

Lost River, West Virginia

Thursday-Sunday; April 24-27, 2014



THE RIDERS:

Bob Gould.....New Hampshire
Richard Anderson....New York
Rob Harman.....Delaware
Doug Snyder.....Pennsylvania
Joel Samick.....Pennsylvania

THE BIKES:

1974 Kawasaki 650 W3
1975 Suzuki T500 Titan
1976 Kawasaki KZ750B1
1977 Yamaha XS650
1978 Honda CX500

These 5 riders represented 4 states and every one of them was a repeat customer and an accomplished motorcyclist. The bikes thoroughly covered the spectrum of Japanese offerings from the mid 70's, from water cooled transverse V-twins to primitive oil burning two strokes. There was little doubt in my mind that these riders on these bikes could cover some ground. A four day run to start our season; I was totally psyched!

Bob left early, riding through some cold weather on the way down from New Hampshire on his modern BMW, arriving mid day on Wednesday. Rich left from Long Island after work and arrived late that night. They both spent the night here while Rob and Doug, both locals, came on their bikes Thursday morning for an early breakfast.



We suited up against the cool weather and prepared for a brilliant ride through the sunshine, heading west and south, through Oxford, PA. Near the Connewingo Reservoir we stopped 50 miles out to adjust gear and enjoy a free cuppa at the local Harley shop which always has free coffee and a clean restroom as well as friendly employees and interesting bikes to look at. Added bonus: the roads around the nearby reservoir are very lightly traveled and great fun to ride, with elevation changes, curves and views of the water.



We managed to bypass Hanover, where the traffic lights always seem to conspire to halt forward progress, and crossed into Maryland, stopping for lunch at Taneytown. A huge commotion during lunch nearly ended our ride early!

We use Impounding Dam Road to bypass Hanover with its traffic lights that seem synched to cause traffic delays as much as possible and are rewarded with scenic views and zero traffic.

At a rest stop in the middle of day one Doug explores the local reservoir. Water levels are definitely down! The temperature is slightly cool but the deep blue sky is glorious all the same.

Perfect vintage touring conditions!





“On Thursday April 24th at around 2pm a large box truck struck two parked cars, then veered “

