

RIDE REPORT: CURTISS MUSEUM

RAIN! There was rain forecasted all through the area. We prepared ourselves accordingly, mentally and gear-wise. Six of us convened for breakfast at 7:30 that Friday morning in early September for a 4 day adventure. This would be the first time RetroTours aimed towards the Glen Curtiss Museum in Hammondsport, NY and I was very excited; this destination had been on my bucket list for a while. Fred and I were the only locals; the others drove or flew here Thursday and stayed overnight, B&B style:

Richard A: Wading River, NY

Eric M: Johnson City, TN

John C: Johnson City, TN

Bruce C: Fernandina Beach, FL

Fred S: Landenberg, PA

Joel S: Kennett Square, PA

Bikes were chosen based on rider request, range, and comfort:

1976 Honda GL1000: 19,2921 miles.

1976 Honda CB550K: 5,982 miles.

1976 Kawasaki KZ750B1: 40,680 miles.

1977 Yamaha XS750: 28,727 miles.

1983 Suzuki GS550ES: 9,347 miles.

1984 Moto Guzzi V65SP: 28,985 miles.

The strategy was to ride long and hard on the first and last day. I felt that Hammondsport was a bit of a stretch for old guys on old bikes on back roads, so I had rented a cabin, "Mountain View Getaway", in Middlebury Center, in far northern PA, as close to the NY state line as possible. This put us 50 or 60 miles south of the museum so we could easily visit there on Saturday or Sunday and have one open day before heading back. It all worked out pretty much according to plan, except of course for the rain; you just can't control Mother Nature so you gotta roll with her or stay at home. ***NOT stayin' at home.***

We had 90% dry conditions all the way up. It was a very enjoyable ride with a bit of adventure sprinkled in. The route was rather convoluted, but it nearly bee-lined north while avoiding any highways or traffic. Soon we were in the Endless Mountains of Pennsylvania having bypassed Morgantown and Robesonia, passing through Danville, where T-rail was first developed, opening up young America via train rails. We stopped for a break in Williamsport at the Hiawatha Paddle Boat dock, about 200 miles in. No scheduled cruises today, but a charter cruise was just leaving the dock, so we got to see the paddle wheel in action. I have a sneaky suspicion that the wheel may have been just for show, the actual propulsion being a bit more modern.

The final 70-mile leg presented an option. Depending on the time of day and the weather, we could make time on numbered routes, or try to 'cut the corner' on unpaved forest roads. After checking the clock and the sky, I chose the latter, more adventurous route. Soon we were on graded dirt forest roads. My research indicated that we would pop out at the Cogan House Covered Bridge and regain pavement. Surprisingly, our road dead ended at a man-made ditch-pond in a plastic lined pit. There were several water trucks coming and going, sucking up water and carrying it away. We parked and I tried to make sense of things and get my bearings. Through a conversation with one of the truck drivers I learned that water was being collected here and transported to a drill site for use in fracking operations—common in this area-- but the driver was no help at all with directional orientation. No choice but to back-track.

As soon as we turned around, I immediately saw a fork in the road that I had missed on the way in. Maybe this was the road to the elusive covered bridge? I made the turn and of course everyone followed. The road immediately began a long, sharp, rocky descent, ending abruptly at a locked gate with nothing but woods beyond. It was definitely time to abort this adventure route and head back to numbered roads and firm pavement. Turns out that would not be so simple! The rocky, uneven ground at the bottom of this 'gravity-cavity' made U-turns challenging for all of us. Some of the riders, short of leg, on a tall bike, tipped over. Helping one another, we managed to get all six kickstands down, bikes turned around and upright, but then the GS550 would not restart. It cranked smartly but refused to fire. I felt a hollow-ness in the pit of my stomach but tried not to show my anxiety as I contemplated trying to get a rental truck into this remote spot to retrieve a broken bike. As the battery began to run down from excessive cranking, we came up with a last ditch plan.

Several riders helped push the GS550 upgrade about half way and turned around to face back downhill. Then everyone rode their bikes back up to the fork to wait. I disconnected the always--on headlight fuse and did a desperation downgrade bump start. Thankfully, the engine came to life just before the gate. We retraced our path out of that hell hole and soon were cruising again on blessed macadam. After several miles the battery recharged, coming back to full power, and gave no further trouble over the course of the weekend. To celebrate, we stopped in Salladasburg for ice cream. Founded by Joseph Sallada in 1837 on the banks of Larry's Creek, the town had a population of 374 by 1890. Now there are just 234 souls living here: not what you would call explosive growth. Still, the Waltz Farm Creamery makes really good ice cream, and we needed it bad!

