Few regions in the United States have more low-traffic miles of wonderful, twisty road and stunning natural beauty than western Colorado and southern Utah. This goal this time is to link the great motorcycle roads between Gypsum, Colorado, and Torrey, Utah, with decent breakfasts and superb dinners. The task falls to No Bad Roads team member Jon Ezequelle. It’s never easy to create the perfect trip, and as the date to leave gets closer, routes are exchanged and itineraries checked and rechecked. Is Jon up to the challenge?

Jon’s brother David and photographer Ron Yara ride from San Francisco and I from Phoenix, meeting in Green River, Utah, for one evening before making a final assault on Interstate 70 and the start of our adventure in Gypsum, Colorado. An early detour to Moab for breakfast makes it convenient to ride one of the most beautiful motorcycle roads on earth, 45 miles on Highway 128 along the Colorado River from Moab to Cisco. With Arches National Park to the north and Castle Valley to the south, our progress is slowed with photo-ops and slack-jawed awe at the vistas of deeply colored red-rock cliffs unique to the area around Moab.

In Cisco, a defunct and collapsing Phillips 66 filling station adorned with a mural makes an interesting backdrop to our discussion of the fate of this long-abandoned town. Established as a watering stop for the railroad steam engines in the 1880s, it was a typical sheepherding town until oil and natural gas were discovered. It enjoyed a brief boom before the bottom fell out of oil and I-70 bypassed the town. Cisco’s population peaked in the 1940s at about 200. Its most famous citizen, geologist Charles Sheen, discovered uranium south of Moab and opened the Mi Vida mine, accumulated over $125M, and became one of the richest men of his day. Sheen moved his family from their Cisco tarpaper shack to a hilltop mansion in Moab, where he invited the entire population of Moab to annual parties.
Arriving in Gypsum late afternoon in one of the downpours that had relentlessly pestered us since the Colorado border, we move the drenched bikes into the garage. Over dinner we plan the next day and the official start of our journey.

Cool, but thankfully without rain, we head south on Highway 92 through Cardiff, stopping in Carbondale at the Village Smithy Restaurant for breakfast. Locals leave personalized coffee mugs on a shelf. Blueberry waffles and fresh Norwegian lox are terrific.

The sun starts to break through with enough consistency to warm us a bit as we point the bikes south on Highway 133 and ride over the McClure Pass to Paonia. Past steep, majestic and rugged mountains, we cross the summit and stare into the clear, deep-blue water of the Paonia Reservoir. At Hotchkiss, we switch to Highway 92 to Crawford, riding along the rim of Black Canyon. We motor into Gunnison for a cup of good, strong coffee at The Bean, before doubling back and taking Highway 149 to Powder - born and then south into Lake City, luxuriating in mile after mile of twists and turns on well-maintained macadam. Just prior to arriving at the Matterhorn Motel and Cabins, I ride the yellow Gold Wing out onto one of those rickety bridges crossing a rapidly flowing stream. It makes a nice photograph, but balancing the sidestand on a cross brace with nothing but air and rushing water beside and below is one of those “better in theory than practice” moments.

The A&A Steakhouse at 300 Third Street in Lake City is in transition. A brilliant chef from Brazil, Solande Moneta, is transforming this bar/steakhouse with a 1800s feel into “SOL,” a trendy spot with sunburst decals on the windows and authentic Brazilian menu additions named for famous beaches in Brazil. From the traditional Caipirinha, Brazil’s national cocktail to start, and all the way through to the Bolo Pratinho (chocolate, cream and coconut) for dessert, the food is delicious and different.

Next morning at the Mocha Moose Coffee House, we smile at a sign on the wall which reads, “Unattended children will be given an espresso and a free puppy.”

Picking up Highway 149, we bag another pass or two as we head south to Creede for breakfast. We park the bikes along Main Street and less than a block away find “The Firehouse,” with a large round oak table in the front window and firefighter gear on the walls. Our kind of place! Our eggs, hash browns, bacon and toast are just the ticket.

Picking up Highway 160 out of South Fork, we ride a nearly deserted stretch of amazing big, sweeping curves between towering mountains: Mount Hope, Chris Mountain, Middle, Pargin, Indian and Grassy Mountains and, finally, Little Baldy and Baldy Mountains as we turn onto Highway 550 and make our way into Carbon Junction to gas up. From there it’s a short ride to Durango and a stop for quality caffeine. In Durango we find excellent espresso across the street from the Durango & Silverton Narrow Gauge Railroad Company’s train depot. Tourists love riding the century-old train on its once daily, three-and-a-half-hour trip to Silverton. We don’t tarry long and are soon on the road. Unlike the train, we arrive in Silverton less than an hour later, again being treated to a flawless highway, twisting and turning like a jump rope left lying on the ground.

