



# ADVENTURE HERMIT 40 PASSES IN 40 HOURS

In 1973, I was maturing into the ripe-old age of 3. At approximately the same, time halfway around the world in London, a virile young man named Ted Simon was celebrating his 42nd birthday in London. Over the next 4 years he would traverse, approximately, 78,000 miles and visit 45 countries. In the meantime, I would traverse from diapers into Captain America Underoos! He would write about his adventures of passing through war zones and revolutions, being taken in by kings and paupers and sitting in a Brazilian prison where he was suspected of being a spy. He would patiently describe his experiences as he waited weeks for critical parts to be delivered to the middle of nowhere. Perhaps he dreamt of a day when a service could deliver things that absolutely had to be there overnight! But then again, that speed would have taken away from the adventure. Rushing is often the enemy





of the explorer. It is only when we choose to pause, or are forced to, that our eyes, bellies and senses are rewarded with unexpected and extraordinary delights.

Six years after he began his journey, Ted Simon's seminal work, *Jupiter's Travels* was released upon the world in 1979. At the time, I was nine years old and deeply obsessed with motorcycles; aware of the book, but not nearly patient enough to sit down and read it. That time would come 25 years later when it was reintroduced to me by the Scottish born actor Ewan McGregor and his English pal, Charley Boorman. They were so inspired by what Ted accomplished that they set out to make a documentary, loosely following in Ted's tire-treads around the world. The result was the wild successfully motorcycle mini-series the **Long Way Around**.

Their experience was virtually identical, with only minor exceptions. Ewan and Charlie had support vehicles, video cameras, Kevlar gear, extra bike parts, mechanics and state of the art BMW Adventure motorcycles. Ted was similarly equipped, he brought along a camera with something called "film" inside of it. His motorcycle was . . . Well, if you ever have the pleasure of passing through the English County of Hampshire, stop into the village of Beaulieu and visit the National Motor Museum. There you can see Ted's Triumph Tiger 100. Not exactly the picture of modern day adventure motorcycling that one would expect, but a thing of beauty. The inspiration for hundreds, if not thousands of people to ride around the world, or at least dream about it on a weekend ride away from the daily grind.

This satirical comparison is in no way meant to disparage what Ewan and Charlie accomplished. They too shared a desire of traveling the world by motorcycle, overcoming fears and shrinking the differences between cultures through interaction and understanding. Yes, they perhaps had more means and support, but these are just semantics. So often, we stop ourselves from accomplishing what we most desire, because we are fearful. We mask the devil of fear with excuses, such as lack of money, not enough time, commitments, etc.; but the truth is we are afraid to fail, so we simply "do not do." Yoda must be so disappointed in us.

I have often let this devil slow me down, but I do my best to fight back. When I do, I have never regretted going for it. Things do not always work out as planned, but I have learned to embrace the changes as they occur as opposed to fight them; sometimes through Zen like control and other times through Jack Daniels. It was with a little bit of both, that I was one day inspired to purchase a Triumph 900 Scrambler. I wanted to explore, but I wanted simplicity. I had become caught up in the gear, the technology and what was "needed" to ride off-road. The truth was I needed an attitude adjustment. In a world of "more cowbell," what I had a fever for was . . . "LESS cowbell."

Steve McQueen almost outwitting the Germans, by jumping his Triumph T6 over barbed wire, followed by the image of a goateed Ted astride his Triumph, wearing work gloves, pilot goggles, and a fleece collared flying jacket were all the inspiration I needed to inspire my own off-road journey



via Triumph! Even if it meant leaving my BMW r1200 GSA, considered by many to be the elite adventure motorcycle in the garage. The Triumph was elegantly simple, with a can do attitude and a gorgeous design. Triumphs, Indians and Harley Davidsons, were the types of bikes that WWII veterans returned to the United States to ride, as a way to stand apart, but also to band together as brothers. In this way, the Triumph was my time machine. I felt a connection with the spirit of the veterans I had seen in so many black and white photos, racing through the woods on heavy, strong and bulky machines. Not letting anything stop them from going where they wanted to go.

The Scramblers 900-twin engine is powerfully flawless for climbing Colorado's elevations, even without the aid of modern fuel injection. But it is just as suited for fire roads and trail riding; although you would be hard pressed to find that corroborated in any brochure. It looks like a gorgeous street bike, albeit with knobby tires, but with its high pipes just under my right thigh, I knew it was meant to climb rocks! I immediately began looking for ways to push the limits of the machine and myself.

Which leads me to the year 2010. Thirty-seven years after Ted Simon took his Triumph around the world I made plans to



conquer 40 Colorado Mountain passes in 40 hours because I had turned 40! I planned a route that would allow me to cover as many paved and unpaved passes in the most efficient period of time. With over 200 passes documented in Colorado, I figured it should be relatively easy. So in September, I set off at 4:30 AM from Lakewood, CO for two days of picturesque riding and Pass Bagging. Soon after I left town I had my first mishap and on pavement no less. While taking a photo, I neglected to properly secure the bike and rolled backwards. Tumbling off the bike as we both hit the ground. Only my pride was injured, but the bike was not as lucky. I broke off the front left foot peg. After a quick moment of shock, I collected myself and thought to replace it with the non-retractable rear foot peg. Crisis averted, I was back on the road.

