

## RetroRideReport: Japan in West Virginia, 04/ 27-29, 2012

Every possibility has positive and negative aspects. Medium and large groups have certain advantages but so do small groups. In this case, only three of us set out on this early season ride to West Virginia. We rode Japanese bikes to a Japanese bath house/bed and breakfast located in the mountains on the border of Virginia and West Virginia. Last year we did the same trip with 7 or 8 riders but there was a crash which changed our plans mid course. This year there would be no mishaps as we sampled every road on the extensive route sheets.



The weather can be if-fy this early in the season but we all had decent quality rain gear and electric vests. The TX750, the CB500T and the KZ750 twin were all equipped with electrical outlets and, in the case of the Honda 500, a low beam cut out switch necessitated by the low output charging system.

We had the benefit of a good quantity of quality breakfast provided by my wife Lynn, and donned warm weather gear, plugged our vests in and set out under overcast skies. It was in the low 50's: not that cold, but on open bikes with high bars and no windshields or fairings we would be singing songs of praise to our Widder vests before the day was done. I wore my vest close to the skin but still felt cold until I realized it wasn't working. Before the end of the day I was able to isolate a broken wire in the switch and once repaired it threatened to burn my nipples but I did stay nice and warm. As usual we followed obscure back roads south and west. This maximizes riding pleasure and minimizes traffic encountered and it takes a lot more time. I was surprised at the end of the day when a 175 mile Map Quest route became a 320 mile RetroTour route.

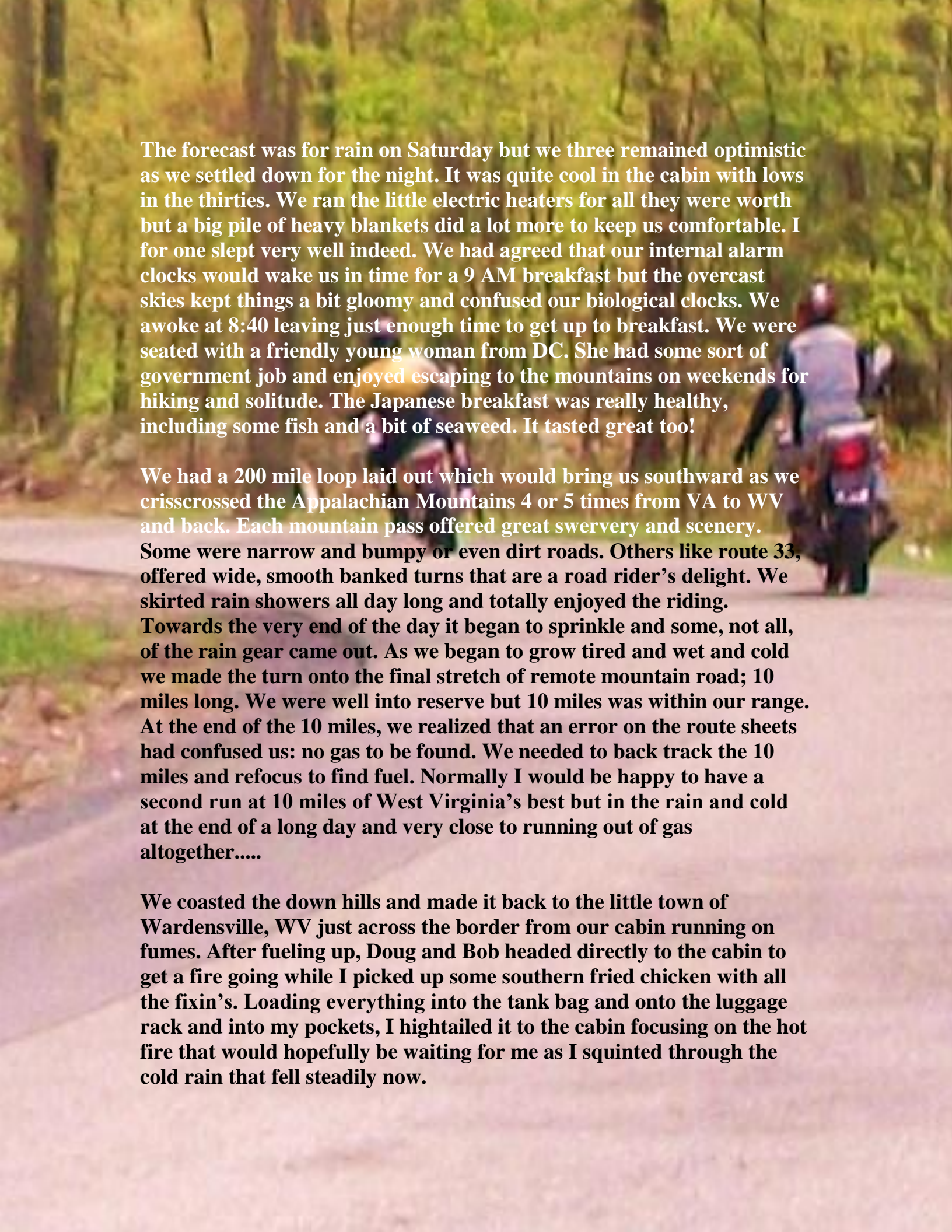


All three bikes ran strong but an annoying oil leak on the KZ forced us to clean the rear wheel at every stop. With no wrong turns and no major issues we arrived at Pembroke Springs, VA at 7:30. We rode the bikes through the small creek which isolates the primitive hunting cabin from the rest of the posh B&B. While parking up on the protected patio I noticed

a goose nesting in the outdoor fireplace/grill. The nest was literally lined with stones on three sides: truly a protected fortress for the 16 eggs surrounded by a down nest where 'mom' sat eyeing us but never once flinching; totally dedicated to keeping those eggs warm. We unloaded, washed and walked up the hill to the main building where our gracious hosts provided cold beer and a delicious Japanese style dinner which included chicken and vegetable curries and plenty of rice. It was absolutely delicious and exactly what we needed after a long day.

