

PA's LITTLE SWITZERLAND

This trip was originally scheduled for 2 weeks earlier but a freak autumn snow storm pushed us back. There were just 4 of us participating; only the most adventurous riders will sign up for a ride this late in the season. We were hoping for one more weekend of pleasant weather and RetroTours finally won the meteorological lottery big time: brilliant sunshine and peak temperatures in the 60's! I was totally psyched for a great ride.

Each rider had his choice of the fleet, the only stipulation being that every bike should have electric start and an alternator capable of running electric clothing. This would allow us to stay warm and avoid overheating from the exertion of kick starting big twins while wearing winter riding gear. Bill chose the Yamaha



XS650. There had been one in his past and he wanted to see if it was as much fun as he remembered. Jon chose a 500 Honda. This would be the first RetroTour for the most recent addition to the fleet: a 1976 CB500T. Doug demands comfort and chose the Moto Guzzi with it's relaxed gait, wide seat and upright seating position. I chose the Harley XLCR because the torque-y beast is a blast to ride PLUS it has a little fairing to help ward off the cold.

Each bike was equipped with a large tank bag to store gear. Granola bars and charcoal/iron reactive hand warmers were distributed and adaptors were made so everyone could plug in their various brands of electric vest and I was trying out a new pair of electric gloves powered by self contained lithium ion batteries. OK so maybe all this electronic gear is not so 'Retro' but survival above all; this is what we have to do to ride in the late autumn.

A more basic approach to staying warm is to keep your belly full. We got off to a good start on that score by enjoying a huge breakfast and we stayed at the table longer than usual as the thermometer continued to rise.

Once the outside temperature was well into the 40's it was time to depart. We were all wearing long underwear, winter over pants and winter jackets over three layers on top, plus electric vests. As we began to angle north and west the vests became redundant with temperatures rising into the 50's by noon. Soon the luggage racks had bungee nets bulging with discarded gear and we could really enjoy the riding.

As we crossed Amish country the cold dry air and total lack of clouds made the sky into a deep blue fishbowl over our heads. Our route cut across the grain of the mountain ranges so we rode up and down several high ridges. A brief rest stop in Robesonia allowed us to admire some lovely green stone architecture that is typical of the region. The roads we took were the smallest lines on the map; traffic was non-existent. At the 100 mile mark we gassed up and switched bikes; I moved from the Harley to the Guzzi. We soon felt our stomachs rumble and stopped for lunch in Minersville. A tiny café where we were the only patrons provided hot soup and lunch. The



ceilings were rippled and stained and the walls wore paneling ripped from the 60's. The waitress and cook spoke Russian and lived in the apartment upstairs, and the prices were totally in line with the old fashioned atmosphere. I think the four of us had lunch for under \$20. Places like this were once the norm but now not so much. Who knows if it will still be in business the next time we pass through Minersville?

We continued north after lunch and the Moto Guzzi which turned 90,000 miles in October gave me cause for concern. A loud thunk presumably from the drive line coincided with the transmission grabbing momentarily. This happened once or twice and I began to fear the worst. Taking it a little bit easier we continued northwards, passing through Ashville where we had originally intended to tour an old coal mine. Unfortunately the tours ended November first so we continued on a short ways to Centralia, or what used to be Centralia.



Locust Avenue, 1983



Locust Avenue, 2001

In 1962 the town dump which was in an abandoned mine pit set a vein of coal on fire. Millions were spent over 20 years trying to put it out but with no success. Carbon monoxide levels in the town reached critical levels, gas station storage tanks began to boil and a 12 year old boy barely survived when the ground opened up beneath him and he fell 150 feet. The town had to be abandoned. The government helped relocate all but a few residents who are convinced that it's all a conspiracy to control mineral rights. Now steam oozes from fissures and only the graveyard remains. Spooky. From Centralia we turned east to make our way through coal country to Jim Thorpe.



We were a bit surprised to discover that coal is not the only abundant source of energy in this region. Newly erected windmills are all over the high ridges; we encountered dozens of them. I felt a bit like Don Quixote as we rounded one curve after another, weaving between the windmills. We stopped briefly for a closer look and heard an ominous WHOOSH as the huge blades knifed through the air looking like slow motion but actually with a tip speed of several hundred miles per hour.

We arrived at our motel a bit before sundown having covered 200 miles. We showered and relaxed a bit then walked ½ mile to a great Italian restaurant. We actually stayed one town away from Jim Thorpe to avoid tourist prices but when I suggested riding the

4 miles into town to have a look see or maybe take in a concert at the historic opera house the response was less than enthusiastic. Our day long exposure to the cool temperatures had extracted a toll; we were too tired to move. So we enjoyed the rustic surroundings and mountain views and just relaxed for a bit, retiring early then meeting for our ‘first breakfast’ in the lobby at 7:30 AM.; continental style and included in the price of the rooms.

That’s when Jon discovered that his wallet had gone missing. We thought about it hard and deduced that he last had it at dinner. We walked to the restaurant but it was closed until at least 10 AM and we found nothing on the ground when retracing our steps. We needed to kill several hours until the restaurant reopened. The bikes were still covered with a thick coating of frost as temperatures had actually dipped into the 20’s overnight. Our best option was to walk to a breakfast restaurant nearby and eat again. This time

we went “full American” and loaded up on eggs, bacon and home fries. Luckily the dinner restaurant had Jon’s wallet and we were on our way, happy to have delayed departure until the temperature moderated. The return route was more direct and temperatures continued to moderate as we headed south. We jogged slightly east in order to visit the Pagoda which overlooks Reading, PA. This gave us the opportunity to enjoy some spectacular views and to learn a bit about the history of this interesting landmark. Jon fits right in with the Japanese theme, doesn’t he? HAIL BUDDHA!

Besides the story of the Pagoda itself as we exit we ride through a series of hairpin curves on Duryea Drive which honors the first American automobile. From Reading we continue south and reach home at 4 o’clock, just in time to eat again! It’s been

an easy 100 mile day and not too cold. After 2 breakfasts nobody is starving to death but Lynn has made ravioli with a vodka reduction sauce. We enjoy a beer with the tasty dish and recount our

weekend’s adventure. We’ve had some good luck: the weather finally cooperated, we found Jon’s lost wallet and the Moto Guzzi made it home under its own steam.

While we are all agreed that it has been good to get out for one more ride we must concede that winter is near: a time of holidays, family WRENCHING & PLANNING. The Moto Guzzi for one will need the final drive overhauled and the BSA is still in bits after the main bush finally gave up the ghost. Luckily

there is a good supply of firewood laid in.

Winter is a time to plan your next season’s rides.

Look for the 2012 RetroTours schedule in mid January & reserve your spot!

Happy Holidays to all.

