

Ride Report from Dallas, TX to Key West, FL to Dallas, TX

Ever since riding up to Prudhoe Bay, Alaska last June, I have had the other end, Key West on my radar. The two extremes are 5,500 miles apart (per Google slab routing). For me and my distractions, double that.

You can read about my Alaska trip here

<http://advrider.com/index.php?threads/alaska-bound-no-excuses-just-ride.1228124/>

Also other adventures at ridewithab.com

Well it's happening right now, read on...

Day 1 - Dallas, TX to Laurel, MS, 531 miles, 4/4/18

I woke up to a chilly April morning, 42°F, heated vest, pants, socks and grips kept me toasty warm. I learned that heated gear is the way to go, unlike layering, it is not bulky and the layers come on or off with the turn of the heat controller.

First stop Athens Cafe, TX for breakfast and to meet my riding buddy, Dwain.



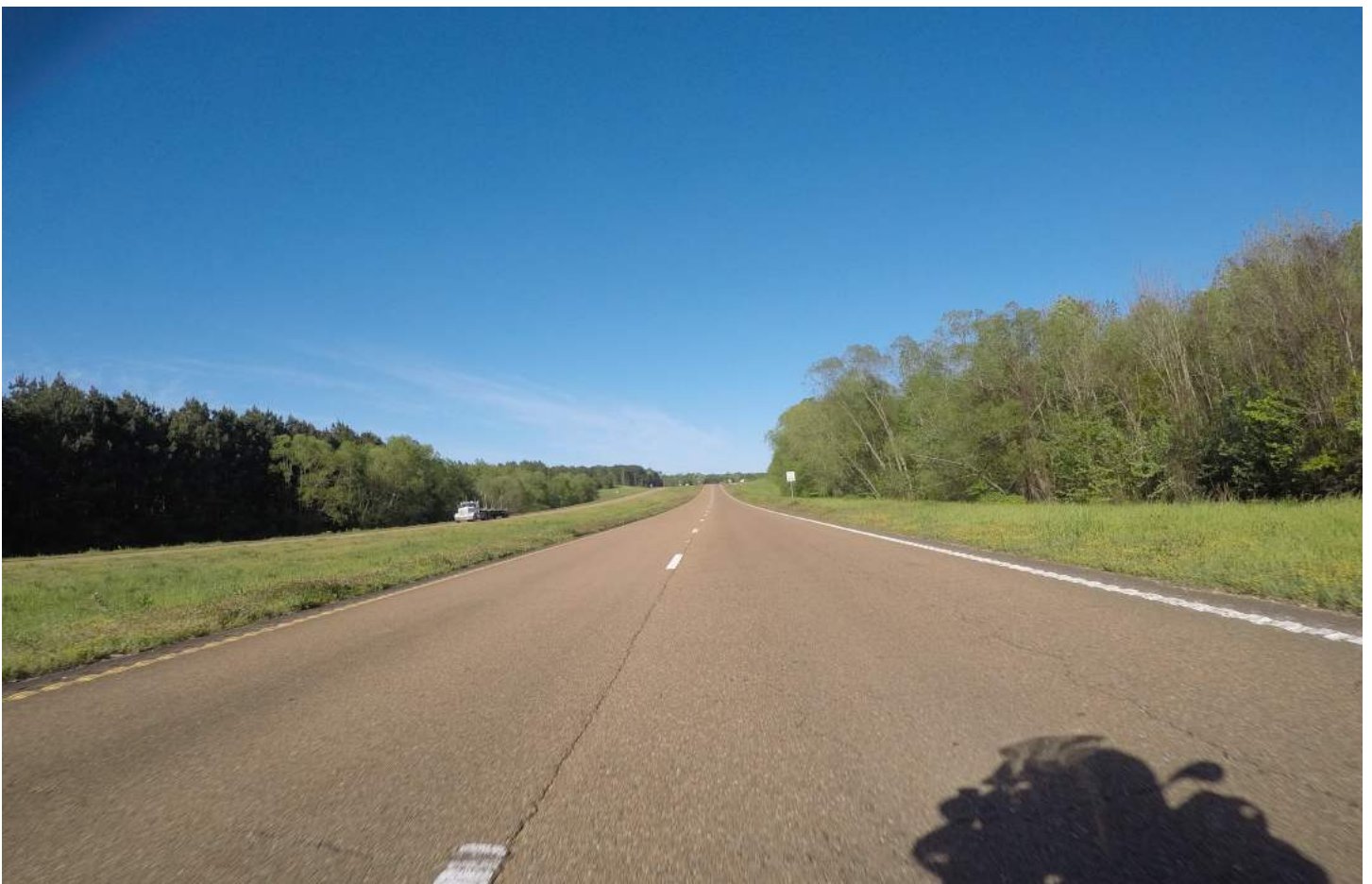
From there, we rode a bit over 500 miles stopping for gas and a short break for lunch.



