

## Bill's Old Bike Barn; July 27-28, 2013



Summer may be over now but as we enter October the weather has actually become quite pleasant. There are still three RetroTours to go in 2013 but winter is definitely knocking on the door. Back in July we were experiencing very unsettled weather alternating between oppressively hot and humid days and cooler weather separated by spells of rain. This pattern repeated several times. Under these conditions one would fully expect to encounter at least some rain but that would not deter this sizeable group of dedicated riders.

Eleven of us would make the journey up to Bill's Old Bike Barn: 5 locals from Pennsylvania, 4 friends from Virginia, and 1 each from New Jersey and Hawaii. My co-guide, Doug would assist with a group this large as I mainly drove sweep on the R100S/RT/EML sidecar rig and carried everyone's baggage. This arrangement gives the sidecar plenty of ballast and frees everyone else from the constraints of bulky tank bags and other baggage. Riders chose from the prepared bikes as they arrived, eventually settling on a very varied mix: 4 from Japan, 4 from Italy and one each from Germany, the US and Great Britain.

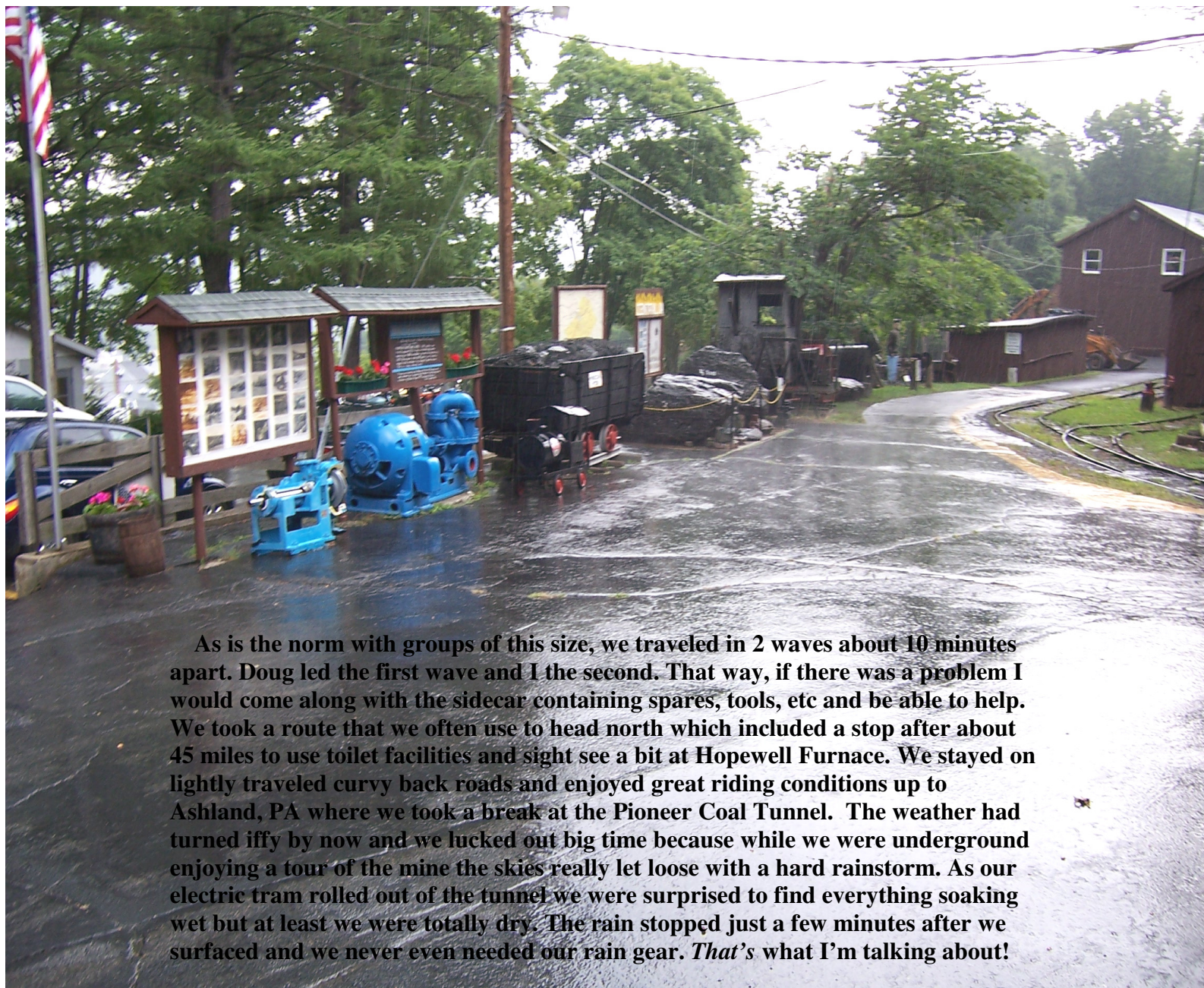
We took the '76 Kawasaki KZ750B1, the '76 Yamaha RD400C, the '73 Yamaha TX750, and the 1974 Kawasaki W3 650. These 4 Japanese bikes represent an amazing spread of engineering concepts, ranging from a primitive knock off of an old BSA twin originating in the Marusho 500 which evolved into the Kawasaki W1 650 and finished a long production run as the W3 which, while never brought to the US, was and still is popular in Japan and Australia. At the opposite end of the spectrum is the other Kawi: the KZ 750, which employs dual overhead camshafts, shim valve clearance adjusters and a balancer shaft. Rounding things out are the two Yamahas with the RD400 representing the culmination of development for air cooled two stroke twins and the TX750 with it's super solid frame and suspension packaging a modern take on big 4 stroke twin design, the first with internal counter-balancers. This is truly a fascinating and eclectic range of Japanese hardware.