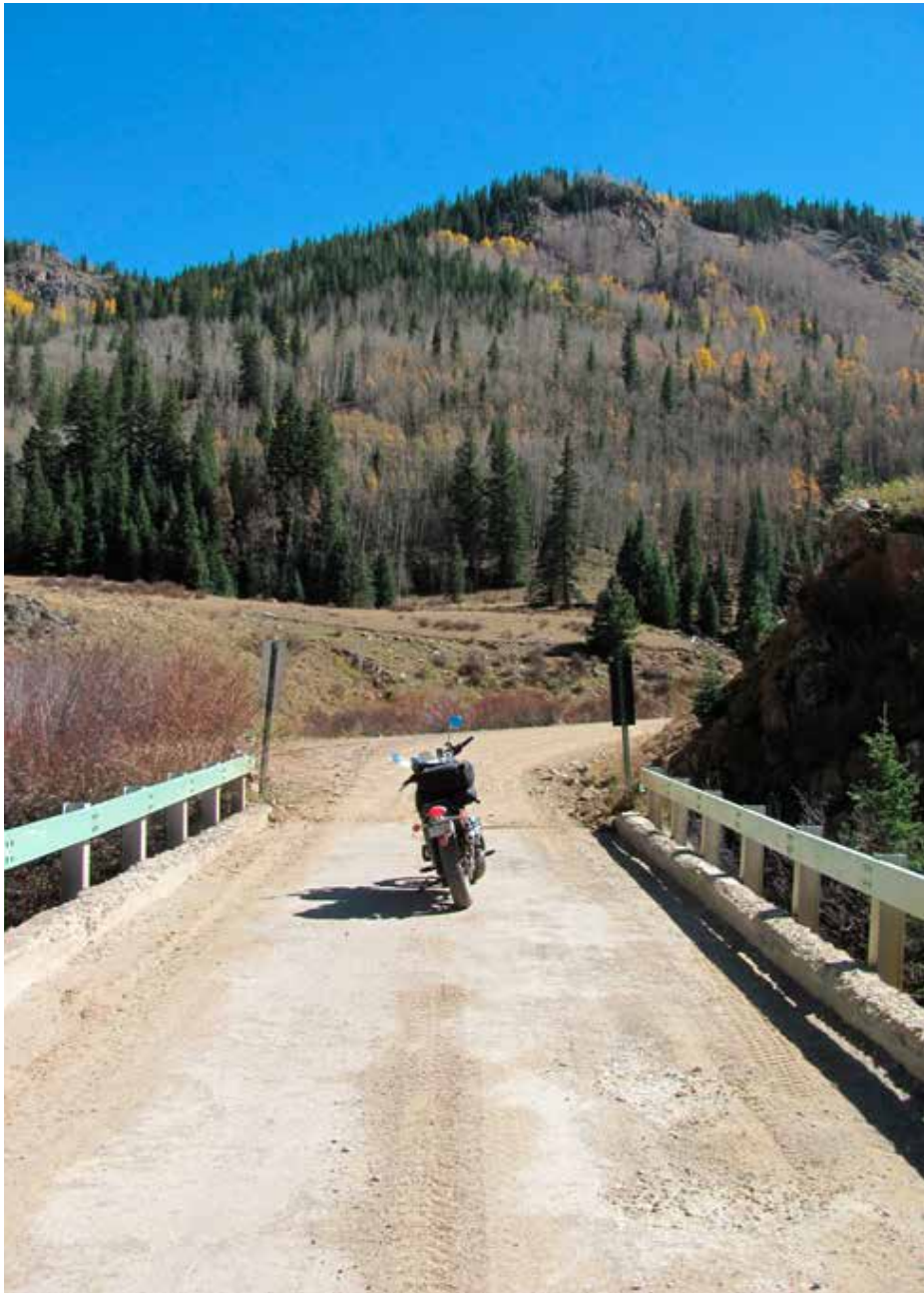
I rode for several hours, and bagged several passes, including Tennessee, Cottonwood and Tincup before tempting fate once again. I had just finished traveling up several miles of wooded trail, part of the Sherrod Loop, before reaching my final ascent up Tomichi Pass, from apparently the "wrong side." The trail was nothing but rocks. No dirt to be seen. I walked a bit of it before making the fateful decision to go for it. I only made it about 100 feet before my front wheel went right and everything else, including me, headed left. I shifted out from under the bike and assessed the damaged. This time,

the shifter broke clean off and the clutch snapped in half.

