

The Eastern Shuffle

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My trip to the 37th annual BMW MOA rally in Johnson City, TN began around 7:30AM in a very light rain that ended almost immediately. Deciding to take I-40 to Lonoke before beginning my planned route North on US 70 to AR 49 through Helena and into Mississippi, I stopped at the McD's there, and before I finished my Egg Mc., a BMW MC driver from New Mexico pulled up on an LT. He introduced himself as Dave Stetz and said he, too, was headed to Johnson City. I would later see Dave at both the MOA and RA rallies.

My route through Mississippi took me along MS 4, to MS 30 and a small section of the Natchez Trace, then on US 72 to Huntsville, AL. At Mooresville, AL, the rain was back and looked like it was going to be around for a while. I rode the final 24 miles in the rain to Monte Sano SP, a scenic spot located on a hill on the eastern edge of Huntsville, and walked into the park reservation office with the rain at its heaviest. My plan was to tent camp at Monte Sano for the night, but due to the rain, I rented a small cabin instead. It didn't take long for the rain to end. Recorded miles today totaled 406.



After unloading the bike, I went into town for dinner at a local Subway near the medical center and toured a little of Huntsville before heading back up to the park. By the time I made it back to the cabin, the temperature was cooler and the clouds were clearing. I was actually regretting not tent camping as originally planned. However, around 12:30AM I was awakened by a lighting strike that sounded like it was at the front door. The rain was coming down as heavy as I have ever seen it. The radar on my phone to indicated that Huntsville had a dark red radar image covering it. I was glad that I opted for a cabin after all.

My second day was going to be a short mileage one. I would be taking a 116 mile route to Hixson, TN, just north of Chattanooga, to spend the night with my aunt and uncle. I connected with US 72 out of Huntsville and exited at AL 117 to



connect with AL 91 into TN. AL 91 runs along the Tennessee River. When I passed over the River on AL 117 I got a glimpse of the first of many coal -fired plants that I saw throughout my entire trip. Railroads and rivers seem to be two pre-requisites for sighting coal-fired electric generating facilities. Most of the day was spent on the phone and computer trying to get a wireless broadband signal from AT&T.

After several moves up the service chain and changes to some settings, a limited signal enabled me to telecommute with the office. A nice dinner with additional cousins and their children capped off the night.

Early the next morning found me making my way to Knoxville for a day of tours that included six near-zero energy homes designed and constructed with the help of Jeffrey Christian, a scientist with Oak Ridge Building Technology Lab. I took TN 58 most of the way to the East side of Knoxville for a short 102 mile day and went straight to meet my friend. Jeff had me talk to the clearance authorization clerk at Oak Ridge to do the background check necessary to enter Oak Ridge as an escorted visitor. We started out with a tour of three homes that were completed and wired with all kinds of sensors, robotic door openers, automatic faucet operators, and different building techniques, all on the same street in one neighborhood, plus, two other homes under construction in a second neighborhood. I got a special tour of the Building Technology Labs. We, as a nation, are benefiting immensely from the research and work that Jeffrey and the building



technology lab are doing as it relates to energy efficiency and building-component testing. Unfortunately, the lessons learned from the studies at Oak Ridge have been routinely dismissed by the typical home builder. The characteristics that each of these near-zero energy homes share are that they are properly oriented, are equipped with both solar hot water and solar electric systems, and are constructed to minimize the long-term operating costs.

Later we delivered a modified Prius hybrid to the driveway of a sixth house that was occupied. Oak Ridge is documenting the energy savings associated with commuting to work in a modified electric hybrid car, also. The HVAC system in this last home is still being monitored and controlled from Jeff's computer and is one of three houses in this third neighborhood constructed with the help of Habitat for Humanity. After meeting the occupants and touring the house, we went directly downtown to a favorite watering hole and had a stout micro brew with fish and chips for dinner. I had initially planned to go on to Cades Cove Campground inside GSM NP for the night, but Jeff invited me to stay in his guest bedroom, and I was able to meet Jeff's wife and father-in-law the next morning.

The next day I was up and out early for a 293 mile day with plans to tour the infamous Tail of the Dragon near Deal's Gap. I decided to drive into the Cades Cover area just to see the campground and road leading into it. I opted for the Old Cades Cove road, but encountered a "DEAD END" sign about 6 miles off US 321 near Townsend. I was expecting a dirt road, but not a closed road. I circled back and took the main Cades Cove road in and out. The area was buzzing with people. Part of the road into Cades Cove is closed on certain mornings of the week until about 10:00 AM so that cyclists and hikers can enjoy the route without interruption from motorized vehicles.

