

Ride Report Gyro 13
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The Redneck Gyro is an annual tradition at RetroTours. This was the smallest group ever for whatever reason, but you know what? That's OK. The three of us rode our asses off. No one fell over and the bikes did well.

Fred and Richard had both been on tours before—we do get a lot of repeat customers—and from the 5 prepared Italian bikes,

Fred chose the 33,000 mile 1979 Moto Guzzi V50.

Richard chose the 35,000 mile 1974 Benelli 650 Tornado S and I chose the 27,000 mile 1976 Moto Guzzi 850T3.

Of course ,we would be switching bikes every 75 or 100 miles, so we all looked forward to varying riding positions and noise and vibration levels as well as a full range of vintage riding experiences.

LEFT: Fred carefully inspects the V50 prior to departure. AOK!

As is our custom when starting out in a southwesterly direction, we cross the Susquehanna at Conowingo and at the 50 mile mark, put in at Chesapeake Harley Davidson to make our bladders gladder, to grab a free cuppa, and to check out the cool bikes. A friendly salesperson latches onto Fred and immediately has him sitting on a lovely, lightly customized V-Rod which Fred might have bought on the spot except for the feet forward riding position which, he says, makes it impossible to stay on the bike if the throttle is opened too fast or if there is a bump. OK, sure Fred, whatever you say. (Alleged Harley Hater)

RIGHT: Our Italian stallions seem slightly out of place at the huge Harley shop, but everyone there is always very welcoming.





We continue to zig-zag our way south and west through the Maryland countryside, stopping next for a short break and bike swap at Gathland State Park, located on a wonderful, little used, curvy road close to the WV state line.



*The weather was quite favorable all weekend, always a bonus!
It is amazing how far a granola bar and a bottle of water can take you. We'll need a real lunch soon though.*





We weren't the only motorcyclists at the Bavarian Inn. Our bikes may not be the fastest, just the coolest.

We barrel on down the mountain and roll through Sharpesburg, MD. The nearby Antietam National Battlefield always makes me feel as if I can hear the screams of dying Civil War soldiers echoing through the centuries; 23,000 men and women died here in 12 hours. The January 6th Insurrection in DC pales in comparison. Next, we cross the Potomac River into Shepherdstown, West Virginia and immediately turn into the Bavarian Inn, located on a high bluff overlooking the river. The ambiance in the restaurant is a bit more formal than our riding gear would suggest, but hey, we're hungry and the service is as good as the food. A bit of air conditioning and lots of cold water to wash down the German style lunch and we are ready and able to press onwards.



The architecture reflects the Bavarian motif as well as the food, and several college campuses add to this town's youthful vibe. The waitresses are students and cute enough to spice up our meal a bit, dirty old codgers that we are.