Getting out of Texas is always long, no matter which direction one goes. Louisiana 2-3 hours, and then 2 hrs to Laurel, an easy route to navigate, basically, Hwy 175 South to 84 East, all the way to Laurel.



I got a GoPro but still learning my way around it. Stay tuned for the next GoPro enhanced trip report.



Overnighted in Laurel, MS and walked over to a Mexican restaurant to get some tacos. They were yummie and went down well with a couple of beers.



Overall, a beautiful day to ride, sunny and cool.

Day 2 - Laurel, MS to Perry, FL, 463 miles, 4/5/18

Started the day at Sonic, My riding buddy Dwain introduced me to the breakfast burrito and I have to say that for fast food, they are pretty good. Apparently they make the eggs fresh when you order vs reheating pre-made stuff. And the price is right.



I have to say we had spectacular weather, a bit cool in the AM gave way a beautiful dry sunny day. It felt odd to ride in the southeast without any humidity.

Almost forgot, while I have visited all 50 States, I have ridden a motorcycle in 48, Florida for some reason has always eluded me, so now I'm going to have to rent a Harley in Hawaii.



Very plain day today, not much to write about except for a couple of points to share about FL roads.

I thought Texas was flat, FL wins the grand prize.

Stay away from 98 near Panama City, the traffic at 2:00PM was horrendous. Had to reroute to a more inland route to get moving again.

It pays to be prepared food wise when traveling the lesser know roads, the one cafe I was salivating for was closed



Tomorrow my riding buddy will be heading to Naples to visit his Brother and me to Wellington to visit a childhood friend. We will rejoin to ride to Key West on Sunday AM.

One more picture from the day, Pop's Dawgs in Panama City.



Day 3 - Perry, FL to Wellington, FL, 404 miles, 4/6/18

Pretty awesome day, although not from motorcycling, but by crossing a bucket list item; always a great thing because it moves or makes room for other stuff.

Riding on FL slab is unlike any other experience I have had. Cars zoom by at 80, 90, 100+ mph, especially on I-95. Simply organized chaos. Wow, I didn't realize these 1200GSAs had it in them. No self incrimination.

There were 6 space shuttles built by NASA, we all know about Challenger and Columbia, the other 4 are on display in museums, hand picked by someone that obviously overlooked Houston's NASA. I have been to 3 and really wanted to get to the Kennedy Space Center Visitor Complex to see the Atlantis Space shuttle, I decided to slab it to maximize time at NASA and then visit with my childhood friend Brad.

The other 3 locations are:

Endeavour - California Science Center in Los Angeles

Discovery, Smithsonian in Virginia

Enterprise, Intrepid Sea Museum in New York

I know this is supposed to be about riding and motorcycles, but Kennedy Space Center is by far the best and everyone that has interest in space exploration needs to get there. An amazing place that I plan on visiting again for a couple of days.





The other thing I try to do is visit family and friends along the way. Many were on spring break, but my buddy Brad was around. Brad is a childhood friend that I had not seen in 25 years. After all that adrenaline fed riding, we had a couple of scotches and a cigar. Brad put me up for the night and was a most gracious host. Thanks again Brad, not waiting 25 year to see you again.



As usual, when traveling solo, you meet so many cool people, always curious about your experiences and destinations. I traded stories with Jay, originally from Colorado, for a good 1/2 hour during lunch. Very cool.

Day 4 - Wellington, FL to Homestead, FL, 222 miles, 4/7/18

A relaxing Saturday, I got a slow start this morning after a big night last night. Life is too short, so we got to have fun.

In conversation with My buddy last night, I asked him about Sunpass (FL automated road toll transponders). I was under the impression that EZ Pass was compatible with Sunpass, so I took all the express lanes yesterday without giving it any thought. Well, it turns out that FL's Sunpass is unique and not EZ Pass compatible. Cannot wait to see my mail in a couple of weeks.

Now I have TX toll tag, EZ Pass for the northeast, CA FasTrax and now Sunpass for FL. The collection keeps growing and maybe one day all these States will talk to each other and pick 1.

Today was National Park day, Everglades and Biscayne. (Also part of a bucket list I am trying to complete). After Denali and Yellowstone and a few others, it's hard to get excited about Everglades.





Biscayne on the other hand is pretty cool, although one needs to plan the visit. It can only be accessed via boat and they have 1 or 2 time slots per day. There is snorkeling on the various reefs, although right now the water is only 74°F. Of course I missed them, guaranteeing a trip back. I really enjoy the Miami area as a destination.





I did take the opportunity to walk/hike a bit which was great after being on the motorcycle for 4 days.

