

Apex

July 2019
Looking Through The Curve

Official newsletter of Bluegrass Beemers, Inc. Lexington, Kentucky
MOA #146 RA #49 <http://www.bluegrassbeemers.org>



Eagle Summit, Alaska

Elevation 3,624 ft.

Around summer solstice this peak basks in 24 hours of sunlight

Photo: John Rice

MOA Rally

By Jeff Crabb

It's hard to believe it had been ten years since I went to a National Rally. With a few vendors missing from the past, plenty of new ones filled the void. Weather was great and the ride down and back superb.

On the cover, what better of an item to think about in hot July, but snow. I'm hoping this cools you down just a little. The photo is from John and Jay's most excellent trip to Alaska.

This month we take a ride with Joe Bark and

friends to Urbana, OH to visit a restoration of a B-17. Also, we have the start of the Alaskan adventure from John Rice.

Please enjoy and remember, this newsletter is made possible by contributions from those that read it. Send all of your contributions to apex@bluegrassbeemers.org.



Spotted at the 2019 BMW MOA Rally in Lebanon, TN

R32

**Apex is the official newsletter of Bluegrass Beemers, Inc.
Lexington, Kentucky MOA #146 RA #49**

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Deadline for submissions is the last day of the month.

Back issues of Apex can be accessed on our website

Join us at Frisch's on Harrodsburg Rd.

in Lexington, Kentucky on any Saturday, 7-9:00 a.m.

**BMW Club
Bluegrass Beemers**



A Million-piece Jigsaw Puzzle

Our “B-17 Adventure”

By Joseph Bark MD #63298

I know we have a load of perfect riding days — but some days are really MORE PERFECT (to use a “double superlative”) than others. Perfect time of year, perfect temperature, perfect riding companions, the roads we all dream of, spring in full bloom, and the destination, oh, the destination, was more than we ever could have expected. The plan was to head up to Urbana, Ohio, a small town with a remarkable secret. There, at the Champaign Aviation Museum there is an exhibit called the “B-17 Warbird Restoration” which has to be one of the finest efforts to preserve history that we have ever known.

My friend, Ben LePage from Richmond Kentucky said one day, “We should head up to that Museum if you want to see a fascinating creation rising from the dead, by the work of many dedicated artisans!” It was a destination, I thought, which meant we had to take the ride!

From Lexington, it’s only about 185 miles, but five of us left early after our Bluegrass Beemers’ Breakfast, our weekly get together “to tell tires and kick lies.” Most of us have a sticker on our sidebags saying, “We ride for Pie,” so about an hour after the ride started, we found ourselves in Old Washington, Ohio, for our final “cuppa” at “Lil Jumbo Coffee Company” where the service was fine and the coffee and pastries were even better — our first “taste” of Heaven that day. But there was more “Heaven” than that, just over the Wild Blue Yonder.

At the Champaign Aviation Museum, Ben’s



friend, Jerry Danewood, an accomplished flyer and trucking firm magnate, welcomed our group into an enormous hangar, which harbored several planes besides the main object of interest, a B-17 Flying Fortress. Since 2005, the Warbird purchased and donated to the people of Champaign by businessman Jerry Shiffer’s family, seemed to be rising up from of a sea of plates, bolts, rivets, and struts along with rack after rack of huge blueprints scattered here and there all over the hangar floor. And the gigantic B-17 arose from this million-piece jigsaw puzzle, right before the eyes of volunteers who bore the brunt of actually making the parts which are being assembled. The plane itself, which had been undergoing this transformation since 2005, when a flatbed trailer, loaded with decaying parts and sections of “The Champaign Lady,” arrived at Grimes Field.

Amazingly, the staff there at the Museum will take you on your own private tour through the bomber, and you can see the minuscule quar-

ters for the ball-turret gunners and the tail gunner! You will be astounded by the incredibly tight seat these guys had to occupy. There were no basketball players who got that job — it was reserved (and proudly so) for the smallest flyers in The Corps, naturally.



The diminutive “ball turret.” See relative size compared to one of our Bluegrass Beemers who saw this exhibit!

