

## July 28 & 29, 2012 Custom Personalized Tour



Getting the guys to choose bikes was not too difficult. John had owned Harleys and though his current ride is a Yamaha Star cruiser, his heart still resides in Milwaukee (or maybe in York). He chose the XLCR. Steve loves British iron and had completed a RetroTour earlier this year that gave him ample seat time on the Limeys. He chose the Kawasaki W3, a better British bike perhaps, made in Hamamatsu though it may be. Richard is a very gifted

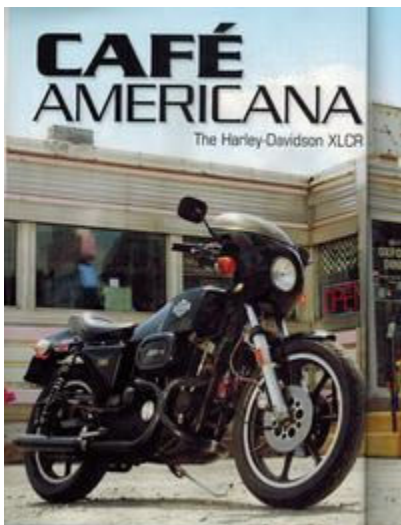
artist from Long Island who sculpts ice and wood. Several examples of his work can be seen at Bill's Old Bike Barn. He leans towards Euro-bikes and chose to ride out on the Ducati 860. Come to think of it, there is an element of art in every Italian bike; quindi perche' non? Marc, an avid classic bike rider and wrench swinger picked the TX750, perhaps to see for himself if it's bad as its reputation (it's not). For the sake of variety, not to mention fuss free smoothness and comfort, I jumped on the R90/6.



The idea was to schedule an open weekend then see who was available and wanting to ride. I didn't pick the bikes, a destination or even a direction, I wanted the participants to have a say in all aspects of the ride profile. Three of the participants were local: two 'newbies' from Delaware and one old hand from New Jersey who had been on many previous RetroTours. The fourth rider rode his bike down from Long Island for his first Tour.

Choosing a destination and daily mileage goals was a little tougher. No one really had a direction or destination in mind. I had polled the riders and learned that none of them had traveled to the west recently so I decided to head west by northwest, aiming for an uncrowded part of the state. We agreed that 200 miles per day would be just about perfect and an arc drawn on my map 150 miles NW of Kennett Square, leaving room to meander some, put our destination at Burnt Cabins, PA. This is a tiny town I had never really noticed before. It appeared to be nested up against the Turnpike but in a large swath of otherwise undeveloped area and the name seemed interesting. We discussed it over breakfast and decided that the Indians must have burnt the settlers' cabins to drive them out. More details to follow.

The three local lads and myself had loaded up our bikes before the day of departure and completed paperwork and safety checks. We shunned tank bags on this trip relying on the luggage racks instead because the forecast was for HOT weather and we didn't want to block any wind. Richard arrived the night before and besides getting acquainted we got him oriented and loaded (actually we got Richard's bike loaded, not Richard) so we were all set for an early departure on Saturday morning. Of course this was preceded by a huge breakfast thoughtfully prepared by my wife Lynn. Thanks Honey; it's always good to leave on a full stomach. We fired 'em up and rolled out.



But we didn't roll too far at first, stopping after 25 miles in Oxford, PA. This short run through bucolic Pennsylvania horse country served as a check out for bikes, riders and equipment, but also landed us at the Little Miss Oxford Diner for a cup of Joe. Here photojournalist Phillip Tooth had photographed the XLCR and written the article that appeared recently in Motorcycle Classics Magazine (see the 'press' section of this website). The owner had actually allowed us to carry the (yes, very heavy) Harley into the diner for a shot and I had promised her a copy of the recently released magazine. This was my opportunity to make good on that promise. The day was heating up so we had a quick cup and continued west.