Tomorrow is the highlight of the trip, Key West, FL, the Southernmost Point in the USA.

A slow day is always welcomed, it give me a chance to catch up on writing the ride report as well as Family and Friends.

Day 5 - Homestead, FL to Key West, 138 miles, 4/8/18

I woke up and was surprised by a pretty awesome breakfast, lots of variety, fresh cut fruit, bottled water, etc, all for a princely sum of \$78 including tax.

Don't worry, I only eat the whites, chuck the yolk



The ride to Key West was very nice, scenic, exciting, but lots of traffic and somewhat slow.





First stop had to be the buoy and it was jammed packed, I did manage a couple of pictures and decided that I will give it another try the next day.



Plus the mandatory selfie



Next was lunch, the Salty Angler on Duval St. I really needed a salad and it was great.



Smoked butter dipped fries, yummie



We found a hotel nearby and relaxed for a bit before going out to explore a bit.



While having a couple of beers in the court yard, we met James, he became our tour guide and took us around.

I found these 3 guys playing poker and I decided to join them



Everyone was super friendly and had great conversation. We met Ray and Toni; Ray was a judge who recently retired and Toni a social worker, they split their time between Lake Tahoe and KW. Talk about living a dream.

(L-R, Dwain, James, me, Toni and Ray)



And the dip in the water



Next we hit a few bars, smoked a cigar and not before long, it was bed time.







And there were many more...

Day 6 - Key West to Tampa, FL, 408 miles, 4/9/18

First thing was coffee, then ride to the buoy, for a retake, much better today.



5 people sat on my bike to take a picture of themselves, but I could have just left it there and charged \$5 a picture and gotten rich.



On the way out, there was a huge accident at the western end of 7 mile bridge, it was closed in both directions and we ended up waiting in traffic for a couple of hours.



Riding the berm for about 3 miles, we made it to an opening where there were 2 riders. They both got \$166 tickets for doing what we were doing, needless to say we stayed with them. Within a 1/2 hour, our group was 10-12 bikes. Lots of great bike talk, most memorable were they two guys from Jacksonville that rode from Jacksonville to San Diego and back in less than 100 hours.

Eventually they let some cars go, but we just missed it by about 150 feet or so. This is when a rider comes by on the opposite side of the road, passing on a double yellow, ignored our warnings that there were LEOs ahead, ignored the flashing lights of the fire truck and keeps going to the front. Of course the cop signals him to pull over and wrote him up for probably \$166. Then this poor guy drops his bike right as he was fiddling with something. Stuff like this always makes me wonder what people are thinking.



The day ended at my brother's house. It's always great to visit family.



Day 7 - Tampa, FL - Marianna, FL, 346 miles, 4/10/18

A scary day, when doing a morning check on my bike, I noticed the rear tire very worn and upon closer examination, there was a spot where the steel belts were showing. My only decision was whether to take the wheel off or ride to the shop for a new tire. I found a shop within 4 miles and rode over. The only tire they had in 170/60-17 was a Michelin Road Pilot, for me it was about safety and convenience, so I took it.

I am not sure how my tires got worn so quickly, it was a TKC70, lasted about 6K miles. Perhaps it's the FL road surface/speed combination.



One of the stupidest things I let happen on this trip



Now it's about 11:00 and finally on my way except I had to cross this massive weather system between Tampa and Gainesville. I decided to slab it to get it out of the way faster. I have been caught in my share of rain, but this was ridiculous. Rain so thick that You could not see 50 feet in front of you, then add thunderstorms, a little lightning and flash flooding. To make it more interesting, a brand new street slick rear tire and I had white knuckles for 100 miles or so.

I do live by one rule, when it rains, slow way day, and if it's hard rain slow down even more. Eventually I was past the storm, but I was soaked and very cold. The temp was 55-60°, so not really that cold. I put on my heated gear and had it full blast for 1-2 hours before my core temperature told me to dial it down.

I decided to stop early, today's miles were hard miles and not too fun. I did enjoy the last 100 miles or so. Forecast for the next 3 days looks awesome, sunny, mild temperatures and no rain.

Day 8 - Marianna, FL to Marshall, TX, 642 miles, 4/11/18

Today was about getting home, a great riding day. The cold morning turned warm as the day ended, and the miles just flowed. I did mostly slab with a bit of small roads in between.