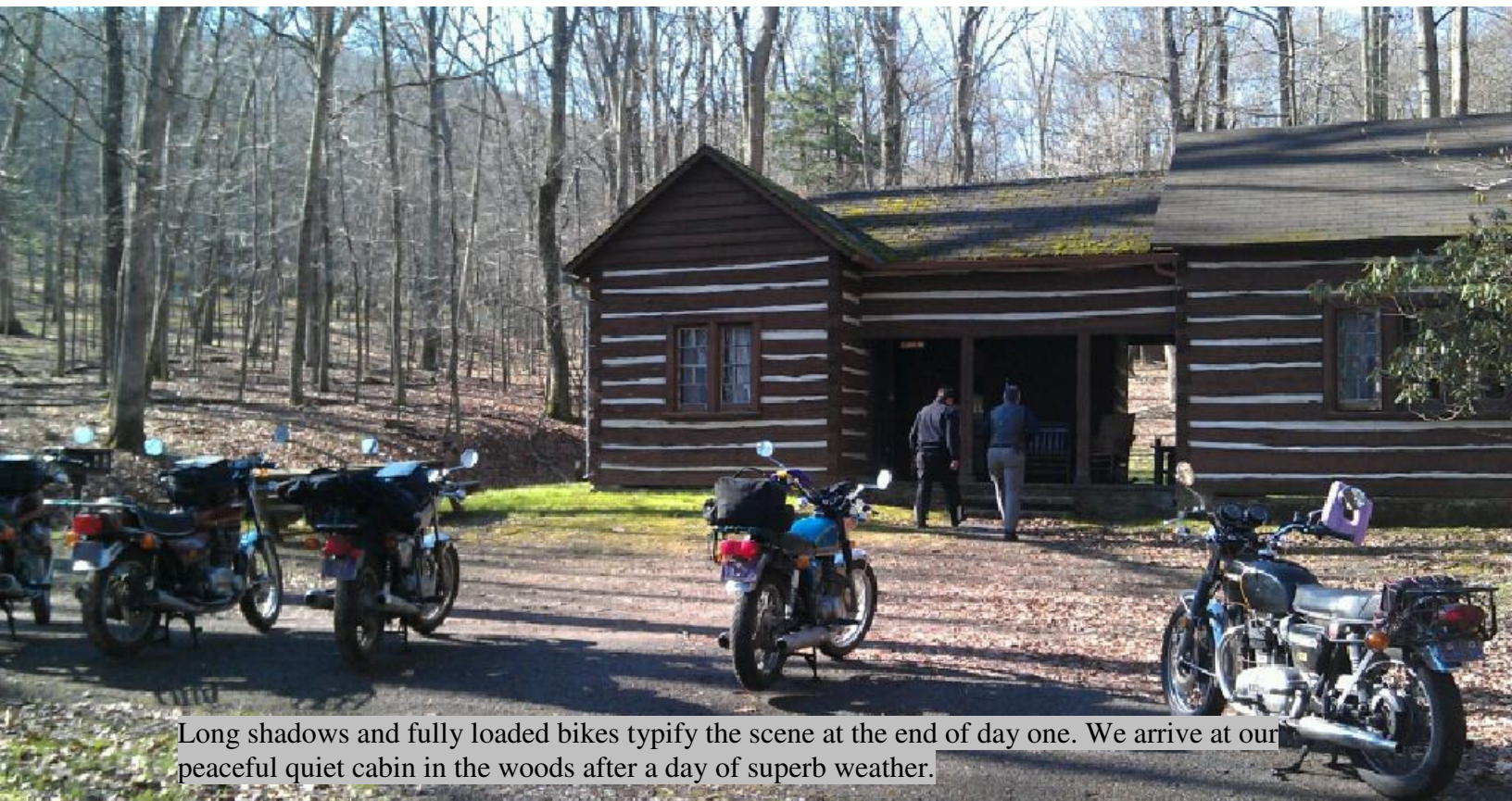
As we pulled into Taneytown, a small town in north central Maryland, my stomach was telling me: “Time for lunch...NOW!” I pulled up to the front of an interesting looking café and thought about parking right there until I saw a more open lot just next door. Shifting to the parking lot we lined up the bikes then sat down inside for nourishment. Towards the end of the meal there as a very loud noise and commotion outside; a box truck had suffered a catastrophic mechanical failure in its steering linkage, gone totally out of control and wiped out a row of parked cars right where we had almost parked before careening into the building directly across the street. It didn’t take much imagination to picture what would have surely been an early end to our trip with wrecked bikes strewn all about had we parked in front. We ran out to survey the carnage. Fortunately there were no injuries.





After lunch we cut south from Sharpsburg, Maryland on Sandy Hook Road along the Potomac River. This road is very lightly traveled, extremely twisty and hilly, with abundant grand views. Here we stop for a break and to warm up in the sun along the river just north of Harper's Ferry, where Maryland, Virginia and West Virginia collide. There is so much Civil War history here; the anguished cries of thousands of dead and wounded Americans are nearly audible, echoing through the centuries.

We make our way through Charlestown and on Summit Point Road we pass the main entrance of the racetrack where amateur road racing and track days are popular. A number of back roads later and we reach Route 55, turn west and cross from Virginia back into West Virginia for the last time at Wardensville. We reach our cabin at Lost River State Park with daylight to spare.



Long shadows and fully loaded bikes typify the scene at the end of day one. We arrive at our peaceful quiet cabin in the woods after a day of superb weather.

Poor Bob is as sick as a dog. After riding his BMW down from New Hampshire to southeastern PA in cold conditions yesterday he barely made today's long ride down to Lost River. At every rest stop his pallor has been decidedly green. We name his affliction the "Typhoid Mary Flu" and apparently it is somewhat contagious: several of us including yours truly got a taste of 'Mary' the week after our adventure. To be honest I'm not sure how he survived the day; this strain of flu was that nasty. Bob chose a private room with a small electric heater in one wing of the cabin and opted wisely to get into bed directly and to stay there.

We gathered some wood; the cabin's stone fireplace was our primary heat source and the very short chimney was poorly designed or maybe the wind was just blowing the wrong way but we had a very hard time keeping the smoke going up the chimney. Judging by the soot on the ceiling, we were not the first to suffer with this problem. Luckily, the park was pretty empty so it was a simple matter to change cabins the next night which eliminated the problem. The lack of campers early in the season had another benefit: we stayed for three nights but only paid for two; part of a pre-season promotion.