We five riders toured the facility, the halves of the

giant B-17, and the preserved “bubble” occupied by the gunners, where the temperature at flying altitude often reached sixty degrees below zero! We talk a lot about the fancy Gerbing electrics we riders wear in cold weather, but by George, I’ll bet that’s a freeze-out for even us electric-clad two-wheelers! But guess what — these guys had electric suits to keep them thawed, but they were so efficient that the little fellas who were in that tiny bubbles had to take special care to extend their legs as much as possible occasionally, because the wires would get so hot that they would be burned behind their knees! Talk about a truly tight fit! And those tail gunners were not permitted in their tiny spheres for take-offs and landings, a fact that we asked 96-year old tail gunner Art Kemp about. He knew the regulation, but rather than crawl back to his cramped station, he tried it at least once, thinking it would be better to “assume

his position” before approaching the target. But he soon found out that the ride in the miniature seat was so rough that he was “almost beaten to death!”

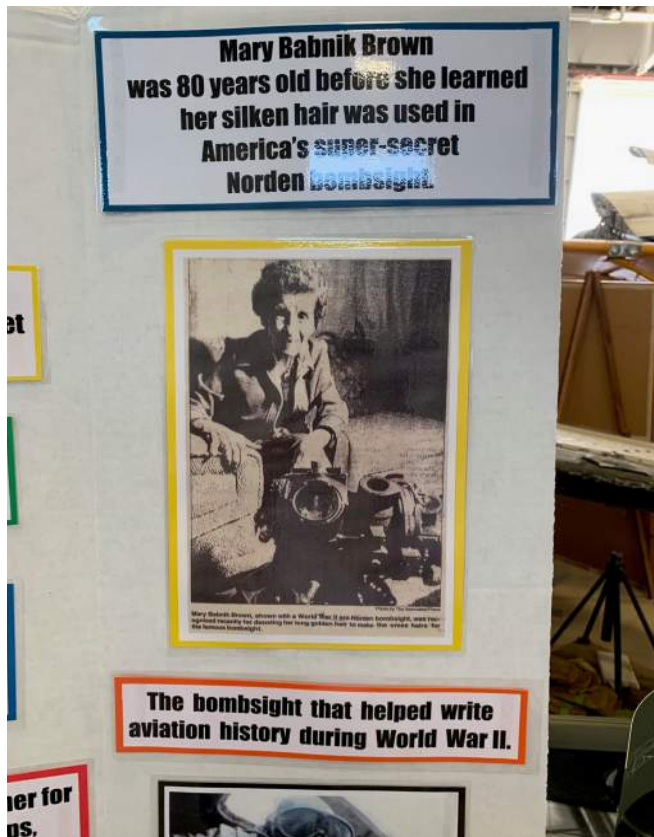
At the amazing age of 96, this wonderful guy is completely “with it,” and he walked around the displays with us for almost an hour, an-



Art Kemp — 96 y.o. Tailgunner for 35 missions in European Theater! Average Crewman lived 7 missions! Here demonstrating his “seat” for those 35 missions.

swering our blizzard of questions about his service in the Army Air Corps! A remarkable fellow, he still shows up at the hangar once a week to put in a day helping with the restoration! And this wonderful man is just one of the plethora of reasons to visit the Museum! Sadly, the entire bomber will take, at best estimate, nine or ten years before it is ready to go “wheels up” at the end of the Airport’s runway. Most of us left donations to help with

their expenses. All workers are volunteer.



Interestingly, though our tour of the Museum spared no answers to guests' questions, the one question I have since wondered about is, "What did the guys rebuilding the plane which killed umpteen Germans, think about a group of BMW riders, on German machinery visiting their project." I'll remember to ask Art Kemp, our guru, that question if I'm lucky enough to land him for a talk here in Lexington.

Mary Babnik Brown — The Lady who saved the Norden Bombsight effort! Three feet of perfect blonde hair, inspiring the term "cross hairs!"

Thousands of rivets and leveling components lined up on one of the newly created wing surfaces.

Among the displays, is a pictorial presentation of how the Norden bombsight was developed, and within that display is an astounding story about a woman named Mary Babnik Brown, who was asked to give up her pristine long blonde hair for the war effort, not knowing that her locks were used in every bombsight made for action in the B-17 and other aircraft (thus the term "crosshairs" came into existence.) She only found out its purpose in 1987, when she received a note from President Ronald Reagan, thanking her for the service she gave the Nation and the war effort.





