



CENTRAL PA: A RELAXED RIDE 150 MILES/DAY. 07/04-07/2013

Local rider Chris P. has a very lovely 350 Triumph; a 1969 as I recall, and a GL1500 Valkerie neither of which has been started for about 7 years. Sometimes we get a little too caught up in the 'work' thing eh Chris? Fortunately his very wise wife Lisa could see that Chris needed to 'break out' for a bit and she bought him a RetroTour for Christmas and then insisted that he finally cash in his gift certificate just over 6 months later. Chris classifies as a "re-entry" rider, AKA a Born Again. He wisely chose the Honda CX500 to start out on. It's extremely user friendly in absolutely every way and the perfect bike on which to refresh one's skills.

At the opposite end of the spectrum is Don H. who is your basic Iron Butt type: obsessed with riding, especially long distances. One more RetroTour for Don makes 6 in just 2 years and he will then qualify for 2 free days. Typically, Don will ride non-stop from Buffalo to Kennett Square, grab a few hours of sleep and be ready to rock and retro the very next morning. Then when we get back several days later, he will usually grab a quick bite to eat, roll his late model BMW motorcycle out of the garage and head north the same way so he can report for work the next morning at 6 AM. Very hard core. Very good rider; good company too. Don picked the Moto Morini 500 which is a bit smallish for a such big guy but still promises a good time. It is simply a big time fun bike and the fat K81 tires make it feel incredibly planted when keeled over in a hard curve.

No one is more determined to ride than Bill P. He flew into Philly from Colorado Springs for this tour and was picked up at the terminal by me. He told me he was the guy carrying a helmet and wearing size 16 clown shoes. I told him I was wearing a green jacket but failed to mention the sidecar; I wouldn't want to scare a client away. After some food and a good night's sleep he had adapted to the time zone change and pointed his finger at the Moto Guzzi V50 which was acquired last year and has turned out to be a perennial favorite. Like Chris, Bill was on his first RetroTour and didn't know quite what to expect.

That left the last choice up to me, and I picked the Yamaha TX750 because it is a fantastic classic ride, and a little known, generally underappreciated model with a possibly richly deserved bad reputation. Like anything else, though, over time, with lots of determination and massive effort, it has been possible to transform the machine into a reliable and enjoyable mount. Besides, no one had picked it in a while and it was overdue for a good thrashing. So it came down to 2 from Nippon and 2 from the land of pasta and racy women (and cars and bikes). Or: three 500's and one 750. Or: two reds, one blue and one Kenny Roberts Yellow (originally bass boat gold with heavy metal flake accents/ UGH!). But anyway they are looked at, for sure, four machines with something to offer for this relaxed pace ride through central PA.

Day One: We head north by cutting across Kennett Square (The Mushroom Capital of the World) through scenic Embreeville then less scenic Downingtown to pick up Route 30 for 3 miles: just enough to reach wonderful curvaceous 282 North. We stop very

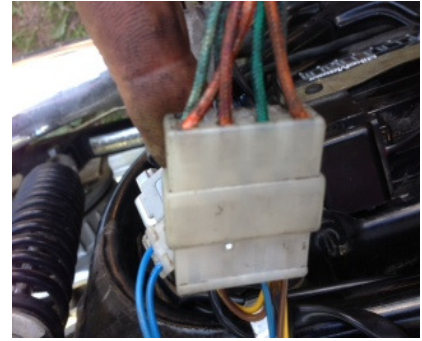


briefly at “The Smallest Church in the World” where we enjoy a rare treat: the descendants of Mr. Cannella who built this tiny cathedral in the early 1900's come out to greet us and tell their grandfather's story. At Glenmoore and we switch to 82 North for a short hop to 345 North which takes us through the lovely Brandywine Valley to our first stop: Hopewell Furnace. We stop here for a little break and to study the giant reconstructed waterwheel that drives two huge wooden pistons with leather 'rings' which pump air into a plenum chamber to blow a constant stream of air onto a charcoal fire hot enough to melt iron for casting wood stove parts. It is absolutely fascinating what was accomplished in the 17 and 1800's using clever but primitive technologies. Interestingly, the crankshaft of the water wheel has its throws arranged 90 degrees out of phase like some modern parallel

twins to keep the wheel spinning at a near constant speed. It worked then and it still works now.