Now we cruised effortlessly on open roads through vast state forest lands. Soon, Route 287 took us through Wellsboro, and another dozen or so miles took us to Middlebury Center, close to the PA-NY state line. Finally, a quick run-down Monkey Run Rd brought us to a dirt road and driveway terminating at our log cabin for 3 nights: The Mountain View Getaway. We parked up and everyone headed inside to check out the abode and to choose beds. I volunteered to take whatever was left and the group generously left me a private single room. Everyone was more than comfortable. The cabin had a great laundry room for washing clothes and for drying damp gear. There was a garage and a barn to explore, and the property was quite private: perfectly suited to our requirements. An expansive porch with comfortable chairs provided a perch for evening socializing, and the well-stocked kitchen had enough food for us to scrape together a meal.

We checked the weather and our luck had pretty much run dry: Saturday looked like a real soaker. Still, we were determined to visit the museum and so everyone brought out their rain gear while I dived into MAPS to plot a direct back-roads route up to Hammondsport, NY. First, I road down the hill a few miles to pick up some farm fresh eggs and a loaf of bread at a roadside farm stand that we had spotted on the way in. At least we would enjoy a decent breakfast. In the AM it was not yet raining, but everyone but me was, sensibly, suitably wrapped in hopefully water-tight plastic gear. We set out ahead of the rain and headed north. Ever the optimist, I decided to skip the rain gear and hope for the best. The first 10 miles were on dirt farm roads. The scenery was rural and there was zero traffic. I was feeling good about not being encumbered by rain gear until we hit pavement and the rain began to spatter, but I was sure there were clearer skies ahead.

I was so wrong! The rain became more and more relentless, turning eventually into a biblical deluge that forced us to slow to 30 mph due to very limited visibility. I soaked through before very long, and not

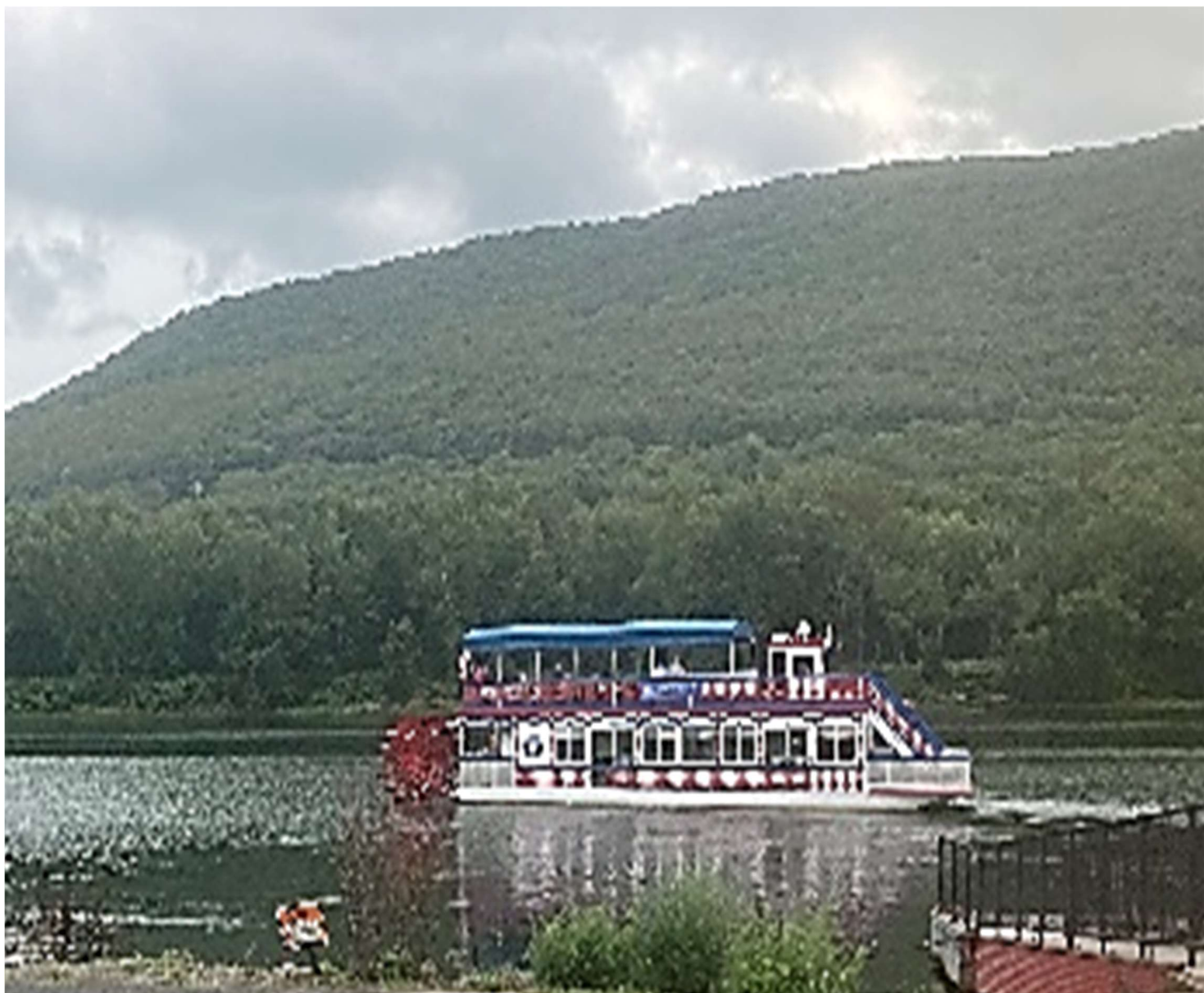
wanting to stop in the open, began to look for the tiniest bit of shelter where we could regroup, and I could maybe put on some of the excellent rain gear stored uselessly in my tank bag. An overpass, an open barn, a shed, a big leafy tree....anything.... but no, nothing but farm fields all around. There was no choice but to soldier on until finally, after 30 miles of torrential downpour, we came to an underpass with a broad sidewalk where we pulled over for a break. I was just beginning to shiver and Fred, who was riding tail on the V65SP, reported that his bike was running one cylinder. He had been reluctant to pull over, fearing that we would not notice, and had been nursing the bike along for the past 15 miles. The right hand spark plug cap had fractured and was arching. We threw it away and pushed the high tension lead directly onto the spark plug which gave life to the second cylinder. I put on some rain gear, not so much to stay dry-- that ship had sailed-- but to hold some body heat in. A granola bar put some sugar into my blood, and we were ready to head onward, reaching our goal in another 15 miles.