Hey RA Charter Clubs!

We're looking forward to a groovy time at the "Set My Soul Free" national rally September 5-8 in Woodstock, Virginia, and we'd like to make it easy for charter clubs to camp and hang out together. If you are planning to attend as a club, let our rally chair Matt Smith know (MSmith1150GS@Gmail.com) and he'll reserve a camping area for your group.

Also, please encourage your members to attend (<https://bmwra.org/events/the-bmw-ra-national-rally/>) and as they register, ask them to add your club name to the "Additional Information" field. This will help us estimate the size of the camping area.

Peace, love and motorcycles
BMW Riders Association



North to Alaska

*(not the exciting one from 1960 with John Wayne, Capucine and music by Johnny Horton, but the **2019 Fly & Ride Excursion** with two old guys on rented dual sports)*

By John Rice

Our flight to Alaska was canceled. After months of anticipation, Jay (whose given name is Stuart) and I stood at the Delta counter while two agents tried their best to re-schedule us. It was like Central Casting had sent them for the comedy roles: the tall skinny one with the too-neat hair and mustache and the short pudgy rumped one with the north-eastern accent. They were working so hard, tapping keys and talking back and forth in numbers and letters when we heard them say “I’ve got Stuart!” and the other one, “I’ve got Smythe!” We looked at each other, then at them and said, at the same time, “that’s the same person”. Their expressions were classic. Their efforts were to no avail and we had to come back at 5 AM Friday, the day we had planned to spend exploring Anchorage.

With a four hour time difference, it was mid-afternoon in Alaska as we caught the shuttle from the airport to the Inlet Hotel. Our driver is in his late 40’s, rides a Harley he says, but is moving to Arizona later in the year to be near the kids. He’s getting a Goldwing to ride there, figuring that it will be better for touring with his wife. The Inlet is a tall, cream-colored building, a rather European-style basic hotel near the harbor. From our fourth floor room, we can see distant mountains which we are told, include Denali, shining in the sun that

won’t set until 11:30 PM. The PubHouse bar & grille downstairs had a nice selection of taps, from which I settled on the Denali Brewing Chuli Stout in honor of the big mountain outside.

On Saturday morning, Nancy Hall, the co-owner with her husband Keith of Alaska Motorcycle Adventures, fetched us in her pickup truck with a wrecked Kawasaki KLR in the bed. Seems a Spanish tourist had come off of it on the dirt and gravel road to McCarthy, a spot that was to be on our agenda in a few days. At the shop, Sarah, one of the mechan-



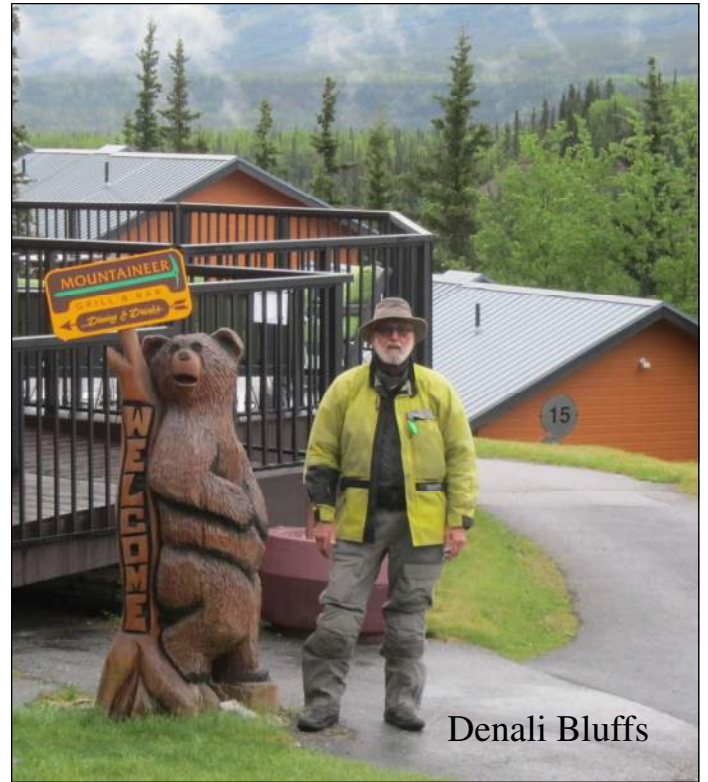
ics, professionally looks over for pre-existing damage and marks the various dings on her sheet. Mine is a 2013 KLR, blue, a new addition to the company fleet just purchased used and low-mileage