This charcoal/iron technology was replaced by coal/steel before too long. Coal allowed higher temperatures so that steel could replace iron and allow for things like t-rails that steam powered locomotives could run on at higher speeds than ever imagined. Thirty or even forty miles per hour was no longer a pipe dream! In fact this region's coal driven industry sparked the worldwide industrial revolution. Its impact could hardly be overstated, and the center of it all was our next stop: Jim Thorpe, the town formerly known as Mauch Chunk which for years was the richest town in the country if not the world. We crossed the Schuylkill River and followed 662 North past Moslem Springs to pick up 143 North. This route begins with 15 mph hair pins and just gets better as it continues. Ultimately we cross a long red covered bridge with Amish good luck symbols painted on its sides, then take to the dirt. The Leaser Lake Road climbs steeply until at its summit it crosses the Appalachian Trail. Soon after the pavement resumes and we shunt up 309 a short ways to Snyders where, at the 100 miles mark, we stop for gas and a bike swap. Changing bikes every 100 miles or so allows pressure points to vary, making these old beasts more tolerable for the long haul.

We decide that we can exceed our self imposed 150 mile daily limit (just this once) by detouring 30 miles to Jim Thorpe for lunch. Parking is always challenging here as many tourists visit this scenic Mecca on July 4th. We grab a meal right on Millionaires' Row, look around a bit taking in the history of the place then continue on our way but we don't make it a mile before the CX500 acts up. An intermittent ignition problem has returned causing the bike to stall out at the last red light in town, leaving Bill holding the reigns of a dead horse. We open the seat, unplug various ignition wires and test every component. Of course they all check out normally. Finally, after running through this procedure several times the ignition inexplicably returns and we are on our way again at last. It all takes about 40 minutes and the afternoon heat is bearing down on us: its 90 degrees in the shade. Finally we clear town and enjoy the blessed breeze of our own forward motion once again.



Smooth sailing into Mahanoy City where coal once was king. Alas, that throne is empty now and better days are just a memory. As we turn north onto 339, we stop for a rest, a drink of water, a granola bar and a warning that the road ahead is full of unexpectedly sharp curves; best be on you toes gentlemen. As we carve and climb we pass a ridge covered with wind mills generating electricity. It's ironic that in a region holding enough coal to run this country for another 100 years, the mines lie fallow and government money is spent subsidizing wind mills that sit on top of the mines producing electricity when the wind blows but providing few job opportunities for the locals. For us though, the wind mills are majestic as we seem to be riding right into the spinning props, and their soft "Wump wump wump" belies the near supersonic speeds achieved by the tips of their slow looking but fast spinning blades.

Thirty-five miles of heavenly roads through Zion Valley brings us to the junction of Route 80 where our Comfort Inn awaits us, complete with air conditioning and a swimming pool. The super helpful desk person, Doug, suggests we take in the fireworks by the river in Bloomsburg, just 11 miles away. Restaurants also exist there and we shower, swim, rest and then head out at nearly sunset (8 PM), finding our way to a very lovely green shady park exactly on the Susquehanna River where the whole town has come out for an amazing free fireworks display. There are junk food vendors galore and we mingle with the crowds, eating and enjoying every minute. This is a perfect example of serendipitous Americana: you could never plan something this good, it just has to happen. The traffic on the way out is predictable, but we are on two wheelers and the very squeaky rear brake on the CX500 is a huge advantage as a tap on the pedal gets the multitude of pedestrians scattering. It's like Moses splitting the Red Sea and we pass through unscathed, finding our clean thoroughly air conditioned beds by midnight.