The museum was awesome! The first thing we did was to stash our voluminous array of riding gear in a large closet thoughtfully provided by the museum. There was hot coffee and a rest room, both sorely needed by all. I immediately bought a ridiculously high priced warm fleece souvenir sweatshirt. When the gift shop sales person began to fold and bag it, I grabbed it from her and put it on straightaway. Some chocolate and some hot liquids got me feeling almost human as the allure of the museum displays began to take hold. Glen Curtiss was a true pioneer who surpassed even the Wright Brothers in contributing to the fledgling aviation industry in the early 1900's. Located on Lake Keuka—one of NY's Finger Lakes—the Curtiss factory used the lake for a runway, and the 'flying boats' used Curtiss engines for power. These engines also found their way into motorcycle frames for testing, and one of these motorcycles, using a Curtiss V8 engine, ran up to 136mph at Daytona Beach in 1907, a world record that stood for decades. There had been a vintage motorcycle display at the museum the week before our arrival and many of those fine old bikes were still on display. This truly was heaven on Earth for us old bike nuts, the rain be damned.

The weather began to look up as we left the museum and we motored into town for some views of the lake and for lunch at one of the local eateries. Sitting outside with our gear piled up around us, we enjoyed some sunshine along with each other's company as we bantered with the cute waitress. The ride back to the cabin was uneventful and, thankfully, mostly dry. Once back in civilian clothes, we concentrated on preparing dinner, then relaxed for awhile on Adirondack chairs on the open deck. Sunday would be an open day for us, and a check of the weather suggested more wet conditions. Monday looked mostly clear for the ride home so we decided to minimize travel on Sunday by riding the 15 miles into Wellsboro where we could have brunch and take in a movie. The brunch was awesome at the historic Wellsboro Diner, the movie not so much. I don't remember the name of the movie, just that everyone was killing everyone and that some of us walked out early. Once the cinematic carnage was over, we sauntered all around town, taking in the sites. Actually, I felt disappointed in a way that it was *not* raining, since we had opted not to ride very much, but there was still plenty of daylight, so we made our way to the Grand Canyon of PA to take in some views of the Pine Creek Gorge. The Grand Canyon National Park in Arizona need not fear the competition, but we enjoyed the ride up and the views were interesting if not totally spectacular. We returned to our cabin for another restful night in preparation for our long ride home on Monday.

