grid locked chaos of central Bucharest to the Kawasaki agents. Four hours later, serviced and loaded up, I decided to set off on the road to the Bulgarian border even though it was getting late and find a place to stay en route. Soon, though, it began to rain and I was battling to find my way out of the city through the day's end traffic. And then something so extreme happened it had me laughing aloud in amazement: the skies became threateningly dark, a nasty wind picked up that was gusting so strongly that the surrounding atmosphere soon became almost obscured by dust and flying debris; a few violent cracks of thunder and then the heavens opened! By this time I had made it to the ring road which in moments had turned into a lake being churned up by hundreds of trucks and cars all trying to escape the city and the storm. As each truck wheel passed through the water, just feet away from me, I was drenched again and again – as if someone was flinging a full bucket of water in my face every 30 seconds or so. I pressed on, amazed that the bike kept going as if under water, and resigned to being thoroughly soaked (my sleeping bag, spare clothes and maps were safe in dry bags). Almost impossible to see with the visor down or up, I finally found the right road for Bulgaria and started looking for some place to sleep – hotel, pension, *anything* – but there was simply no accommodation to be had anywhere and it was getting late. Thoroughly soaked now, I realised I was going to have to find a place to camp despite the driving rain and sodden land, and started slowing down to look for a likely spot. My visor was completely fogged so I had to ride with it open and it was like trying to keep my eyes open under water, the rain was coming down so hard. Nothing looked even vaguely acceptable - well, in a deluge, no place looks good on the side of the road as a camp site! Then I saw an open piece of ground that looked a possible option so I turned off the road onto it only to realise – too late – that it was made up of that terrible glutinous mud that immediately turns your shoes into footballs when you attempt to walk on it. Trying to turn the loaded bike was impossible and I was fighting to keep it upright so I tried to gun it through to some solid ground about 25 m in front of me. But suddenly the bike juddered to a halt and I immediately *knew* what had happened – I'd read about this from a biker who got caught in equatorial rains in Zaire but had never

experienced it myself before. This type of sticky mud is picked up by the tyres and packs itself between the tyre and the mudguard until it jams the wheel solid. I knew this was going to be a long job. First, unload the bike; then start the unenviable job of trying to dig the claggy mud clear of the mudguard with fingers... Needless to say I was soon head to food covered with mud as well as soaked to the skin. With the wheel partially free, I then had to turn the bike but every time I tried, the front wheel just ploughed sideways and the back wheel spun madly as I battled to keep the bike upright. It was like riding on oiled glass. I tried to drag the front wheel round with my hands but it wouldn't budge and, of course, I couldn't get any grip under my boots in the mud. Then the inevitable happened: I dropped the bike down a reedy slope that looked like it led into a marsh. Now I had to lift the bike upright against the slope. There was a brief time when I thought I would never get it up; it's very heavy and my feet were slipping badly in the mud but I knew I had no option – I *had* to pick it up and, in the end, managing to crouch and get my shoulder under the handle bars, I heaved it upright. There were bits of old tar and rocks about so I constructed a bit of a track through the mud, especially in front of the front tyre to give it some grip so I could turn. All this time it was, of course, still bucketing down with rain and starting to get dark. In the end I finally managed to keep the bike upright, get it turned and with a mad spinning of the back wheel and expecting the front wheel to lock up again at any moment, I managed to get it back on the road.

There was a huge puddle just there so I gave myself and the bike a bit of a wash then took the front mudguard off and dug out all the muck and stones and clay that had compacted there, put it all back together, gave myself another wash in the puddle, loaded up the bike and headed off again in the dark. That little off-road episode had taken me over an hour to recover from. In the dark I rode slowly, looking for the first level (mud-free!) place to set up my tent. Then I saw what looked like an abandoned barn with some flat grass to one side and decided it would have to do. But as soon as I had stopped a group of Romanians emerged, invited me over and *insisted* I spend the night with two of them who were working on the property.

An hour later I had changed into dry clothes, sleeping bag laid out on the floor (they even gave me blankets!), all my soaked stuff draped about the shed drying, tummy full of fish soup, bread, beer which they insisted I share, hot coffee and some wine which I provided and ready for bed in a bare room which I share with two old Romanians who cannot speak a word of English! A long, eventful and most memorable day!

One's first impression of Bulgaria are that it must be pretty close to being the arsehole of Eastern Europe – un-signposted and rutted road to the border, an overpowering stench of rotting rubbish left on the sides of the road but the entrance as one crosses the old bridge across the Danube is marked by typical Soviet-era, gigantic and imposing Corinthian columns (rather tatty and neglected now like a once wealthy person down on their luck trying to maintain the pretence of status). Still a little damp from my soaking the previous day and aching in all my muscles from lifting the bike and getting it out of the quagmire, I stopped at the first grotty little

café after entering Bulgaria where I studied the map, drank the strongest cup of black coffee I have ever tasted and used an unspeakable squat toilet (and discovered that my toilet paper is wet). I do feel that squatting in a wet and smelly toilet is the most undignified process ever inflicted upon a human being and this was one of the worst since Africa. I then travelled along pot-holed roads with the foetid sweet smell of untreated sewage wafting over me as I passed through successive towns on my way inland. But my first impressions of Bulgaria changed by the time I reached the beautiful town of Veliko Tarnovo, a “survival from the Middle Ages” according to *Lonely Planet*. I immediately decided to rest a day there – my first rest day since the journey started.