After Cades Cove, I was on The Foothills Parkway which makes up part of the loop that runs around the south perimeter of GSM NP and connects with the section of TN 129 known as The Tail of the Dragon. I was fortunate to be here on a Wednesday. The number of motorcycles can get really numerous on the weekends. Needless to say this section of highway and the rest of the roads going through the heart of GSM NP are incredibly beautiful. There were several photographers snapping photos of every motorcycle coming and going through the Dragon. They

sell the photos to riders by having the riders select their pictures from the photographers' websites. This one I ordered from Zee Photo's. The Deal's Gap



parking lot was full of bikes, and everyone was consuming edibles or collectibles. The Deal's Gap Store sells nothing on line. They want you to actually show up to acquire their mementos. The only significant traffic was in Cherokee, and then Gatlinburg, which, as a town, reminded me of Keystone, SD.

TN 321 and TN 93 led me to Johnson City. Arriving around 6:00 PM, I found the registration room closed. That was not unexpected since the rally did not officially start until the next day. That does not mean people don't show up early. It looked like at least half of the 8,500 people who were to eventually attend the rally were already set up. I found one of the last fairly level spots in the main camping area and was off to bed as a continuous rain, which lasted overnight, began to fall.

Breakfast at the local Sit-n-Bull resulted in a really bad attempt at a ham and egg omelet and grits. This Thursday I had plans to make a run down to Asheville to tour the Biltmore estate and possibly meet Ricky Boone. I 28 to Asheville is quite an interstate. Unlike mountain top removal where things are leveled out, I 28 generally follows the mountain contours,



complete with run-away truck ramps. I had heard an interview on NPR with Ricky, who operates a modest magic shop, "Magic Central," on the north side of Asheville. Mr. Boone was in the shop this day, and I watched him interact with a young budding magician, there with his grandmother who was helping underwrite additions to her grandson's collection of magic tricks. Ricky informed us that NPR pulled the story about him from the Library of Congress. According to the interview, it turns out that Ricky's inspiration to pursue magic was a high school football coach who also had heard about the interview and would be in town the

next week for a visit himself. The two have not seen or talked to each other in over 20 years. The cover of the July issue of “Bold”, an arts and cultural monthly magazine, had a picture of Ricky and Mark DeVerges, known as Asheville’s Magic Men on the cover. I bought a card trick and visited some before moving on to see the Biltmore.

I did not know it ahead of time, but the BMW MOA had pre-arranged a nice discount on the tour price at the Biltmore. I opted for the audio addition to the tour and was glad I did. As soon as I saw the estate from the entry gate I thought about our own George Gleeson here in Little Rock who must have gotten his inspiration from this structure. Mr. Gleeson, a local bank



chairman in Little Rock, is almost finished with his own 40,000 sq. ft. version in Little Rock. One thing about building a residence on this scale in our town, USA, is that it will be a long time, if ever, before anyone else in the area will match the size and scope. Just a tad on the excessive side, I think. On the way back from Asheville, I found Beaverdam Road out of town. It turned out to be a curvy gravel road that quickly connected to the Blue Ridge Parkway for the 30 miles to Busick, NC. My roundabout route on scenic NC 80, NC 197, NC 226, TN 173, and TN 362



put me back into Johnson City around 7:00 PM. I completely forgot about the invitation for a reception and dinner I had accepted for prior published writers to the BMW ON, and after meeting up with Harlan and getting a bite to eat, I was off to bed with rain again falling overnight. The 203 miles covered today would be one of the nicest routes of the entire trip.

On Friday, I connected with Pat and Harlan for a quick tour of the vendor booths where we purchased official rally tee shirts. Lunch and part of the afternoon was spent with my friend, John Dickison, from Pennsylvania. I last saw John in West Bend, WI in 2007. Since that time John had suffered a devastating motorcycle accident that left him without a right leg. He has recovered nicely and seemed to be his old self again, with a fresh perspective on life and living. John now drives a vintage airhead with side car. Among other things, John is able to pack a set of crutches, a walker, a wheel chair with detachable wheels, and his new artificial leg in the side car! At one

vendor booth that was staffed by a particular woman, complete with makeup and cleavage, we were quickly made the proud owners of \$25 worth of overpriced plastic cleaner and antifogging solution. Later that evening I reconnected with Pat and Harlan for a cheeseburger from one of the food vendors manned by local Kiwanis club volunteers. We then made our way