The next leg of our journey took us through Amish country and as we rode through Quarryville the small town seemed to be just waking up. Families filled horse drawn buggies clomping through town while in the countryside just outside of town young men stood tall behind their plows urging teams of handsome horses to pull the blade straight and deep. We passed through Intercourse, Lititz and Lebanon, all bastions of Amish culture then the surroundings changed from lush farmed valleys to overgrown strip mined mountains as we navigated twisty Gold Mine Road, an obvious favorite of local sport bike riders. We made our way north and west through Tower City and Lykens: coal country, and stopped at a roadside Italian eatery for lunch before encountering a major obstacle.

The Susquehanna River must have been a major obstacle to early settlers trying to head west. We could have crossed on any one of three or four major bridges but opted instead to try our luck with the Millersburg Ferry. This paddlewheel powered mini-barge is the oldest continuously operating ferry in the US and once was an important way of surmounting this formidable natural obstruction. Today it operates as a historical curiosity for laid back tourist travelers: perfect for us! One thing about traveling by historic ferry: it doesn't run about half the time. Often river conditions prevent operations and of course there are mechanical issues that have to be dealt with from time to time. In the end you just never know and you get to the riverbank; hopeful but prepared to detour to a bridge if necessary.

We seemed to be in luck at first: the ferry *was* in operation. We signaled the boat on the far side of the Susquehanna to come get us and in 30 minutes it arrived but then stopped before landing and the captain yelled to us: "I can't take any passengers because the first mate twisted his ankle and had to go to the clinic." There are actually two boats but the other was chartered by a group of students and not available. This seemed like incredible bad luck but then a burly pedestrian appeared on shore and announced that he was an off duty first mate and would stand in for his injured counterpart. We loaded our bikes and crossed the serene river in short order but as the chartered boat was occupying the normal slip our captain tried to maneuver for a direct shore landing but ran aground short of his mark.

We were stranded there, 20 feet from shore for another half hour until finally the first mate jumped in and 'put his back into it', finally prying the boat free and we were able to disembark. So the river crossing which would normally have taken like 3 minutes by bridge wound up taking about an hour and a half. The funny thing is that no one minded, in fact we loved it! We got to relax and talk to some of the locals and we had ourselves a mini adventure and a little rest. It was all good.