And this epitomises this kind of travel – the previous night I was exhausted, drenched to the bone and filthy, sharing cold fish soup and dry bread with a peasant family in an abandoned barn and bedding down on a concrete floor; the following night I was resting in a fascinating medieval town with old fortified walls still standing, cobbled streets, fascinating shops full of antique bric-a-brac having consumed a delicious traditional meal in a small restaurant accompanied by an excellent glass of wine! One simply never knows what will be around the next corner.

And so, the next day, rested and fulfilled, it was back on the road and over the Rila Mountains, a vast range that seems to rise like a barrier out of a flat plain on either side with no foothills at all. A terribly potholed road winds its way through forest punctuated by monuments to significant battles won during Bulgaria’s history, monuments to Communism so vast in scale that they quite take one’s breath away, as if the state was *willing* its people to be impressed and so see beyond the suffering and mediocrity of their lives. The roads are very poorly signposted and those signs that do exist are in Cyrillic script and my map not, my GPS just gives me the most basic of information, often telling me “There are no roads in the vicinity of your destination”! But it does tell me in which direction I am travelling so I go by that and the little of the map I can understand.

Then over another range of mountains, also part of the Rila chain, and, after a long day’s ride, I camped half way up yet another mountain range next to a lovely fast-flowing river 60 miles from the Macedonian border.

The border between Bulgaria and Macedonia is on top of one of the mountain ranges and I negotiated it easily with friendly and efficient border officials wishing me a pleasant journey. And then a delightful spell of 400 miles of small roads, sufficiently bumpy and pot-holed to keep them interesting, that wound their way over, around and between range after range of almost deserted mountain countryside; villages were few and far between, towns encountered every 20 – 30 miles and these negotiated in 5 minutes or so. I was beginning to forget what traffic lights look like! Because I was so high up, the temperature was cool; the skies a crisp blue and the vegetation mostly forest. And then I descended to the plains again to be confronted by the heat leaving me sweaty and enervated. The countryside too changed quite dramatically as I descended the escarpment and neared the Albanian border, brown and dry and rocky.

With a little difficulty I found the small road to Prilep close to the Albanian border and made my almost

solitary way through farmland populated by flocks of sheep and the occasional peasant farmer. The road got smaller and smaller and narrower until, inevitably, it became dirt. Ahead and dominating the skyline was the most enormous mountain range and the little dirt track was heading straight for it. I stopped and asked directions off a man working on the road and he confirmed that it was the road to Prelip – then he paused and said, “The *old* road.” The way he said it and the way he looked at me immediately brought to mind the story of the little train that could: “*There’s an old track right over the mountain. But you’ll never make it – you’re too small!*”

And the road got smaller, rougher and more rocky then things were growing in the middle but it was rideable and, to cut a long story short, 20 miles later, using mainly 1st and 2nd gear, I made it to the top – a challenging and exciting ride!

Reached the Albanian high up on the top of a windy, rocky mountain which seem perpetually to dominate Albania’s skyline. After a friendly exchange with the border officials I wound my way down into the valley to be met by another cloudburst which had me soaked in about 15 minutes.

The following day I was struck down by a nasty case of gastro. In between bouts on the toilet and basin, I packed up and headed off rather gingerly. Again it was unbearably hot and, for some reason, all the motorways in this country seem to narrow into bottlenecks every time they meet a town or city and long lines of cars and trucks jostle and fight their way through to the other side. Feeling ill as I was and in the heat, this was torture but I struggled on, stopping twice to try to take in fluids but promptly vomiting up everything I had drunk. I finally gave up at about 2 pm when I wasn’t able to stop quickly enough to get my helmet off and vomited (mainly water, thank goodness – I hadn’t eaten in 24 hours) into my full-face helmet. A hotel just across the road beckoned and I collapsed for the rest of the afternoon and night.

The next day, partially recovered but still not eating, I headed south along the beautiful and dramatic coast road, climbing over two very high mountain ranges before making good progress along the plain, the clear blue waters of the Adriatic on my right and the towering coastal range, which blocks easy access to the hinterland all along the Albanian and Croatian coasts, on my left. Then, just before the Greek border, with a lovely feeling of accomplishment in my gut, I turned inland to begin the long road home.

