



**Ride Report:
Redneck Gyro
August 27, 28, 29
2022** *On a glorious
August morning, Jack
stands proud over a field
of bikes.*

He and Ed rode in on their own bikes: the modern Indian and Kawasaki in the foreground. In the background are the 7 or 8 bikes that were prepared for the 5 riders. This gives riders some choices and leaves back-

up bikes available if needed. 'Lip', the RetroTours mascot dog, could care less; he just wants **FOOD**.

We ride 50 miles: a wee shake-down cruise, then, having crossed the Susquehanna, stop at Chesapeake HD for some free coffee, clean restrooms, and a chance to gawk at the new Harleys. ***Parked up at the Harley shop: the chosen bikes. Right to left: BMW R100/7 Guzzi V65SP Ducati 860GT Guzzi 850T3 Benelli 650***



We are a group of 5, all experienced motorcyclists, (mostly) all on fine Italian steeds, all totally psyched for a mad 3-day adventure.



TOP ROW L-R: Ed White, Jack Williamson, Fred Shufflebarger: the local boys.
BOTTOM ROW: My fat ass, Art Locke.

Lynn has prepared a wonderful breakfast for us. We are not really wide awake at 6:45 on this Saturday morning, but a hearty breakfast and some java go-juice puts things right. We have our riders' meeting and eat a lot; one never knows when the next meal will come. Next, it is time to choose. Seven bikes, five riders. The Moto Morini and the Laverda are out. the BMW is in with the Italians. We are the evil axis of WWII:

Germany aligned with Italy. Those are the bikes, but who are these guys?

Ed and Jack are local yokels who both work for a company that makes packaging. I'm not sure what that means either. They are also aviators who work on and fly small planes and they both have done some bad-ass hang gliding and the like. Fred, also from the immediate area, discovered RetroTours quite recently and has become badly addicted. He also really likes the BMW and I believe he now owns three Airheads. Fred works at the Last Chance Garage, where he does repair and restoration on antique autos. Art has flown in from Lubbock, Texas where he teaches motorcycle safety courses. He speaks with a weird drawl and carries a six shooter at all times and wears a ten gallon hat. OK I made most of that up, but he really is a long, tall Texan, and something of a character. I can tell by the time breakfast is over that this tour is going to be something special!

We head out under absolute glorious weather. I mean, it could hardly be better than this. After the Harley shop stop, we keep a westerly heading across Maryland, passing through Civil War points of interest like Finksburg, Eldersburg, and Frederick. Then, at Burkittsville, we turn right and are in another world. Thick forest prevails as we climb through the curves, gently but persistently, pulling off at the peak to snack and pee, at Gathland State Park.



Gathland State Park is a public recreation area and historic preserve located on South Mountain near Burkittsville, Maryland. The state park occupies the former estate of war correspondent George Alfred Townsend, who wrote under the pen name "Gath" during the American Civil War. He covered the assassination of Lincoln for a NYC newspaper and his novels include *The Entailed Hat* (1884), which fictionalized a true story of a woman who kidnapped free blacks and sold them into slavery.

At this time of year, it is also really, really GREEN.

The arch that Townsend built is the first monument to memorialize war correspondents.



From Gathland we ride another 30 or 40 minutes to cross The Potomac into Shepherdstown, WV for lunch at the Bavarian Inn Restaurant. High on a hill overlooking the river, the Inn is a bit upscale for our

ragtag group but more importantly, it is highly air conditioned. The food is also great by the way. We take advantage of it all. Satiated, it is time to switch bikes and wobble on our way as we acclimate to fresh horses. We make our way through Martinsburg, then onto a section that never fails to delight: The Tuscarora Pike and Hampshire Grade which carry us over the Shaghai Gap. These little used roads skip between VA and WV, a narrow, bumpy, curvy, steep route that winds up and down 2 smallish mountains. One section follows a narrow, high ridge with long views of valleys far below on both sides. It feels like I am flying in a small plane. The road brings out the competitive spirit as we negotiate gravelly hairpins and bumpy sweepers. On the way down, we pause to let everyone regroup and wait a bit longer than usual for the Ducati to join us in the pull out at the bottom. It seems that the big Ducati 860 has ungraciously tipped over when some gravel was encountered. This is not a road that favors big engines and long wheel bases. A few more battle scars on this tough old bike and fortunately no injuries. The bike and rider shake it off and we all realize that it has been a long day, it's not over, and we need to be cautious and agree to COOL IT, DAMN IT. *Shite happens.*



The Ducati has finally come down off the mountain, a bit worse for wear. Time for a break with damage assessment. Fortunately, rider and bike are relatively unscathed. We may not be so lucky next time.

It's West Virginia, Almost Heaven at it's best, as we pass Unger's Store and the road shrinks then narrows yet again, then becomes dirt. Big Oak Tree Road crosses us back into VA and terminates at route 522, a major roadway, some miles south of Berkeley Springs. Just 2 or 3 miles and we take to the back roads again on Sleepy Creek Road, then my route sheet has us ford a small creek past a HUGE No Trespassing sign. That sign can't possibly refer to this dirt road, though; it plainly shows up as a public way. I try to explain this to the angry looking farmer who approaches us. We stop and I discuss the

matter respectfully. Long story short, we backtrack the hell out of there, then regain the route just a mile or so later, so, no big deal. We pop out onto Old Route 55 which takes us to Mathias, where a general store allows us to gas up and provision for our mountain top cabin that is pretty close now.



The sun's rays are getting long as we buy chips, dips, beans, bread, lunch meat, and lots of easy to cook food. The clerk insists that we also take a load of fresh picked squash. It's free; a local farmer has brought it to the general store for distribution, rather than have it go bad. I'm not quite sure how to cook it, but we'll figure it out.



