

The 24th Annual MMOC Ride

OR

Caltrans And NDOT Snafu's And A Comedy Of Errors

Coastal redwoods flourish as canopy; damp fog shrouds visibility yet comfortably chills core temperature at sea level. Transport to granite wall canyons heading inland containing a raging snow-melt river far below and morph to hell's kitchen heat in high desert. Seldom traveled roads through barren topography of indigenous peoples holy land give way to a 9624 foot mountain pass allowing gravity to deliver us once again towards the coast after traveling through some familiar and often aromatic bovine grazing country. Amazingly diverse sensory overload. Magnificent, *with caveats!*

Our meet and greet in Healdsburg Sunday, July 9, featured a grandiose surprise birthday party dinner sponsored by Santa Rosa's Past President Keith Thomas for longtime girlfriend Carol Feldner (she turned 18) and unknowingly was a prelude to epic Caltrans folly beginning Monday. Countless dozens of single lane defile road closures for soil erosion, paving repair or road realignment, some noted on their website, most *NOT*, dotted the entire northern California region for our first 3 days. California 1 and U.S. 101 were the most impacted, frequently with successive closures within 2 or 3 miles of each other *AND* often on steep inclines/declines of tight radius curves, recurrently off camber, too! Inland, Nevada DOT was not immune to ridicule, either. Read on.

Past President Terry Blumenthal had whipped out his magic Ouija Board late last year, prior to winter storms of epic proportions, to conspire a clockwise and interesting route from Healdsburg to Gilroy via Eureka, Weaverville, Red Bluff, Susanville, and then Pyramid Lake in Nevada to Fernley. Next up was Bridgeport, Sonora then Firebaugh into Gilroy; remarkably, no four AAA maps or like number of GPS units were in agreement on routing through certain areas as multiple choices of short cut, long-cut and no-cut were readily available. Some old, some new, and good for you if you knew, for few of us had a clue!

Limericks notwithstanding, Terry, myself, Rhoda, Cliff Heanes (and where was his riding partner and soulmate Mickie? Home licking her wounds from a DFO 3 days earlier on San Jose's Mt. Hamilton!), Arizona's Baron Laetzsch and Joe Waid, Nebraska's George and Barbara Firchow, Jeff Heanes, Nick Nicosia, Ohio's Lynn and Kay Waid, Dewey Presnell, Nevada's Director and MMOC Webmaster Doug Wayne, Oregon's Steve and Irene Armbruster, Mary Ann Mann, Director Mark Murray and Utah's Andy Huffman bobbed and weaved and zigged and zagged across vast plains of ever-changing topography, scenery as varied as our states of residence, choice of steeds and riding style. Multiple Harleys, a lone BMW and singular Honda, a new Ford Raptor, GMC and Dodge, too. And out of LAPD, retired 37 year MMOC member Dave Szabo ventured north to meet

us in Susanville for lunch and join our scenic ride past Pyramid Lake in Nevada's Virginia Mountain range into Fernley.

Rowan and Martin's Laugh-In character, the raincoat-clad leprechaun that continuously fell over on his tricycle, did an encore performance twice on day one. Lynn and Kay Waid suffered road rash on a gravel-strewn slow-speed curve and not 50 miles later, Jeff Heanes once more mimicked Arte Johnson, flopping his Harley on a tight steep-camber 5 MPH uphill curve that came to an abrupt stop, yet again, thanks to Caltrans' ignorance of motorcyclist safety issues. Day two heading to Red Bluff was a relief with the carnage now hopefully behind us (ahem) and far less traffic and road construction; mostly new tarmac offered the opportunity for some of us to twist the throttle on glorious 299, 3 and 36. Some even took in the spectacular scenery; with a 0700 departure out of light fog and a gradual transition to low 90's, the weather was phenomenal. Blumenthal would receive a PM call from his wife Mary informing she tripped over one of their sausage dogs and was in a temp cast awaiting surgery Wednesday afternoon. He was dutifully in the wind the next morning.

Wednesday we headed towards Fernley, Nevada, with a breakfast stop in Susanville. First, we had to motor through "Hossfeld Curve", a narrow and winding section of Ca 36 about 40 miles east of Red Bluff that is wonderfully challenging yet has caused much bodily injury to motorists over the decades, including our own Bob and Vi Hossfeld in 2005. There is now a massive 5 mile cut and fill realignment project underway. Dave Szabo, today living in Reno's Mount Rose area, met us at breakfast where our months old debate of road surface suitability on the north western flanks of Pyramid Lake were great cause for discourse. He has ridden the area several times and AAA Maps generally support his statement: 35 to 45 miles of Nevada 445 and 446 are graded gravel yet passable with caution. Despite weeks of calls to Nevada DOT and BLM, they never responded to phone messages. At the 11th hour, Mark Murray put the issue to rest with a chance call to the Pyramid Lake Rangers Station. Miracle of miracles, a real live non digitized warm-blooded mammal answered. To paraphrase....it's never been paved (!) and with last winter's monsoon rains, numerous sections are now impassible with 30' wide and 10' deep washouts. Resolute end of discussion!