Friday dawned dismal and grey and the weather worsened as the morning wore on but except for a recovering Bob we were psyched to ride out in full rain gear hoping for the best. We took the 17 mile long mountain road towards Moorefield. This is a narrow slab of asphalt that winds up and down 2 mountains. There are no crossroads and the few houses perched back there in the woods generate very little traffic. Normally an ideal playground for motorcycles, the light rain made traction problematical so we moderated our pace and just tip toed into town. Even in the light rain the ride was uplifting but as we pulled into Moorefield the heavens really opened up and it began to pour. Still with high spirits, we pulled into a gas station for fuel and shelter and to regroup. We could only chuckle at the weather which showed no sign of improving. A plan was definitely needed.

The beauty of a 4 day ride like this is that we can always sit out a day if the weather is too bad or if we need to deal with mechanical issues or is we just feel like sleeping in. No one feels like they are missing out since there are still 3 full days available to ride. There in the pouring rain a plan developed. We had brought empty tank bags thinking we might shop for provisions and cook back at the cabin. Instead it was decided that we should load up on fried chicken and side orders of greens, beans and what have you at the take out restaurant next door, then hightail it back to the cabin to eat lunch and to reevaluate our plans. Some soup was found for poor old Bob. We packed everything in plastic bags and picked our way back 17 miles over the mountains.

Back at the cabin we built a rip roaring fire to dry our gear and feasted on hot fried chicken and all the fixin's. We may have had a beer or three. Tell you what...it all tasted damn good! We relaxed, napped, read magazines and hiked away the rest of the day then, after the rain had cleared off leaving the roads merely damp, headed a few miles downgrade for dinner at the N&S. Friday night at the N&S means tasty local food and live music by local talent. This is the bluest blue grass you can find and we enjoyed the meal, the music and the company of strangers. After a good night's sleep at the peaceful cabin we were ready for a serious loop under sunny skies on Saturday. Except Bob, poor soul, he was feeling better but wisely decided to relax one more day to marshal his resources for Sunday's long ride home. From there of course he still had to make it back to New Hampshire.

(Right) South
 259 X VA line
 " @ Foulks " Right on
 Back Rd. towards
 Rovey Springs (SW)
 R (west) on 33.
~~R (north) on 220~~
 R @ OAK FLAT along
 river north. R before
 Moorefield back to
 river

We studied our maps of West Virginia back country. Lost River is in a pocket of the state that is particularly undeveloped and we laid in a 100-125 mile long loop following the very smallest lines on the map. Some of the roads took us through long smoothly paved sweepers connecting fantastic overlooks while others were unpaved and to be honest we may have deviated from our intended loop here and there. Of course no one minded as the sense of adventure that tingles the senses when you are picking your way through deep puddles on a bumpy, twisty mountain dirt road that goes God knows where, miles from anything, on bikes that are 30 or 40 years old, where cell phones just don't work, and where if you stand still for a moment you may hear banjos whispering on the windwell....that's something you just have to experience.

It is the essence of RetroTouring.

I think the pictures speak for themselves.

Our hastily prepared route sheet took us back and forth between West Virginia and Virginia. As the state line follows a high mountain ridge, each crossing involves a very twisty ascent

followed by an equally precipitous descent; sometimes on smooth paved sweeping curves but other times on gnarly dirt forest roads. The previous day's rain had created some deep puddles and watching guys like Rich who had plenty of road miles but very little off road experience was most entertaining. To be fair, the man has got some game: he hit the puddles aggressively with both feet on the pegs, carrying sufficient speed to insure that one way or another he would make it to the other side. He slithered through every one; no problem at all. Late Rich would tell us in confidence that he felt like he had "lost his cherry" vis a vis off road riding. Next time we promise to kiss you first Rich.



