

KINZUA BRIDGE GYPSY TOUR: 10/05—10/08, 2018

Last year we picked Kinzua as our destination at the last moment, heading away from bad weather. This year, there was a chance of rain, but the destination was locked in well in advance. While riding in a random direction with no particular destination has its appeal, the magnificence of the Kinzua Bridge, and the light traffic conditions on the curvy, scenic, central PA mountain roads demanded a return visit. The scarcity of overnight accommodations in the area, which we experienced up close in 2017, made reservations a necessity.

Once again, there would be three riders; 4-day trips are generally less well attended, but that's fine with me. Bob N. from Middletown, DE and Keith F. from Salisbury, MD would be joining yours truly: Joel S. from Kennett Square, PA. I had prepared three antique bikes suitable for a 750-mile 4-day trip during the previous week. The 1976 Honda GL1000, the 1976 Moto Guzzi 850T3, and the black 1974 BMW R90/6 were check listed and bagged and waited patiently for us in the garage.





We meet for breakfast early on Friday morning. After completing paperwork and a brief riders' meeting, we drag our feet a little to let the weather clear up a bit, then head out with our rain suits packed away, but ready, just in case.

The morning sky is cloudy, but hey, it's not raining for a change; we'll take it! Bob is all smiles, and anxious to try out the pristine, naked Gold Wing. We follow the Brandywine Creek north on tiny back roads to



Coatesville, then turn west. Passing through Amish country, we pick up route 125 in Pine Grove and head north again on one of the area's favorite motorcycle roads: Route 125, which takes us all the way to Shamokin. Normally famed for curves and pulse quickening elevation changes, the road is approached with

reserve today. PA has a “quick ‘n cheap” method of re-surfacing rural roads: tar and chip. The inconsistent traction demands full attention, but even so, we experience a few minor slips and slides.

We next tour downtown Sunbury, where Joseph Priestly lived in the late 1700’s. He invented carbonated water and the rubber eraser, but is best known for his discovery of oxygen, or ‘dephlogisticated air’ as he called it. Sunbury is also the home of the Hotel Edison, built in 1871, and the first building to receive Thomas Edison’s three-wire electrical system, which he helped install. It is a very cool restored building; next time we’ll try to stay there. Toady instead, we head a bit further, crossing the Susquehanna River and finding a very overpriced motel on Route 15 in Selinsgrove. Well, at least they have a swimming pool...no wait...it’s closed for repairs. In the plus column, the restaurant is a short walk, and the scenery in the lobby isn’t too bad; a girl’s academy high school reunion party is happening, and the celebrations go on into the wee hours.



Keith (left) and Bob (right), parked up at the pricey Holiday Inn Express in Selinsgrove.

Day two takes us from Selinsgrove to Smethport, about 150 miles, with a lunch stop at Yesterday's Hotel, in Renovo. Bob and I have done plenty of off road and Adventure riding in this area which boasts several state forests with excellent trail systems and forest roads. Today though, we pause at Hyner's View. It's clouded over, but the ride up is worth it, even if the view is obscured. After lunch, we head north through thick Susquehannock Forest lands to Coudersport, where we pick up the Grand Army of the Republic Highway, AKA the Gateway to the Endless Mountains, AKA PA Route 6.

This little lake is one of several scenic spots along the way.



We turn west and get a good local recommendation for hand dipped ice cream. MMM! Before long we enter Smethport, our destination, just as a heavy rain begins to fall. We escape without needing rain suits by the skin of our teeth, and check into our not-at-all-fancy motel. It's the only motel for miles around, we have a reservation, and it's clean. The rain is serious, and the last thing we want to do is walk or ride to the center of town where there are a few restaurants. We call in an order to be delivered, then the rain stops, whereupon we totally confuse the kitchen staff by walking into town to eat our 'take-out' meal in the dining room. We get a close look at this cute little town which features several fancy homes, many of which are Bed & Breakfasts.

Early Sunday morning, at our tiny motel in Smethport, as the sky begins to clear.



Breakfast for us comes late on Sunday. We first ride about 15 miles to the Kinzua Bridge State Park, where we are the first tourists of the day, and have the place pretty much to ourselves. The weather is decent now, and we explore the displays before walking out on the Sky Walk. It is quite a sight, only made better by the fall colors. We agree that the tax payer dollars spent creating this spot was money well spent.

We were the only ones in the Visitor Center, and we found the displays to be informative and entertaining.

Leaves are just starting to change color, and the mist hangs mysteriously over the mountains.





The Kinzua Bridge was built in 1882 and billed as the 'Eighth Wonder of the World'.

The center section was knocked down after over 100 years by a tornado in 2003.



After an hour and a half, we move on, negotiating some pretty roads for 40 miles into Emporium, where we finally eat a hearty breakfast in preparation for the long ride ahead. We plan to cover high mileage today, reaching for a motel in York, PA, just a mile from the Harley Davidson factory, which we hope to tour on Monday morning. This will leave us with a short day after the tour: just under 100 under miles to home. The La Quinta Inn in York is reasonably priced and there is a cool restaurant practically next door that features a display of old cars and motorcycles. Getting to the Inn proved to be a bit of a chore due to a navigational error that added 80 miles to an already long day. At one point, I thought the troops might mutiny, but we made it just before dark, a little cranky, but OK. On the way, we follow the West Branch of the Susquehanna River from Emporium back to Renovo, along Route 120. It's wide open sweepers all the way, closely paralleling the river bank, and it is a relaxing ride with great views all around. Turning south from Renovo, we pick up 144 which passes through a vast expanse of state forest, with no traffic, no cross-roads, and no worries. Our unintended detour did allow us to experience the bucolic Path Valley. Sometimes wrong turns have an up-side.



