

RIDE REPORT: Local Loops. Saturday, June 10, 2017



We were a compact group of four on a warm, sunny Saturday in June: a good time to be riding classic motorcycles through the Brandywine Valley. We were sampling the best offerings of Great Britain and Italy: a Triumph Bonneville and a Norton Commando contrasting nicely with a Benelli Tornado and a Laverda 750SF.

Could this be vintage-Euro-moto heaven?

The day included a leisurely breakfast-cum-riders' meeting, Mexican food for lunch at a local favorite taqueria, and a splendid home cooked dinner served up by my wife Lynn.

Our route would take us through 125 leisurely miles of lush countryside, with stops every 25 miles or so to compare notes. Including:

#1) Smith Bridge: built in 1839 as a covered, one-lane wooden span over the Brandywine just south of the Pennsylvania line. It was destroyed in 1961 when it was set on fire the night before Halloween in 1961 and the Delaware Department of Transportation rebuilt the bridge without a cover.



The "new" Smith Bridge, which spans the Brandywine River, was "rebuilt" in the spirit of the original covered bridge at a cost of \$1.2 million. The design of the bridge was provided by members of a group interested in preserving the historic look of the bridge. Their insistence on keeping Smith Bridge true to its history has resulted in what is most definitely one of very few one-lane covered bridge that will be built in the 21st century.



#2) Stroud's Preserve: a 332-acre farm bequeathed to Natural Lands in 1990. Since then, the preserve has grown in size through donations and purchases of neighboring properties. The land was once part of the Laird farm, a massive cattle farm that stretched from the city of West Chester west to Wawaset Road. But the preserve's history stretches as far back as the founding of the colony. The stone farmhouse, built by Thomas Worth in 1740, is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Dr. Stroud's will stipulated that Stroud Preserve be available as a long-term study site for the [Stroud Water Research Center](#), internationally

acclaimed for its pioneering research on streams and rivers. Scientists from the Center have set up experiments on the preserve to evaluate how to create riparian forest buffers and how they can filter out sediments, nitrogen, phosphorus, and other chemicals that threaten downstream waters. Because the Center has permanent access to the preserve, they can conduct studies that last decades instead of just a few years. It is the only such site in Pennsylvania.

#3) The Smallest Church in the World: At the turn of the 20th century, Francisco Cannella, a native of Palermo, Italy immigrated to Glenmoore, PA. He wanted to bring his family over but didn't have quite enough resources to accomplish this, so he made a vow to God that if He would provide him enough to reunite with his wife he would attend church every day. Francisco worked very hard at several jobs and finally raised enough funds to have his family moved to the United States but keeping his oath to God turned out to be more difficult than he had anticipated. The closest church to the Cannella family was located 9 miles away in Downingtown. The trek to the local sanctuary during the harsh Pennsylvania winters made this task quite difficult at times. Being knowledgeable in masonry and working in a quarry, Mr. Cannella did the next best thing. He built a tiny church on the corner of his property, large enough for one to two people and a modest altar. For the next 24 years, until his death Francisco would attend his own church which is still owned by the Cannella family. There is a sign out front of the "Little Church" commemorating its builder, a man who stood for what he believed in and followed his dreams.



#4) Lunch @ La Pena Taqueria; John Guest, Ed Richmond and Steve Blacker (L-R)



#5) Valley Garden Park:

Valley Garden Park may be the best little-known park in all of Delaware. Located in the chateau country of the Brandywine Valley, the park offers paved walking trails set amid a shallow river that is landscaped with miniature waterfalls. It is the perfect place for passive recreation, such as long walks, reading, and picnics in the grass. For our purposes, it also has a big parking lot and port-a-potties.



#6) Ches-Len

Preserve: In 1763, surveyors and astronomers Charles Mason and Jeremiah Dixon came to the New World to end a bloody, 80-year boundary dispute between Pennsylvania and Maryland. Their survey established the official line between the two colonies and stands among the greatest scientific achievements of the time. A reference point, now known as Star Gazers' Stone, was placed to mark the astronomical meridian line north of their observatory on the nearby Harlan Farm. The Star Gazers' Stone and a small plot of surrounding land are

now part of 1,263 acre ChesLen Preserve, once part of a 17,000-acre tract owned by the legendary Texas-based King Ranch, which expanded to this area. Visitors can pass by remnants of the Chester County Poorhouse. Built in 1798, the poorhouse was a place of refuge for orphans and indigent adults. The poorhouse expanded over the years to include an asylum for the mentally ill and eventually became the Embreeville State Mental Hospital, in operation until 1980.