I had decided to take an interesting looking small road into the mountains as an alternative route and immediately missed the turn but spent a happy hour following a mostly disused track badly in need of repair. But it was good to get away from the press of people and cars and trucks that clog the coast road. Wondering how wise I was being, I turned off on a small road into the mountains, heading for Berak about 80 miles away. At first the road was good and I thought it would be a breeze but then, as these things do, it got smaller and smaller and finally turned to dirt and then, quite literally, into a donkey track – I met two groups of men on donkeys and one 4X4 during the next four hours of hard riding along a rough, rutted track. After two and a half hours fuel was starting to get low but I knew if I turned

back I would have just enough. I pressed on. Disturbingly, every now and again a track would appear from the side and join and at other times, the track I was on split. I always took what I considered to be the more used track but I was starting to worry that if I did decide to turn back I might take the wrong track and become lost in the mountains. With fuel very low, I was becoming concerned, aware that I was entirely on my own in the mountains in a remote part of Albania and I hadn't seen another person or any sign of habitation for over an hour. If I had broken down or had an accident and injured myself I knew I would be in very serious trouble. This was the only time on the trip I felt I was pushing my luck riding alone. Finally I decided I would ride to the top of the next ridge and look for signs of habitation and then – perish the thought – turn round and try to make my way out. Well, as one does, that ridge became “just the next” and “just round the next corner”, hoping against hope I wouldn't have to retrace my steps. Then, thank goodness, I saw telephone wires and I knew I was safe. Around the next corner appeared a small village and they assured me that Berat was only 30 miles further on. I had just enough fuel to make it.

And so, after 4 days in Albania, I entered Montenegro heading north. Just before leaving Albania, filling up at a garage, a van driver called me over. He just wanted to say how much he admired seeing such an old man – his words - travelling the world on his motorcycle. This is the 4th time on this trip that strangers have commented on my age and the fact that I am travelling alone. And yet, strangely – or, perhaps, understandably – I have seldom felt younger or more alive.

Soon after I set off the next day, I rode down one of the most breathtaking mountain passes I have ever experienced. My heart was in my mouth trying to look at the view of the Dalmatian Coast from thousands of feet up whilst making sure I didn't drive over a cliff! At the bottom, riding along the clear waters of the Adriatic, I couldn't resist and paused for a long cool swim. Then on to the border with Croatia. The turnoff to Sarajevo was approaching as I neared Dubrovnik but I really didn't want to leave the beauty of the coast so I decided to follow the signs to an “Auto Camp” 5 miles off the road.

Then inland into Bosnia and the mountains towards Sarajevo. The route into the centre of Bosnia is virtually uninhabited, a small winding road makes its way over range upon range of high mountains, the soil very thin so that almost always, except in the bottom of the valleys, the rock strata show through. For over 120 miles this delightful road snaked its way through mountains, the wind cool from the altitude and very little traffic to spoil the ride. It was the kind of road that makes one smile while riding for the sheer joy of it, like a fun-fair ride that only stops when you want it to.

And finally into Sarajevo, the last 70 miles partly through a steep-sided cleft – one can't call it a valley because cliffs seemed to meet the road almost vertically on both sides, with many tunnels and numerous rock falls, some still partially blocking the road. The mountains became increasingly wooded and as I rode I could imagine the partisan forces and bands of Jews hiding and fighting in there, living there through the snow-covered winters, for the duration of the war. The Old City in Sarajevo is a fascinating place with mosques

all around – there are supposed to be 73 mosques in Sarajevo, making it the most “Turkish” city in the Balkans (the Turks ruled Bosnia for 400 years and left behind much of their architecture and religion), little alleys full of shops and bars and eating places – very tourist oriented but lovely to be here and soak up the atmosphere.

Then on across Slovenia and into northern Italy, up and up into the mountains until, when I reached the top, far off in front of me were the proper Julian Alps, craggy and snow-capped and beautiful! Other than being nearly run off the road near the top of the Aredel pass by an idiot in a 4X4, I had a truly wonderful day riding up and down mountains, some so steep and high that it quite takes one's breath away. Most of the mountains are over 2000m (highest peak Mt Triglav – 2864m), their bare rock almost pure white so that it is difficult to work out what is rock and what is snow, the remnants of last Winter trapped in gullies and cirques.

Because it was so beautiful, I rode all the way to the top of the St Bernard pass, down the other side and then up the St Gottard Pass for the hell of it! Being Sunday, every biker in Europe, it seemed, had come to see how fast they could negotiate the hair-pin bends – there were thousands! After the fun, I settled in to crossing Switzerland and heading for the French border.

And then, suddenly, I felt like making for home – a long way, about 800 miles, a good 3-4 days' normal travel - but I realised I would rather be home than pacing myself along boring French motorways so I did it in 2. I was longing for creature comforts, company, a sleepy cat on my lap and a dog insistent for love and attention.

A great, trouble-free trip on a faithful, completely reliable bike.

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FOR SALE

Van-Hossen Hydraulic Bike Trailer.

Price £750.

Contact: Bob Caswell:

MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL FOR 2009/2010

I/we wish to renew my/our membership(s) of the Mojacar Touring Club for the forthcoming year

I/we enclose a cheque for £11.00 joint or £9.00 individual membership made payable to: **Mojacar Touring Club**

Name _____

Address _____

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