

September 2019
Apex
Looking Through The Curve

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



Denali Highway, Alaska
Photo: John Rice

Calendar of Events

September

5th-8th, Woodstock, VA—National RA Rally
6th-8th, Pineville, KY—MOA Getaway Pine Mountain
12th-15th, Louisville, KY—Lap of Kentucky
13th-15th, Morganton, NC—Ride the Blue Ridge
27th-28th, Parker Crossroads, TN—45th Annual Rams Rally
27th-28th, North Vernon, IN—34th Annual Hoosier Beemer Rally

October

17th-20th, Nunnely TN, Adventure Ribfest



Spotted at the 2019 BMW MOA Rally in Lebanon, TN

R75/2

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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



Why was there a camera?

By James Street

In the late eighties Honda brought to the States a marvelous recreation of an English sporting thumper: the GB 500 TT. Replete with clip-ons, single seat, and rear-set pegs, it was the embodiment of the 1950's British cafe racer. It had all of the beauty of a Velocette Venom Clubman or a Gold Star without any of their idiosyncrasies. In other words it effortlessly started every time the starter button was pushed and didn't require the leg of an Olympic weightlifter or the vocabulary of a sailor to get it running (I have a BSA single, so I under-

In the midst of my almost pornographic motorcycle dreams Rider Magazine brought their rally to Richmond with the requisite motorcycle manufacturers and demo rides. Honda had in their stable the magical, to me, GB 500. Somehow I managed to nab an example on one of the first waves of rides, and it was everything I had dreamed of: light, responsive, relatively quick, and with a wonderful but compact riding position. It really was one of the few things that I've pathologically desired that produced the thrill I thought it would.



Photo courtesy of carandclassic.co.uk

stand the juxtaposition well). I lusted for one the way a pimply teenage boy dreams about a date with the Snowball Queen, and because of a new baby, mortgage, and a loving wife had about the same chances of getting one.

(Note: I always consoled myself that the Snowball Queen had halitosis and couldn't carry on a conversation with a dog.) Anyway, upon getting back to the Honda corral one of their reps came out with a Polaroid camera- this was the eighties- and snapped a photo. Af-

ter the camera's mechanical churning popped out the film and the chemically reacting photo was handed to me, I stood shaking it to make the image appear. During that minute or so of waiting I was alternatively thinking about how cool I must look on the bike and planning how to scrounge together enough resources to buy one. As the image appeared my dreams were shattered, as I didn't fit the bike. The compact riding position was actually Honda's way of telling me that the bike's stature was more suited to someone about three-quarters my size. In other words, I looked ridiculous and fortunately had the good sense to recognize it. That realization kept me from looking more stupid than I already do and it may have saved my marriage, now in its 38th year.

Fast forward to a couple of days ago. I took a ride on my Triumph Trophy 1200 that mean-

of me. He was traveling with a buddy who didn't make it to the intersection in time to get in front of me so I split the pair. Mr. Harley Rider in front of me, helmet-less, turns the wick up to match my speed-about seventy-and his leather saddlebags began flapping like Dumbo the elephant's ears and the bike was wandering around like a heavy drinker exiting a bar at 1:00 a.m. I suppose he realized the he was entering a realm in which his bike may exfoliate major components, so he slowed down and I eased out to pass him and rolled the throttle up enough to get around quickly. At the same time I hear the explosive sound of another motorcycle, obviously another Harley, behind me, so I look into the rear view mirror and was met with a specter of what looked like a mutant giant flying squirrel perched on a loudly rumbling motorbike. On closer inspection I realized that what I was looking at

was an overweight guy in a white tee shirt riding a bike with perhaps the tallest set of ape hangers I've ever seen. He looked ridiculous. Don't get me wrong, as there's a warm spot in my heart for old-school choppers, but I have to wonder if he'd be quite so happy about his bike if he saw the image I did when I looked in the mirror. Maybe he is, and maybe there's



dered west and south with the final stretch taking me from London north toward Richmond. Motoring along at a brisk pace, just south of Livingston a guy on a Harley pulls out in front

room in my garage for a GB 500. I just won't get in front of a Polaroid; it had to be the camera, right?



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

Part Two, with more gravel

By John Rice

(We last left our geriatric wanderers in Fairbanks, dusty, tired, but revived by food and beer, ready to press on)

Our Diner was closed on Tuesday morning, so we had “breakfast” in the hotel basement. On the way out of Fairbanks we stopped in at the large BMW dealer on Karen Way, out near the airport, where we wandered around among the bikes and goodies on offer and talked with some staff and customers. Upon hearing that we were doing a “fly and ride” all seemed to agree on one thing, that the road here from the lower 48 is an ordeal, a real destroyer of bikes, and that renting someone else’s machine for exploring Alaska was a good idea. We have arrived on their “winter clearance” sale day and Jay found a good deal on Klim cold weather gloves, but, alas, there were none of those in my size. Though what the locals consider to be the real winter is over here, it’s still cold enough for us pampered folks from the warmer regions to appreciate such gear. After a brief confusion involving closed roads, we found our way over to Route 2 headed south, the east side of the Circle, down to Delta.

