

REDNECK GYRO #10 / BLACKWATER: RIDE REPORT

Coya Erickson..... Port Angeles, WA
 Doug Erickson..... Port Angeles, WA
 Scott Ansel..... Richland, PA
 Loren Gerhart..... Richland, PA
 Joel Samick..... Kennett Square, PA

1972 Laverda 750SF

1973 Norton Commando 750

1976 Moto Guzzi 850T3

1979 Moto Guzzi V50

1983 Suzuki GS550ES

The bikes were checked out and prepared for travel in the week before. They stood in the garage with massive tank bags and lots of bungee cords on the luggage racks. I picked up Coya and Doug, the couple from Washington State, at the Philly airport on Friday afternoon and got them settled into the mother-in-law suite. Scott and Loren rode in and staked their claim to our spare bedroom with private bath. The air was thick with anticipation as bikes were loaded that night and we all retired at a very reasonable hour; we wanted to be well rested for our long ride on Saturday.

Breakfast is early Saturday and the weather looks fine. Final loading is just after sun-up; each rider chooses which bike to start out on. We take to the back roads at once, passing through Landenberg, then crossing the Mason-Dixon Line just past Lewisville and on through Rising Sun, MD as the rising sun rises higher in the east. Route 1 takes us across the Susquehanna River and at the 50 mile

mark, our bladders tell us to take a break at Chesapeake Harley Davidson where we often stop for clean toilets, free coffee, riding gear if needed, and of course to ogle the shiny bikes. The next leg is a bit longer. After a gas stop and bike swap, we reach Poolesville where lunch is planned at Bassett's, just a short hop away from White's Ferry.

LEFT TO RIGHT: Coya, Doug, Loren, Scott, Joel





Outdoor seating is allowed in this state and Bassett's is prepared for us with a massive tent top set up in the parking lot. As always, the food is good, and the camaraderie is growing as our group coalesces.

After lunch, we follow 107 for about 8 miles and get in line for White's Ferry, a historic Potomac River crossing on a cable drawn ferry boat. Offloading in VA,

we ride for a mile or three on traffic-y Route 15, away from congested Leesburg, then head onto a series of scenic Virginia backroads taking us through Charles Gap to Paeonian Springs. Named for the Greek god of medicine, this was a popular resort in the late 1800's when folks from DC would take the train to get here and enjoy the hot springs and luxurious hotels, long since gone.

Next, we follow power lines, paralleling Route 7 as far as possible before finally ramping onto the open roadway for about 15 miles of easy cruising. I watch the landmarks go by carefully so as not to miss the turn onto Blueridge Mountain Road which takes us up, up and over Storm Mountain, past opulent mansions and terminating at Route 50, but not before we stop to admire the Mount Weather



Emergency Operations Center. From the side of the road, we peer past locked, guarded gates at the 435 acre site which includes 600,000 square feet of hardened underground space. The US government gets relocated here in case of attack, as it was during 9/11.



We use Route 50 to cross the Shenandoah River, then exit immediately to cut through Virginia horse farm country on a rough gravel dirt road, optimistically named Featherbed Road, then make our way to Old Route 55, a curvy mountain road through Baker, Needmore, and Moorefield. It is beginning to rain, but our goal is near, so we dress the part and press on. Back roads lead us up to a mountain top with a power plant on it. We gas up and try to warm up; damn! It's cold up here. Power Station Hwy and the Synergy Highway bring us to Route 32 and Davis, WV, population around 700, and at 3,100 feet, the highest town in West Virginia. Here, the Blackwater 100 was run: the biggest and bad-est off-road race that there ever was. Just another 10 miles—we are cold and wet by now—and we finally reach our luxury vacation home in the mountains of the Canaan Valley. The hot tub by a burbling spring awaits. We partake and our freezing bones are restored.