I felt like it was a not so subtle cue to call it quits. I had covered many passes, but I knew it was not enough to cover 40 in the time I had left. If I jumped on main roads I could be home in less than 4 hours. I lay next to the bike contemplating my next move. Finally I reached a decision and common sense lost out. I dug out some electrical tape, the lesser appreciated cousin of duct tape, and I "MacGyver'd" a foot shifter using a stick as a splint. As for the clutch, I was able to grab what was left of the metal with two fingers. After about 15 minutes and a 60-point turn, I managed to get the bike upright and facing







downhill. I eventually made it back down to the dirt area and stopped next to the sign that warned me not to go up in the first place. I decided going home, just yet, was not an option. Even if I could not cover all 40 passes in 40 hours, I could still enjoy the ride. I decided to press further south, towards Gunnison. On my way, I decided to bag one more pass and detoured up Waunita Pass. It ended up being my 14th and final pass of the trip. I eventually made it to Lake City for the evening, but well after everything had closed. A key was waiting for me at the Matterhorn Motel. My evening meal was an energy bar and some cashews I found in my pocket. Two showers later, one to warm up and one to get clean, I was fast asleep.

The next morning, I got up feeling pretty good after the previous days disappointments. I was no longer on a time crunch so I waited for sunlight and headed to the Tic Toc Diner (rumor has it, the Tic Toc has since relocated to Gunnison) for a monster breakfast complete with biscuits and gravy. I planned to meander home on paved roads. Then the check came, signaling the end of the meal. As paid my tab, I realized I was not quite ready for the end of my trip. Before I had time to talk myself out of it, I was headed into the Alpine Loop to summit Engineer Pass. As I rode, I passed through Capitol City, established in 1877. It once had a population of 400 people and hopes of becoming the capital of Colorado. Losing out to Denver, it is now littered with the skeletons of a few homes and has only ghosts for caretakers. Dark rain clouds began to appear to the East, the direction home, so logic dictated I head in the







opposite direction. Cruising through the tunnels of golden aspens was beautiful but short lived, as I once again came across some fairly rocky conditions. I stood up on the pegs and managed to keep the bike upright and in return it didn't buck me off. I passed some hard-core dirt bikers riding sensible, smaller, lighter machines. Each gave me a surprised headshake and a thumbs-up at the sight of the Triumph in a place it didn't seem to belong.

Minutes later, after a sweat drenched rock wrestling match that ended in a draw, I stopped to read a sign. I was informed that the road ahead would "get difficult" and only 4x4's should pass. I looked back on the trail I had just wrestled with and wondered how much tougher it really could get. I wiped the sweat out of my eyes, and began to remount. It was then that I noticed that I was no longer riding two-up. My luggage had departed somewhere down the trail and out of sight. It was evident that rain or not, I was going to be heading east, and directly into it.

About a mile down the trail my bag was patiently waiting for me by the side of the road. I strapped it back on and continued the challenging descent back into Lake City. I was going slowly, but unintentionally fast enough to catch up with the rain. Perhaps not a victory but it felt like something, after so many unexpected challenges. As the rain increased, I was convinced that staying on pavement was a wise move. For most of the six hour ride home, the rain as my companion. I arrived home almost 36 hours from when I had first left. I only bagged 14 passes. I was disappointed, but still exhilarated by what the Triumph and I had accomplished. I was no Ted Simon. I hadn't circumnavigated the globe. Hell, I hadn't even been covered much more than 500 miles, but the expedition that the Scrambler and I undertook made me feel



exhilarated and ready to take on whatever was next. The words, "Don't try. Do" echoed in my head. Next time Yoda . . . Next time.

#### *Epilogue:*

*A few weeks later, after getting the bike back into shape, and tweaking my route, I tried again. This time it was early October. When it comes to weather, anything can happen in Colorado in October. As if on cue, the snow came almost immediately as I began my second attempt. Berthoud and then Loveland passes were sheets of ice. Right out of the gate I was making terrible time, but I kept pushing on. I managed to keep the bike and myself in one piece. Darkness came as I reached the 34-hour mark. Unfortunately, many of the passes are barely, if at all marked. Without, visual evidence, I was no longer motivated to take such risks, especially in the dark. Despite the snow, I made it much further than my first attempt, completing 37 passes; the final one being Bigelow Divide. I reluctantly headed home, riding on a dirt road in almost complete darkness, just north*

*of Walsenburg, CO . I followed lights in the distance that I hoped would lead to a town and eventually pavement. As I got closer the lights started circling in the starless night sky. No trespassing signs began to appear along barb wired fences. It was only as I reached pavement did I finally see the sign for the USP Florence ADMAX, a maximum security US Penitentiary. I wondered if anyone inside could have seen me riding through the trails behind the prison. Was it even legal to be where I was? Did they too dream of Steve McQueen and great escapes? I didn't take the time to find out. I rode swiftly, eventually reaching town, fueling up and heading home. It was no around the world adventure, but it was an experience that I will never forget on a bike that deserves far more credit.*