Silverton is close to our evening’s destination of Ouray, Colorado. This small, picturesque town is surrounded by 14,000-foot peaks and is home to the finest Best Western hotel ever—the Twin Peaks Lodge. This incredible find exceeds expectations with its spacious rooms filled with super-soft beds, plush robes and thick, luxurious towels, not to mention two hot springs (outdoor and indoor) to bring relief to our saddle sore bodies.

After a refreshing soak in the hot springs, we enjoy a short walk to the Bon Ton Restaurant on the lower level of the recently restored St. Elmo Hotel. Not yet open, this nine-room hotel is being restored to its full Victorian flair. The antique furniture and new paint on the lobby ceiling show how the Grande Southern Railway fend off bankruptcy for many years. Below: Mountain valleys can be as beautiful as the peaks.

Above: We make considerably better time than those who traveled in this wagon. Right: Linking great motorcycle roads between Gypsum, Colorado, and Torrey, Utah, guarantees fabulous scenery in the latest “No Bad Roads” series. Below right: Looking out from an abandoned filling station in Cisco, Utah.
incredible attention to detail. Stairs off the lobby descend to this charming wood-paneled bar and restaurant. The din of chattering locals provides a comforting soundtrack for the Bon Ton’s killer Caesar Salad and luscious entrees.

The following morning we leave Highway 550 at Ridgway on Highway 62 to Placerville and take Highway 145 into Telluride for a quick coffee, then back out Highway 145, south, to Dolores, a truly incredible mountain road! Having previously ridden this road in sleet and fog, it is thrilling—in a good way—when dry and clear. In Dolores we pause to marvel at the “Galloping Goose,” a cross between a school bus and a railway locomotive. Seven of these rail buses operated on the Rio Grande Southern Railway between Ridgway and Durango beginning in the early ’30s as a way to keep the railroad from bankruptcy. With the rails and trestles in poor repair and unable to safely run heavy engines, the railroad turned to these lighter-weight, gasoline powered buses to transport passengers, light freight and mail. With increased reliance on trucks, the rail line was eventually completely abandoned by 1951.

We take 184 along the south side of the McPhee Reservoir and pick up Highway 491 to head toward Utah. We elect to take the 25-mile straight road to Monticello, Utah. Our previous plan was to go north on Highway 141 up to Highway 90 to Naturita and then west to the La Sal Junction before heading south to our hotel for the night in Blanding. While technically a “bad road” given how straight it is, the extra time gained allows for a stop at the Peace Tree Café in Monticello. Their smoked salmon Panini is out of this world—so good, in fact, that we found another Peace Tree Café in Blanding the
next morning and had it again. Once home, I called them for the recipe and prepared it in my own kitchen. Delicious! We find the coffee, sandwiches and other treats at the Peace Tree cafés in Monticello and Blanding exceptionally good and enhanced by friendly people—a most welcome stop.

After a forgettable night at the Comfort Inn and the restaurant next door, we catch Highway 95 just south of Blanding to Natural Bridges National Monument. We make the detour into the park to investigate these amazing natural stone bridges, picturing in our minds how cool it would be to see a motorcycle on the top of some of these wonders of nature. We cross the north end of Glen Canyon where the water level is the lowest it has been in years. Nevertheless, the view from the lookout is breathtaking and the like-new blacktop roads are nearly empty, allowing our speed to climb as we navigate wide, sweeping turns into and out of the canyon. At Hanksville, Highway 24 leads us west. We take it slowly through the stunning Capitol Reefs and pause frequently to watch the sun play along the various ledges.

We close out the day at Torrey and the Days Inn and a much-anticipated dinner. Café Diablo and its remarkable offbeat vertical food is one of the best reasons to visit Torrey. It is listed by The New York Times in “1,000 Places to See Before You Die.” From the street, the low-slung yellow buildings of Café Diablo provide few clues to the wonders in food that await inside. Owner and chef Gary Pankow graduated from the legendary Culinary Institute of America in New York and nightly cooks up things like crown rack of glazed ribs, slow roasted in chipotle, molasses and rum glaze and served with squash, zucchini and mashed sweet potatoes. Each plate is meticulously constructed as an edible work of art. Taste buds, meet Leonardo da Vinci!

The next morning the group splits. Two head back to California via the Grande Staircase-Escalante National Park, the Dixie National Forest and Cedar City (earning performance awards from the Utah highway patrol before leaving the state). I head south to Kanab and then into Arizona at Page. At Flagstaff I can’t resist riding through Sedona before continuing home to Phoenix. Our trip organizer heads back to Gypsum, satisfied that he’s more than met the heavy mantle of a perfect trip—great roads, good food, decent weather and superb company.

Two weeks after getting back home, a package arrives in the mail from the trip photographer. Ron has assembled his photographic highlights of the trip into a book, which he titles “Head Out on the Highway.” Good idea.