A bit past Lost River State Park we take to the dirt once again, negotiating a somewhat confusing maze of steep gravel roads that take us up Fallbush Mountain. Somehow, with only 1 or 2 uncomfortable U-turns, I locate the isolated cabin where we will spend the next 2 nights. It is damn close to dark, I am so glad to finally be here and off the bike.

We unload and head inside to each claim a bed. We figure out how to turn on the lights and more importantly, how to turn on the hot water. Day one is done. We made it!

Saturday is in the bag.
We will sleep well.

Note the squash wedges on the counter? I call Lynn who suggests we microwave them in a shallow dish of water. It works great! We feast on steamed, fresh picked local squash. I am lucky enough to get the loft bedroom. This cabin is perfect!



The plan for Sunday is wide open. We discuss the matter, look at the weather, check nearby and not so nearby points of interest, consult the road maps, and make a decision. We are going to help search for extraterrestrials at the Greenbank Radio Telescope. This is the largest moveable object on the planet. A massive dish set in a protected valley, in a part of WV that is known for its clear skies and more importantly, for its lack of electro-magnetic interference. The surrounding mountainous countryside is sparsely populated (Greenbank: population 143) and designated as a National Radio Quiet Zone. In the Allegheny Mountains, close to National Forrest Lands, the roads leading to the telescope are perfect for motorcycle riding: elevation, curves, and very little traffic. The round trip looks like 300+ miles, but after a good night's sleep, we are totally ready for it.

First though, we have to get off this mountain top. The gravel roads and tight turns can be intimidating when you're on a strange bike and pointed steeply downhill. I pull over at the bottom for a regroup and am mightily entertained when Jack joins us on the long, tall Ducati 860. Jack is not long of leg, but he has plenty of off road experience, which is a very good thing, because when he taps the sensitive front brake on the big Duke the front wheel locks for a moment, then he releases it and in recovering, expertly surmounts the humped edge of the road and comes to rest, fortunately upright, in the tall grass above us. NICE SAVE DUDE! Back on pavement, we cruise through the sweet morning air, then stop for breakfast at a tiny diner along our route.



At Greenbank we sit through the presentation, get the tour, and a light lunch. It's all very fascinating to me but we need to get moving before too long; it's a good long hike back.

We planned our route on a table napkin over dinner. Now we follow that route, and as we near our cabin, it is decided that we absolutely must stop for provisions; especially beer. This takes a few tries,

but we succeed in locating all needed supplies but now we are making the last several miles after nightfall. It doesn't help that the BMW headlight relay has gone all wonky, but we are able to hot wire

the headlight on, so we go for it. Luckily, I have made a mental note of a landmark to help us find the turn off and before long we are back in our comfortable cabin where microwaved squash and beer help make our dinner well rounded as well as delicious.



Monday morning, and it looks like another perfect day for riding in wet, wild, wonderful WV. We get an early start and wend our way through some really obscure back roads. We are travelling at a very relaxed pace, allowing for the haze that hangs over the landscape, which gives a dreamlike quality to our environs. A patchwork of one lane roads meanders through the hollows where we can almost hear a ghostlike banjo strumming. We can see the farms and houses and it's like another world. Howards Lick leads us to Dove Hollow, then Parker Hollow. Thirty miles of this bliss brings us to Route 50, where we hope to make some time. It's a wide open road that heads due east, crossing several high mountains. First though, we need some gas. The Benelli has the shortest range of all the bikes, and it is deep into reserve. We stop to use cell phones to locate the nearest gas station which luckily, is on our route, just a few miles down Route 50. ***OK guys, where's the nearest gas station?***



With full tanks, we set sail east, cruising at 60 mph and negotiating the perfectly banked curves as the road climbs. Fred and I make a couple of sketchy passes and find ourselves getting ahead of the rest, so we pull over onto a gravelly pull-out for a regroup and dismount. Things get exciting when Ed sees us a little late, pulls onto the gravel, and locks up the front wheel of the—not again!—Ducati. Poor old bike. Poor Ed. Poor me & poor Fred: we are getting ready to jump for it as Ed and the Duke are sliding towards us on a collision course, but happily, their momentum is arrested in time. The tough Ducati just has a bent shift pedal, and Ed's only injury is to his pride. Continuing on, we soon reach PawPaw, then take the back road into Berkeley Springs, where we pick up 522 North, another open road that allows us to make good time.



Just before Berkeley Springs we enjoy this 3 state + Potomac view, once enjoyed by General George Washington.





From WV, it's not far to Maryland, and heading due north now, we cross into PA after just 12 more miles. We turn east again at Burnt Cabins, following Grist Mill Rd through Fannettsburg and Upper Strassburg. This is a very entertaining stretch with curves made challenging by the dips and bumps that winter's frost heaves have left behind. Riding through here at a good clip, it feels like I am on a

roller coaster. Next, we pass through apple country: Arendtsville and Biglerville. Seven Valleys comes and goes, and we are on 851 which carries us due east just on the PA side of the Mason-Dixon Line. We re-cross the Susquehanna at Holtwood, and stop for a break and to top up the thirsty Benelli, using the BMW with it's massive fuel tank as a mother ship. We are tired and sore, but close. Amish buggies greet us in Quarryville, and before long we are filling the tanks for the final time, just 3 miles from home. It has been an amazing three day Gyro. We covered 900 miles. There have been 2 lay downs and one magical save. Adventure indeed! At home, Lynn has us covered with great food, beer, & Motrin. I'll take 2 please.



"A group of men sitting around a table."



L-R: Fred, Art, Ed, Jack, Joel: Smiles all around!