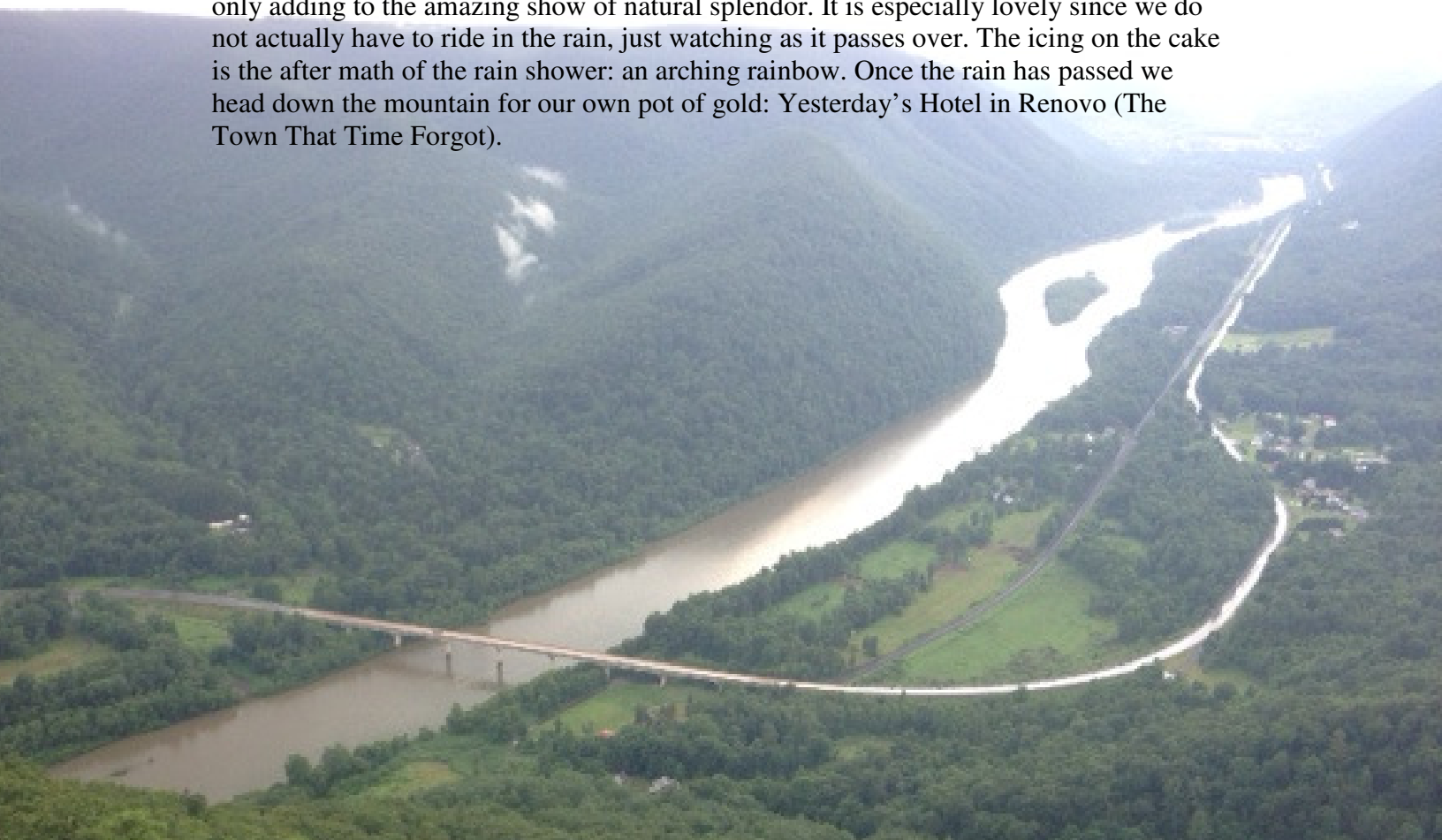
Day Two: After a decent motel breakfast we are off to Bill's Old Bike Barn, just two miles from our motel. Here we bask in the aura of Bill's out of control collecting habit. The motorcycles alone would be more than enough but Bill and his partner Judy have collected so much more than motorcycles that I couldn't begin to describe it all here. We



