

15th Annual Ride Recap

The Jailhouse Blues, Smoky Mountain High and You Can't Get There From Here

On the appointed day, fifteen riders from two states representing nine California jurisdictions converged on the smoky yet “lovely” town of Willows, California to kick off our 15th Annual trek through scenic mountains of the Northwest. The ongoing spate of forest fires to our north, south and east, combined with changing wind currents rendered the sun barely visible at times, air quality mostly lousy and sunglasses often unnecessary. Yet, joining Rhoda and me poolside sat the likes of Mike and Jeanie Rores, Bill Loveless, Mary Ann Mann, the famous Heanes brothers duo of Cliff and Jeff, Mark Murray, Mike Oliveira, Bob Holland, Mel and Tami D’Angelo, the father and son team of Chuck and Ted Nicolls, Rene LaPrevotte and Oregon transplants Steve Armbruster and Doug Foss. Conspicuously absent were Bob and Vi Hossfeld who were back home in Arizona, he on the mend from a blood clot in his left leg, she doing her wifely duties by wiping his brow with a cool damp towel and consoling Grumpy with sips of Early Times whiskey. Of note, this marks the first time since 1994 when Bob and I convened the first ride that they’ve failed to show, now leaving Mary Ann Mann as the only person to have attended all 15 events, yours truly included!

Our 15th Annual ride would present many challenges over the next four days and poolside on the 8th of July, we knew, 1) reservations had been made for lodging months in advance in Susanville and Auburn, 2) High Desert State Prison offered us a tour of their maximum security institution two days henceforth and their schedule was not flexible, 3) the State of California was under siege with over 2,000 forest fires, and 4) road closures and detours in the weeks preceding the ride had become as frequent as the sight of Harleys in the bed of a pickup! What to do you ask, Bunky? Caltrans website and their toll-free road closure phone number would prove invaluable for the next few days and, as the assembled leather gods fueled their guttural tanks with liquid refreshments, there was no lack of suggestions on the appropriate route to take! And things were changing by the minute too, Reggie. Two hours after we arrived, Chuck Nicolls received the phone call no one wants to hear. With Phyllis on the other end of Ma Bell’s invention, he learned his home town of Junction City in the Shasta-Trinity National Forest, perhaps 100 air miles away, was in the path of a very fast moving fire, and he might consider coming home! Caltrans verified that all routes from the east and south were closed so he and Ted plotted a circuitous route from the west they would take at sunrise on the 9th.

With ash raining on us at the pool, it was time to adjourn indoors to the on-property Casa Ramos Mexican Restaurant and enjoy a feast of south-of-the-border delicacies and thirst quenching margaritas. It is an excellent, modern eatery, favored by locals and travelers alike, and the delicious libations concocted from the agave plant flowed almost as fast as the BS spewing from certain mouths! You can infer from that statement we were not a quiet group, more like riotous and raucous, with belly aching laughter!

Early to bed, early to rise, makes a man healthy, wealthy and.....hung over! 7:30 on the morning of July 9th would prove to be too early for a riders’ meeting with a bunch of fat heads, yet we persevered, discussed mileage we were going to lop off the new route to Susanville in order to steer clear of smoke and fire, yet still allow our sightseeing

sojourn through Lassen Volcanic National Park. Substitute 50 miles of IS 5 freeway and 46 miles of fairly scenic Ca36 for 120 miles of motorcycling nirvana north east of Chico and we were at the portal of Lassen Park on Ca89. Ms. Rangerette at the Southwest Entrance Station was so officious and thorough, it required more than 20 minutes to pass 13 bikes and one chase vehicle through “her” quagmire. Competency and tenacity notwithstanding, 30 minutes later we stood at the Bumpass Hell Overlook at the park roads high point of 8512’ and were once again reminded why rural America can be so enchanting. With snow capped majestic Lassen Peak looming two miles to our rear flank and 2,000 feet higher into the clouds than our footing, the view of the valley floor south and east was mesmerizing. Far off in the distance we could see columns of smoke from multiple fires polluting the region we just vacated, yet we were offered a temporary high altitude respite, and all enjoyed a breath of fresh air and the prospect of pollutant-free riding for a few hours. A lunch break within the park and 25 more miles of saw-tooth shaped, curvy and pristine roadway would allow us exit to Sr44 and our 2 hour leisurely scenic trek to Susanville.