from a local resident. The 12 volt pigtail I needed for heated gear isn't installed, so Keith puts it on for me. Jay's bike is slightly older, black, with a Sargent seat (the good news) and an aftermarket loud exhaust (the bad news). After all the paperwork and cautions about bad roads, large animal collisions, flat tires and limited gas are done, we headed out of town about 11-ish, up Rt. 1 through Anchorage and on to Rt. 3, the "Parks Highway" that leads to the national parks along the way. Jay has been here before, during his military career, but the weather on those occasions was so overcast that he hadn't yet seen the mountains which overlook our progress.

Lunchtime came in Wasilla at the MatSu restaurant, which is not Chinese food as the name had suggested to we lower 48-ers, but is instead the name of the borough (county), derived from a contraction of the Matanuska (Glacier) and Susitna (both a river and a mountain). The waitress tells us that Sarah Palin used to come in all the time, but since she "got famous", they haven't seen her. We check in the parking lot and are, sadly, unable to see Russia from here.

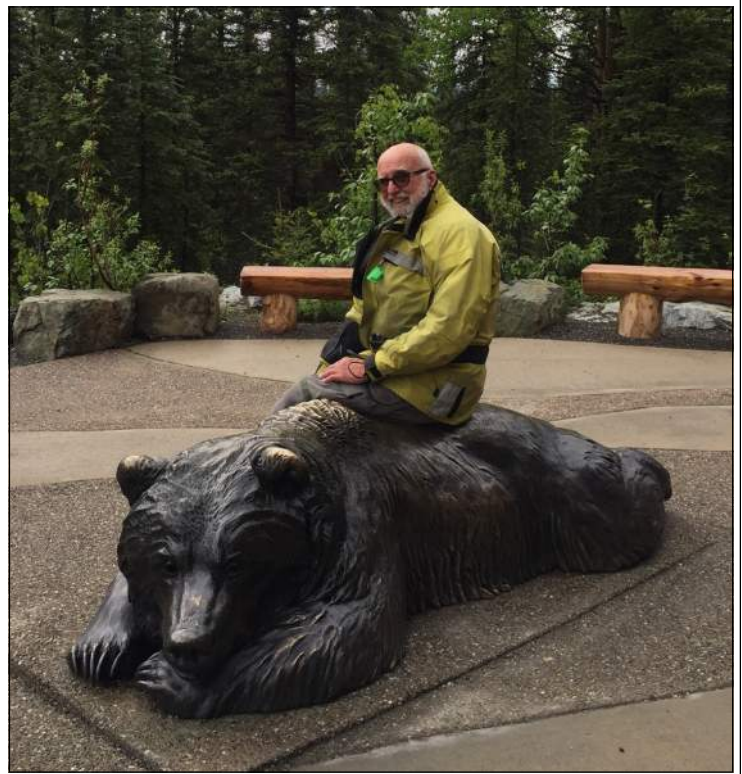
Rain had arrived in fits and starts before we got to Wasilla and by the time we were a bit north of the town, it was constant and cold. We found our lodging at Denali Bluffs, in a downpour, with no parking spaces at the inn. A young man from Macedonia came by with golf cart. "I'm the boss here", he told us (perhaps a slight exaggeration of position) "and you can park where it says not to". We unloaded our bags from the bikes into his cart and he drove us down a narrow path to a "rustic cabin" which contained our small room. We walked back up the path later to the restaurant on site where the beer selection was adequate though not inspired, but the food was quite good. As we would find everywhere on

this trip, salmon is plentiful up here and well prepared.