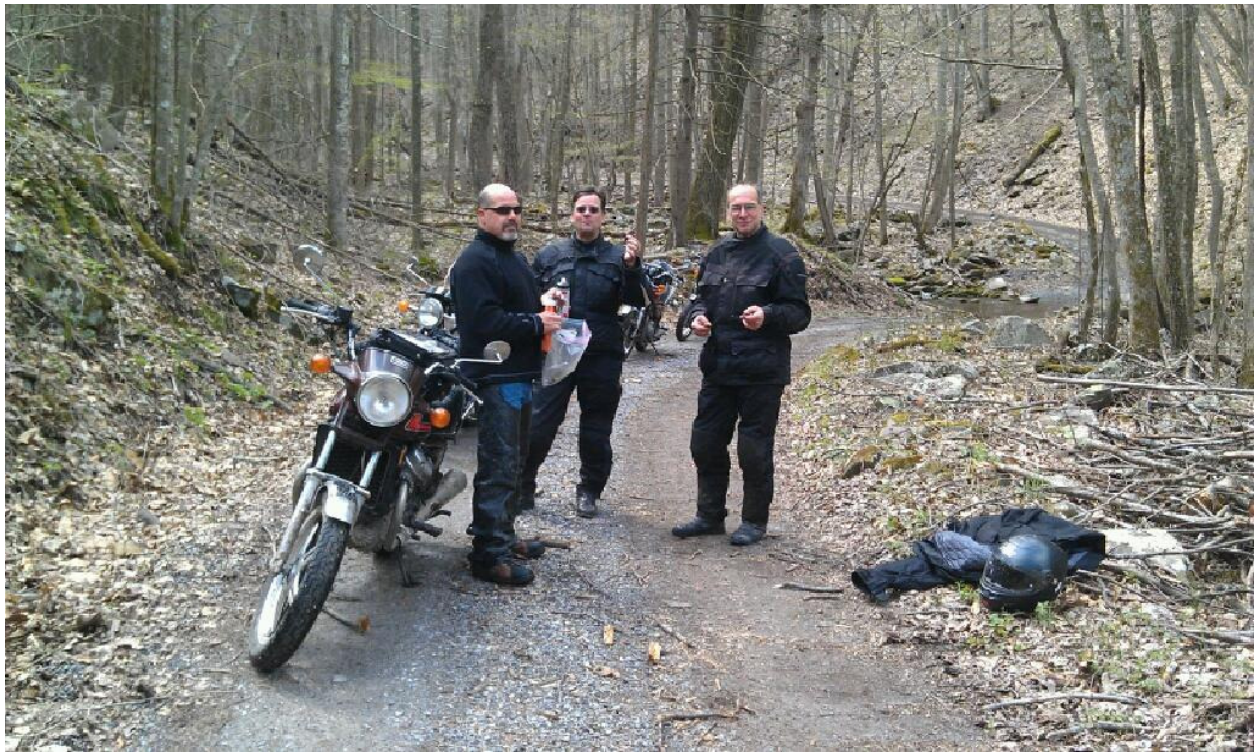
They say that if you flattened out West Virginia it would be bigger than Texas.

One of many scenic overlooks along the way.





Standing in Virginia, looking into West Virginia.



“Ride to eat...eat to ride”



Seriously, would you want to meet these guys in the middle of the woods? I’m just sayin’.

The ride Saturday was awesome. Back at the cabin we found a much rejuvenated Bob close to fully recovered. A final restful night and we make an early start Sunday after coffee and biscuits in the cabin to find our way back. We follow the “Scenic Virginia Back Road” signs along route 600, one of my favorites. After a 2 mile unpaved stretch we pick up a particularly torturous strip of macadam which takes us through the Shanghai Pass, along the Hampshire Grade and onto the Tuscarora Pike through Andy’s Gap to crest North Mountain. At the entrance to Route 81 we stop for a hearty brunch then follow the superslab for exactly 1 exit, thankfully shifting to smaller roads to zig-zag through Shepherdstown and Boonsboro.



Next we cross the Catoctin Mountain Ridge en route to Thurmont, Maryland, zigzagging north and east. All the bikes are running well and we are making good progress. Finally we make the mighty Susquehanna, crossing on an old hydro dam before cutting directly east across the very top of Maryland to Fair Hill. Here we turn north to return to Pennsylvania at Lewisville, picking up Route 1 for the final few miles. Our stomachs are growling; we are running on empty, but Lynn hooks us up as always with fine food and a hot fire. We recount the weekend over wine and beer, say goodbye to the locals and turn in. Bob and Rich will head out in the morning. We feel as if spring has really arrived; our riding season is off to a great start. I can’t wait to do it again next year and I really think you should join us.

Lost River is Thursday-Sunday, April 23-26 2015.

Reserve your spot now with a \$50 deposit..

THIS IS HOW YOU WILL FEEL AFTER YOUR RETROTOUR:



Mason Harman

DON'T WAIT...YOU MIGHT BE TOO LATE.