

YELLOWSTONE
NATIONAL
PARK



The Scenic Route

Words by Ryno Verster.

Photos by Ryno Verster and Charles Heleker.

Last issue we travelled with Peter Kyte across the US for the East/West Mini meet. Ryno and Ella Verster from South Africa made the same trip, but at a much more leisurely pace.

My wife Ella and I had some great fun by attending the Mini 45th Celebrations in Rockford, Illinois, last year.

Our friend Charles Heleker in Seattle bought two of my restored Wolseley Minis a couple of years ago, and we had a deal that whenever we visit them in America, we will be able to use the grey one, nicknamed Earl Grey or EG for short, for some travelling.

The visit never materialized due to Rand/Dollar exchange rates and other reasons, but with the Mini's 45th birthday in June 2004 on the horizon, Charles and his partner Dorothea started to lean on us to visit.

We arrived in Seattle on Saturday 19 June 2004 and left there very early on Tuesday morning, to attend the "West Meets East" Mini gathering and the 45th birthday celebrations, some 90 miles North of Chicago.

Ella and I used EG, while Charles travelled in Biscuit (the other one that he bought from

me). Just to keep the two South African Wolseleys in check, Jerry Miller joined us in Charles' 1968 Cooper S cop car, which in its time did duty in Liverpool, England. So on Tuesday morning, the "Class of 1968" was ready for a one-of-a-kind Mini adventure, generating more Mini Memories.

Charles and Jerry did some immaculate route planning for the entire trip, and we seldom used the freeways.

Mount Rainier National Park was the highlight of Day 1, which ended after 584km of travelling, in the very small town of Dayton, still in Washington state.

Day 2 took us into Idaho and some scenic travelling along the Clearwater River. We stayed right on the riverbank for the best part of 150km, then through the Lolo Pass, for a total of 766km.

Imagine a road sign cautioning "Winding Road next 77 miles." Pure Mini Heaven!!

Day 3 was into Wyoming and a Yellowstone National Park day, entering from Yellowstone West and exiting at the Northeast gate for the real adventure of the trip.

The Beartooth Pass is usually only opened for public use at the beginning of June each year. It is, however, not uncommon that in years of very heavy snowfall in winter, it remains closed for longer. We were in luck, as

it was open, and the narrow, very steep pass (with not too many Armco barriers) suited the Mini's cornering qualities perfectly.

The small capacity engine provided the perfect excuse to negotiate every corner at whatever speed you were travelling, to be able to survive the next steep incline (OK, Ella believed it, and it was sheer fun capitalizing on this handy excuse!).

If you would like to read the rest of this story, grab your copy of The Mini Experience from your local newsagent, or subscribe today.



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Ryno & Ella Verster with EG.



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Charles Heleker & Jerry Miller.



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Charles Heleker with Biscuit.



Not a common sight on American roads.