


RetroRideReport: May 5th/6th 2012 Steak on the Susquehanna

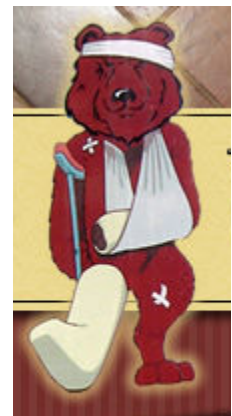
The weather threatened to co-operate as we 6 riders gathered. Rainsuits would be carried for insurance but no electric vests needed on this one. Three local riders had stopped by during the week to choose bikes, square away paperwork and perform safety checks. Kieth, Doug and Bill would all arrive on Saturday morning at 7:30 sharp, ready to roll (after breakfast here of course). Friday afternoon Frank rode his immaculate Hinkley Triumph down from Scranton, about 3 hours distant while Don rode his BMW from Buffalo NY: 7 hours by highway.



After making sure they were fed and slightly rested I assaulted them with paperwork then we headed down to the shop/garage to choose bikes and do safety checks. As luck would have it, they both chose bikes that needed new rear tires which I had set aside so it was asses and elbows for me as I mounted up the new rubber. No worries, this merely provided the necessary motivation for me to get 'er done. I dragged myself out of the sack before 7 AM to get the bikes staged. All 6 had fresh rubber and oil, a clean sheen and tank bags mounted and loaded up. Breakfast was whipped up as if by magic by my partner and wife, Lynn. After 35 years I still can't figure out how she gets food on the table that fast. We sat, we drank coffee, we got to know each other and we discussed procedural matters. Kickstands retracted, butts up and heads down: wheels rolling at 8 AM. Cool morning air; the open road!

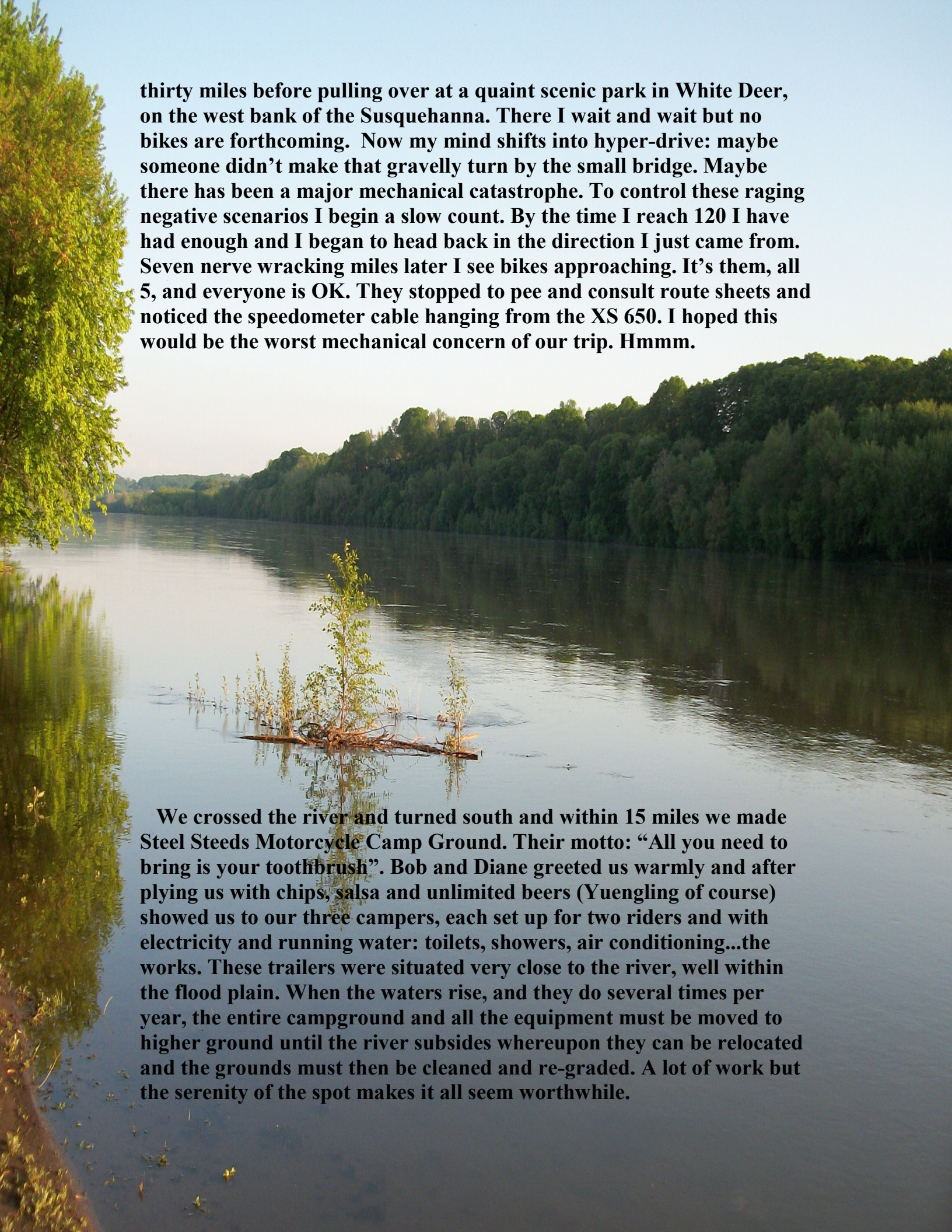
And so we headed north: the Norton Commando Fastback, the BMW R90/6, the Ducati 860 GT, The Yamaha XS650, the Laverda 750 SF and the always willing RD400. Our route took us through some spectacular southeast Pennsylvania horse farm country and after 35 miles we did a quick stop to get rid of excess coffee and to check that all our equipment was in proper working order. We stayed on twisty two lane roads and slowly worked our way north and west, cutting against the grain of the Appalachian range to insure altitude changes and the attendant swervery. On these roads, with stops to stretch every 50 miles and swapping bikes at gas stops every 100, we arrived at Bob Logue's Honda Shop and Museum 10 minutes before closing time at 2 PM. Several of us had been here before but I felt bad for the others as a quick walk through was all that could be managed; the shop was hosting a huge road run early the next morning and the employees understandably needed to leave on time. Otherwise, they would have surely hung around for us. Lesson learned, next time we'll leave at 7 not 8. The early bird catches the museum still open.