spent about 90 minutes cruising the museum, then another 90 minutes baking and sweating in the hot sun trying to get the CX500 started. The ignition bug has resurfaced. I consider donating the bike to the museum. I consider riding two up for the rest of the weekend. I consider running 150 miles back home to fetch a replacement bike while everyone else cools their heels in the pool back at the motel but in the end, after just repeatedly going through the same test procedures, and seeing nothing at all amiss, something clicks when two plugs are reconnected and suddenly it starts right up and runs normally. Since we have thus far been able to resurrect the beast, we decide to continue on our journey. Traveling at our relaxed pace we bypass Bloomsburg with a brief sprint on Route 80 then turn North again on 487. Within 20

miles we switch to 118 and stop for lunch where we watch locals cooling off in the river from our air conditioned dining room. We then zigzag on small back roads through a very mountainous and heavily forested region, working north and west until we enter State Forest Lands and then cut south on a very narrow, steep and twisty road: Hyner Run.

“The Run” brings us down toward the west branch of the Susquehanna, but before reaching the bottom of the valley we detour towards Hyner View. A 7 mile long access road with multiple switchbacks leads us to a cliff edge lookout at 1900 above sea level and 1300 feet above the river below. The river twists and turns like a giant Anaconda, crossed by railways and roadways as it stretches from horizon to horizon while bisecting two impressive mountain ridges. It is a sublime view; one of the best anywhere and today we are treated to the added attraction of a lightening and rain storm that passes over us, only adding to the amazing show of natural splendor. It is especially lovely since we do not actually have to ride in the rain, just watching as it passes over. The icing on the cake is the after math of the rain shower: an arching rainbow. Once the rain has passed we head down the mountain for our own pot of gold: Yesterday’s Hotel in Renovo (The Town That Time Forgot).





Here we park up and check into this relic from the past. Built in the year 1900, this 50 room YMCA was used by workers on the railway and in the forest and coal industries. They would ride the rails into town on Sunday night and stay in the YMCA until Friday afternoon, returning home to their families. Now a 'hotel' the facilities have been upgraded very little. It is rustic but inexpensive and very old fashioned. It fits into the theme of RetroTours quite nicely and the surroundings are stunning, with roads to die for. In addition to a Spartan room with the bathroom down the hall there is a bar just off the lobby, and ice cream counter and a small restaurant. For entertainment (aside from watching the locals watching us flatlanders) there is a pool table, and in the basement, what I believe to be the only operational manual pinset bowling alleys in Pennsylvania. If you want to bowl, you must tell the front desk hours in advance so they can summon on-call pin setters: local youths small enough crawl around in the tiny cave at the end of each of the four alleys.

We have dinner and breakfast in the Yesterdays restaurant and take a leisurely walk around town after dinner. We have seen impressive rain showers but we have not ridden in them. Life is very good. We are at our turn around point now: tomorrow we begin to head south again.

Day Three: Route 144 is special. We cross the mighty Susquehanna at the east end of town then follow the river for a bit through South Renovo. Then 144 begins to wind its way up and up into a vast tract of State forest Land.

Interestingly, this entire area, thousands of acres, was barren and treeless by 1900. Mindless greed led to exploitation of the natural resources here and that included chopping down absolutely every single tree for miles and miles. As far as the eye could see there was nothing but bare dirt and erosion threatened to wash away the topsoil until conservation efforts were begun in earnest. The results today speak for themselves: the forest is back! For over 30 miles, Route 144 traverses lush green verdant forest with very little development, and even on this Saturday of July 4th weekend, there is not a car in sight and the road is ours. We carve it up, finally arriving back to civilization as the road drops quickly enough to make my ears pop, descending into the little town of Snowshoe.



Next we pass through the center of State College, absorbing some youthful energy as lots of young people on summer break ply the streets. We expend some of this new found energy by meandering southeast on numerous back roads. The Appalachian Ridge, called the Endless Mountains in these parts, runs from the northeast to the southwest. Major roadways naturally tend to follow the valleys that parallel the ridge but minor roads that cut 'against the grain' are the most fun. In this part of the country a road that angles from northwest to southeast is going to cross mountain peaks; curves are assured along with great scenery. We are definitely not disappointed as we follow the wiggliest line on the map which eventually brings us to Route 74 leading to Carlisle. Sometime around 1 or 1:30 we happen across a mountain lake with a small beach. It's the Fourth and there is a modest crowd but the weather has remained very hot and humid all weekend so we are happy to use the clean dressing room to change into swim trunks for a delicious refreshing dip.