We saw a sign for “Rikka’s Roadhouse State Park which promised both some history and lunch with pie. Back in the early days of “settlement” up here, roadhouses sprung up along what was then a pack trail from the seaport of Valdez in the south to Eagle, on the Dawson River up north. In 1898, the

US Army constructed a road, later called the Richardson Highway, to offer an “All American” route into the gold fields during the Klondike rush. Over the years, as the paths became roads, these outposts expanded, becoming hubs for commerce. This one, at the site of a ferry across the Tanana River, was owned by a woman from Sweden, Rikka Wallen, who began as a cook for one of the previous owners, then eventually took over and developed the site into what is there today. Several buildings are gathered around a main house which served as headquarters for the roadhouse and lodging for travelers. It is difficult, coming from a place and time where travel is for the most part relatively convenient and comfortable; to picture what life in that era was like for travelers up here. After days in the snow, following a path, this place would have been a welcome sight indeed.

South of Delta, the road is how I imagined Alaska would be, a series of sweeping curves in a canyon following a rushing glacial stream



Jay at Rikka’s

with enormous mountains looming over us on the sides, so high that from the road the tops can't safely be seen. Craning one's neck back that far would result in a dunking of bike and rider and the water coming off of the glaciers is, I'm sure, really, really cold.

Our destination for the day was the Denali Highway, crossing the diameter of the circle route, going back to the area of Denali National Park. We had read that this road was about 140 miles of dirt with the big mountain at the end...just what we were looking for. We had planned to take it halfway, spend the night, do the rest tomorrow, wander around the park and surrounding area a bit, and return to our room. It was a bit worrisome when we found the gas station at Paxson closed up and abandoned, but decided to go on anyway. It would have been many miles back to Delta and we figured, "It all will work out, it always has". This time, at least, it did. Gas was available at an outpost at Tangle River, near where the pavement ended. As is somewhat typical here, there is a gravel parking area with a complex of a few small rooms to rent, like a 50's style motel, a single gas pump under a wooden shelter, and a dark, very smoky bar, with the lighted screens of gambling machines glowing in the haze, where we go inside to pay. Although most public places in Alaska are non-smoking, this is far from any population center and rules are "optional". The locals sitting at the tables, playing cards and drinking beer from the bottle barely look up at the strangely dressed visitors.

Gassed up, we headed west into what would be the setting sun, if it did that sort of thing up here, with Denali and its brethren visible all the way, snowcap shining brightly.

Then the pavement disappeared, replaced by awful gravel, deep and marble-like over very hard packed dirt, more like bad asphalt. Not the kind of dirt road we had enjoyed in other places, this was skittery and uncertain, with deep gravel making progress difficult, producing constant seat-clenching episodes. Slowing down meant the front wheels dug into the gravel, threatening a washout and speeding up produced the feeling of waterskiing above one's ability, knowing that to then slow down raised the prospect of digging in the front, while continuing to increase speed had a very predictable outcome. Add to that the deep potholes, sometimes hidden, but not softened by gravel, and the sum came out as "not as much fun as we'd like".

An hour or so later, we were happy to arrive at the McClaren River Lodge where we had reserved our room. It is a rustic place, very

