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Audio

## *On God's country and grizzly bears*

Tim Wees

So here was I living my dream, astride my bike and high in the Kootenay mountains. The air was pure and clean. In this place it was a pleasure and delight to be alive and breathing. The sun was shining brightly onto the coolness of God's country.

The angels must live here, them and the grizzlies. This was Mr. Grizzly's country and he was boss. An encounter could be nasty, but it would not happen because he was hunting me. If he knew I was there he would be hightailing it the other way. Grizzlies fear people. Smart bears. I'm told they used to hunt bison in the low country, but the bison became history and the bears retreated to the high country.



Image © 2008 Province of British Columbia Google Earth

These are Kootenay's mountains and the Wilson Creek Road where I learned to ride.

So this was not the place to be sneaking about unseen. You just might accidentally accost someone large and furry. Noisemakers are standard equipment, preferably some trail bells tinkling merrily as you walked.

My noisemaker was Matilda. She was my motorcycle, a 550cc Honda with four pipes and a putter that was like Ebony purring. We had been weeks getting this far up the trail. It was but a forty mile hike up the mountain road from Rosebery, but when Matilda and I started this journey the snow was only beginning to recede up the mountain from Slocan Lake. I bought Matilda the year before for a song and a dollar. I told the fella if he could drive it to me I'd buy it. He did and I did. I unhooked the battery and threw a tarp over her, and soon she was covered in snow and snoozing through the long winter.

When the sun came out in the spring Matilda reappeared from the snow. I took off the tarp and let her warm in the rays for a couple of hours. I reconnected the battery and opened the fuel line and pressed the starter. Believe it, she started! Was I delightfully surprised. Wow! I've got something here. This is going to be an interesting year.

I had not driven anything motorized on two wheels for thirty years, and I needed to relearn how and get a license. The local cop said he wouldn't worry if I did my learning off highway and up in the mountain trails. In the beginning I had only a kilometer of dry road to work with, but gradually as the sun warmed the land the trail extended further and further into the back country.

When I was ready for pavement, I found a friend to be my coach. He had a Yamaha 1100. Riding high speed on pavement was not like riding mountain trails, but my friend helped me master the skill. The day came when I did pass my exam and became legal. He had shown me the ropes on the highway, and now he wanted to go up into God's country, this magical place where Matilda and I had played in the spring snow.

It was this afternoon that some adventurous pixie tickled the spirit, and we spontaneously left for the mountains. We followed the now dry trail for several hours, up through the rocky landscape. As we rose, the air cleared and cooled. All was well. The sun was shining and we were like a couple of little kids in grownups' bodies exploring universes where no-one has gone before.

We came up this last hill, the one below me now, and saw the mountains and valleys stretching out forever. We had crested the ridge and were looking at the downhill route to Nakusp. And then ..

Put, cough, put put, cough cough. Oh oh! And then silence. Matilda quit. This stupid idiot soul hadn't filled the tank before leaving, and Matilda, bless her, was out of gas. Forty miles up in the mountains with a gas tank as bare as a dry bone. Sigh.

My friend was not thrilled. He knew what was coming. He looked at me and I looked back feeling some serious chagrin.

"I'm sorry," said I sheepishly. Hmmm.



He got on his bike and headed back through the mountains to find some gas. He knew there was no point in asking me to abandon Matilda. That was just not on. So he bit the bullet for forty miles out and forty miles back, and here I sat, wondering about grizzlies and me without a noisemaker.

Every now and again I banged on the empty gas tank, and that helped I'm sure, and now I'm simply sitting here and drinking it all in, warming in the silver lining, the sun setting over these western mountains, sitting in silence with only dainty alpine flowers and this majestic tapestry.

Darkness did come, and so did my friend, and I did go home, safe and sound, and somewhat wiser.

**I set the camera on a rock and took this as  
I awaited my friend.**

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