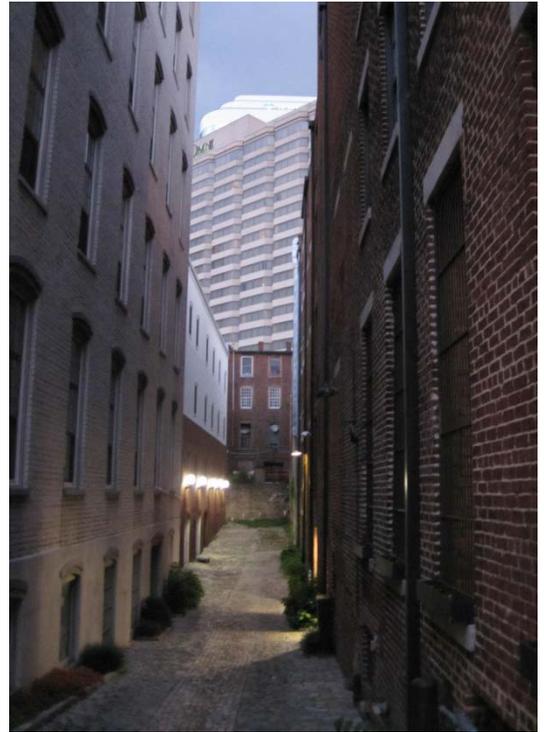
down towards the main stage and beer tent. Delbert McClinton was the headliner. We ran into Morris and Judy Hale who were sitting on the hill overlooking the area. We visited with them for 30 minutes and watched a continuous flow of drivers into the fair grounds.

Saturday morning, Harlan, Pat, Wayne, a new friend from Missouri, and I left for Boone, TN to connect with the Blue Ridge Parkway. We travelled a scenic US 321 to Boone where we split up. They were heading south as they started their return to Little Rock. I was heading north to Staunton River SP in southern Virginia. I was on the Blue Ridge Parkway for 118 miles to near Floyd, VA. I knew I was in Virginia when I saw my first fields of tobacco along the next set of highways. I continued east on VA 40, then US 501, VA 344, and VA 360 into Staunton River SP. Today was another really nice 340 mile day of riding.

Picking out one of the few remaining sites I set up quickly to allow the tent a chance to dry with the last remaining sun light of the day, did a load of laundry, and got back on the bike for a ride down the road to the local driving range and

restaurant called “Tee’s and South Fork.” They were actually closed but kindly unlocked the door and let me in. The owners and some of their extended family were in town for a reunion. I had a very good dinner that night and a good breakfast the next day on my way to Richmond.

Sunday morning, I decided to do a few laps in the extra long swimming pool that is one of the highlights of the park, and my late brunch allowed me a chance to see the British Open playoff between Watson and Cinck. The family that owns Tee’s and South Fork were extra gracious and made my favorite breakfast of bacon, eggs, grits and toast, just like I do at home. Today’s mileage was going to be around 112 as I made my way to Richmond on US 360. Once I was close to Richmond I encountered my only toll gates and ended up paying around \$3.00 to travel 10 miles. I spent the night at the Wilson Catlin B&B and for dinner, went into downtown Richmond for a pasta and microbrew at Richbrau Brewing.



Monday morning’s threat of rain never materialized, so I was up and out after the included breakfast. The short 122 mile leg, mostly on US 301, included the Harry Nice Bridge spanning the Potomac. On the other side of the bridge was another coal-fired plant. Arriving in DC was uneventful until I hit major traffic and stop-light issues on Florida and Capitol streets inside the beltway. After 30 minutes



of six cars at a time making it through the intersection, I decided to pull over and let the bike cool down. Thirty minutes later I started back up and arrived at Tom, my brother’s house around 2:30 PM. My nephew, niece and great niece were there, and we shared a homemade pizza for a snack. Kevin and family were then off to their house on the other side of town. After

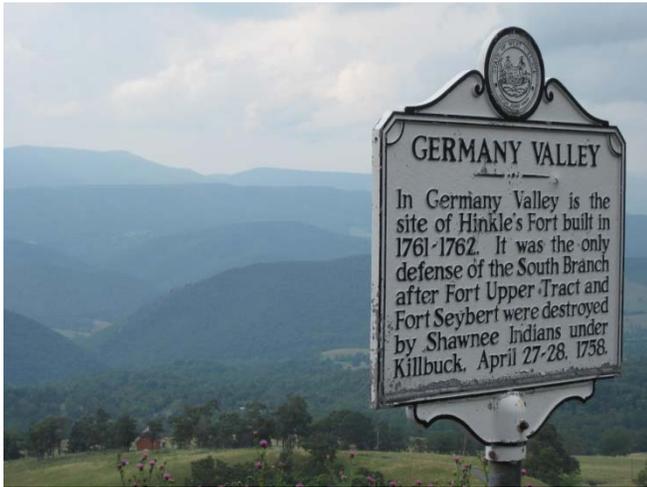
unloading the bike and parking it around back in Tom's driveway for the night, I checked on line for the bus times and routes to take to Kevin and Granetta's house in the NE quadrant of the city. I took the MET and the trip over took almost an hour. The four of us, including Shayla, walked to a local restaurant, Argonaut, and had dinner and a leisurely walk back. Kevin and I shared a couple beers sitting out in their front yard. I caught another bus around 10:15 PM and was back at Tom's at 11:00 PM, walking the last 8/10's mile to his house.

