

RIDE REPORT GYRO 2022...OUCH! FULL DISCLOSURE. August 14th,15th, 16th 2021

Eric Waciega: Maryland
 1984 Moto Guzzi V65SP 25,835 miles
 Joel Samick: Pennsylvania
 1978 Moto Guzzi 850T3 23,708 miles

Three riders signed up for this massive, all Italian bike ride to the wilds of West Virginia. At the last moment, 2 cancelled, leaving Eric and me. All Italian became all Moto Guzzi when it was decided to ride 2 of the 3 Guzzis in the RetroTours fleet. Eric is a Maryland Forest Ranger and we got acquainted over breakfast on Friday morning. 7 AM is on the early side, but we had a very ambitious day planned.



That's Eric on the right. I'm the goofy looking one.

We load up and familiarize ourselves with our bikes, then set out on a nice day, heading southwest to cross the Susquehanna into Maryland over the Conowingo Reservoir Dam. We progress smoothly westward across The Free State through Cockeysville, Reisterstown, Finksburg, and Eldersburg, each historic village connected to the next by relaxed, scenic 1 or 2 lane roadways. Finally running out of Maryland just past Sharpsburg, we cross the

Potomac into West Virginia, stopping for lunch at The Bavarian Inn, perched on a river overlook in Shepherdstown. Eric is riding the 850 at this point; we've been switching bikes every 75 miles or so.

Just past Martinsburg we pick up one of my favorite sections of road: The Tuscarora Pike which leads us to The Hampshire Grade and Shanghai Pass. This route ascends to 1500 feet, affording fantastic views of Back Creek. The feeling is akin to flying a small plane at low altitude. There is no traffic at all as we negotiate the twisty, bumpy road that crosses back and forth from WV to Virginia. Passing through the tiny village of Unger's Store, we find an obscure dirt road that pops out onto Route 522 in Virginia.

A short run south on this major roadway brings us to the aptly named Sleepy Creek Road which connects us to intermediate routes 127, 29, and finally 50 west, featuring long, broad sweepers which our rangy Italian bikes devour like a bowl of fresh pasta.



LUNCH STOP IN SHEPHERDSTOWN, WV



REST STOPS SOMEWHERE IN RURAL WEST VIRGINIA

Route 55 is a superhighway which we avoid by taking Old Route 55: the original narrow road that winds up and down several small, forested mountains enroute to Moorefield. Soon we ride right past dirt road 19 before realizing our mistake, then double back ½ mile to pick up a 15 mile-long dirt road that passes through **Dolly Sods** — a U.S. Wilderness Area in the Allegheny Mountains of eastern West Virginia, part of the Monongahela National Forest and the U.S. Forest Service. Dolly Sods is a rocky, high-altitude (2600-4100 feet above sea level) plateau with sweeping vistas and lifeforms normally found much farther north in Canada. To the north, the distinctive landscape of "the Sods" is characterized by stunted trees, wind-carved boulders, heath barrens, grassy meadows created in the last century by logging and fires, and sphagnum bogs that are much older. To the south, a dense cove forest occupies the branched canyon excavated by the North Fork of Red Creek. The name derives from an 18th-century German homesteading family — the Dahles — and a local term for an open mountaintop meadow — a "sods". The area was used for artillery practice in WWII and unexploded ordinance may still lie about; best to stick to established trails and roadways.

Dirt-road 19 is one such established roadway, but to us it feels like the artillery practice is ongoing. The washboards are so severe that we are certain our bikes will be rattled to death. We slow to a tolerable pace and bounce our way through this wilderness area, finally crossing Red Creek where we pause to chat with some local hikers who are also bikers as they check out our old bikes. We have finally regained pavement on a 1-lane road should take us back to a numbered route. I was last here a few decades ago, and things look remotely familiar. In the past 15miles, we have seen one car and 50 deer. I will see one more deer close up.

A mile or two down this tiny, paved road that connects Dolly Sods to WV Route 32, a medium sized doe runs full tilt into my front wheel, taking it out. I am on the 850T3, and I hit the ground hard. I realize at once that I have probably broken a rib or two. Eric's ranger training kicks in and he wants to call 911 but there is no reception. I tell him, far too optimistically, that I will be OK after a brief rest. Eric picks up the massive Guzzi and we survey the damage. The crash bar is scratched up, the headlight popped out, and the left foot rest is bent way back. Still, it looks rideable. Eric manages to put the headlight back together, and with no better option available, I slowly climb into the saddle, and we continue onward at a reduced pace. The day has been one spectacular ride; too bad it has to end this way. It's about 25 miles to our "river-side double-wide" just outside of Parsons, WV (population 1500). The road is spectacular, but I don't really notice; I am hurting for sure. In the tiny village of Parsons, my route sheet

says to turn at the Chevy dealer, but we don't see a Chevy dealer and pass right through town. Doubling back, I pull into a gas station and ask a local if there is Chevy dealer in town: "no, but there used to be". So much for Google Earth. With this friendly gentleman's help, we find the building that used to be the Chevy dealer and get back on route, crossing the Cheat River, then following the riverbank to our accommodations for the night.

The trailer is well air conditioned and has an overstuffed leather recliner where I sit and don't get up until morning, after eating a half dozen Motrins. Planning ahead for bladder control issues, Eric finds a big jug for me, and we settle in for the night. My wife wants to come get me but it's 5 hours one way by highway. I insist on waiting until morning, then deciding what to do. Eric gets to explore a bit while I sit and concentrate on breathing. In the morning I decide that I should be able to ride at least half way home at which point I can reassess my condition and plan accordingly. On Sunday, we ride a more direct route than originally planned towards home, covering 175 miles until I throw in the towel and call Lynn to come with the pick up truck. Eric loads both bikes into the truck bed and drives the three of us home. We arrive around 10 PM. It takes me a few weeks to recover enough for the next tour. In 25 years, there have been crashes and some injuries, but this is the first time I have crashed myself. I will be eternally grateful to Eric for all his help and patience. He dressed my wounds and helped me immensely. His 3 day ride shrank to a 2 day ride: not what he signed up for, though we both understand that the possibility always exists.

THANK-YOU ERIC! Please come on another tour and I promise not to fall down again.



***SOMETIMES WE FIND OURSELVES IN THE MIDDLE OF NOWHERE
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I spent 100% of my time at the “river-side double-wide” in this red chair while Eric explored the back porch, the back yard, and the Cheat River, which is formed by the junction of its Black Fork and Shavers Fork, at Parsons, West Virginia, in the Allegheny Mountains. Its 1,380-square-mile basin drains parts of southwestern Pennsylvania, western Maryland, and, in West Virginia, parts of central Preston County, western Tucker County, eastern Randolph County, northern Pocahontas County, and eastern Monongalia County.



*RetroTours will return to this area one day soon.
Much was left unexplored.*