Denali Bluffs

Sunday we awoke to cold rain and low clouds. We know there are huge mountain peaks ringing the area, but we can't see them. Our breakfast is served by a Jamaican waitress who, like many of the foreign nationals we will meet in Alaska, works here in the summers, following the tourist seasons through the parks around the country. We rode down to the Denali National Park, but though we could see the centerpiece peak from nearly two hundred miles away, now that we are standing next to it, not a clue. We tour the park road, as far as we can go, until a ranger stops us at a kiosk to say that only busses are allowed to proceed from here. We decline to take a tour bus to not see the mountain when we cannot see it on our own just fine from the bikes. My KLR has been acting up with occasional hiccups and now it is beginning to get worse. The tachometer has gone wild, going from zero RPM to redline, and then stopping completely, then the needle flailing about without



Denali National Park Visitor Center

any actual connection to what the engine is doing. I've seen this before on later BMW airheads, when the battery is failing. My tail-light begins flickering, Jay tells me. When we leave the park and head to a gas station, the bike quits no electrics.

As Nancy had instructed us, I call the number supplied and get their mechanic on duty. He agrees that it sounds like battery failure, but isn't certain I can replace a battery myself. A bit frustrated, since I know it will eat up the rest of the day for him to get here to deal with it, I tell him that I've been doing this sort of thing longer than he's been alive and while my skills have diminished, I can handle this. With him still on the phone, we remove seat to get at the battery and discover that when Keith had added the 12 volt pigtail, he evidently had left off the washers (negative pole had some) and the positive pole connection is now just "floating", having finally vibrated enough to come adrift. The Glitch....I can't remove or tighten the bolt without a 5mm Allen wrench,

which the tool kit doesn't have. It has an 8, for something, but not a 5. I take Jay's bike to Healy, ten miles away, to get an Allen wrench and washers to make their repair, hoping that the battery itself is still good. There are two young men at the Ace Hardware, here in the home of self reliance, but I had to explain to them what an Allen wrench was so they could point me to where in the large store it might be. Washer installed, bolt tightened, problem solved. All is good.

As the day progressed and we headed north, weather improved and with the blue skies and sunshine, the vastness of the country is apparent. Up here the mountains seem more distant, the pine forests and rolling hills seeming to go on forever on both sides. There are few signs of habitation, only occasional side roads with a mailbox, and the convenience stores with gas, so ubiquitous back home are completely absent. We spot our first moose strolling across the road and into the bushes on the other side, where she stops to look over her



Inside Denali National Park



Rumor has it, the
BIG mountain is
right past the tree

massive shoulder at us, mildly offended as we take pictures of her backside.



It was well past lunchtime when we came to the tiny town of Nenana, population 378, with the Dusty Roads Cafe where they serve an excellent apple pie with espresso for me and good tea for Jay. We were the only actual customers, though there were several people just passing the time at a center table. We listened as the indigenous women who own and run the place talked among themselves about daily life in this town and delivering the to-go orders to the truckers that supply everything in these parts. With such great distances to cover, these entrepreneurs will bring the men and women drivers food, so the trucks don't have to be off of the road for long. Their necessities of dealing with the extremes in weather, distance, supply chains for staple items, nearly everything that forms the routines of human existence in a society, are foreign to our experience.

Our destination for the night was Fairbanks, 358 miles north of Anchorage and only 188

miles south of the Arctic Circle. Coming into town, it looks much bigger and far more cosmopolitan than its official population number of 33,000 would suggest. It is the hub of the North Borough which is roughly the size of New Jersey in area. Our modest hotel is by the Chena River, once a major transportation waterway, now supplanted by the highway and the Fairbanks International Airport nearby. The Pipeline, focus of much of the development in Alaska, comes through here.

After a walk around the immediate downtown area, we settle on Lavalles, the restaurant in an old hotel that harkens back to the early days, with a vibe reminiscent of a 1930's establishment in a black and white movie. One can see the ghosts of travelers, men in double-breasted coats and fedoras, women in tight-waisted jackets and elaborate hats, wandering these narrow halls. This hotel and its restaurant would have dealt with people in transition, coming in for business, moving on to the next place tomorrow. They probably ate meat and potatoes, but for we less hardy travelers, it was an apple, blue cheese salad, with black bottom crème brûlée for dessert. The Denali Single Engine Red on draft bridged the gap between modern cuisine and days past.

Out in bright sunshine Monday, looking like noon though it's only 6 AM, we walked across the bridge to "The Diner" for breakfast. Everyone seems to be here, so the simple name must be sufficient. The Special includes huge portions of scrambled eggs, home fries with the little crusty bits around the edges and marvelously spicy reindeer sausage. It is far too much, unless I'm going to be hiking the ridges and tree-felling all day, but I do my best to finish it anyway.

