

'Aren't you Bullet's girl?'

In Canada, Dave Smith found the local bikers to be very 'friendly'

L Killing time before college, my friend Greg and I decided to visit the wilds of Ontario and Quebec, keeping it cheap through a subtle combination of camping and that time-honoured freeloading skill of "calling in unannounced on distant relatives".

We flew to Toronto, then stayed there for a couple of days of "acclimatisation" (drinking beer and playing pool). We'd been promised some camping gear by one of Greg's second cousins, and drove our hire car a few hours north to collect it. Canada was already making the grade — it was big, there were lakes and, if the road signs were anything to go by, there was the promise of exciting wildlife.

Hungover from a night of extreme acclimatisation with Greg's kin, we headed out on the real trip. After a long, long drive, we made it to Quebec province. It was starting to get dark, so we scoured the map for camp sites, using the tried and tested method of picking the ones with the funny names. Which is how we ended up in Maniwaki.

The camp-site guy told us to help ourselves to logs for our fire and showed us where the axe was. After a quick photo session of us looking rugged — in carefully considered check shirts — with the axe, it was time to walk into town for what I imagined would be some good times and back-slapping bonhomie with rough trapper types.

Hoggs Tavern looked just about right. It had a flashing neon sign and a few Harleys outside — both okay in my book. Greg and I wandered in and tried not to look too terrified by the sight of some serious hombres in full biker gear, looking us up and down. They were all leather, beer bellies and whiskers.

After 10 minutes, one of the big guys from World of Leather called out. I glanced up. He was looking directly at me.

"You guys on the road?"

"Oh, er, yeah."

"You wanna join us?"

CONFESSIONS OF A TOURIST

For all their filthy language, hair and blatant neglect of their abs, you couldn't hope to meet a nicer bunch of guys. Mikey, Pit Bull, Big John and Bullet were the town's resident "outlaws". They introduced us to their girlfriends, too, with a gesture at the table opposite and a "Those are our old ladies".

After some serious drinking, I stumbled off to find the loo. One of the girls was standing outside, leaning against the wall.

"How's it going, Dave?" she said. Maybe she had never seen anyone with so little facial hair, but for some reason she grabbed my head and snogged my face off. Then she went to the loo.

I went back into the bar and told Greg what had happened. "You prat," he said. "He'll kill both of us if he finds out. Why do you think he's called Bullet? 'Cos he's a fast runner?"

Every time I went for a pee, though, there she was. Lips at the ready. And... it was fun.

"But, Amy, what about Bullet?" I asked. "Oh, he don't mind." "What? He knows?" "No, but he don't own me!" And she kissed me again. Really well.

Greg and I finally made it out alive and staggered back to our tent, promising to meet the guys — and girls — the next day for a hunting trip. We didn't show.

To this day, the throb of an approaching Harley still brings a hunted expression to my face, because a guy can just tell — I'm sure he *would* have minded.