The Italian bikes chosen are certainly no less interesting, with the Moto Morini 500 Strada and Moto Guzzi V50 both produced in 1979 representing nimble lightweight 500cc machines with peppy little motors featuring Heron cylinder head designs: a concave piston crown beneath flat roofed combustion chambers. Three disc brakes, integrated in the case of the Moto Guzzi, and good quality suspension and frame components insure that all the available power can be used all the time. Contrast these two with the pair of long legged heavyweights: the 1972 Laverda 750SF and the 1975 Ducati 860GT. These both feature very stable steering geometry which favors long sweeping high speed corners and suspension that insures that the ride will be sporting in nature. Again the group chose their bikes wisely: these motorcycles represent a wide range of the riding experiences that were available from Italian bikes of the 70's.

Rounding things out were the brutish but highly entertaining 1977 XLCR which surprised a lot of riders with preconceived notions about Harleys or about AMF or both and the 1971 BSA 650 Lightning, the sole representative of the once mighty British Empire. The BSA also belied that brand's reputation by running reliably for the entire weekend, leaking very little oil and shedding no parts at all. I believe that all the electrics functioned perfectly as well. Surprising perhaps but no more so than the BMW/R100S/EML sidecar outfit which swallowed 11 riders' luggage with ease and still maintained a pace that was brisk enough to entertain everyone.

The ten riders circulated amongst these machines, swapping saddles every 100 miles while I stayed with the sidecar machine. As interesting and as varied as the 11 bikes were, the riders themselves were even more fascinating, ranging from old timers who have been riding for decades to newer younger riders experiencing this type of machine for the first time; RetroTours after all is about much more than just machinery. Our group included a banker and a carpenter from PA, a jeweler from VA, a man born in Turkey, and a somewhat jet-lagged aviation maintenance manager from Hawaii. Each rider had certain unique and interesting qualities that contributed to our troop's esprit de corps. It always fascinates me to see cohesion form as the trip unfolds; each person contributes something to the team. The pleasure of sharing our passion for riding classic motorcycles and the freedom of the open back roads makes every RetroTour special. Yes, it's about the machines but it's also about the people and the shared experience: *camaraderie*.