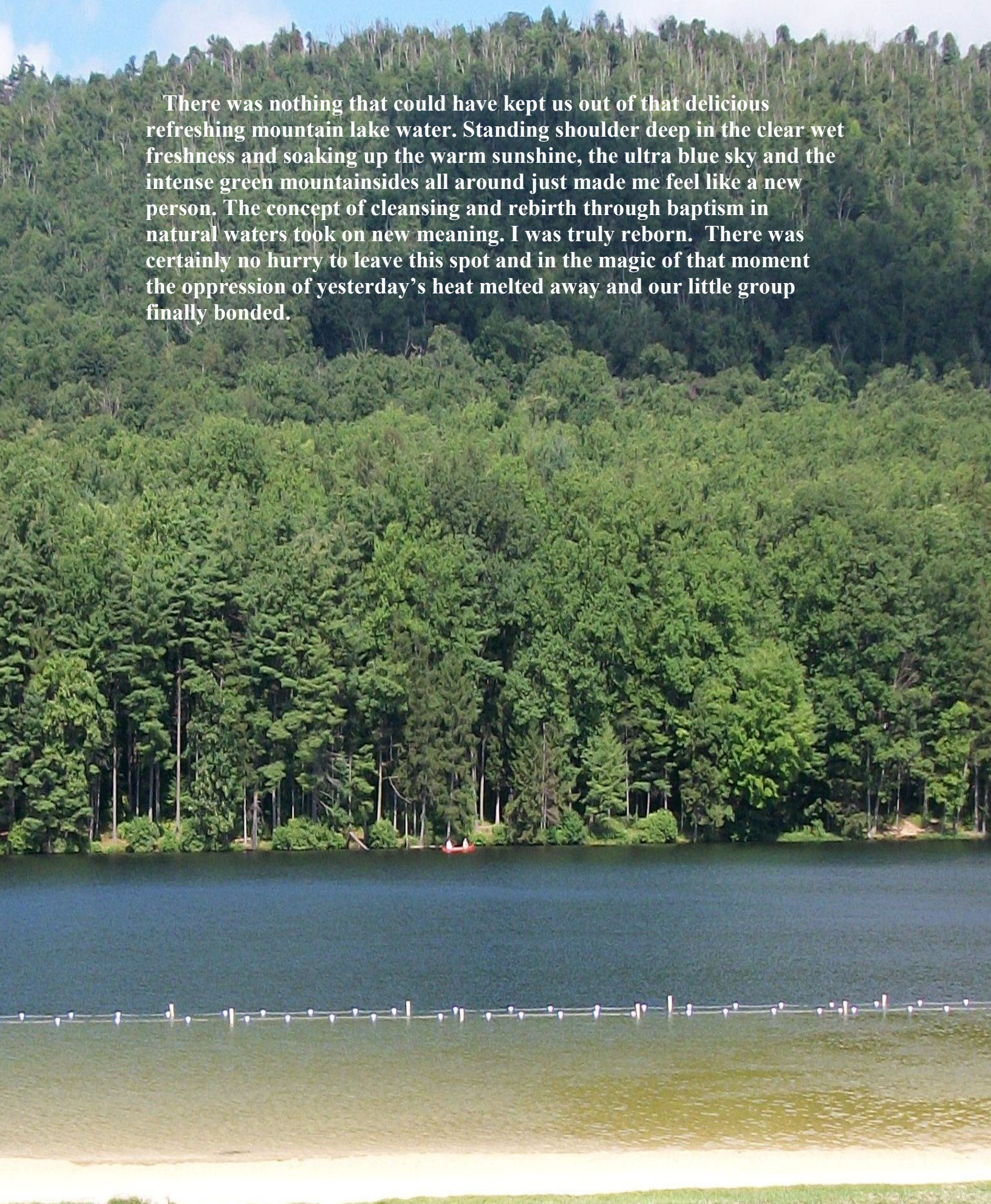
The countryside changed again as soon as we crossed the mighty Susquehanna. Now we were in hilly green lush state forest land and as we continued west we crossed the Tuscarora Trail, a 250 mile long bypass of the Appalachian Trail, and passed through the villages of Roxbury and McCrea finally reaching Upper Strassburg. Here we picked up a favorite road of mine: Fannettsburg Road which twists and turns up and down a mountainside revealing stupendous views all around, although one mustn't take one's eyes off the road for long since it is very narrow and bumpy as well. After 2 or 3 10 mph hairpins, the tiny roadway ducks under the Turnpike and surfaces at Ye Olde Grist Mill Campground in Burnt Cabins.

This was a sight unseen reservation and I wasn't sure what to expect. Despite the area's remoteness the campground borders the turnpike so some traffic noise is inevitable. I had reserved a camper trailer and there was a camping store for provisions and the historic grist mill was an interesting attraction. We had been riding all day in temperatures in the 90's so we were all pretty ready to hunker down some. The camper was listed as 'sleeps four' but that must include 2 small children and there was absolutely no way all large 5 of us were gonna be that close after only one day in the saddle. Luckily Marc had packed a small tent which he preferred at any rate so with one person sleeping on the floor and one in the tent we managed alright. The showers were good and hot and with a campfire going we cooked ourselves a little dinner and enjoyed life under the stars. It had been a great day and we were tired enough that this rustic accommodation seemed perfect.

In the morning there was good hot coffee at the camping store and we had a very light breakfast. We ate granola bars and fruit to get us on the road where we hoped to find a more substantial offering within 50 miles if not sooner. Everything was right on schedule food wise. Really the only concern was for excessive heat but I had an ace up my sleeve: about 10 miles into the day's ride we passed through Cowan's Gap on a fabulous deserted mountain road and came upon a large mountain lake; well maintained with a sugar sand beach and very few people this early even on a hot summer Sunday morning. The facility even had changing rooms and showers.



