

Heckman Pass rises gradually through twisting cattle country, and fly-in-lake fishing resorts, into Tweedsmuir Provincial Park. A set of gates mark the summit at Rainbow Range trailhead and snowmobile area, where the "steep" descent is marked by 12% grade warnings for the trucks. "Steep" is a relative term, not so noticeable with trees on both sides of the roadway. Then, at the first hairpin, no protection at the outside edge and hundred-foot-drops definitely get one's attention. Grade warnings now show 14%. The wide two-lane gravel narrows to an optimistic lane-and-a-half, then sheer wall on the right and just air on the left, a single track with turnouts. No real time to contemplate how many hundreds of feet the drop is now. Overlooks along the descent provide a chance to walk to the edge amid the bluish haze of warm brakes, but photos will never do justice to the extreme elevation changes. "Somewhere" in that chasm there is a stream, and somewhere those little specks in the distance will turn into cars. In less than ten miles the GPS recorded elevation changes from 5000 down to 287 at pavement. In the 45 miles remaining to Bella Coola through a narrow valley of pastures and farms, the rally was treated to views of snow-capped peaks, sheer rock faces, and avalanche chutes topped by blue glacial ice.

Side trips, as time allows, along Hwy 20 include: Farwell Canyon, for California Bighorn Sheep (also nearby Deer Park Reserve and Junction Sheep Range Park); Anahim Lake, home of endangered American White Pelicans; Rainbow Range Trail with dense Lodgepole pine changing to sub-alpine forest, home of one of BC's largest herds of Mountain Caribou; 845-foot Hunlen Falls at the bottom of "The Hill", six miles up Tote Road then a ten-mile steep trail; Fisheries Pool, along Hwy 20; or Alexander McKenzie Heritage Trailhead, honoring the first European to cross North America by land, reaching Bella Coola in 1793.

Day Three was a transit of 1.2 road miles and approximately 200 nautical miles aboard BC Ferries' 376-foot Queen of Chilliwack. There were spectacular views in North Bentinck Arm, with the Captain's commentary on early villages and native clans, recent commercial ventures that boomed then busted, and various whales,

sharks, and dolphins. There are two stops enroute for local commerce, and a stop to drop sea-kayaks into the water for primitive camping and to await the next ferry. During the night portion of the 24-hour cruise, under a full moon, the open ocean of Queen Charlotte Strait had 9- to 18-foot swells and buffeting winds, neither of which helps with sleep. Dawn brings the early-risers to the northern tip of Vancouver Island, a brief mandatory lifeboat drill, and then Bear Cove, near Port Hardy.

Day Four began as we left the ferry. Some well-rested; others definitely not. Nor'Wester Sweep, Kevin Barrows, with Jim and Sue Elder along for CP duties, came upon a vehicle that had left the roadway. Not being one to pass up an opportunity to help, Kevin extracted the errant vehicle in no time and went on down the road to take up another CP location. A turn at mileage, off the highway, with no signage, caught even Rally Chairman Jerry Hines off guard. The narrow strip of pavement marked the entrance to **Gold River TSD**; covering 39 miles of twisting, sometimes rough gravel, with numerous "narrow" and "very narrow" bridges but surprisingly light traffic. Competitors had been cautioned to watch for elk, however only a few smaller deer watched from the tree line.

The town of Gold River marked the return to pavement, and traffic, and construction. Transit speeds were moderate, however delays on route were plentiful until **Campbell River** and the 4-lane. Summer tourist traffic through the "Grove of the Giants" on the 2-lane entering **Port Alberni** brought a shorter than desired lunch break. Very heavy traffic, including one of the island's huge "off-road loggers" taking up most of the road, on the gravel 40-mile **Bamfield transit** necessitated a revised Car Zero Time to regroup the workers and competitors.

Carmanah-Walbran TSD left the busy haul road and gave competitors a feel for Canadian-style "brisk" rallies. (Special thanks to Brian Carriere of the Island Rallysport Club, for writing this section of the rally.) Eight miles of smooth gravel at 42 turned to rocky and rutted with no speed change. Then, very tight, narrow, twisting at 20, before smoothing somewhat

at 42 again. The two cars with 40-series, 17-inch street tires survived the rocks and maintained the speeds. Gravel rally tires on the leading Subaru may have been more of a prudent choice.

Bamfield South Transit led the rally through another 50 miles of twisting, dusty scenery along several picturesque lakes and campgrounds before the welcomed pavement and fuel near Cowichan. Another 58 miles brought the "weary" to Victoria's Traveller's Inn to relax briefly prior to the Awards Banquet at the elegant Canoe Brewpub, overlooking its own marina in Victoria Harbor. The route book called out 1155 miles... Your mileage may vary.

First "Cycle Touring", on his BMW R1150GS was Glenn Parker of Bend OR. "Buddy system" partner on another BMW, and farthest traveled, was Ken Westfall from Port Crane NY. Ken had the most mechanical trouble of all the riders, and came away from it all with the biggest smiles.

First in "Cycle SOP" on his Suzuki DL-1000 V-Strom, with street tires, was Dean Scheel, Lake Oswego OR. Dean chose one of the optional survey routes, with KTM 640 Adventure rider Paul Burke from Abbotsford BC (2nd overall on Day Two), and one of the Rainier four wheel drive Sweep crew. Paul's KTM "supertanker" had plenty of gas left, but Dean was "on reserve" and taking it easy before the pavement at Tatla Lake and fuel. They arrived four hours later than most of the others.

First SOP (cars) on their first rally were Tony and Siobhan Dodge, over from Wyoming, in an Audi A6. Both vowed to do Alcan, but "in a different car!"

First Unlimited went to Steve Richards of Everett WA, and Gary Reid of Olympia WA, in the Subie Impreza Wagon. Steve and Gary have been rallying for nearly 40-odd years each. Nor'Wester was first presented in 1967, and in 1969 the winner was—a much younger Steve Richards. None of us can remember which car he drove that year.

Results, photos, and more at www.alcan5000.com/05NwB

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