After several mid morn granola bars, our late Lunch was at the Crippled Bear Inn just up the road. The waitress actually remembered RetroTours from the year before. A perfect atmosphere, excellent burgers and much needed rest for the weary travelers. Suitably refreshed, we refueled for the second time and swapped bikes. Riders tried desperately to look cool as we wobbled away from that gas station fishing for shift levers that were suddenly on the wrong side and worked backwards. Quickly acclimating, we ran south for a few exits on route 15 then crossed the river and headed up and up and up.



Williamsport is bordered on the south side by the mighty river and a very high pronounced ridge which we ascended into state forest lands on smooth mountain roads devoid of traffic. The object was to reach Old Route 880 and East Valley Road which parallels New Superslab 80. To get there required about 5 miles of dirt road, well graded but with a series of 7 hairpins that challenged everyone. We really got a feel of what this part of the country is like in its primitive natural splendor. We stopped for a break there in the forest and listened to.....nothing actually. So refreshing!

We reached our desired route and turned east again. Since Route 80 was built no one really uses the old road so we had it all to ourselves. Patches of gravel and a few sweepers punctuate repeated crossings of the new highway and the numerous bumps and potholes require serious concentration at any kind of speed: some are large enough to destroy a rim, but overall the feeling is one of elation as we banzai along. As there are no real turns, I go the full



thirty miles before pulling over at a quaint scenic park in White Deer, on the west bank of the Susquehanna. There I wait and wait but no bikes are forthcoming. Now my mind shifts into hyper-drive: maybe someone didn't make that gravelly turn by the small bridge. Maybe there has been a major mechanical catastrophe. To control these raging negative scenarios I begin a slow count. By the time I reach 120 I have had enough and I began to head back in the direction I just came from. Seven nerve wracking miles later I see bikes approaching. It's them, all 5, and everyone is OK. They stopped to pee and consult route sheets and noticed the speedometer cable hanging from the XS 650. I hoped this would be the worst mechanical concern of our trip. Hmmm.

We crossed the river and turned south and within 15 miles we made Steel Steeds Motorcycle Camp Ground. Their motto: "All you need to bring is your toothbrush". Bob and Diane greeted us warmly and after plying us with chips, salsa and unlimited beers (Yuengling of course) showed us to our three campers, each set up for two riders and with electricity and running water: toilets, showers, air conditioning...the works. These trailers were situated very close to the river, well within the flood plain. When the waters rise, and they do several times per year, the entire campground and all the equipment must be moved to higher ground until the river subsides whereupon they can be relocated and the grounds must then be cleaned and re-graded. A lot of work but the serenity of the spot makes it all seem worthwhile.

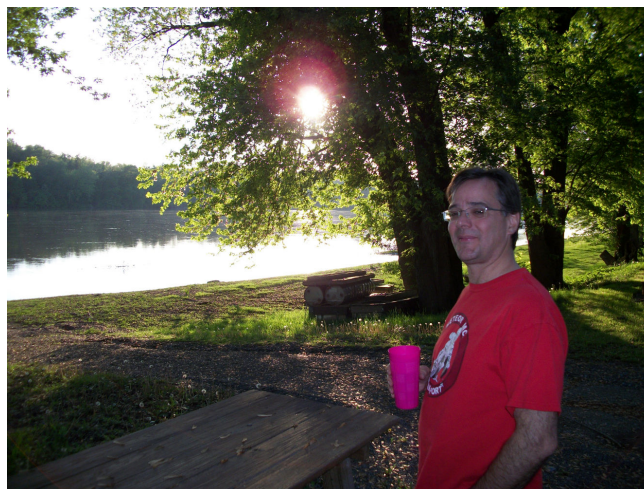
I did say, "Do something stupid with the banana, Frank".



That ol' river, she just keeps on rolling along.



When the sun goes down
the moon comes up.