Perfect high 80, low 90 degree weather greeted us mid-afternoon at High Country Inn and beckoned our presence poolside.....with ice chests in tow, of course! Our two night stay at this great hotel would provide relief from the grind of repacking all our gear daily, and the incessant smoke of the day before, too. Within a stone’s throw of the western border of Nevada where there is nothing to burn—read barren—prevailing winds allowed us to once again see blue skies, contrails from airliners in the jet stream 35,000 above and Billy Joe Bob passing by our abode repetively in his jacked up hootie replete with Confederate flag. Strategic planning was in order as tomorrow; Thursday, July 10th was scheduled to be our morning tour of High Desert State Prison and afterwards, a four hour ride through rustic countryside unfamiliar to this scribe. Enter Helen Clark, a cherubic former Reserve Police Officer at OPD, who 8 years ago decided her love of all things equestrian and rural outweighed big city life and moved to the boonies. As a Dispatcher for the Susanville office of the CHP, she found her niche, but more importantly, knew all the back roads of the region as she plied her other love: riding motorcycles. While others frolicking in cool water persisted in embarrassing those of us sedate in demeanor, Helen and I mapped out our route, sipped Perrier and threw peanuts at the buffoons on liquid encouragement!

With the sun threatening to set before we abandoned our water enclave, it was time to weave the 200 or so feet to the motel restaurant soooooo far off in the distance. Wait staff often make good money when they can adapt to loud and boisterous groups, and tend to the needs of the needy, and we really needed help this night. Seated in a private room (I wonder why?) at a loooooong table that reminded me of Michelangelo’s Last Supper, we 17 clowns, 1) declared the winner of the next Presidential election, 2) declared the winner of the next Presidential election will not be from Florida and therefore pregnant chads and “Electile Dysfunction” will not be an issue and, 3) the next President will not be a female and therefore, not eligible for maternity leave on the taxpayer dime! And this rhetoric was just for starters. The Three Stooges, who shall remain anonymous....., but their initials are LaPrevotte, Holland and Rores were yammering on about their ancestors’ contribution to WWII after I, innocently of course, maligned the French and suffered the wrath of The Perve. The cocktail waitress was trying to take drink orders, the waiter likewise trying to take dinner orders, Holland was making faces at both of

them with his Gene Simmons of “KISS” fame tongue waving in the breeze, Rores was going on about the Greeks bringing up the rear of many campaigns in Europe and Herr Foss was heard muttering that the loss by Nazi Germany was not Germane to this event as it wasn’t Oktoberfest yet! Wow: dinner, drinks and an ongoing comedy club routine that lasted for an hour or more. Very little of that rhetoric is printable in this publication, but it was HILARIOUS, our guts ached and the restaurant patrons seated outside our room looked mortified each time the staffers opened the door to tend to our every need.

Early to bed, early to rise, makes a man healthy, wealthy and.....hung over! High Desert State Prison awaited us at 0900 hrs, and as Mike and Jeanie Rores, Bob Holland, Mel and Tami D’Angelo, Mike Oliveira and I traveled the 12 miles to that barbed wire city and approached from the west, I think we all wondered what we were getting ourselves into. I had been forewarned months ago that I may be asked not to discuss or print certain aspects of the prison’s operational procedures as the California Penal System has been under scrutiny from the United States District Court, Northern California *and* the ACLU—two notoriously liberal bastions of power—for more than two years. Suffice it to say; HDSP is an expansive “level 4” institution, spread out over perhaps 200 or more acres and houses approximately 4500 prisoners. There are but a hand full of such maximum security institutions in California, San Quentin and Pelican Bay come readily to mind. With more than 2,000 staff personnel, there is seemingly a high ratio of Correctional Officers to inmates; but when you factor in these are all lifers with slim chance of parole—the majority of which have gang affiliations—that ratio is not so appealing. Passing through entrance security, we are given control badges and gingerly escorted past the lethal high voltage, high amperage perimeter fence bounded on four corners-square by gun towers.

