

UNSCHEDULED TOUR: Fiftieth reunion ride.

SEPTEMBER 7TH -8TH, 2016

Tom had been on a RetroTour several years ago, so I was happy to hear from him in July of '16. He lives in California but grew up in Connecticut and with a group of high school classmates was planning a big east coast reunion this year: most of them were turning 70 years old. Tom had a half dozen or so good friends that still ride and he set about trying to pull together a group from all around the country for a RetroTour. Of course, getting people to commit to dates is like herding cats; in the end 3 riders signed up for this one—a small quantity perhaps but of the highest quality:

Tom Garland, California
Bart Ensero, Connecticut
Bob Smith, Florida

“Highest quality” in this case refers to both riding abilities and fun to be with. These three riders have 149 years of combined riding experience! Tom flew in from the west coast, Bart and Bob rode down from Connecticut on their plush modern bikes: a big Harley and a BMW. I swear their two bikes took as much room in the garage as 6 of the RetroTours bikes! Such is modernity: MORE is BETTER. Tom flew into Philly a day or two early for some sightseeing and called with a bit of a problem Tuesday afternoon: he couldn't find a taxi or an Uber driver willing to take him to Kennett Square. It's only about 35 miles but I guess it just wasn't worthwhile. I got Tom to take the AMTRAC train from Philly to Wilmington, DE: just 12 miles from here and I picked him up at the station; problem solved. We had dinner here Tuesday night, got to know one another, had a look at the bikes that were chosen, and did some pre-orientation and loading. This was our little fleet:

Bart chose the Harley-esque 1971 Moto Guzzi Ambassador.

Tom had a hankering for the sporty 1973 Norton Commando Fastback.

Bob thought the quirky 1973 Yamaha TX750 might be fun.

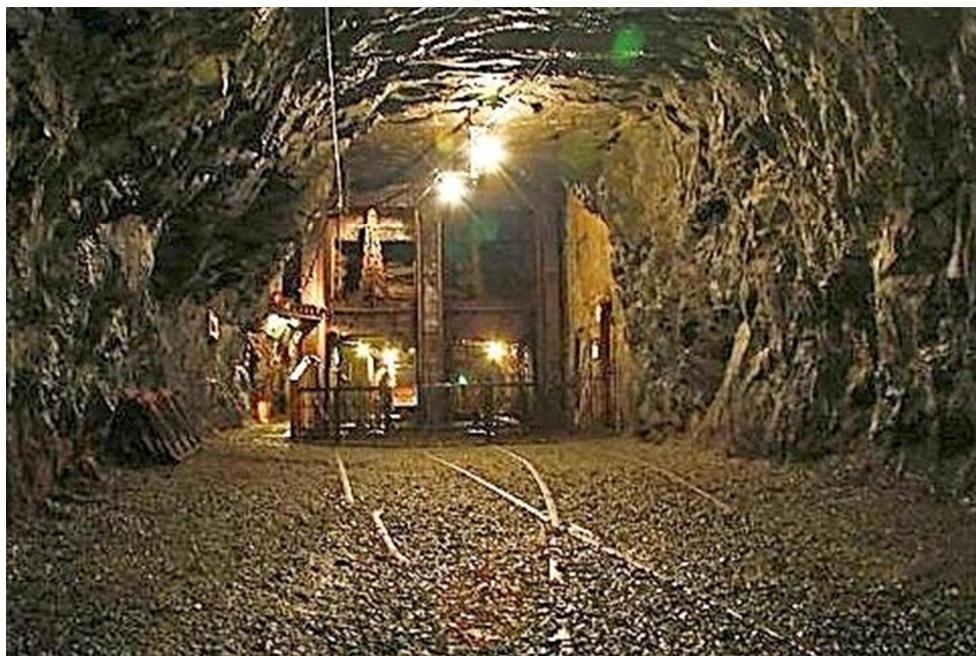
I drove the 1977 BMW R100S/GS/EML sidecar rig (with everyone's baggage inside for ballast).