The ride home is somewhat of a blur. The weather was decent, so, good start. We actually saw the sun at times and motored through some interesting forest lands on graded gravel roads, stopping for a break along the Tioga River. Whenever the sun broke out, I tried to make myself large so as to soak up more of

the warm rays. We eventually crossed Hawk Mountain and closed back in on Kennett Square, having covered some 250 miles. We were happily weary and didn't freak out too much when the group somehow splintered into 3 small groups when we were maybe 10 miles from home. Richard, a RetroTours veteran, knows the way, I thought, and of course there is always smart phone GPS, and so it came to pass that everyone found their way back. As usual, our adventure concluded with an excellent home cooked meal—thanks again Lynn—an adult beverage or three, maybe a Motrin or two, and a look at MotoGP, although some of us may have fallen asleep, our deep fatigue overriding the excitement of the races. We all slept well; it was a 4-day weekend to remember.



On the way up we stopped in Williamsport and caught the paddle steamer Hiawatha just leaving the dock.



Er, there's not supposed to be a pond here and by any chance, do you know where the Cogan House Covered Bridge went?

John and Bruce relaxing in the Mountain View Getaway log cabin after a hard day's ride.





Our bikes are parked below as Bruce, Fred, and John enjoy a peaceful evening on the deck.





Eric from Tennessee, ready for any kind of weather. The rain gear would come in handy.



Leaving the Museum; the rain has finally stopped. LEFT TO RIGHT: Bruce, Richard, John, Fred, Eric.

Curtiss 3-cylinder engine. 10 HP, belt drive, Curtiss carb, 3 ignition coils, 4 dry cell batteries. One year only



FASTEST MAN ON EARTH

1907



Glenn setting a record time of 46.67 seconds for the mile race on his two-cylinder cycle, January 23, 1907

January of 1907 found Glenn H. Curtiss traveling by train to Ormond Beach, Florida, for the second time in three years. He was headed there to participate in the official week long time trials known as the Florida Speed Carnival. Accompanying him on the journey with three of his Curtiss motorcycles were his longtime friends C. Leonard 'Tank' Waters and Capt. Thomas S. Baldwin as technical and moral support.

On arrival, with the trials underway and no time to lose, Glenn first brought out his single-cylinder, 3 hp motorcycle, a stock machine he was producing for commercial sale. After several test runs to get the feel of the beach, Glenn set an officially timed record of 1 minute 2 seconds for the mile run in the single-cylinder class on January

21st. Competing in the mile race for two-cylinder cycles on the 23rd, Curtiss came in first on his other stock machine and found he had again set yet another record time of 46.67 seconds. With enthusiasm running high, Glenn brought out his newest bike the next day, powered with a 40 hp V8 engine of his own design originally produced as an aeronautical engine.

Obviously not a standard cycle, the V8 could not be entered into any race on the docket. However, officials did agree to a time trial allowing a two-mile start to get up speed. Curtiss covered the next mile in 26.4 seconds – over 136 miles per hour! It took him another mile to bring the bike to a stop and in the process, shattering the world speed record, going a mile faster than any man in history. The record

however would not be an official one due to damage occurring to the cycle while attempting a second run.

Glenn's comments on the event were a bit subdued as was his nature. He was quoted as saying "Riding an eight-cylinder motor cycle is not likely to become very popular" and at such a high speed "All I could see was a streak of beach with wild surf on one side, sand hills on the other and a black spot where the crowd was." "The machine set up a terrific and inexplicable vibration; it was so great that it did not create wholly comforting thoughts." However, he did say of the experience: "It satisfied my speed craving."

His unofficial world speed record he set that day would stand only for a short four years when it was broken by an automobile in 1911. However, as a world motorcycle record, Glenn's time would stand until 1930 – the year he passed away at the age of 52.





BONUS! *The remnants of the previous week's vintage bike display.*





Using two of the V-8 engines that powered the speed record motorcycle: a Curtiss 'flying boat'.





In Hammondsport after the museum, John, always very entertaining, claims that he is trying to attract women. In reality, he is trying to dry out the contents of his soaking wet wallet.

Lake Keuka





The historic Wellsboro Diner: great atmosphere, good food, and a must see when in town.

Eric checking the menu (or is it the waitress?).



*If it looks like we're having a great time, it's because
we're having a great time!*



**A GREAT RIDE AND A GREAT GROUP OF
RIDERS TO REMEMBER!**

The Pine Creek Gorge, AKA The GRAND Canyon of PA.