It had been “leaked” to the general population days earlier that “dignitaries” from Sacramento would be touring the grounds this morning. While my ego says I should feel honored, my bubble was burst when reminded prisoners don’t like LEO’s, retired or not! With the seven of us closely escorted by a like number of CO’s into the first of four segregated exercise yards slightly smaller than a football field, the cold reality swept over me; we, the good guys and gals, walking amongst the male dregs of society and separated by no more than 20 feet verbally mandated by our escorts, were outnumbered by more than 30 to 1, *including the substantial compliment of Correctional Officers normally assigned to that area!* “If you see or hear a fight, hit the deck and freeze because there’s a good chance bullets will fly”, we were told. “Understand, in the yard or cell-block areas, no one is armed, for our own protection—but look at that elevated and heavily fortified gun turret shaped tower over there; I’ll guarantee he’s got our back.” Indeed, cameras, eyeballs and spotting scopes monitor our every move for the next 3 hours as we progress through several cell-blocks and yards to the fourth and highest-security exercise yard. The cell blocks were spooky, and I’m not to discuss them at length, but outside in the yard, we could really feel the tension amongst the prisoners, all with gang affiliations. Blacks on one quadrant, whites on another, and the two different factions of Mexicans: northern and southern, staking out their turf apart from each other. As we meander amongst the convicts, their gaze constantly shifts from us to Correctional Officers in the yard and overhead on cat-walks and, to their fellow inmate enemies. This tension is surreal, spooky and not to be taken lightly and as we exit, a wave of relief hits this scribe and my cohorts! Back at the administration building, we bid adieu to our guests and to a

person, are in awe of what we just witnessed and our new-found respect for Correctional Officers within the California Penal system.

Within minutes we're back at the hotel, meet up with Helen Clark and are off on our 3 and a 1/2 hour ride via Forest Route 172, past Antelope Lake to the tiny hamlet of Taylorsville. The General Store is a source of sundry items for this berg of perhaps 20 families and more importantly, great home cooked food for our palettes. County route A22 delivers us to Ca89 and the periphery of the Plumas National Forest fire. Skirting the smoke, we take Ca147 past Lake Almanor to Ca36 and back to the hotel. Beautiful scenery, no traffic and great rural America!

As our last night in Susanville loomed ever closer, what to do for an encore? Back to the pool's refreshing water, of course! Oakland PD's Paul Pabon, a retired Motor Cop of the first order, paid us a day visit and joined in the ongoing bashing. Dinner this night was to be a repeat of yesterday, just slightly more subdued. Many of us adjourned back to the pool to enjoy the cool, clear evening breeze before saying goodnight.

Friday morning, July 11th, it was time to head to Auburn and our last night's abode. Lopping off 4 hours of very rural back roads inaccessible due to multiple fires, we detoured onto boring super slab US395 and IS80, visited the new Cabela's super store in Verdi and then had an impromptu lunch stop and Kodak moment at historic old-town Truckee. We arrived at our Super 8 in short order, but only after numerous serpentine traffic defiles due to year's long road construction in the IS80 corridor of the Sierra Nevada mountain range. Mid 90's, ice chests full of cold drinks and shade umbrellas around the pool provided perfect relief from the relentless sun. Enter local residents Mike and Rita Stevens and Bob Glover who graced our presence long enough to judge our ongoing aquatic maneuvers and tomfoolery sufficiently to pronounce many of us unfit for H2O aerobics. As has been the norm for years now, MMOC chipped in and bought our final night's pizza which washed down very well with ice cold brews, thank you. A lengthy discussion on locations for next year's 16th Annual Ride brought a consensus of far northern California with perhaps a touch of Oregon thrown in for good measure. As we reflected back on this adventure, it became apparent fortune was with us. No traffic delays, minimal smoke intrusion after the first night's stay and wonderful, very scenic country from the perch of our iron steeds.

I want to thank all that participated this year and continue to support our MMOC touring endeavors. You are special to me! We have tremendous fun, somehow seem to solve all the problems of the world nightly and more importantly, are a cohesive group with great camaraderie. And, we all owe a huge debt of thanks to my lovely wife Rhoda who was relegated to chase vehicle driver at the eleventh hour. Just days before our departure and after months of discussions, Rho learned the previous driver desired to back out due to business concerns. Understand, for many reasons, I will not put on a ride without a chase vehicle and for this to surface at the last minute REALLY put a ton of pressure on the collective "we". Rho loves the pillion perch and all that goes with those sensations, but that was not to be this year. She stepped up to the plate, never bitched once and guess what, we're still married!

As you read this, we've just finished the 3rd Annual Southwestern Ride, and reserve July 14th, 15th, 16th and 17th, 2009 for the 16th Annual MMOC Ride, the details of which will be posted at www.mmoc.org soon.

I remain, His Own Self, Dennis M. Brown, Touring Executive Ride Director