

## Invading Utah! The 18<sup>th</sup> Annual MMOC Ride

Somehow touring California, Oregon, Nevada and even Arizona seemed so passé when MMOC could initiate an entirely new life-style to the inhabitants of Utah. When Brigham Young led the first band of Mormon pioneers to Salt Lake Valley July 24, 1847, the U.S. Government was not too keen on multiple marriages and decades of strife ensued with the settlers. Denied statehood several times, the 1890 Manifesto endorsed by the Mormon Church officially proclaimed a ban on Polygamy (perhaps spirits too?) and paved the way for Utah to become the 45<sup>th</sup> State admitted to the Union, January 4, 1896.

Now in defense of some of my MMOC brethren who would take issue with that Manifesto, I proclaim our ride to the verdant and colorful southwestern plains, valleys, mountain tops and canyons of Utah, breaking bread, educating and imbibing with the natives, was an overwhelming success. We came in peace yet conquered philosophically, and as one of the famous King Brothers (don't remember if it was Rodney, Martin Luther or Larry) continuously whispered in our ears: follow the credo, "Can't we all just get along?"

Let's begin the exploration of the National Parks in that region of the state with a more westerly rendezvous two days earlier on Saturday, July 2<sup>nd</sup> in the *beautiful* gambling mecca of Reno, Nevada. On a warm sunlit afternoon, retired Sunnyvale Department of Public Safety (think: 6 months carrying a gun, 6 months fondling a fire hose!) Lieutenant Bill Weber generously hosted a poolside cocktail party and fantastic food fest. Since the mid 1990's, Bill has made the Mount Rose area his home, dabbled in real estate and is a tenured Commissioner on the Washoe County Planning Commission. Sharing in the jibes and partaking of the vittles, refreshments and cool waters with Rhoda and me, were Mike and Jeanie Rores, Mary Ann Mann, Bill Loveless, Doug Foss and the duo of Rene' LaPrevotte and Susan Johnson (who joined us for the evening revelry but had to leave the following morning due to prior commitments). Loren Carlen, long time Honorary Member and friend of SoCal's CK Williams showed up too, keeping us "young" whippersnappers in line. It was a long day and thanks to Weber, a great and memorable evening.

On the morning of July 3<sup>rd</sup>, we departed for Ely, Nevada, a barren 322 mile trek mostly on US-50. Meeting us for breakfast at the Black Bear Diner in the bustling metropolis of Fernley, Nevada were the Heanes brothers, Cliff and Jeff who caught up to us on our easterly trek on their throbbing Harleys and Mark and Helen Murray who caged it into town to say hello. Good vittles and company, but time to ride.

Some would say there is merit to performing a *thorough* pre-ride inspection on one's iron steed, especially when the finish line looms 2,000 or more miles distant mostly on secondary roads and where the infrequent "TOWN" is a piss-poor use of a noun! Austin, Nevada met those criteria, with a restaurant and gas station and nothing else. It's here Loveless discovered his front tire tread was separating from the carcass. It's here that we observed a black donut with the resilience of prehistoric coal or a burnt briquette on the front of Bill's GL1500.....or so it looked. It's here that we collectively feared to inspect the rear tire. It's also here that we left Bill to putt further east to Eureka solo, 70 miles distant, at a *much* slower pace and meet us at our lunch stop. Now understand, Eureka Nevada has perhaps 6 1/2 more inhabitants than Austin, the same level of "services" and

a *newly* repaved ¼ mile long Main Street that was under construction by their County road crew in June, 2010, when 20 of us hapless souls from Oakland and San Francisco blazed a path to Pikes Peak for that famous Hill Climb. The wheels of time turn slowly in rural America, donchaknow! Facing a 77 mile leg into Ely and noting another section of the tire delaminating, Bill forged ahead with the Heanes brothers riding in tow. Ten minutes later we blew past them in a 70 mph zone, duly noting their 35 mph pace with hazard flashers pronouncing for the entire world.....we're crawling and say a couple Hail Mary's! By the time the trio reached us at the Jailhouse Motel and Casino in Ely, we were all checked in, on our second brewsky and, applying Police Forensics, noted said tire was now TOAST! Moreover, both *front and rear* hoops qualified as "Mississippi May Pops" as *eighteen thousand miles* on sun-baked stone-age rubber will do! A rousing serenade of Bill Engvall's words, "Here's Your Sign." was apropos!