I had polled everyone via email to determine what kind of ride was desired and had planned two 150 mile days. Our route would take us due north to Bill's Old Bike Barn near Bloomsburg, PA: a very appropriate RetroTour destination. We would ride on Wednesday and Thursday so all three could be in Connecticut on Friday night for the big reunion. Things were coming together nicely and we turned in early Tuesday night for an early start Wednesday morning, anticipating fine weather for our trip. We would not be disappointed.



We made our way north on back roads which included frequent stops at points of interest such as The World's Smallest Church, a restored pre-colonial village/iron foundry called Hopewell Furnace, and a very funky covered bridge near Moselem Springs. The Dreibelbis Station Bridge was built around 1870. It is a 172 foot long Burr Arch Truss type and spans the Maiden Creek. We rode through it and followed the scenic creek for a bit, then found route 895 which climbs sharply to summit at the eastern continental divide where it is crossed by the Appalachian Trail. Just beyond lies Snyders, a tiny town with a strip mall containing a Mexican restaurant run by a Guatemalan which also serves pizza: a very multi-cultural kind of place.

I was getting a little nervous as we left the lunch stop. I wanted to visit the Number 9 Coal Mine in Lansford, PA and the last tour was at three. We kept our heads down and made it there just in time only to learn that there were no tours



scheduled on Wednesdays this late in the season. This is not your typical tourist attraction however. This mine opened in 1855 and was active until 1972, then it was reopened as a non-profit

historical site in 2002 and is run by local volunteers. I begged and explained our situation. The friendly family running the museum building suggested that we peruse the exhibits for a bit; at least they did not say no. Finally, we were treated to a private tour which took us 1600 feet into the mountainside where we viewed a 900-foot-deep mine shaft and all the artifacts left behind from over 150 years of mining operations. The ride down was even more jarring than our vintage bikes' primitive suspension systems. The narrative from our guide was as entertaining as it was fascinating. BONUS...it was very cool down there: a constant 52 degrees year-round. We appreciated the break from the heat.

From the mine, it was an easy 50 miles or so to our luxury cabin in Berwick. The route included a very entertaining run down twisty route 339 from Mahanoy City. Where coal was once king, windmills now rule and we passed close to several of the huge turbines which created an other-worldly air, churning slowly as we passed close by. We had dinner at a local steak house and were soon snoring in air conditioned comfort.

In the morning, we breakfasted like kings at Mays, a local diner with a richly deserved reputation for serving lots of good food. The group was beginning to bond and I found myself enjoying the company. Tom is famous for his laugh which is unusual in that it occurs as he inhales. Hearing it makes everyone else laugh and there was plenty of opportunity for laughter provided by Bart, who can best be described as Andrew Dice Clay on acid. And I mean that in a good way. Bob was a little more on the quiet side but these three guys, friends for decades and still riding together 'after all these years' had a way of keeping each other (and me) well entertained.



Fully caffeinated, we took a 25-mile loop through the back country to check out two more covered bridges, including the twin bridges of East Paden: a unique and well preserved example of times long past. This loop ended at Bill's Old Bike Barn a bit before opening time, but Judy was kind enough to grant us entry and we had the place to ourselves. After 90 minutes or so sensory overload began to set in and we prepared to mount up and head south. So many bikes. So little time.

The ride home took us through Shamokin at the top of PA Route 125: a favorite of motorcyclists in eastern Pennsylvania. Over the course of 150 miles we climbed and descended several mountains, passed through Amish country, stopped for a much-needed ice cream break, and finally made our way back to Kennett Square. We were hot, sore, and tired but happy at the same time. My wife Lynn had a special birthday (X 3) dinner waiting for us which included much needed beer and wine. Over dinner Bart was non-stop. Each story led to another; I'm not sure where his energy comes from. In the morning, he and Bob were undoubtedly happy to be back on their own very comfortable bikes.



Still, there is something alluring about touring on old bikes. The challenge had been met head on by these three and they took away some memories that will not be forgotten any time soon. I'm thinking they had some good stories to tell at their reunion.