We rode up to Fox, where we gassed up and connected to Rt. 6, the Steele Highway headed

Buttoning up for rain



Bears and tourists
favor bright clothing

Even in the wilds of the north,
good pie can be had!



toward Circle. The mountains in the distance, look softer, not as jagged, perhaps a bit older from some earlier continental collision. There is good pavement for the first 80 miles or so, then suddenly we are on dirt and gravel. The surface is fairly well graded, surprisingly smooth under the KLR's wheels. These bikes seem to like it here. The road begins to get steeper and we crest Eagle Summit pass, only 3,600 feet but it seems much, much higher. We can feel the temperature dropping as we rise, deep snow appears on the sides of the road, and trees get sparse. Down the other side, we eventually came to the little town of Central, with a gold mining museum and Rick's bar where the only gas, a single pump

here, and the big Circle Hot Springs resort 8 miles down side road to draw tourists and locals for merriment. Now all are gone, with just this place, serving as bar, restaurant, grocery store, gas station and community center, surviving. The full time population of the town is 70, with a few more coming in summer.

There is some confusion over Jay's order (they don't get many vegetarians here, I think) and he is given a cheeseburger instead of the grilled cheese he wanted. He made a local woman's day when she walked in seeking just such a meal and Jay gave it to her. Outside we met Ziggy and Fred, who had seen our bikes

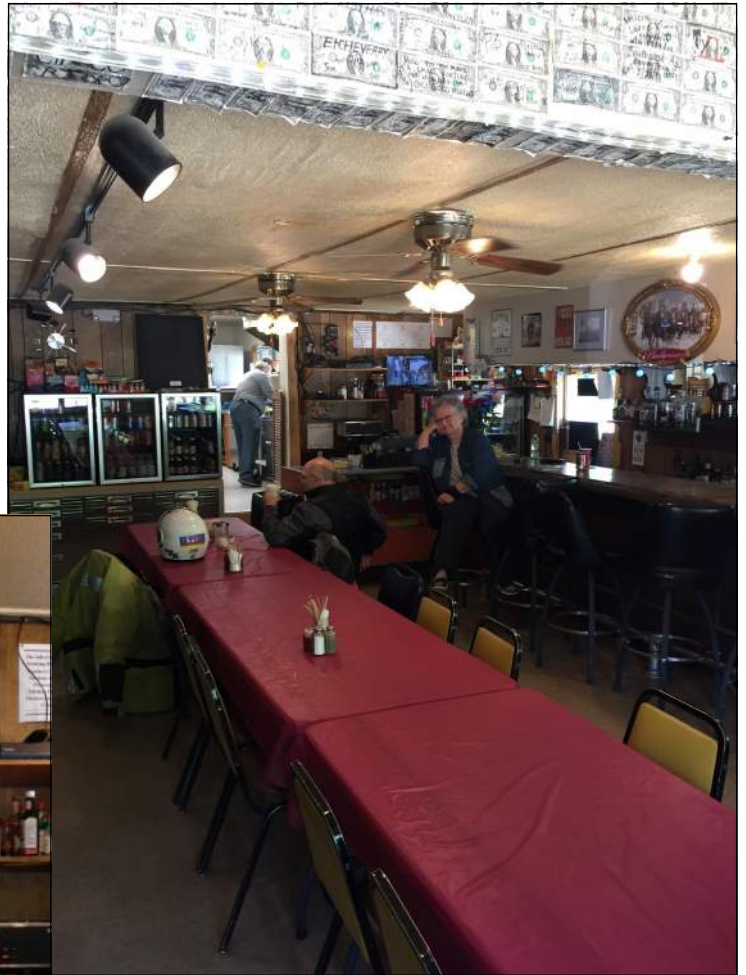


Fred, Ziggy and Jay at Rick's Place in Central

off to the side of the gravel parking lot, can be found. Inside, Rick's mom is holding court at the bar, telling us visitors that after coming to Alaska in her youth for adventure, she has been here in Central since Rick was 17. He is now white bearded, a Santa Claus lookalike, and we are gentlemen enough not to ask her age. She and Rick tell us that in the heyday, some many years ago, there were three bars

in the lot and stopped to inspect the newcomers. Ziggy is from Asheville, North Carolina and has trailered his new BMW 310GS up here to stay and ride with Fred, a local resident, for a week or so. He is maybe 30-ish, and reminds me of the comedian David Cross, in appearance and demeanor. Fred is nearer to our age, late 60's or more, and lives here full time, one of the 70. He looks like a mountain