There was nothing that could have kept us out of that delicious refreshing mountain lake water. Standing shoulder deep in the clear wet freshness and soaking up the warm sunshine, the ultra blue sky and the intense green mountainsides all around just made me feel like a new person. The concept of cleansing and rebirth through baptism in natural waters took on new meaning. I was truly reborn. There was certainly no hurry to leave this spot and in the magic of that moment the oppression of yesterday's heat melted away and our little group finally bonded.

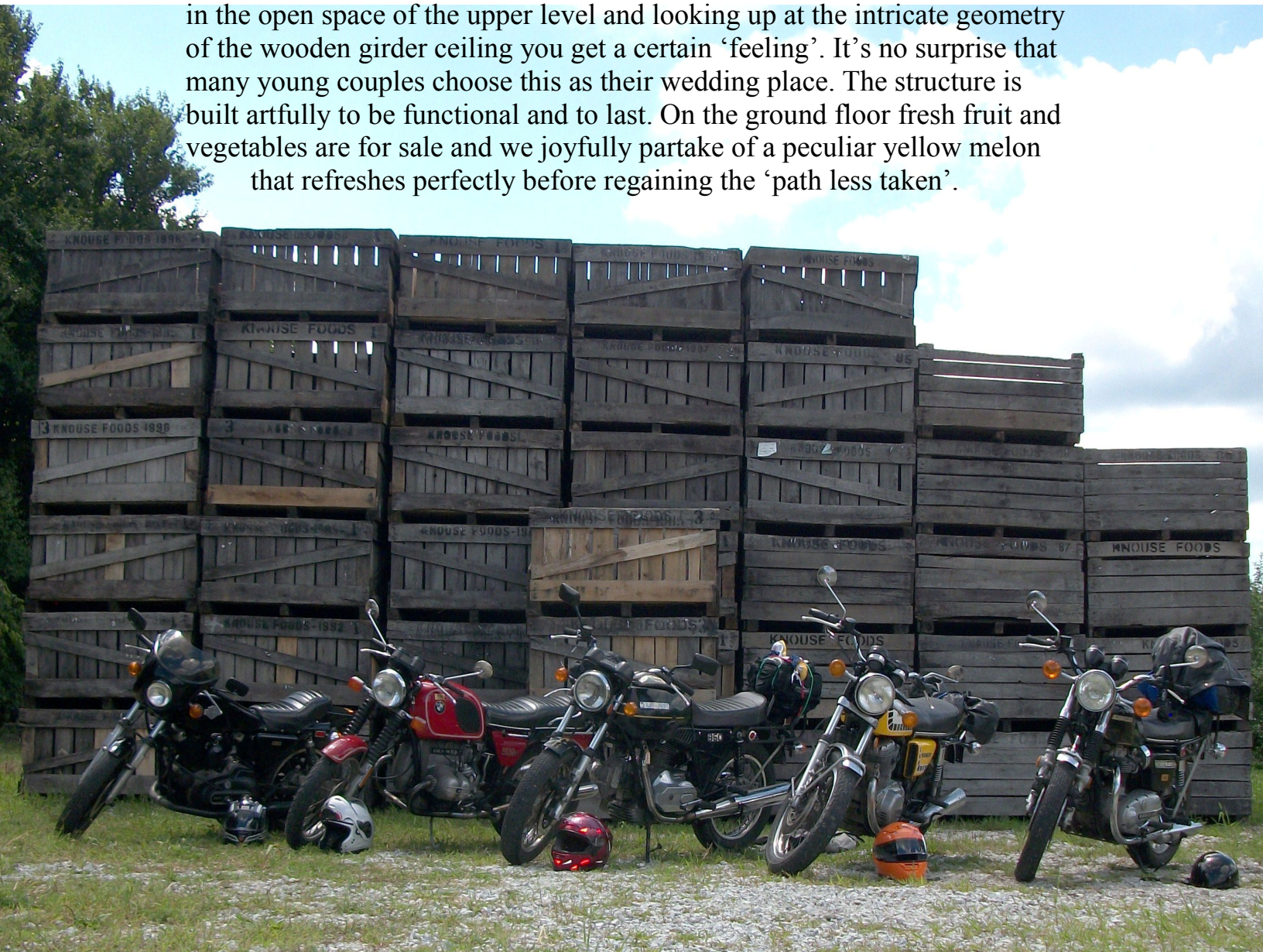






Ultimately of course we did leave and continued through to Route 30 where we turned east to follow this original east/west road which predates the Turnpike and goes up and down every mountain that the new superslab tunnels through. Therefore very few people use Route 30 these days leaving it uncrowded for the enjoyment of motorcyclists who revel in the smooth wide sweepers. We find an interesting diner just as food and gasoline are becoming concerns and stop to fill our tanks and stomachs. We

surmount Mt. Alto and South Mountain, switching now to smaller roads and finding ourselves needing a break in Arendtsville. Besides having 5 consonants in a row which is pretty unusual I think, Arendtsville also has a very fascinating round barn. It's three or four stories tall and when standing in the open space of the upper level and looking up at the intricate geometry of the wooden girder ceiling you get a certain 'feeling'. It's no surprise that many young couples choose this as their wedding place. The structure is built artfully to be functional and to last. On the ground floor fresh fruit and vegetables are for sale and we joyfully partake of a peculiar yellow melon that refreshes perfectly before regaining the 'path less taken'.



That path takes us next through Seven Valleys enroute to our re-crossing of the Susquehanna at the Hotwood dam, one of the oldest: built in 1905. As we angle our way towards home, the Harley falls behind with a problem. The transmission won't stay in fourth gear. I trade bikes with poor Steve who is ridden with guilt and he's right, it's jumping out of gear so badly that it's necessary to ride in third gear, only shifting to fourth on down-hills to let the rpm's drop a bit so the engine can rest. Luckily the motor is flexible enough to withstand this harsh treatment even on a hot day. We are only 50 miles from home when this occurs and with a short rest stop half way I see no reason not to press on. Any damage within the transmission is already done so we decide to bring her home under her own power.