It is fortunate that our vacation house in the mountains has a dryer. Our gear is wet, and the dryer gets a serious workout. The next day the weather is kinder, hot even, but I can assure you that no one complains. The middle day of the three day Gyro sometimes finds us just riding randomly, soaking up the great roads and lush scenery of West-By-God-Virginia. Other times, if we're too tired or the weather just sucks, we hole up in our cabin and rest. This time, we feel good and the weather beckons. Plus, I have found a destination that promises to be interesting: The Trans-Allegheny Lunatic Asylum. I mapped out a route that starts with some major numbered roads then switches to small county roads. In the end, I missed a sign (if there was one) and we find ourselves following an amazingly narrow mountain road, way, way off the beaten track. It seems to go on forever and no one minds one bit. This is WV riding at its best; BEAUTIFUL! Un-trafficked, tiny roads that connect mountaintops to hollows. If you listen carefully, you can hear banjos. Every road must go *somewhere* I keep telling myself, and sure enough, eventually we pop out onto a major route, although I don't know which one, or which way to turn., Time for a break, I guess. Shunning GPS, we do it the old way and actually talk to people: we ask for and receive orientation, then regain the route to Weston.



Designed in Gothic and Tudor Revival styles by Baltimore architect Richard Snowden Andrews, the Lunatic Asylum was constructed from 1858 to 1881. Originally designed to hold 250 people, it became grossly, inhumanely overcrowded in the 1950s with 2,400 patients. It was forcibly closed in 1994 due to changes in patient treatment ethics. The hospital was bought by Joe Jordan in 2007 and is opened for tours and other events to raise money for its restoration. The hospital's main building is the largest

hand-cut stone masonry building in the United States, and the second largest in the world, with the only bigger one being the Kremlin in Moscow. The Weston Hospital Main Building was designated a National Historic Landmark in 1990.

I find it fascinating that the architect felt certain that if he designed the space just so it would help the residents with mental illness recover. Maybe he was right, we tour the facility to find out.

Wide corridors, bright colors, large windows...yes, it does have an uplifting effect. But most of the facility is still very rough; its restoration is a decades long ongoing project, like many old motorcycles I suppose.



The fully restored sections *are* uplifting, with bright colors and wide corridors, but maybe someone should have suggested that mental health is just a motorcycle ride away. After our tour we drop a little more money in Weston by eating lunch at a local restaurant. The town can use it, some many jobs were lost when the asylum closed. Fully refreshed, we re-fuel and head out for the 80 mile ride back to Davis.



More great riding: the reason we came to WV.



We prepare to leave our weekend home early on Monday morning after a restful night. The first order of business is breakfast, and we manage to find a very out of the way restaurant next to a tiny airstrip. We decide to don rain gear as we remount, since the sky is threatening. I roll the dice and ride without. Luckily for me, the rain holds off.

With our bikes and bellies full, we pass back through Davis, then Thomas, and make our way to Route 50 which we follow for a good long way. This is a wide open two lane that crosses over several mountains including the aptly named Mt. Storm. We make good time as the towns of Shanks, Hanging Rock, and Capon Bridge come and go, riding through endless sweepers and the occasional hairpin, heading due east. Watching closely, I manage to pick out the turn-off for Scenic Byway 600. This tiny bucolic road crisscrosses the VA/WV state line. There is no traffic at all in this 'dead space'; between the states; the road is entirely ours. An even more obscure back road leads us up through the Shanghai Gap, with several 10 mph hairpins and a very bumpy road surface. We connect with the Tuscarora Pike which follows a high ridge affording splendid views to the left and right, passing through Civil War towns like Martinsburg and Boonsboro, we next surmount the Catoclin Pass, crossing finally back into Pennsylvania, and continue east ward, finally brushing Amish country just before regaining home at Kennett Square. We made it!

My very understanding wife Lynn has prepared a hot meal, gourmet style, and we eat and get warm and cozy with adult beverages. Tomorrow everyone will return home. We have managed to travel through the Covid pandemic. No one got sick. In fact, our mental health is greatly improved.



Our adventure is over, but the memories will last forever.



L to R: Joel, Coya, Scott, Doug, Loren



Someone really likes that Norton!