The "shock and awe" of Loveless' debacle was soon overcome when retired Bakersfield PD's Steve Armbruster arrived an hour later via his digs in Silverton, Oregon. He rode the 840 miles straight through in 14 hours. That in itself is amazing but more so, he had gotten off a plane in Portland just hours earlier after motorcycle touring in Europe for 2 weeks, and then visiting in-laws in England for another 2 weeks! I get jet-lag going from PST to EST, but not Steve, and he was therefor bestowed the Ironman Award by all.

Two hundred thirty five years after signing the Declaration Of Independence, firewater and fireworks awaited us in Utah; therefore, it was time to say goodbye to Loveless who is landlocked at the hotel during this holiday weekend and blaze a 210 mile trail through barren wasteland, or so it seems, to Cedar City. Transitioning from highways Nevada 319 to Utah 56 draws a stark comparison: at the exact state line, the previous dustbowl moonscape of abandoned farms and brown pastures gave way to our final 60 mile trek through verdant land where water flows freely for crops of barley and oats, and cattle and horses graze in painted green pastures. Water is the life-blood of a thriving agriculture and are we witnessing politics at its finest?

As we pulled into the Crystal Inn, our home for the next 5 nights, my very-best-new-most-favorite-friend George Firchow greeted us at the lobby with brewski's in hand and a warm welcome. He and Barbara have been in town for a day from Lincoln, Nebraska, an 1100 mile jaunt. One of my "old" Motor partners, Carroll "Lefty" Wright pulled up seconds later from Whitefish, Montana on his Suzuki Hayabusa, his 1086 mile trip a two day affair. More importantly, he's been a lifelong motorcyclist, an MMOC member since the 1970's and this is his *first* ride! Welcome aboard Lefty. Checked in and gathered poolside for several hours, the reflective glint of a bright afternoon sun mirroring off the huge windshield of a beautiful teal GL1500 announced the arrival of Baron Laetzsch and lady friend Josie Loughridge. When asked if said windshield was stolen from the mast of one of Magellan's sailing ships, I *think* Herr German's native-tongue outburst was, er, profanity laced.

Well into the evening and amongst incoming shrapnel from fireworks, we discussed the order of the 6 National Parks and Monuments we're here to visit in the next 4 days, the routes of which are outlined on hand-out sheets. With more than 900 miles to ride and the requisite scenic and lunch stops, plus the ever-present threat of afternoon thunder-boomers, my naiveté led to the stupid question: "Did anyone bring a lap-top so we can check hourly and regional weather patterns?" Damn, what a mistake! Within nano

seconds, computer geeks Armbruster, Foss, Loughridge, Rhoda and the Heanes Bros. whipped out every conceivable type of electronic device from fancy leather embossed hip holsters, faux diamond-encrusted titanium cases and that old stand-by enclosure, Naugahyde! I mean, these yuppie nut-cases fondled smart phones, droids, iPads, iPhones and iPods, then segued into nerd heaven salivating over a discussion on apps and gigabytes. Armbruster won this impromptu Q & A, thereby becoming the only Iron Man Awardee in the contiguous 48 states likewise classified as a geek and nerd too! Question answered, I think: we'll leave tomorrow morning at 0700hrs for Zion N.P. and Cedar Breaks National Monument.

A beautiful and refreshingly cool sunrise greeted us as we departed on this day's 175 mile jaunt. Minimal traffic and 55 miles into the ride we paraded down 25 mph residential two-lane Utah 9 in the very sleepy hollow of Rockville, just a mile or so from the south entrance to the park. Every house on both sides of one mile long Main Street is proudly adorned with an American Flag on staff in their front yard this July 5<sup>th</sup> morning! We are in awe of their patriotism! Utah 9 winds through Zion like a sidewinder snake, according us a magnificent crawling-pace-view of cliffs towering above, then through the 1.1 mile long Zion-Mount Carmel Tunnel to the east exit. This pitch-black tunnel was bored in the 1920's to allow passage to US Route 89 and facilitated our venture to lunch at the Thunderbird Restaurant in Mt. Carmel Junction. Internet ratings don't do their excellent staff and cuisine justice.