At a pull-out along route 144.

It's hard to believe, but at one time, not a single tree remained on those mountain sides: every one of them had been cut down for lumber. Strong conservation efforts in the 1900's reforested the land, preventing top soil run-off, and restoring much of Pennsylvania's natural beauty for us to enjoy today. The weather has finally turned our way; a good thing, as today's ride is very long; even longer than planned.

After breakfast in the motel, we ride a few miles to the Harley Davidson Plant in York. Today is



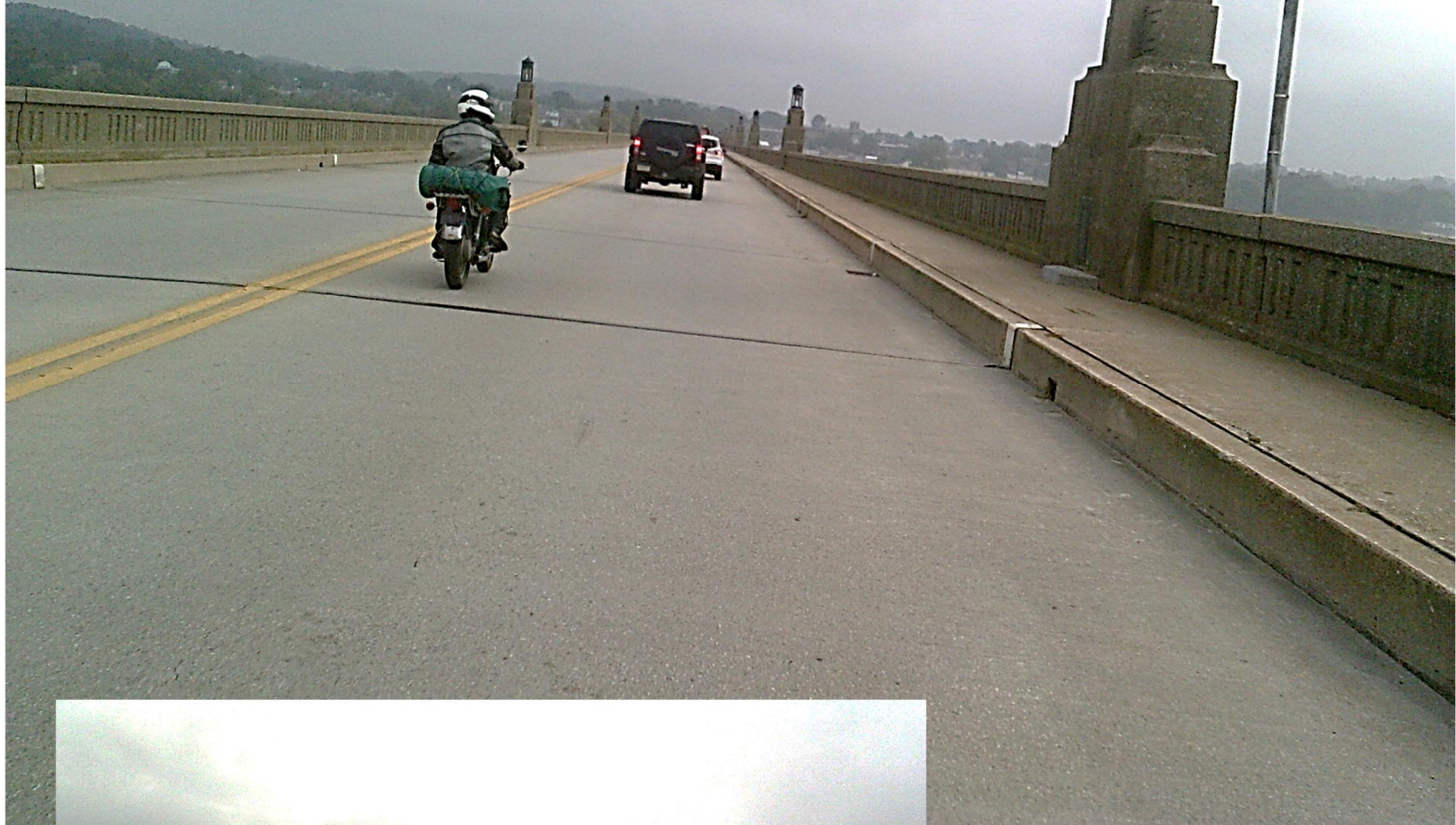
Columbus Day, and we are the first ones there for the small group tour. It is much better than anticipated, we were all impressed and decided to go out and buy new Harleys first thing when we get home. Ok, that's an exaggeration, but the tour was really very interesting and worthwhile. BONUS: it's free!

This place is humming! Harley Davidson is definitely running on all cylinders: the factory is massive and efficient. They are making it even larger since closing the Kansas City facility, and there are hundreds of new jobs being created right here in York. Photos are not allowed, and security is tight, but



I managed to get these. Don't ask! Bob thought that the factory workers should all be wearing uniforms. I offered that they *are* in uniform; the uniform is dungarees and T-shirts. I argued further that the Harley lifestyle is based upon staunch individualism, and work uniforms would be anathematic. I guess I just like to argue sometimes; especially with Bob. He does that to me.

From York, it is a short way to Columbia, but first we have to cross the mile-long Wrightsville Bridge to get across the Susquehanna River.



The final miles take us south on River Road, paralleling the river as far as the Holtwood Bridge, where we turn east on 372. This takes us back through Quarryville and Amish territory, and finally to route 82 which takes us south to Kennett Square. The usual homecooked meal awaits, Lynn pretends to be interested in our boyish adventures, and we three part ways, having shared another unique 4-day experience.