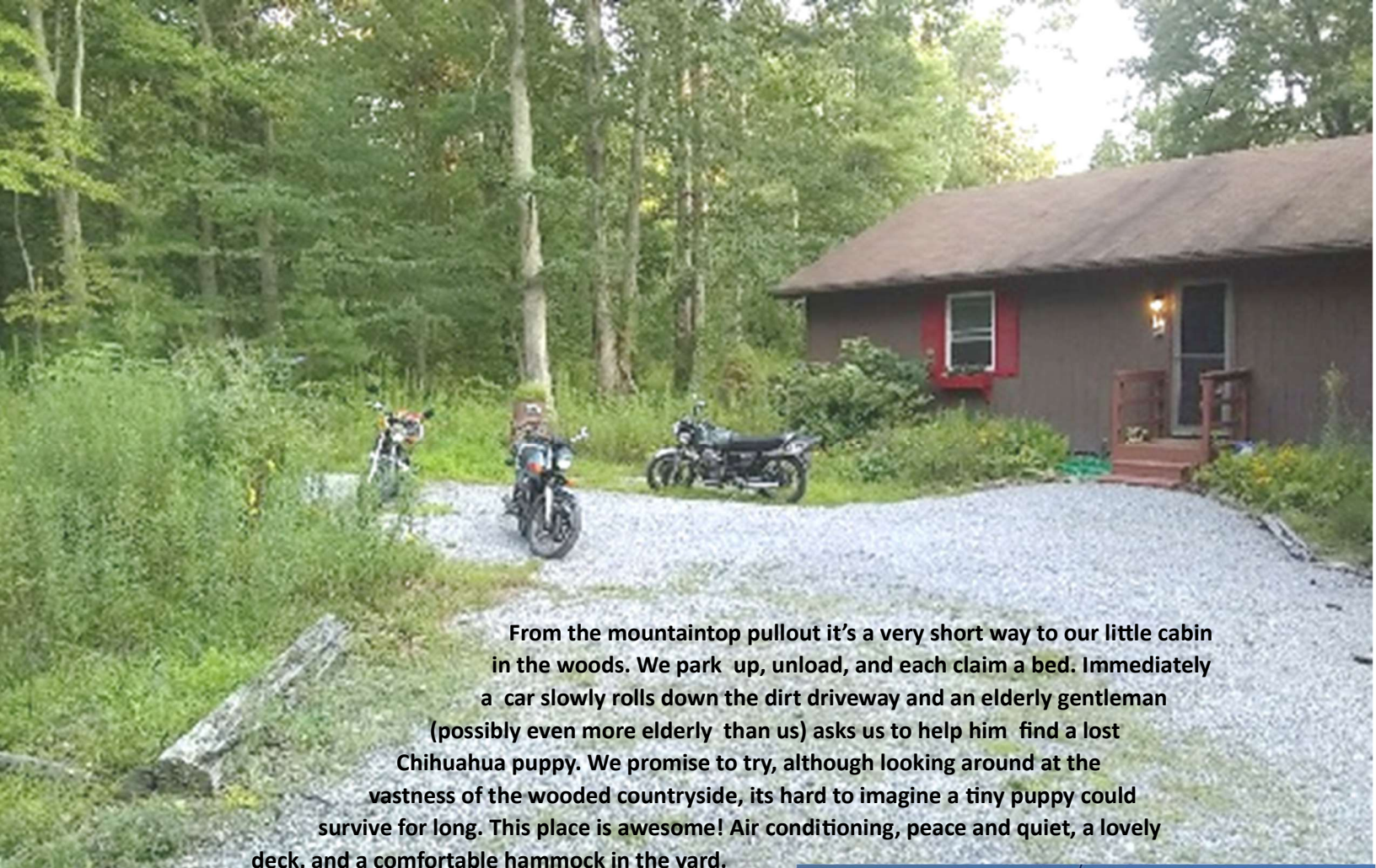


After lunch, we head towards Berkeley Springs via Shanghai Gap and the Tuscarora Pike. These narrow, sinewy roads carry us over a pass that features 'I-can-see-forever' views of the valley far below. To me, it feels like a small airplane experience, just closer to the ground. On the other side, we ease past Unger's Store, West Virginia and penetrate the woods, passing into Virginia on a dirt road that seems to be leading us into the wilderness, but then terminates surprisingly at major route 522 back in West Virginia. A short hop north brings us into the historic tourist town of Berkeley Springs, once called Bath, where George Washington and many generations of indigenous folk before him bathed in the natural hot springs (which are still available should you fancy a dip). Route 9 takes us a bit further west as we follow in George Washington's footsteps, pausing at the top of Cacapon Mountain for a 3-state, 2-river view at Prospect Overlook: MD, VA, WV, + The Potomac and Cacapon Rivers. It's 1,000 feet down to the river below.



Wet, wild, wonderfulWest Virginia.





From the mountaintop pullout it's a very short way to our little cabin in the woods. We park up, unload, and each claim a bed. Immediately a car slowly rolls down the dirt driveway and an elderly gentleman (possibly even more elderly than us) asks us to help him find a lost Chihuahua puppy. We promise to try, although looking around at the vastness of the wooded countryside, its hard to imagine a tiny puppy could survive for long. This place is awesome! Air conditioning, peace and quiet, a lovely deck, and a comfortable hammock in the yard.

What could be better after a long ride? FOOD! Right? We need to provision this place pronto.

To do that we make a quick run to the tiny village of Cacapon where Doris's Deli has everything we need to survive. Beer mainly. Bungee nets stretched to capacity, we retire to the cabin to make dinner and watch the stars come out.



Relaxing after dinner we begin to plan Sunday's ride which has been left open and unplanned until now.

That night I scratch out a route on the back of a napkin which I carefully tuck into my tank bag map pocket for a pre-GPS heads-up reference. Of course, the napkin barely makes it through the day, and my age-blunted memory serves poorly to recall the details of that day's glorious ride, but I do remember some short dirt sections, great, no, perfect weather, fantastic, remote riding roads, and meeting some local characters. Fortunately, Richard is a good photographer; I will let his pictures tell the story of the day.....



*A tattered old map, a tank bag, the sun,
riding mates, and a gassed up Guzzi.
Life is good.*



LEFT TO RIGHT: Richard, Fred, and I with the Pawpaw High School Track Team.