Because some of the aggrieved and grumbling "we" still wanted to visit Pyramid, the lake that is the sole terminus of the 121 mile Truckee River from Tahoe's North Shore Basin and to this day is near overflowing its banks, Szabo came up with plan B; a long-cut version of US 395 to McCarran Blvd to Pyramid Way. Yes, the first 10 miles heading back northeast through Spanish Springs had horrific traffic in the ever expanding north Reno and Sparks area but we eventually found the solitude of no traffic on the last 35 miles. At 30 miles long, 9 miles wide and 356 feet at its deepest, Pyramid is (now?) a massive body of water thanks to epic winter storms. We finally chalked off another bucket list item, albeit only 10 miles of shore-line and eventually motored another 19 miles to our Fernley hotel. With a steamy indoor pool and increasingly warmer weather outside, we ordered in Chinese food (in Fernley?) from 2 sources for a lobby party. Need you ask?

Sonora calls this Thursday morning via the west flank of Nevada's swollen Walker Lake. Thanks to Doug Wayne's expert guidance, he corrected my erroneous Utah-bound course and got us on the correct path after an unnecessary 40 mile sightseeing venture. There's hundreds of square miles of lush grazing pastures and tranquility as we follow the curvaceous and raging Walker River. Burger Barn in Bridgeport offered up its namesake delicacies for lunch. Damn, they're out of Dad's Root Beer which stopped absolutely no one from gorging themselves. Cresting lightly trafficked Sonora Pass at 9624' in elevation, with the tightest sections behind us, it was time to find a pull-out for a photo op on the western slope; massive snow banks in the background provided the Kodak moment we sought. Up pulled the Armbruster's who had got caught behind a slow moving RV and you guessed it, they too flopped over on a crawling curve. Steve professed to know better, but out of earshot and hopefully print too, admitted he prefers solo riding....oops! Click, click for pictures, drop the hammer and soon we're poolside in Sonora. A wonderful 90 degrees, cool water and MMOC pizza, what's not to like?

One more day of optimistically incident free road-tripping into Gilroy found us, ahem, once again circumnavigating a 20 mile stretch of gravel road on our 50 mile out-of-the-way long-cut route through barren Firebaugh. We practiced our parade formation U-turns on pothole infested dirt to remain on asphalt and beat feet back on I-5 to Ca. 152 and over the Friday afternoon traffic infested Pacheco Pass. A relaxing shaded stop at windy yet tranquil San Luis Reservoir was a nice respite as a prelude to the motoring insanity into Gilroy. An introspective pool side chat, dinner and good byes were in order for we were going in multiple directions early morning.

Five days on the road rubbing elbows *and* 6 nights of elbow bending have a way of bringing out critique, criticism (mostly constructive), humor, insanity and barbs; camaraderie was excellent throughout. Much conversation centered on the *vast* riding improvement of Andy Huffman. When he surfaced last year at Cedar City after a 35 plus year hiatus off a bike, Andy's riding had regressed from his Oakland Motor days and was visibly unstable as was his personal being. AT 74 YEARS YOUNG, he self-critiqued, bought a new 2016 Harley Street Glide Special and spent the last 10 months attending 5 (!) riding schools, HD Basic and HD Advanced, twice. Courses at the Utah Highway Patrol Academy and the City of Ogden Motor School put the frosting on the cake. Many of us had never witnessed such an amazing short-term transformation and to a man, we were happy and proud of and for him! The other side of the coin: By unanimous vote, the most deserving of the D. Brown His Own Self Acid Tongue Award was Oakland's own Dewey Presnell. *Somehow* he landed on Motors in October, '85 and worked (?) more than 20 years of Leather God duty, the majority in our Commercial Enforcement Unit, the very detail I commanded and slaved at [**a bold face lie! Ed.**] for 14 years. Since 1985, Doug Wayne, myself and countless *former* friends gave him MMOC applications out the wazoo, mailed them too....all to no avail. Well, just 2 weeks before this 24th ride kickoff, Quartermaster Cliff Heanes got Dewey's weathered, fondled, spindled, faded and mutilated application in the mail with a PayPal script. Talk about sleeping under a rock for 32 years! We'd be remiss if we didn't chide Dave Szabo, too. Thirty seven years of membership and he finally smelled the roses, inclusion on an MMOC ride. Welcome aboard.

Next year's destination? By unanimous vote, check the eastern and southern slopes of Washington State's Mount Rainier off your bucket list; wonderfully diverse roads and scenery await us. With at least 2 nights of layover in Kelso we're afforded the opportunity to revisit Mt St. Helens once again. Some poolside pundit suggested for this significant 25th anniversary and my final ride leadership-role, we procure commemorative monogrammed T-shirts; from my perspective and logistically, a pain-in-the-ass but doable. Let me know if that should be a go.

A heartfelt thank you one and all for your participation, and particularly those that ventured far distances to be part of our adventurous group. True dedication.

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