These spots that we sometimes happen across, where, for example, you can stand in cool water up to your neck and admire the surrounding mountains and sky are so special. You never know what amazing sights are around the next bend. On this RetroTour we are riding slowly enough to see them all and our low daily mileage goal of just 150 miles per day leaves us enough time to sample many unplanned treats. We arrive at Carlisle early in the evening without reservations but it doesn't take long to find a reasonable motel with good air conditioning and an outdoor pool. AHH! That's more like it. Riding all day in 90+ degree temperatures can be tough; especially since the CX500 has been acting up again, seemingly during the most oppressively hot part of the day.

Luckily, Chris has been watching each time we wrestled with the problem and based on his observations, he suggests that we unplug the ignition gang connector, crank the engine for 3 or 4 seconds, then plug everything back in,. Of course I know that this is poppy-cock. It can't possibly work, but I am at wits' end so why not humor poor old Chris? It must be that the heat has affected his brain.....this can't work; but of course it does. For the remainder of the trip, any time the CX refuses to start we do "the Chris thing" and have her running in 1 minute flat, no tools, no muss, no fuss. Honestly, I have no explanation for this but at least I am now confident that the bike will bring us home.

Day Four: Carlisle is where Interstates 81 and 76 cross. In a sane world there would be an interchange but in reality the merchants on surface Route 11 didn't want to miss out on all of that lucrative traffic so they used political clout to block construction of an interchange. The 1 mile long strip of 11 that connects 76 top 81 is called "The Miracle Mile" and it bristles with truck stops, gas stations, restaurants and diners. We gas up our bikes but postpone breakfast, running on motel muffins until an early lunch stop on the other side of Boiling Springs, somewhere deep in farm country, at a popular local diner. We are on the home stretch now with only 100 miles to go. We tidily bypass the traffic cluster that is York, PA and rejoin 74 which takes us to the Holt reservoir where we share a long bridge across the Susquehanna with many Amish families in their horse drawn buggies returning home from Sunday church meetings and socializing. A stop in Quarryville for tall cold drinks gets us pumped for the final leg of our 4 day journey.

Now we are passing *scores* of Amish buggies. I have never seen so many; they are bumper to bumper, each with its orange safety triangle displayed on the back as a concession to modern traffic realities. At one point we are easing past a buggy that is passing a buggy. Little kids hang out the back window to escape the heat of the day and they smile and wave at us. It's really quite a sight, but then so are we to them I suppose. I am riding the Guzzi V50, enjoying these sights when suddenly I feel something odd in my right hand and the engine is running on just one cylinder. I keep it going for a few miles trying to figure out what is happening. I raise one plug cap then the other and decide that it's the right cylinder that has quit. When I try to pull up on the throttle cable I realize that the cable has broken and the cylinder actually *is* running but only at idle. Now I look for shade. It's in the 90's again and I need a shady spot to pull over and see what can be done. I find my emergency landing area before long and we pull out of the traffic to deal with the situation. I have spare throttle cables stowed on board and in 25 minutes or so we are ready to get underway again, covered in sweat.

Home is not far now. We make our way back to Kennett Square and park up, unload our bikes, take a quick shower then convene in the dining room for cold drinks and one of Lynn's Famous end-of-tour dinners. Delicious as always, thanks again hon. I do not feel as totally wasted as I do after 2 or 3 - 350 mile days; this 150 mile per day thing has got a lot going for it. We had time to rubberneck and stopped a lot to smell the roses. Hey, I admit that I'm not getting any younger. Sure, I can still munch miles with men half my age but the shorter days are looking better all the time, I must admit. After dinner Bill and I hit the sack, tomorrow I will drive him to the airport. Chris drives 10 miles to his house, and Don? He jumps on his new-ish BMW for the ride back to Buffalo, about 8 hours north. Just forget what I said about shorter days, OK Don?