We ride an easy 75 mile loop to Paw Paw and stop for breakfast. The local track team and their coach are raising money by selling some tasty snacks which we obligingly devour. After some coffee and conversation, we are suitably refreshed and ready to hop across the state line into Maryland for a tour of the Paw Paw Tunnel, a 3,118-foot-long canal-tunnel on the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal (C&O) in Allegany County, MD, hand built to bypass the Paw Paw Bends, a six-mile stretch of the Potomac River containing five horseshoe-shaped bends. The town, the bends, and the tunnel take their name from the pawpaw trees that grow prolifically along nearby ridges. Built using more than six million bricks, the tunnel has been described as "the greatest engineering marvel along the Chesapeake & Ohio Canal National Historical Park."

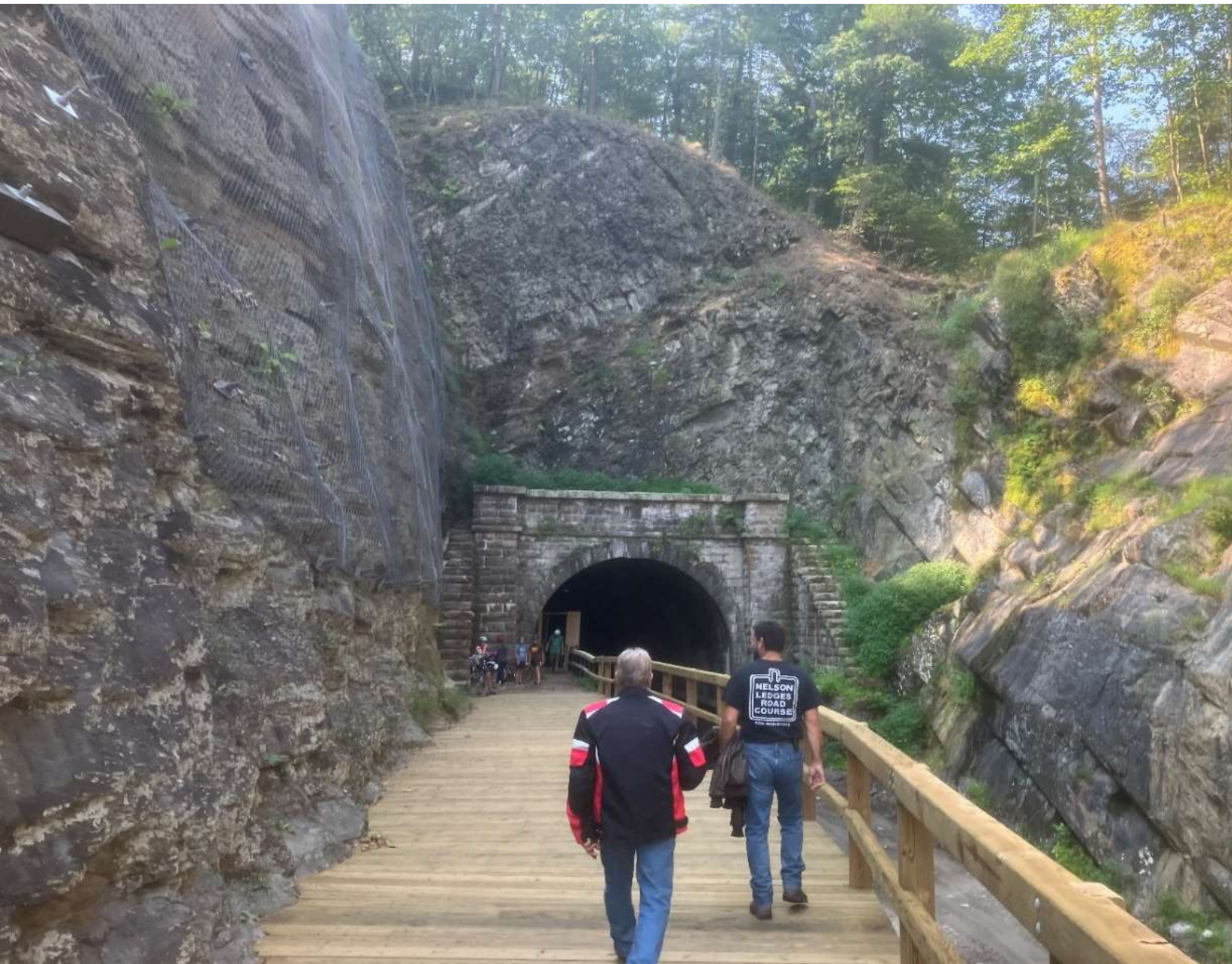
Construction on the tunnel began in 1836 and was expected to be completed within two years at a total cost of \$33,500. But the project proved far more complicated and costly than expected, and the tunnel did not open until 1850, more than a decade behind schedule. The tunnel was used by canal boats until the C&O closed in 1924. The tunnel and towpath are now maintained for public use as part of the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal National Historical Park. Though never one of the longest tunnels in the world, Paw Paw Tunnel remains one of the greatest engineering feats of its day.

