

CLR - The Cool Little Roads Colorado adventure

A couple of questions. 1) What's the most fun car to take a road trip in? 2) Where should you drive your Miata? A couple of answers. 1) A Miata 2) Colorado.

Several years ago, the Indy Miata Club went to Marietta, OH for the Marietta Madness tour. Four or five of us said, "Hey, let's extend this another day and go down into West Virginia!" We did and had a great time. We started doing trips as a small group, and we started planning our routes. Brian Liechty became our map master and on one of the first trip he planned, he pointed out a road that was just a squiggle on the map and said, "This looks like a cool little road!" And so the Cool Little Roads adventures began.

The group has anywhere from four to seven cars on a trip and Brian plans out the routes, but then we double check them as Brian always seems to include a gravel road or five on them.

Back of the Dragon, The Snake, Route 80, the Blue Ridge Parkway and so many roads we've forgotten their names. We've stayed in nice places (The Mountain Aire in Blowing Rock, NC) average places (name a big brand motel, we've stayed there) and odd, questionable, and not on the good side of town places, like the Count Gilu Motel in Welch, WV. (As a local said, "You're some brave cats!"). Commemorative t-shirts have been made for Cool Little Road (CLR) trips and the shirt for CLR 2018 said "This is the best gravel road we've been on all day!". We gave Brian Liechty a lot of good natured ribbing about some of the roads he's taken us on.

After the 2018 fall trip, we were messaging back and forth about what to do next and a trip to the Ozarks was thrown out as a suggestion. We then started going crazy... "Hey, Colorado!" "Then we could go west through Wyoming." "Then over to the Pacific Coast Highway!" "California!". "Then to Hawaii!". Then Brian L. said, "Hey, I can get us rooms at a time share in Colorado for cheap." The planning for a week long adventure in Colorado.

We started to get really serious about the trip. We decided it had to be at least seven or eight days. Brian started planning the routes for each day and we started double checking his roads.

Saturday, June 1st - Four cars left Indiana and started heading west (Brian Liechty, Roger Burrill, Ryan Rosenogle, and Andrew Zeller with Alicia as his navigator/photographer). Sara joined them as they zoomed by Lawrence, Kansas and they headed for Hays for the night. Mileage from Indy to Hays? 740 miles!

Sunday, June 2 - Sunday morning we hit the road fairly early as it was going to be a long day (566 miles) through the mountains. We headed to Limon, CO and then left the interstate and headed southwest to Colorado Springs. A quick lunch and gas stop and then off to Pikes Peak! Oh, look, clouds are building up, how pretty! A quick tour through the Garden of the Gods, and then we started up the road to Pikes Peak. It started to rain, we got in line with slower traffic and started to smell the overheating of brakes from the cars coming down. Brian (our fearless leader) watched the temperature gauge on his roadster start to rise as we went slower and our elevation increased. We finally pulled over and he decided the best course of action was to leave Sunny on the side of the road and let it cool down. Brian would ride with Roger and he'd get the car on the way back down. As we pulled back out on the road, the rain turned to a light snow, but some of us were still driving top down.

Arriving at the top (last part of the road was gravel, of course) we parked, put tops up and enjoyed the view from 14,000 plus feet through the snow and clouds. Then the thunder and lightning started with snow coming down, so we decided to leave. Down to the bottom in a snowstorm and back into sunshine.

We headed south through Cripple Creek, then over to Colorado 9 up through Breckinridge, There was still a lot of snow in the upper elevations so the views were drop dead gorgeous. Leaving the two lane roads we jumped onto I-70 for the last leg of the day to Avon where we were staying for the next four nights. While we were having our adventure in the mountains, Tom Lewis was an interstate warrior westbound from Elizabethtown, KY and rolled into Avon about 30 minutes after we arrived on Sunday evening.

Monday, June 3 - As we were all pretty beat, we decided to switch the planned drives on Monday with those from a "shorter" day. We headed east on I-70 and at Georgetown headed south on CO Rd 381 over the Guanella Pass. This 22 mile drive became the first highlight of our trip as far as receiving a "cool little road" designation. Great curves, great pavement, scenic views with mountain lakes and a creek flowing by the road, snow in the treeless upper elevations and wildlife crossing the road (Look! Bighorn sheep!). Over to CO 285, up to Evergreen and then over to CO Rd 103, Squaw Pass Road. We were going to drive the road to the summit of Mt. Evans but it was not open due to snow, so that was put on the "Next time!" list. We then headed east to Lookout Mountain. After stopping, Sara was put in the lead and we headed down a very nice windy road going into Golden which was made less enjoyable by a car going 16 miles an hour. Sigh. We turned onto CO6 (Clear Creek Canyon Road) which took us back onto I-70 and back to Avon. Another great driving day, only about 250 miles!.