Bellies full it was time to pick up the pace for an early afternoon visit to Cedar Breaks Nat'l Monument, 55 miles distant. "Only 55 miles you say?" Reggie. There ain't nothing straight out here; besides, when I laid out our daily routes, I searched for the most diabolical, scenic and serpentine pathways to motorcycle nirvana! Several stops at this monument afforded us group photos from wind-whipped 10,500 ft. rock outcroppings. More than a mile below, raptors soared through canyons in search of prey as multiple streams continue their million year quest to alter rock strata.

Two hours later we toasted resident nerds and geeks poolside as the heavens opened up at the prescribed time. Score one for their electronic wizardry and disillusioned mindset! High 80's returned shortly as steam rose from the deck and once again there's unanimity: "My (insert brand name, model # and storage capacity) geekculator sez the weather's clear at the Grand Canyon tomorrow." Remember that prophecy! Bill Loveless showed up late afternoon sporting a new front hoop after a 260 mile flat-bed tow from Ely to St. George, Utah. Ahhhh, but it continues.....tied to his top-trunk was a new rear tire the St. George dealership didn't have, soooooo Bill had to ride back to Cedar City where he purchased that.....but their mechanic was off sick and injured soooooo Bill had to ride back the 55 miles to St. George on July 6<sup>th</sup> to have it mounted before rejoining us! Damn, would it ever end?

On the morning of July 6<sup>th</sup>, we cleared the cobwebs at 0700hrs and departed on our 350 mile round trip to the North Rim. Wide open roads and sparse traffic delivered us in short order into Arizona and the Jacob Lake Inn and Restaurant, just shy of the parks portal. This eatery was highly recommended on the internet and we agreed, as many alternative delicacies were offered by our waiter Bruce, and Mike Rores, Laetzsch and the Heanes Bros. devoured their organic fruit compotes while we macho manly-types stuck to traditional fare. Within 45 miles of twisting and undulating tarmac, we ascended through dense aspen forest and sheer-walled canyon roadway—many miles flanked by

bright green pastures with foraging deer—to the park’s visitor center. For those of us who have *ridden* to both the North and South Rims, we are unanimous in our belief: The road to the North Rim is far less congested much more scenic and challenging, and the view from various outlooks *slightly* less panoramic albeit more enjoyable because of diminished pedestrian traffic. Our 8255 foot perch this crystal clear 80 degree day is more than one thousand feet higher than the South Rim, visible 10 miles distant. Just minutes after noon, it’s time to ride the 175 miles back to reality. Five miles down, black clouds passed overhead and then opened up, drenching us in a steady chilling down-pour for the next 40 miles. Some hapless souls donned rain gear on the infrequent narrow shoulders, the rest of us elected to ride back to the Jacob Lake Restaurant gas station and seek refuge while topping off. Some are soaked without rain gear; others drenched but now covered in fashionable plastic at this damp lower-altitude mid 70’s. Within 1/2 mile from the station, drizzle gave way to low 90’s bright sun as I laughed at the overdressed sweating dummkopfs with steam wafting out of neck and sleeve openings on our remaining 130 mile voyage! Back at the ranch, darts and verbal abuse were heaped on Foss and Armbruster for their collective ignorance of all things weather and computer related. Hero yesterday, P.O.S. today!

Our third day’s round trip ride to Red Canyon and Bryce Canyon N.P., with a detour to the lava beds of Dixie National Forest, was a 240 mile stark-contrast lesson in topography. Vivid green grazing pastures gave way to bright red vertical rock arching over our roadways, magnificent multi-hued spires and columns reached from thousands of feet below to the heavens above and hundreds of square miles of grey-black lava beds disgorged centuries ago treated our aural senses. Our education and wonderment is broken only by the occasional petrol and consumable fuel stop. Midafternoon, our requisite pool deck cocktail party ushered in another deluge and welcome relief from the 90 degree bright sun.