A refreshing shower and a delicious meal put the perfect exclamation point on a wonderful weekend. The locals eat and run, as local are want to do, and Richard will B&B one final night then get an early start for Long Island. A week later I open the Harley up and find that a \$3.00 part has cracked apart resulting in the total demise of several gears and a shift fork. I make a list of needed parts and call the local dealer. Some of the parts are available, some of them are obsolete but on hand at a dealer somewhere and some of the parts are obsolete and no longer available anywhere. Incredibly, every part in the last category is now being manufactured by an accessory company and in the end I have all the bits in hand within three days. That sort of parts availability for a 35 year old motorcycle is encouraging! The Harley has nearly 30,000 hard miles on it and in my mind this is just fair wear and tear. The old iron horse has a few more RetroTours left in her yet.

Oh, and before I forget: the origin of the name "Burnt Cabins". We assumed that the Indians had burnt the settlers' cabins to get rid of the white skinned invaders but while at the campground we got the real scoop. The colonists had basically seized Indian lands in the east and the government relocated the Indians to this part of the state, promising them that if they moved peacefully they would enjoy their new home without fear of being pushed out again. After time passed, some colonists were coveting the rich farmlands to the west where no white man held property titles. When the government would not issue titles in order to honor the agreement with the relocated Indians, some settlers built a small village of cabins and lived there as squatters. The Indians minded very much and complained to the government which responded by sending the army to evict the white trespassers. These colonists simply returned to their cabins however as soon as the troops left. This happened two or three times until finally the government ordered the army to burn down the settlers cabins, and THAT is the actual origin of the name of the town: Burnt Cabins.