Tuesday morning I had an appointment in Gaithersburg, MD at Battley Cycles to have a new rear tire installed. When I left Little Rock I thought I could make the trip on my existing tire. By the time I reached Virginia it was starting to go bald, so I queried the Zumo and found Battley open on Monday, which is rare for a motorcycle shop. I took Rock Creek Parkway out of DC and I 270 to Gaithersburg. I arrived right at 10:00 and they were finished with my bike before 11:00. I realized that I missed an opportunity to go to the famous-and-always-friendly Bob's BMW in Maryland. However, the fact that Battley was open on Monday, had the tire in stock, and would install it first thing Tuesday morning was an incredible response and service. As I was leaving, there was another fellow GS rider from Florida who was on the return side of a trip to Canada. He had an issue with his rear valve stem, and they were getting right on his problem, too.

I went directly from Gaithersburg to the Native American Museum on the Capital mall. A friend of mine, helped direct the design, construction, and opening of the new museum for the Smithsonian. The building and exhibits are very impressive and are a fitting tribute to the history of those Americans who were already here when the rest of us showed up. I returned to Tom's house, loaded up the bike, and went to Kevin and Granetta's. For dinner Tom, Yan, Kevin, and I walked to and had a great dinner at Bistro Italiano.



Wednesday I traveled to Canaan, WV. The route promised to be a scenic 250 miles, and it was especially nice travelling on Skyline Drive from Front Royal, VA



through Shenandoah National Park and then on US 33 into West Virginia. The smog covering the mountains on this section was worse than I had seen earlier in North Carolina. Despite the pollution, I felt special to be able to go from one state to the next on roads that are less traveled. The only time I entered a new state on an interstate was from TN to NC and from IL

to MO. For the most part I was entering each new state on especially scenic roads. I have heard that there are no bad roads in WV and I have no reason to doubt it.

The rally site at Canaan Valley Resort was exceptional, and the camping set up was also good. While the crowd was only about a fifth of the size in Johnson City, there were a rather large number of riders who made both events. This guy had a pet carrier attached to his bike! Two of those who made both rallies were Charlie Bishop and Bill Lewis, friends from Arkansas, who hauled their bikes but still participated in riding the local roads around the area. We had a beer and caught up on the latest goings-on.



I called John D. and had to leave a message. When John called me back a short while later, I learned that he was still in TN and would not be in Canaan until the next day. I went to bed with rain again in the area. The next day I roamed around, caught a few seminars during the day, did a little telecommuting, and got in a nap. John arrived late on Thursday evening. I helped him unload his stuff into his room before we had dinner. After dinner we caught the tail end of another seminar and then called it a day.

Friday morning I packed up and met John for breakfast. While packing my bike, the guy camped next to me, who was from WV and had a new GS, recommended that I should be sure to see the Radio Telescope in Green Bank even though it

meant a 100 mile side trip. After breakfast, John and I went to the RA sales room where we each bought rally shirts.

I was then on my way to see the rest of WV, first down south to Green Bank and, then back up to Elkins, before continuing East on US 33. The trip to the National Radio Telescope site was well worth the time and effort. This is the largest fully steerable radio telescope in the world. It is also the largest man-made



moveable object on the planet. It took 10 years and \$87M to build. I saw a close-up demonstration of superconducting in a Styrofoam cup. The well-informed staff described the clarity of the images that the radio telescope delivers as being similar to being able to spot the pepperoni on a pizza from a mile away. There was a nice deli on site, also, where I had lunch.

I made it to Elkins around 3:00 PM and still had over 200 miles to go. Highway 33 across WV brought me through the heart of the Mountain State and was a good representation of the twisty roads that WV is famous for. I drove nonstop from Green Bank to near Ripley. Near Ripley cars were backing up on the highway.

Sensing I was going to be here awhile, I turned the bike off and just coasted downhill for 30 minutes or more waiting to get a handle on what the problem was.



When I reached the final curve there were cars lined up as far as I could see. I immediately checked the GPS and decided to take a detour that ended up adding another hour, plus, to my route. The detour put me into Gallipolis, OH much later than planned, and I saw another one of those coal plants, this one on the Ohio River just outside of town. Actually there are two of them together.

I found a Holiday Inn in Kanauga, OH. Since there were not many places open for dinner, I settled for Wendy's and a trip to Wal-Mart. It was after 10:00 PM,