As is the norm with groups of this size, we traveled in 2 waves about 10 minutes apart. Doug led the first wave and I the second. That way, if there was a problem I would come along with the sidecar containing spares, tools, etc and be able to help. We took a route that we often use to head north which included a stop after about 45 miles to use toilet facilities and sight see a bit at Hopewell Furnace. We stayed on lightly traveled curvy back roads and enjoyed great riding conditions up to Ashland, PA where we took a break at the Pioneer Coal Tunnel. The weather had turned iffy by now and we lucked out big time because while we were underground enjoying a tour of the mine the skies really let loose with a hard rainstorm. As our electric tram rolled out of the tunnel we were surprised to find everything soaking wet but at least we were totally dry. The rain stopped just a few minutes after we surfaced and we never even needed our rain gear. *That's what I'm talking about!*

We continued north on gorgeous Route 339 and reached our motel just a few miles from Bill's Old Bike Barn at a decent hour. Judy, Bill's wife, had agreed to cook us one of her famous gourmet dinners and our timely arrival left a good 90 minutes to shower, have a beer and rest. Doug, Ian and I crammed into one room to save on expenses since only doubles were available and we were an odd numbered group. I volunteered to sleep on an air mat on the floor; thank goodness the sidecar had enough room to carry the air mat and sleeping bag along with everyone's baggage.

We met outside the lobby at 7:30 PM a just as the rain began again in earnest. Sure, it was only two miles to dinner but after riding all day none of us relished the idea of pulling on full rain gear. People were starting to grumble, and who could blame them? We looked around for a kindly local with a big car but found none. We asked at the lobby and learned that there were no cabs out here in the boondocks. **What to do?**



I reached for my cell phone and stared at it trying to think of how I could ask Bill or Judy for a ride when I noticed that I had a phone message. It was Judy offering to have Bill pick us up in his 15 passenger van. SALVATION! I returned her call and thanked her profusely and 15 minutes later we were squatting in the back of Bill's van. Since he uses it to transport old bikes and parts the seats are all removed and there is a certain oily patina inside but for us it was a luxurious limo. We had the museum entirely to ourselves for several hours and we put our beer inside a perfectly functional antique refrigerator (and enjoyed a few) while touring the incredible displays. At 8:30 Judy called us in for a fantastic lasagna dinner with salads and dessert which she made entirely herself and we all took bread together in a dining area which was imported from Italy. The beautiful wooden bar and the ceiling and walls had been slated for demolition when Bill discovered them on site in Europe and he arranged to purchase and ship them to Pennsylvania for re-erection inside his museum. The guy is totally wacked!