Tuesday, June 4 - Tuesday morning found us heading west on I-70 to Wolcott and then north on CO131. Oh, wait? Where's Roger? Somehow, when we left Avon he thought we were headed east. Out of range of our walkie-talkies and no cell service, he decided not to try and catch up with us though we really did expect him to appear in our rearview mirrors. (We would meet up with him later on the eastern leg of the drive.) The drive north on CO381 was through open country with a steady elevation rise and mountains off in the distance. We drove east across CO134, then jumped onto US40 to Granby and south through Winter Park. The road down from Winter Park to Berthoud Falls was a four lane, big elevation change, switchback, hairpin heaven of a drive. Everyone had big smiles. A short drive east on I-70 and then we turned north on CO119. We made contact with Roger who had continued east and done some recon for us. The original plan was to drive to Estes Park and then go up as far as we could into Rocky Mountain National Park. We knew Trail Ridge Road through the park had been closed due to a snowstorm (next time!), so we planned to just turn around and head south again. Roger had driven to Estes Park and advised against us going there as due to road construction, heavy traffic, it was a zoo. We had lunch in Nederland and plotted our next move.

Brian found a route that, to this day, we had no clue where we were. We headed east, there was a sign that said we were in Boulder County, but Brian said we weren't going to Boulder proper. We did find a short gravel road, so that made Brian's day. Back west to CO119, south to Central City and then down to I-70 (the great Colorado connector road!) and over to Loveland Pass Road. Another fun road up to the pass for a great photo op and then we drove by all the ski resorts in the area to Dillon, back onto I-70 and back to Avon. Daily mileage? Unknown due to the many changes of the planned route, but another great day in Colorado.

Wednesday, June 5 - This was the day we headed to Independence Pass. We had been watching the webcam run by the Colorado Highway Department all spring with fingers crossed that it would open by the time of our trip and it was. We headed east on I-70 and then south at Copper Mountain on CO19. We then turned west on CO82, went through Twin Lakes and started the climb up to the pass. The snow was about ten feet high on one side of the road and a long ways down on the other! We stopped at the top of the pass and chatted with some people who were going to ski down. They had been dropped off and would hike another couple of hundred feet up and then ski down the mountain. We drove down the mountain in our cars through Aspen and Snowmass and at Basalt, turned onto Frying Pan Road. This was

a road that we knew ended in gravel and we would eventually turn around, but on the map the paved section looked like a cool little road and with its name, we had to drive it. We drove further on the road than Brian had planned just to verify it did turn into gravel. Spoiler alert, it did. We turned around and headed back to Basalt for lunch, then headed to Glenwood Springs and once again, jumped onto I-70. We drove west to Rifle and then north to Rifle Falls. We turned around and headed back to I-70. Tom and Sara decided to skip the last portion of the planned route as they were tired and would head straight back to Avon. The others would take a route that was supposed to be fun with only a few miles of gravel.

Tom and Sara departed and after about 15 miles they noticed the mileage marker numbers were decreasing. Oops, they were heading west, not the right direction. (Hey, they were tired.) We got turned around and then drive through Glenwood Canyon. The section of I-70 through the canyon is about 12 miles long and features tunnels, 40 bridges and viaducts and miles of retaining walls. The eastbound lanes extend cantilevered over the Colorado River and the westbound lanes are suspended on a viaduct several feet above the canyon floor hugging the north side of the Colorado River while the Union Pacific tracks can be seen on the south side. An amazing and beautiful piece of interstate to drive.

The other cars were having an adventure themselves. The three miles of gravel turned out to be about 30. Whoops. There were some very dirty cars in the lot that night! Mileage for the day? No clue.

Thursday, June 6 - We packed up all the cars for an early start for our drive to Durango where we would spend the night. Wait, Brian locked his keys in his car! Minor surgery on his top with duct tape covering the slit and we were on our way. We headed west on I-70 through Glenwood Canyon and then south on CO82 to CO133. Andrew and Alicia decided to some exploring on their own on their own and would meet us in Durango in the evening. The rest of us continued south to CO92 where we followed the Gunnison River into Gunnison on US50 for lunch, then backtracked west to CO149 and continued south where we drove along the headwaters of the Rio Grande. We had several "stop and smell the roses" stops, another stop to let Brian's engine cool down (anytime we were over 10,000 feet it seemed the temperature started to rise....) and had a spirited discussion of how long it would take a Miata to hit bottom of a deep canyon. (We didn't know but asked that whoever did it take pictures on the way down.) We decided to stop at Chimney Rock National Monument outside of Durango, but arrived too late to go to the visitor's center, so took pictures from below. We all arrived in Durango, ate a good dinner at Serious Texas Bar-B-Q, Brian learned how to use the self service car wash and with over 420 miles under our belts for the day, we called it another great day.

