

35th Annual BMWMOA Rally

By Frank Kelly©2007

Rod and I left Conway around 9:30 on the 10th of July and took US65 deep into Missouri as we made our way to Mexico, MO. Avoiding the interstates and large cities, we had our rain gear, but could have survived without it, as we encountered only light short rain spurts that started and ended before we hit Missouri.



We spent the night at the Lapaz Inn and found the local pizza joint out of beer. My butt was numb for 2 hours after I got off my new R1200GS Adv. The next morning Rod learned that it was the resident ghost that woke him up at 3:30. I remember tossing and turning all night. The inn is modeled after the US Consulate in Chile. I told Rod that they should let their potential guests know ahead of time that the place is haunted.

The next day we headed for Savanna, IL, which is a small sporting town with the Mississippi running through it. There are numerous wetland protection areas that include a protected frog pond. The Mississippi really shows its other side around Savanna. Seven Eagles resort had a pool, and you can camp or get a room. When we arrived the owner was not present, so I called her on the phone and she told me room 2 was open. It only had 1 queen size bed so I was willing to start with my sleeping pad on the floor. Before we could really get settled, the owner showed up and said that room 4 had two double beds with my name on it from my earlier reservation, so we moved our gear.

On Thursday the 12th, we hit the Washington County Fair Grounds around 12:00, and the place was teeming with people and motorcycles. We got checked in and found a wonderful tent site under the high tension electrical transmission lines on the outskirts of the camping area as far away from the beer garden as we could get.

In the two months before the rally, I made e-mail and phone contact with an old friend whom I had not seen or talked to in over twenty years. My friend, John, is manager of communication technology at the Penn State College of Agriculture Services. John and his wife, Tracey, both ride Beemers. Tracey could not make the rally as she was instructing a MSF course over the weekend. John was renting his tent set up from the Sherpa's, and I happened to be walking up to the area when I saw him figuring out where his tent was. It was great to see an old friend, and we got in two rides together. He had just completed a trip to the rally at the Biltmore and a trip to Albuquerque, so over a four-week span, he was racking up over eight thousand miles on his 75' R60/6.

Yes, John and Tracey are IronButts!



The rally was an eclectic mix of riders, bikes and vendors. We spent Thursday, Friday, and Saturday nights at the rally. In that time I was tempted enough to purchase an aluminum table from GSI Outdoors, a Silver Eagle evaporative cooling vest, and summer gloves distributed by Qwi, a company out of Blytheville. The picture to the left is one of the many vintage bikes that were on display at the rally. The next picture is around Cross Village, MI, and the "Tunnel of Trees." A great place to start your search for that MI vacation getaway!



In the weeks leading up to my departure, I outfitted my new bike with additional BMW headlamps, a lamb's wool seat cover from Sickafus Sheepskins and a Sirius Stiletto100 radio. I wired the speakers into my helmet with a pair of Sony headphones that I first needed to run through the band saw to get the headband off. The set up worked great, but I'm sure there is a healthier way to get helmet tunes. The combination of these three additions allowed for survival on my longest motorcycle trip yet. Next year the rally is in Gillette, WY, and I hope to make it, too. Anyone else want to go?

Sunday morning, Rod was up early and off to spend the night in Chicago to see his daughters and then back to LR. Since I was already in WI, I had plans to go from the rally on up to Land O Lakes and spend two nights with LR friends who have a paradise spot that has been in their family for over 50 years. Words cannot describe what an incredible place this turned out to be. Can you imagine a three hundred acre piece of land that crosses the border of WI and MI and touches on a six hundred acre lake that is just inside the border of Ottawa National Forest? The lake was full of 16 inch smallmouth

bass and has an island with a resident bald eagle, nest, and an eagling that was enormous. We got to see a parent eagle pick a squirrel up off the water surface and take it to the youngster who is happily fed for up to a year before leaving the nest.

The morning of my last day at Land O Lakes, four of us were up at 5:30 for a round of golf fifty miles away in Minocqua. I had my first bout with acid reflux soon after waking so I spent the morning trying to get back to normal. I ended up shooting an eighty six. After a Prilosec, two cups of chicken noodle soup, and a shower, I left for Marquette, MI, around 2:00, moving on to see the Great Lakes a little more intimately.



On the way I toured Porcupine Mountain, and it was there that I first saw Lake Superior with fog that made it impossible to see where the lake horizon ended and the sky began. It was one big foggy space while the road right next to it was clear. As you probably know, the temperature around the Great Lakes can be quite chilly. The summit to Porcupine Mountain is a half-mile hike from the parking lot consisting of a partial-deck path and a thirty-foot wooden tower overlooking the forest and the lake. When I got back lakeside, all the fog was gone. See photo to the left. With perfect weather for the full twelve days, I quickly discovered that being along the Great Lakes is what makes Michigan an incredibly enjoyable place to be most summers.

I ended up making Marquette around 9:30 in the Eastern Time zone with sun light fading and opted for a Comfort Suite rather than trying to make Au Train for a first-come, first-serve campsite. I had heard stories about the MI mosquitoes, so setting up camp at dusk sounded a little scary.

I got a great night of sleep and the next morning was really relaxed. The motel had a notice posted on the check-in counter about special towels for motorcyclists. It turned out to be a regular bath towel that, with a little hot soapy water, proved just right in helping to get a day's worth of black flies off the windshield. I left around 10:00 for a final destination of Wilderness State Park just south and west of Mackinac City. The day's stops were Pictured Rocks National Lakeshore, Tahquamenon Falls, and the locks of Sault Ste. Marie.