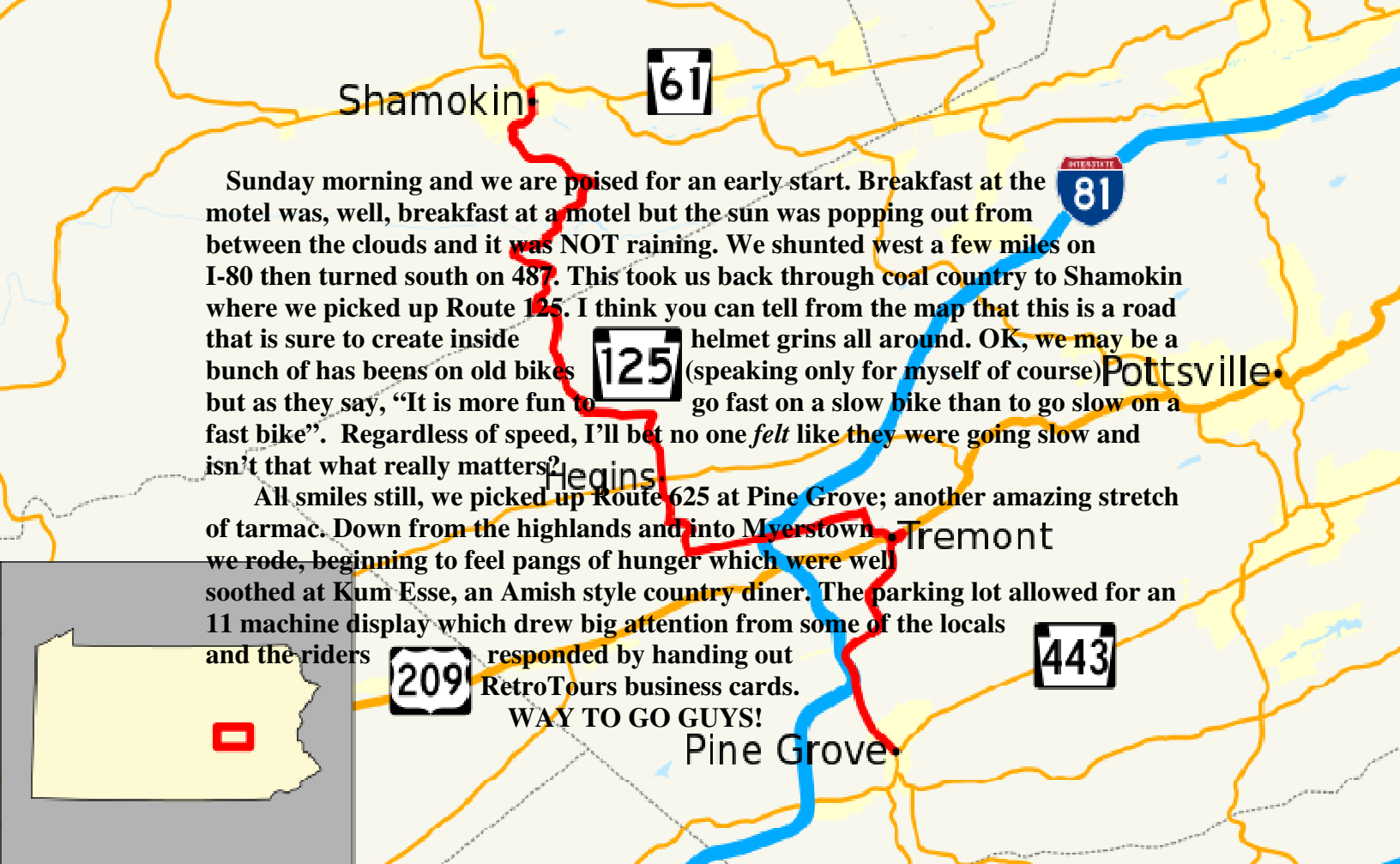
To say that Bill and Judy took good care of us would be an extreme understatement. We are all very grateful for the chance to have the museum and Bill and Judy all to ourselves. The amazing meal and the ride to and from our motel were just over the top. It was a great way to cap off our excellent ride. **How can it get any better than that?**













The ride home from Myerstown featured some bucolic Amish farm country with lots of horse drawn buggies being driven home from Sunday social activities. It's all somewhat of a blur to me now but we arrived home at a decent early hour after just dodging more rain and enjoyed a celebratory meal prepared by my wife Lynn; thanks again sweetheart.



Rob and Joel getting an early start



Ian, John and Aytac; gas stop





L to R: John, Vince, Doug, Andy, Ian & Tom at the motel; day two and it's NOT raining!

The Harley has a way of making Gene smile



Rob & Vince/mine entrance





Left to right:

Nick P of Hawaii. Bill of Bill's Old Bike Barn. Aytac K, Vince P & John E, of Virginia.  
 Ian & Doug of PA. Tom of NJ. Andy & Rob of PA. Joel, gone to the dogs. Gene H. behind the camera.  
 Everyone rode well. We missed the rain. Bill and Judy really rolled out the red carpet for us; can't thank  
 them enough. Great roads, the bikes ran well; a quality weekend in the company of like minded enthusiasts:

**BOO YA!**