Friday, June 7 - Off to Grand Junction to visit the Mecca for Miata owners, Flyin' Miata, a planned drive over about 260 miles for the day. Heading north on CO550, the mountains were beautiful, still covered in deep snow. The stretch of CO550 from Silverton to Ouray is known as the Million Dollar Road and has steep cliffs, narrow lanes, and a lack of guardrails; the ascent of Red Mountain Pass is marked with a number of hairpin curves used to gain elevation, and again, narrow lanes for traffic cut directly into the sides of mountains. Yes, a fun road to drive, but really hard to pass the slow moving cars and trucks. After Ouray, we drove through farmland but after turning onto CO65, we started to climb again as we headed towards Grand Mesa. There was no traffic and nice sweeping turns as we climbed over a mile and then headed back down. No overheating problems either! We continued north and then once again jumped onto I-70 for a short stretch where we headed to 499 35 Rd, Palisade, CO, the home of Flyin' Miata. Brian had called earlier to ask if someone could take a peek at his car, so they were expecting us.

We arrived, met Teri Cardell, and got a tour of the shop. Oh my. Project cars, customer cars, Bill Cardell's cars. We tried to persuade Andrew to spend the money and get the Habu V8

conversion instead of going to law school, but he didn't go for it. Jeremy, Mike, and Matt hooked up their computer and took Brian's car for a test drive and gave him several suggestions for his overheating problem from very simple (change the ratio of water to coolant in the radiator) to very expensive (there's no problem time or money can't solve!). As our visit was ending, one of the guys asked if we were driving over to Moab on US128 from I-70. We mumbled it wasn't really in our plans and he stated "It would be a crime to be this close and not drive 128 to Moab." Being the law abiding citizens that we are, we headed into Utah. Memo: check your fuel gauge before leaving Grand Junction. We found out that gas stations are very limited on that stretch of I-70!

The drive down US128 was stupendous! Great scenery, the road ran along side the Colorado River with the red cliffs towering over us. We drove to Moab, turned around and headed back up to I-70 and Grand Junction. A quick turnoff outside of Grand Junction and there we were at the entrance to the Colorado National Monument. It was about 8:30, so only Brian and Ryan did the drive while the rest of us opted to head back to our motel. The reports from the Rimrock drive ranged from "OMG!" to "Terrifyingly awesome". Brian drove it once, but Ryan drove it several times. In the dark! The drive was added to the "Next time!" list. The addition of driving to Moab to our route added miles for a total of over 400 miles for the day (more for Ryan and Brian!). Another really great day on the road.

Saturday, June 8 - Our merry band decreased by two. Tom headed west to Salt Lake City to pick up wife Laura and then motor on to Portland, OR to see his daughter and then drive south on the Pacific Coast highway. Roger left us to drive straight to Denver to visit his daughter and grandkids. Brian, Ryan, Andrew and Alicia, and Sara started a long, eastward trek towards home, with over 800 miles to drive for the day. We headed south on US50 and then east towards Gunnison to Salida. We stopped at Royal Gorge and most of us walked the bridge and peered down at the river and railroad tracks 1200 feet below. Lunch in Canon City, then up CO115 to Colorado Springs and then we headed towards Limon and I-70. The clouds were beautiful but then we realized we were watching two fronts approach each other. We stopped for fuel in Goodland, KS and the sky was black and wind was blowing with heavy gusts. We checked the radar and it was decided to get back on the road, we're having dinner in Hays!

The wind became worse, the clouds became darker and it began to rain hard. (We were sure that Alicia was on the floor of the car looking for a basement to hide in.) We had driven about seven miles when it began to hail. Then as it came down even harder, cars ahead of us decided to stop under a bridge to get out of the hail. The problem was that the cars were stopped in the middle of I-70 under a bridge, blocking all lanes! (Note from Sara J: stupid! stupid! stupid!) We just sat at a dead stop on I-70, flashers on and hoped someone wouldn't pile into us and the cars behind us. Ryan watched in his rear view mirror as a semi came up behind him; no place for him to go! The hail came down for a good five minutes and weather alerts were sounding on our phones and radios with tornado warnings. Luckily the twisters were to the south of us, so at least we weren't going to experience that. When the hail stopped, we started moving but there was so much standing water, Sara wasn't driving over 30mph. Andrew went zipping by but Brian and Ryan kept me company. Hail was piled up beside the road like a snowbank.

The rain stopped, the road dried off and we were soon driving at speed (the speed limit in Kansas on I-70 is 75mph, so at speed is 80-82!) and enjoying a great lightning show high in the clouds all around us. A fuel stop and quick bite to eat at Hays and back on the road. Brian peeled off in Topeka for his motel. Ryan and Sara continued to Lawrence where Andrew and Alicia had arrived earlier. Sara pulled into her apartment's parking lot at 2:30AM with 3603 total miles on her odometer for the trip. Another long, exciting day.

June 9– Sara had said she'd meet the Indy folks for breakfast, but instead slept in. The remaining three drivers headed east toward home. It was rather uneventful except for some rains in eastern Illinois Andrew and Ryan split off for home at Indy and Brian headed north, finally arriving at his home about 10:30. He reported a total of 4855 miles in eight and a half days. Roger rolled into Indy later that week and Tom returned about 10 days later.

Altogether an awesome adventure with awesome Miata folk.