Inside Rick's Place with Rick and his mom



Rick

Rick's Place



man, long untrimmed beard, dressed more for comfort than style. He rides a new KLR, his second one after wearing out the first. He had a BMW once, but said it broke down and the KLR “never does.” Says he likes Ziggy’s 310 but doesn’t think it has enough power for him. (If the specs are to be believed, it actually has about the same.) We swap riding stories for a bit, as the mosquitoes feast upon us, and then Ziggy and Fred depart, throwing gravel and dirt from their rear wheels as they tear away down the side road toward Fred’s home.

We were going on to Circle, another 20 miles or so on dirt to the Yukon River, but Rick tells us that the proprietor of the only store and gas station there is giving it up. He is elderly and his wife recently died, so he doesn’t see the point anymore. When Rick was up there recently, the store was closed.

Instead, we took the eight mile detour down the dirt road to Circle Hot springs, to see the remnants of the once thriving resort. From all appearances, it must have been a great place to spend a week or two back then, but it is now abandoned and roofs of the various buildings have fallen in under the weight of Alaska’s winters. Nature here requires constant vigilance to maintain human intrusions. There are “no trespassing” signs everywhere and we decide that in this remote place, a closer look is not worth the bullet to ignore the warnings.

Our return trip was faster, since we now are more comfortable with these bikes and the road. We are skimming along the dirt and gravel at 50 mph, sometimes more, with the KLR suspensions soaking up all but the worst of the bumps, tires drifting gently back and forth along the surface as the gravel gives the tires what it will for traction and direction. On the paved section, Jay spots an eagle’s nest on a tall pole and we stop for a bit to watch the

mama tend to some chicks. She is briefly upset by our interference, circling around the nest with warning calls, but quickly decides we aren’t worth the effort and returns to maternal duties. We gas up again at Fox (never, never pass up a chance for gasoline in Alaska) and make a brief stop at a roadside park where a section of the Pipeline can be seen. It seems to be completely unguarded, with tourists like us wandering around and under it at will, but I suspect there is some security that we don’t see preventing us or them from doing it harm. At least I hope so.



Back at our hotel at supper time, an 11 hour day, nearly 300 miles with well over 100 on dirt. Too tired to walk far, we opt for dinner at Big Daddy’s next door where a guy on a bar-stool hears us debating the tap choices and launches into his advice lecture on the subject, making very specific recommendations backed up with chapter and verse of beer technology and art. He is dressed as a hipster, baggy pants with suspenders, small white straw hat perched on his head inside the bar, well trimmed and perhaps dyed beard thrust forward and wagging as he educated us. He has waited all evening for this opportunity. We do try one of his choices and it isn’t bad.

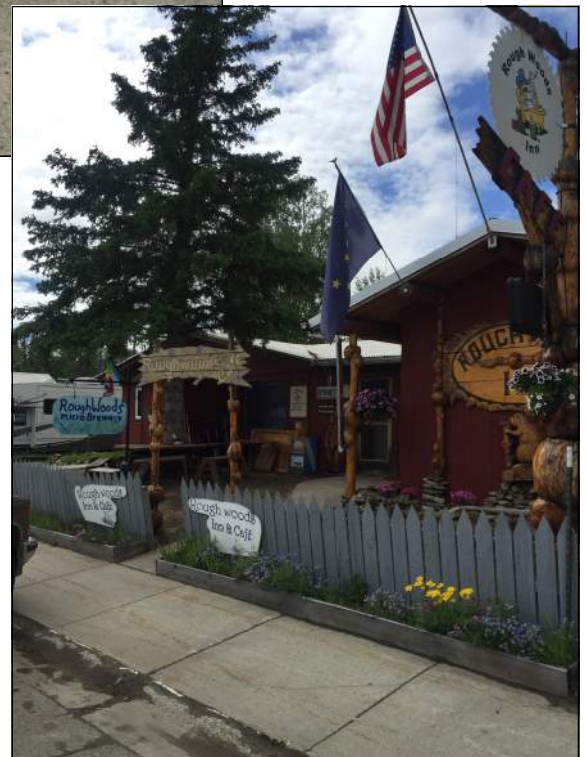
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Above two photos: nearing Eagle Summit. That isn't a light pole, it is a snow pole to show the plows where the road is in winter