Friday, July 8<sup>th</sup> is our fourth and final MMOC Tour day. Kolob Canyons is a promontory viewing point in the northwestern quadrant of Zion N.P. and accessible by motor vehicle only from exit 40 off I-15. It offers spectacular sight lines in a region favored by backpackers and mountain goats alike, but does not connect to the south or east park entrances. After a short but rewarding visit, we departed the high elevation fog and light drizzle for St. George 30 miles distant, and then picked up UT-18 for a 35 mile sprint to Mountain Meadow. This State Shrine on a grassy meadow in rural Washington County commemorates the September 11, 1857 massacre of 120 pioneers passing through the region from Arkansas to California, *allegedly* at the hands of Mormon Church settlers and hierarchy alike. If only the famous King Brothers had been born a century earlier there may have been a more peaceful resolution....”Can’t we all just get along?” *September Dawn*, the 2007 movie starring John Voight and Terrence Stamp paints an ugly picture of church philosophy in that era and you can draw your own conclusion.

Early afternoon we’re back-at-the-ranch preparing for the hot-rod car show that is invading Cedar City this day, Saturday and Sunday too. Our hotel is booked to the gills with my type of people and the parking lot resembles downtown Reno and Sparks, Nevada during the annual Hot August Nights funfest. We motorcyclists blend and bond with the owners, myself trying not to salivate on meticulous paint and chrome. The common denominator, Internal Combustion! Late afternoon the Crystal Inn sponsored an

outdoor barbeque with hundreds of us feasting at long rows of tables. What could reign in this event? Rain! It poured for two hours necessitating sprints to our rooms and eliciting grumbling from hot rodders with calloused hands reeking of polishing compounds and wax. Late into the evening the assembled we recapped our daily rides and this year's festivities, coming to the conclusion: The sights of the region are unparalleled with both lush and barren canyon floors; sheer and stepped canyon walls married to spires, columns and arches painted every color and hue from bright red to tan; rock strata that causes geologist's hearts to palpitate and sparsely traveled roads throughout in excellent condition, all contributed to a wonderfully scenic, memorable and immensely fun tour. The hotel staff is outstanding and our nightly meals in their restaurant very good with varied and tasty entrees. Not once did we feel the need to look elsewhere for sustenance. And let's not forget our participants; a cohesive gathering of competent, fun loving and humorous riders not afraid to throw darts or share accolades!

Tire kicking at 6 am sucks, but we said our goodbyes to those going in different directions and with throttle cables stretched, the Rores, Mary Ann and the Firchows join Rhoda and me in our quest to get across the Mojave Desert before stifling heat saps our strength. One hour later and 170 miles down I-15, we stopped in Vegas for fuel and Gatorade where it was 75 degrees. Impossible you say Reggie? Like I said, we had it on afterburner, particularly through the glorious downhill serpentine canyon-stretch near Littlefield, Arizona and we transitioned from Mountain Time to Pacific Time. You do the math. After two more hours we ate lunch in Barstow where it was now in the mid 90's and rising. Cool vests donned, Ca-58 spirited us towards our evening stay in Bakersfield, where the further west we ventured, the hotter it became. At the top of the Tehachapi summit, aptly named for the town we're blowing past and the only section of this four lane without a center divide K-rail, a scraggly and flea infested Wile E. Coyote sprinted north across our westbound lanes in pursuit of the mystical and invisible Roadrunner. Half an hour later and sweltering in 109 degree heat at our motel entrance, Rores and Mary Ann would swear I hit his tail! I was still wide-eyed although not profanity-laced-speechless and nevertheless needed to change my strides, thankful for divine intervention.

Hours of pool-side meditation segued into filet mignon at the premier KC Steakhouse in downtown Bakersfield which morphed into slumber-land. Tomorrow's another day and will see us to our 2466 mile trip's end. Goodnight all, thanks again everyone, and George and Barbara.....you're the greatest! Can't we all just get along?

As my weary digits stroke this key board, a reminder to check [www.mmoc.org](http://www.mmoc.org) for the 2011 trip photos and the latest updated info on the 2012 MMOC tour. Where to? Thanks in part to retired LAPD's Gary Smith, now living in Washington State, beginning July 8, 2012, in Williams, California, we're going to venture north to Medford, Oregon on the 9<sup>th</sup>, then on to Kelso, Washington for the 10<sup>th</sup>, 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup>. Much like STD's, I have a disdain for freeways and interstates and will, where possible, seek out scenic secondary and back roads to get us to Mount Saint Helens. Contract negotiations for the hotels will be complete in weeks and lodging and route info posted to the First Quarter 2012 Siren. Care to join us in our quest to discover America?

I remain, Dennis M. Brown

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