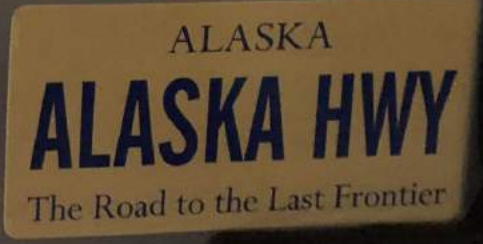
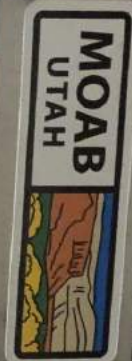
I still have a left over bad habit, Diet Coke, I love that stuff. At a Loves gas station it took me 1 second to decide which one I would buy, on the left is a 2 liter for \$2.29 or on the right, .6 liters for \$1.89, you bet I got the 2 liter. I don't get pricing.



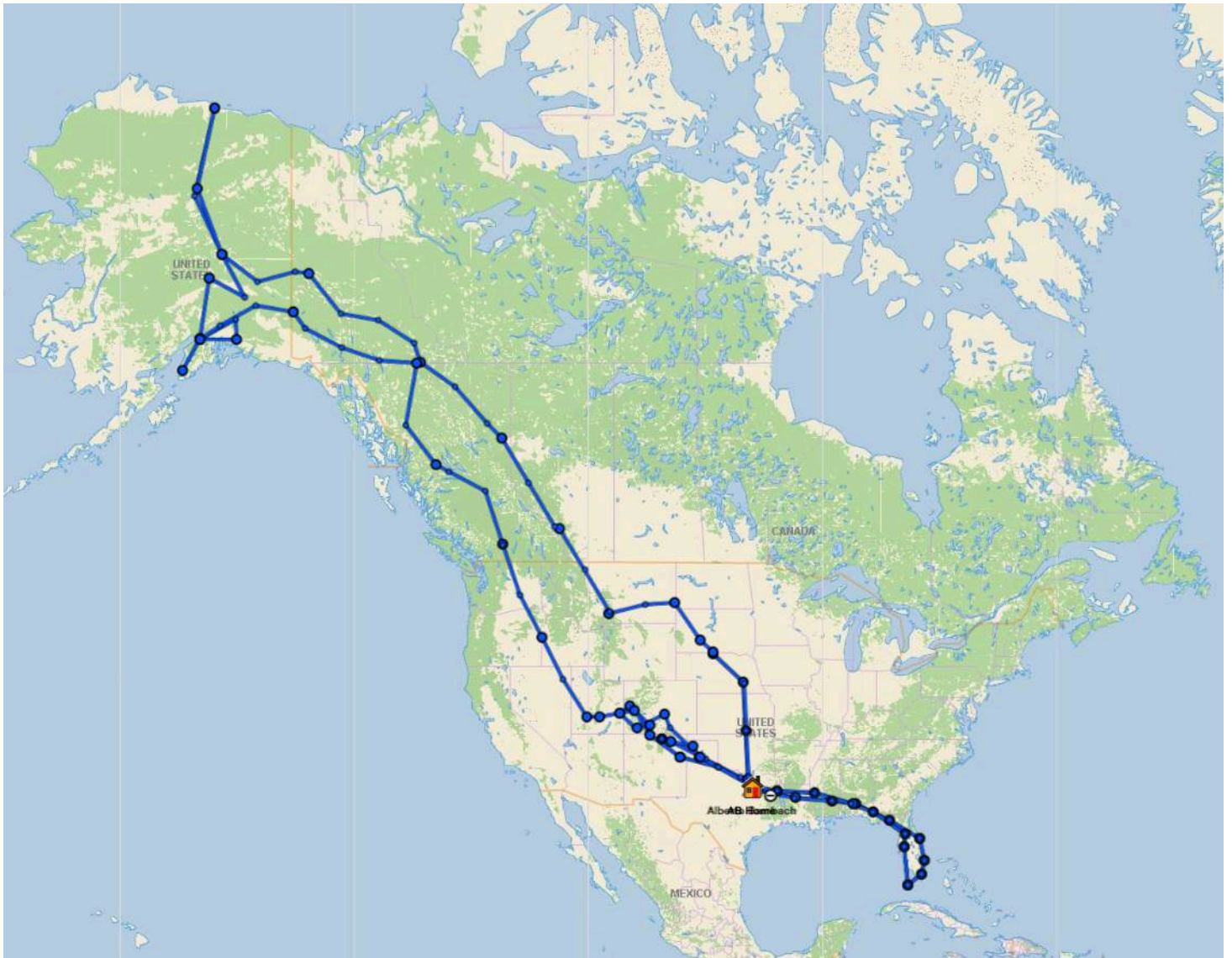
Day 9 - Marshall, TX to Dallas, TX, 155 miles, 4/12/18

Home sweet home, the 9 day expedition covered 3,261 miles. Putting the stickers on the bike felt good.





And now my InReach tracker looks like this



I guess I need Cabo and Labrador next although looking at the map, it will be far shorter.

Thanks for tagging along and if anyone is interested in riding to either Cabo or Labrador, get in touch with me. Cheers...AB