After a great day of coastal riding, I arrived near Wilderness SP around 8:30 and met a guy and his son who were at the corner grocery admiring the bike. He is a fire inspector with the Traverse City fire department and owns a Suzuki. Robert, his wife, and son, Colin came by on their bicycles and, invited me over to their site later. Wilderness SP was not what I expected. There were around two hundred and fifty sites, and all but a few were filled. I was up until 2:00 visiting with my new found friends from MI and remember hearing rain drops on the tent. I woke up around 9:00 to light rain and checked the radar on my cell phone see that squall lines were moving across the area, so I went back to sleep. By 12:00 the tent was dry, and I started down the coast to Ludington.

The famous Leg's Inn is just down the road in Cross Village, and the fourteen mile section of the "Tunnel of Trees" on MI 119 begins. This is the start of a great stretch of road that runs along the coast of Lake Michigan. By the time I got to Harbor Springs it was apparent that the northern winds were going to be with me all day. For those that have been there before, you know that 40 mile an hour crosswind gusts can make for an interesting ride. I was thankful that I had a heavy bike. I made it through Traverse City without getting blown off the road.



Coming out of Traverse City on MI 72, I saw my first MI state trooper. He saw me too. His options were to pull over one of three speeding cars or the speeding motorcycle. I was out front having started in the rear of a passing lane, and figured I would get around all the cars. First, he wanted to know if the motorcycle had shaft drive. I said, "Yes, it does." He then asked me, where I was headed. When I told him, that I was on my way to Ludington, he said, "Ludington! Do you know where you are? Ludington is way south of here!" I said, "Yes, I think it is about three hours from here." He agreed. I then pulled out my MS Streets and Trips printout of the day's ride and flipped it over to where it showed me going by Sleeping Bear Dunes. Then he asked to see,

"my papers" and asked whether I had any fire arms on me? "No, no firearms." After asking about my driving record which I described as "perfect" he checked with "Hal" to see that I was shooting him straight. I got some friendly advice about how 71 mph might not be a good idea and sent me on my way with my "perfect" record intact. I shall always have fond memories of Michigan, and glad to be riding such an infamous motorcycle!

When I got to the overlook near Acadia, I had to pull over to see the view and found myself walking on yet another deck up to a vista. All of the scenic overlooks I walked on were built with winding wooden decks and stairs. This one stepped up about fifty feet on top of the Lake Michigan coast line that was at least another 100 feet below. When I got back down to my bike there were two HD riders on their way to Traverse City. They were brothers. One of them told me his story about how he almost bought a BMW and ended up with the HD instead. He was full of regret. His new plan was to trade it in when he returned home and get that BMW. His brother was renting his for the weekend.



The camp ground just north of Ludington was private and half empty. It was another late evening arrival, so I set up quickly, got a shower and headed right to sleep. The next morning I was up and out by 9:00. I started thinking about leaving MI and wanted to get a picture of one of the caterpillar-like asphalt dump trucks with eight trailer axels. I stopped for an Egg McMuffin, and when I came out there was one parked six feet behind my bike! I got a picture and moved on before the driver returned with his breakfast. See below.

There is a lot to love about Michigan. Grand Haven looked like a nice town too. I know very little about it other than it presented a great first impression. I stopped and had pizza just west of I196 in Benton Harbor. The waitress had lived in AR and mentioned she lived in Russellville and Mt Magazine.

The trip to Berwyn, IL, was going fine until I hit the I80/I290 split toll booth that was backed up for two miles. If I ever find myself in that situation again, I will definitely hit the Ipass window and figure out how to get the funds to the state later. When it finally was my turn, I guess I was thankful to be sitting on an oil-cooled motorcycle on the verge of overheating. All so I could pay 60¢. Where is the motorcycle lobby when you need them! I just knew my R100RT would have melted in that situation.



I spent the night with my oldest nephew, Tom, who had recently graduated from Rush with a nursing degree. He is now an RN. We had a few beers and dinner at the nearby bar and restaurant complex that includes Fitzgerald's bar and Wishbone restaurant. Then we caught the Sox versus Socks game on the tube. The game was complete with a Boston grand slam!

The next day I was up and away around 8:30 with St. Louis in my sights. I mapped out a nice route on IL 40 and US 51, which was a great alternative to I55. Getting out of Berwyn was a lot easier than getting in. The straight stretches of the two lane highways in IL make it possible to drive without hands if you are so inclined.

As I neared the I55 Mississippi River Bridge over into St. Louis, the IL troopers were picking drivers off from an overpass on I255 in Dupo. I was coasting by then with only five miles to go before I arrived at my aunt Mary Rose's on the south side of St. Louis. My aunt had a pool for me to cool off in, and we had a take out dinner with two of my cousins, one of their spouses, and his friend. That was the night the power went off in the Arch!

On Sunday morning my aunt made waffles, and we were off to the City Museum downtown. If you have never been to the City Museum of St. Louis, you should go and take a child, if you can. The place is incredible. It is an old shoe factory that has become the new home of numerous recycled building materials from the past. The place is, among other things, a welder's masterpiece. There is an incredible amount of stainless steel, rebar, tiles, concrete and almost anything else you can imagine, all fabricated and recast into one of the most interesting displays of human creativity that you will ever see. It's human powered entertainment! Plus, there is an aquarium section with fish, reptiles and, small mammals exhibited. You can even pet a stingray.



This was my longest motorcycle trip ever. There were no near misses and no close calls. With such an enjoyable experience, can you wonder why I am anxiously awaiting the next opportunity to get out for another adventure? When you take the motorcycle, every trip is an adventure.

Yes, to the left, those are people climbing inside a wire tunnel fifty feet in the air.

It's on the way to the airplane fuselage! Finally, I really need to thank Jim



Sculley, a transplanted Michigander who helped me plan my essential stops in the land of The Great Lakes.