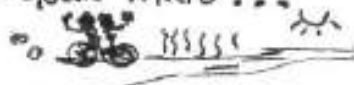
We try to find the best places to eat...or the only place

Roughwoods Inn, Café and MicroBrewery





YESTERDAY, REACHED ONE HUNDRED, THEY SAY,
IN THE HEART OF THE BLUEGRASS STATE,
YOU CAN STILL HAVE FUN, IF YOUR SCOOTER WILL RUN,
RIDE TWO-UP, TAKE A DATE, OR YOUR MATE ...



Here's The Group for today:

- * 1). Paul Elwyn
- * 2). Ben Pruitt
- * 3). Chester Martin
- * 4). Joe Bark
- * 5). John Rice
- * 6). Jim Brandon
- * 7). Chris Warner
- * 8). Fern Root
- * 9). Ryan King
- * 10). Dave McCord
- * 11). Boone Sutherland
- * 12). Hulbert Burton
- * 13). Robbie Carter
- * 14). Tim Kouns
- 15). Ken Cribbins
- 16). Peter Galschies
- 17). Dean Gasser (has Tom's old '67 Norton)
- * 18). Charlie Norton ! Blaine ? Travis

Boone

Books available on loan

The following books are available on loan. Email me when you want to borrow one, and I will bring it to breakfast (or whatever other arrangements need to be made...I can deliver within reason) and I'll put your name beside it on my list.

I don't mind if people keep them a while (it takes me forever to read a book now....I keep falling asleep and then have to re-read the last 10 pages or so) but I don't want to give them away for good. At least not yet.

John Rice



Bahnstormer By LJK Setwright
Streetwise By Malcolm Newell
The Bart Markel Story By Joe Scalzo
Mann of his Time By Ed Youngblood
Yesterday's Motorcycles By Karolevitz
The Scottish By Tommy Sandham
This Old Harley By Michael Dregni
Racer: the story of Gary Nixon By Joe Scalzo
All But My Life: Bio of Stirling Moss By Ken Purdy (OK, not a motorcycle book, but who doesn't like and respect Stirling Moss?)
Investment Biker By Jim Rogers
Obsessions Die Hard By Ed Culbertson
BMW Twins & Singles By Roy Bacon
Bitten by the Bullet By Steve Krzystyniak & Karen Goa
Cafe Racers of the 1960's By Mick Walker
More Proficient Motorcycling By David Hough
Tales of Triumph Motorcycles & the Meriden Factory:
By Hancox
Sport Riding Techniques By Nick Ienatasch
Total Control By Lee Parks
Smooth Riding By Reg Pridmore.

A Twist of The Wrist (Vol 1 & 2) By Keith Code
Triumph Tiger 100 and Daytona By J. R. Nelson
This Old Harley (anthology) By Dregni
Side Glances By Peter Egan
Mondo Enduro By Austin Vince
Big Sid's Vincati By Matthew Bieberman
101 Road Tales By Clement Salvadori
Riding with Rilke By Ted Bishop
Legendary Motorcycles By Luigi Corbetta
Red Tape and White Knuckles By Lois Pryce
A Man Called Mike By Hilton (bio of Mike Hailwood)
The Perfect Vehicle By Melissa Pierson
One Man Caravan By Robert Fulton (first known circumnavigation of the world by motorcycle)
Monkey Butt By Rick Sieman
Ariel: The postwar models By Roy Bacon
Short Way Up By Steve Wilson
Endless Horizon By Dan Walsh
Leanings (1 & 2) By Peter Egan
Into the Heart of Africa By Jerry Smith
The Last Hurrah By Des Molloy
(Autographed copy, with DVD of the trip)
Whatever Happened to the British Motorcycle Industry
By Bert Hopwood
Down the Road By Steve Wilson
Motorcycling Excellence
By Motorcycle Safety Foundation
Leanings 3 By Peter Egan
Ghost Rider By Neal Peart
Revolutionary Ride By Lois Pryce
How to Drive a Sidecar Rig by David Hough