We walk the length of the dark tunnel only to find the egress gated and locked.

Fred, and the proverbial 'light at the end of the tunnel'.



After hiking the length of the dark tunnel, we were confronted with a locked gate. Cleverly, we managed to climb along the guard rail, in spite of the barrier intended to prevent that, to get to the board walk beyond. This involved precariously hanging over the canal. The path extends all the way to Washington DC and is used by cross country bicyclists. To celebrate our climbing skills, Richard ascends to pose for this "Elf on a Shelf" shot. (Look above the arch)



Apparently, these bicyclists were cleverer than us. Using their tool kit, they managed to unhinge the gate and ride through. Why didn't I think of that?

From the tunnel, we stay in Maryland for a bit, following the north bank of the Potomac on Route 51W, diverting briefly to explore this section of the river and canal, and encountering a large group of kayakers who are just coming out of the water. A short walk treats us to views of an old train trestle and a fascinating aqueduct, where the canal crosses **over** the river.

AQUADUCT



TRESTLE



Getting back across the river from Old Town, MD involves a water-level, privately owned toll bridge. It costs 50 cents to cross the Potomac on wooden slats, assuming no high water.





We are riding south through West Virginia on unmarked roads now and my napkin route has failed. I am lost and loving it, dead reckoning, hoping that we will hit a major marked route eventually, but these back roads are heavenly. I am secure knowing that Fred and Richard probably have no idea, that I have no idea where we are. Then the road turns to dirt. I

am trying, but I seem to be getting deeper and deeper into heavily forested no-man's land. Finally, we pull over for a granola break. Maybe getting some sugar into my blood will help with my sense of direction. A young man on a massive CanAm ATV pulls up and stops to chat. Caleb lives nearby and is out for a spin. He graciously offers to lead us to a road that leads back to civilization.

Before long we hit a numbered route and stop at a gas station where we meet another local who is admiring our bikes. This fellow likes to talk but may have met his match with Richard. Richard races cars and the two launch into a conversation about old cars and trucks. Apparently, that old pick-up has about a million miles on it. My growling stomach insists that we curtail the small talk and follow this major road into the closest town for lunch. It takes a couple of ride-bys to choose a crowded Italian restaurant. It seems that church just has let out and the congregation has moved here, but the food is tasty and large, and so we pray: ***"We humbly thank you Lord for this food. Amen"***





The penultimate leg of our Sunday outing brings us back to Paw Paw for gas and liquid refreshment. Here, we are set upon by an *extremely* enthusiastic gentleman with an amazing story. He has recently survived cancer, and on a bet, he left the Carolinas on his bicycle just days ago with nothing but the clothes on his back. He tells us that he has been sleeping on picnic tables and surviving on the kindness of strangers. The story goes on and on, becoming more and more amazing. In the end, he relieves us of 40 or 50 dollars, and we head over the mountain on a back road leading to our cabin outside of Berkeley Springs. Reflecting upon the encounter that evening, we decide that his story may have been a bit *too* amazing. Still, the guy was just so entertaining!

Maybe we have been conned, but we don't mind, the entertainment was worth the price of admission.

It has been a perfect day.

MONDAY: THE RIDE HOME.

Day three of The Redneck Gyro commences early after a restful and comfortable night's sleep. We backtrack to Berkeley Springs and turn north on 522 to cross back into Maryland at Hancock. Here I decide to deviate from the route sheet and explore a bit.



WONDERFUL LILLY PADS ON THE CANAL, BEHIND HANCOCK, MD

We do a slow ride along the canal for several miles, then loop around to continue north into PA. This doesn't take long as Maryland is only 12 miles wide at this point. Northwards into PA and we ascend into the Endless Mountains, searching for the "50-mile café" which is found just a few miles past the 50-mile mark. A good ole country breakfast really hits the spot, and we are soon on the move again. At Burnt Cabins I offer up that there is a sweet swimming hole not far off-route. Everyone agrees, considering the heat of the day, that a swim would be sublime, and so it is that we turn off at The Olde Grist Mill and head up to into the Buchanan State Forest where Cowans Gap State Park features a nearly deserted 42 acre mountain lake with dressing rooms, a sandy beach, and showers: hard to imagine a more pleasant diversion.



Back on our main route, we cruise comfortably over a small mountain and descend through bucolic Pennsylvania apple country and Seven Valleys to work our way back toward Kennett Square. I have been in touch with Lynn who has hors d'oeuvres, cold beers, Motrin, and a fabulous gourmet hot meal waiting for us.

We eat, relive some of the moments from our adventure, and begin to think about the next tour.

REDNECK GYRO #13 IS IN THE BOOKS.





Japanese cabbage/sushi/rice salad with a side of edamame. ARIGATO GOZIAMUS sweetheart.