And that night, under wide open brilliant clear skies, the moon came up as it never has and never will again in our lifetimes. The un-obscured full moon far from city lights was closer to Earth than it will be for decades. The light from the swollen orb cast distinct shadows all night long. It was like daytime on a planet just a bit further out than ours. Diane put the steaks on the Barbie and with potatoes and beer we feasted under the moonlight as the gurgling river soothed our tired souls. The huge bonfire gave us a place to gather with other campers and we all breathed a huge sigh and just.....existed.

Suddenly someone called out “Look up there, in the sky!” One of the campground regulars was launching flaming mini hot air balloons. Due to the intermittent breeze one became snagged in a tall oak tree and for a moment I thought we might be getting a visit from the fire department. In fact, the weekend before the police had stopped by after the nearby private airport had reported several sightings of unidentified flying objects. The flaming balloons rose above the trees, caught the breeze and sailed upwards and onwards finally disappearing in the distance. One by one, just as the balloons flickered out so did 6 tired riders of vintage motorcycles. The cool night air insured we would sleep very well indeed and in the morning we were mostly bright and cheery and ready to have at ‘em again.



We made good our planned early departure despite the Ducati battery being mysteriously deader than a doornail. Luckily the CDI ignition does not depend on the battery to run. We rode back across the river heading west for 10 miles to a tasty breakfast buffet recommended by the locals. Suitably nourished, we continued west past Harleton to pick up Route 235 south, one of the best. This road cuts south and east crossing several mountains. The three passes are delightful in terms of scenery and a challenge to one's riding skills. Doug was back in the lead as I rode tail end. As I came around one very tight hairpin turn there were two bikes on the shoulder and Kieth was pushing the RD off the road. I immediately feared the worst but Kieth is an excellent even an amazing rider and when I asked what happened he replied stoically, "The shifter broke". I looked at the lever. It looked normal until he reached down and pulled it off with his bare hand. The lever had developed a stress crack right where the flat arm is welded to the splined knuckle. "No problem" I said, "I have a spare right here in my tank bag".

Kieth seemed relieved until he saw that I pulled a big vice grip out of the bag. After clamping it firmly in place on the stub of the original and wiring the release lever in the locked position we were ready to catch up to our mates at the next regroup stop a few miles down the road. The back roads continued to delight and we made steady progress south until the RD stopped us again. Frank was on board this time and at first when he pulled over I assumed that the vice grip had just come loose. In reality, there was now no clutch, as if the cable had broken. All the bikes have spare cables stashed on board so this time I really *did* have a spare but when I opened the side-cover I found that the cable was fine, it had just detached. WEIRD! I'm certain in retrospect that the full moon must have had some effect on our bikes.

While we examined the RD, a nice guy in a pick up truck pulled up and after expressing real enthusiasm for our bikes and for our journey offered to help. He had, among other things, an old Yamaha single nearby at home which was not being used. He offered us the shift lever if it happened to fit. Any time a local human offers help like that I am ready to take advantage. I think it's just wonderful how most fellow motorcyclists are ready to do almost anything to help a comrade. Thanks very much to Benjamin Machamer of Valley View, PA. He led us all to his house, gave us the run of his garage, and even though the shifter didn't fit, his willingness to help a fellow rider in need totally made my day.



The next victim of LMMS (lunar mechanical malady syndrome) was the BMW which NEVER, EVER gives any trouble. The electric starter had been getting if-fy and finally gave out altogether. Luckily it also has a kick starter. Unluckily, it is nearly impossible for a normal sized human to operate it. Maybe a 6'6" Aryan rider named Hans can kick start two 450 cc singles at once but the rest of us just try really, really hard to always park at the top of a hill. No hill you say? Time for a true "bonding" experience: recruit a fellow rider to push 700 pounds of bike and rider until it starts. As promised in the brochure...every ride is an ADVENTURE! Maybe I could have sorted the starter, but it was the last day and we weren't that far from home. Besides, bonding is good, right?

The final leg of our journey had us limping a bit but still making steady progress through serious Amish country. It being Sunday afternoon, the gentle folk were out in numbers and their horse drawn buggies lined the shoulders in both directions as far as the eye could see. For me, this fit right in with our retro-themed weekend. Those good folks live their lives at a slower kinder pace, close to the land and to each other. Maximum respect.

We reached home at 5:30 and even though Lynn had to go out, there was a multi course hot meal waiting for us on the stove. We feasted and basked in the glow of our adventure. All in all, the roads were fabulous, the bikes performed well despite contracting LMMS and we had, all 6 of us, stepped out of our comfortable ruts to share a block of time doing what we truly love with a fantastic group of like minded individuals. Long live the open road!



Left to right:

Don Harris, a REAL MAN; he rode 7 hours that night to get home at 2 AM.
Me, Joel, hopelessly addicted to nicotine. Can you get cancer from 1 cigar?
Bill Wells, his fourth or fifth RetroTour, always pleasant and fun to be with.
Frank Boyko whose high mileage Triumph has no right to be that clean.
Doug Snyder, co-leader. He sets the best pace: quick, steady AND safe.
Kieth Silfee, we've crossed continents together. Most pleasant/ great rider.