With room for as many as 8 or 10 in the cabin we had our choice of sleeping accommodations but once claiming a spot we had to experience the baths. Hot spring water is cooled to 104 degrees and piped into one of two stone tubs, each as large as 4 hot tubs. Each bath has its own private room with glass windows from floor to ceiling allowing unobstructed views of the mountains all around. There are no chemicals in the water and to keep it that way the Japanese custom of nude bathing after a thorough shower is followed. This doesn't sit so well with some "biker types" but those of us who felt reasonably secure in our masculinity enjoyed a hot bath "au naturel". What could possibly be more pleasant after a long ride in cool weather?



The background image is a blurred photograph of a dirt path winding through a forest. Two people on motorcycles are visible in the distance, riding away from the viewer. The trees are lush and green, suggesting a summer or early autumn setting. The overall tone is peaceful and scenic.

The forecast was for rain on Saturday but we three remained optimistic as we settled down for the night. It was quite cool in the cabin with lows in the thirties. We ran the little electric heaters for all they were worth but a big pile of heavy blankets did a lot more to keep us comfortable. I for one slept very well indeed. We had agreed that our internal alarm clocks would wake us in time for a 9 AM breakfast but the overcast skies kept things a bit gloomy and confused our biological clocks. We awoke at 8:40 leaving just enough time to get up to breakfast. We were seated with a friendly young woman from DC. She had some sort of government job and enjoyed escaping to the mountains on weekends for hiking and solitude. The Japanese breakfast was really healthy, including some fish and a bit of seaweed. It tasted great too!

We had a 200 mile loop laid out which would bring us southward as we crisscrossed the Appalachian Mountains 4 or 5 times from VA to WV and back. Each mountain pass offered great swervy and scenery. Some were narrow and bumpy or even dirt roads. Others like route 33, offered wide, smooth banked turns that are a road rider's delight. We skirted rain showers all day long and totally enjoyed the riding. Towards the very end of the day it began to sprinkle and some, not all, of the rain gear came out. As we began to grow tired and wet and cold we made the turn onto the final stretch of remote mountain road; 10 miles long. We were well into reserve but 10 miles was within our range. At the end of the 10 miles, we realized that an error on the route sheets had confused us: no gas to be found. We needed to back track the 10 miles and refocus to find fuel. Normally I would be happy to have a second run at 10 miles of West Virginia's best but in the rain and cold at the end of a long day and very close to running out of gas altogether.....

We coasted the down hills and made it back to the little town of Wardensville, WV just across the border from our cabin running on fumes. After fueling up, Doug and Bob headed directly to the cabin to get a fire going while I picked up some southern fried chicken with all the fixin's. Loading everything into the tank bag and onto the luggage rack and into my pockets, I hightailed it to the cabin focusing on the hot fire that would hopefully be waiting for me as I squinted through the cold rain that fell steadily now.



We feasted on that bird and sat very close to a roaring blaze, playing trivial pursuit into the wee hours. OK, the truth is we fell dead asleep at 10 o'clock. It was much warmer this second night since Bob slept right next to the fire and fed it wood all night long.  
FIRE.....GOOOOD.



We decided to set out for home early on Sunday morning with plans to eat breakfast at the “Fifty Mile Café” (which is *any* eatery at around the 50 mile mark). Our route initially followed some of the best roads I’ve been on in some time. We began by following a scenic byway north: state route 600. We crossed into WV near Siler then picked up some incredible tiny county roads (CR17, CR13, and CR7). Passing through sleepy villages festooned with Confederate flags and with names like Shanghai and Boyd’s Gap these ranged from bumpy curvy narrow lanes that snaked up and down the mountains to well graded dirt roads like Hampshire Grade, and Back Creek Road where we found abundant traction and no dust thanks to the damp conditions the day before. At this early hour on a Sunday morning we saw just 1 or 2 other vehicles every hour or so. Listening carefully, I thought I could hear banjos dueling. The sun was low in sky but brilliant nonetheless; it promised to be a glorious day.



That 50 miles to breakfast produced some



outstanding scenery. The road followed a high ridge affording spectacular views to the left and to the right. The luscious curvy roads begged to be ridden at breakneck speed but the awe inspiring views demanded that we slow enough to rubber neck, trying to take it all in. That run to breakfast on Sunday morning was the highlight of the trip for



me. We three felt a special bond that had been forged by our sharing of a moment in time which will long be remembered. Breakfast was buffet style at Stuckey's and I think I had about 8 plates stacked up in front of me by the time we rolled out of there. Regarding the morning's ride, we all agreed that *it just doesn't get any better*. (If you haven't heard Dueling Banjos lately, Google it right now and listen to the whole thing; you'll get 'the feeling'.)

We continued following our route sheets, crossing the Potomac into Maryland from Shepherdstown. Civil War monuments were all around us as



we made our way through Boonsboro then over the Cacoctin Mountains where for once we had the road nearly to ourselves for a three miles downhill run through the twisties paralleling a roaring creek so closely that the overriding sensation is akin to whitewater rafting. After Thurmont, familiar routes led us north and east to Kennett Square. Even now, two weeks later the good feelings remain. A ride like this is just good for the soul.