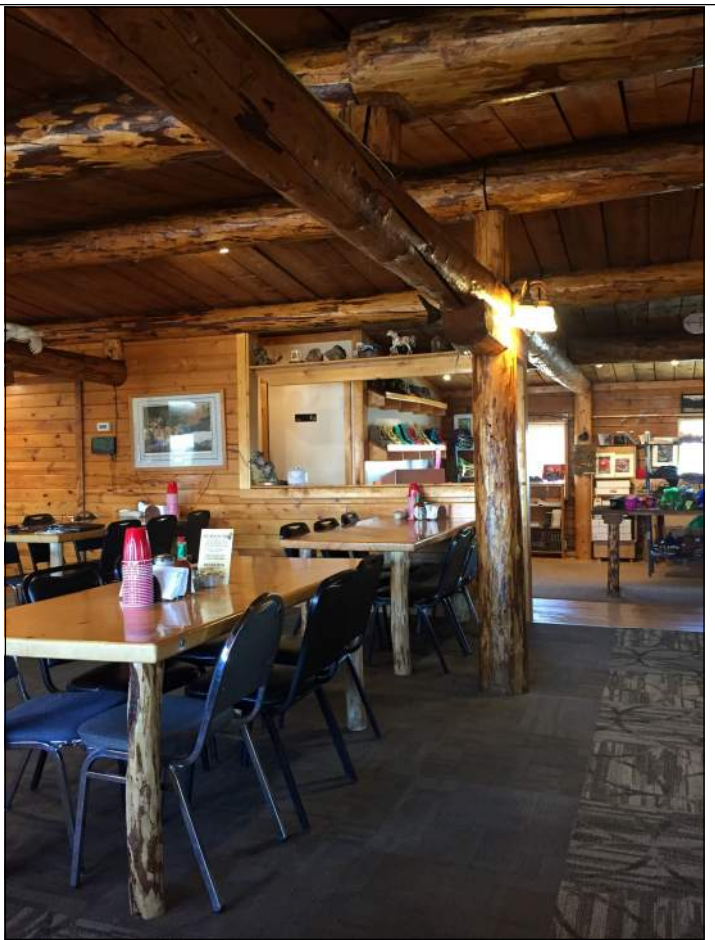


McClaren River Lodge

friendly, with multiple resident dogs who wander in and out at will. They lounge around the "dining room" of the small lodge building as we are checking in, raising their heads when the staff half-heartedly attempt to shoo them out. The dogs, we are told, have the run



Lodge Dog



Inside McClaren Lodge

of the place most of the year, but are supposedly “trained” to stay out of the dining area when tourists are around. Like dogs everywhere, they have learned their humans well and know that they can stay where they want until the orders get more seriously delivered. We assure the staff that we are dog people and actually prefer to have the critters around while we eat. The dogs seem to understand the transaction and lower their ears, put their big furry heads back between front paws and resume their naps.

The complex here is spread out over a large graveled plot, maybe a couple of acres, on two levels, bordering a backwater “lake” from the McClaren River that runs on the other side of the property. There are groups of wooden cabins spread out along the back side of the complex, with an older row on the “high” side behind the main lodge building and a newer

set of small duplex units on the “low side” overlooking the backwater. Our room is in one of these, with a small unrailed open deck overlooking the swans swimming in the lake. The room is tiny, maybe 10 x 15 or so, with two double beds a tower lamp between them and no other furniture of any kind. There is a bathroom with shower, about the size of one in a camper trailer, with the sink out in our room, on the wall. There is no place to hang or even set down anything, other than on the floor, so we drag the two plastic lawn chairs off the deck and press them into clothes rack duty.

Outside, there is the machinery that keeps a place like this going. In a shed dug into the hillside there are large fuel tanks for generators, some machine-shop and welding equipment and an airplane wheel which suggests they are ready for any kind of transport into this area. Parked nearby is the most elaborate



Our cabin at
McClaren River
Lodge

The McClaren
River Lodge
compound



Domesticating the Wilderness

Rika's homestead, which included this barn and outbuilding, was fundamental to the operation of the roadhouse.

In the Barn

The barn was home to cattle, sheep, goats and horses. Rika raised cattle for milk and meat. Calving was carefully timed to have milk available year-round. Sheep were sheared for wool and provided mutton for the roadhouse. Rika made cheese and butter from goat's milk, which she kept cool in the spring house. In addition to keeping her own livestock in the barn, Rika occasionally wintered horses for miners and prospectors in the area.

How Does Your Garden Grow?

Rika tended a large vegetable garden in the area between the current museum and the roadhouse. Because her renowned garden was so successful the Cooperative Extension Service at the University of Alaska studied her farming techniques.

Work Shop

This outbuilding, now serving as a museum, had several uses. Archaeological excavation uncovered tack for horses. Dog harnesses, sleds, tools, and feed grain were also stored here. If this was your homestead, how would you use this building?

On the Farm

Rika cultivated crops to support her livestock and roadhouse. In addition to harvesting hay, potatoes, and turnips, Rika raised chickens and ducks so she could serve fresh eggs to her patrons. The Guide to Travel on the Richardson Highway, published in 1928, described Rika's as a "commodious roadhouse boasting such luxuries as fresh milk and domestic fowl."

All this was hard work for one woman. At times Rika employed a cook and hired miners to help with the crops, construct and repair buildings, and perform other odd jobs. In this way, Rika got the help she needed and the miners got their grubstake to go back to prospecting.





Truckers' Rebellion

Rebel truckers took the law into their own hands when a ferry toll was imposed.

Weigh and Pay

The federally-built Alaska Railroad was losing money, in part because it was cheaper to truck freight to Fairbanks on the Richardson Highway. In an effort to force freight onto the railroad, the U.S. Department of the Interior established fees in 1935 for truckers on the Richardson Highway. When truckers refused to pay, the Department instituted a toll for use of the Alaska Road Commission (ARC) ferry here at McCarty, now called Big Delta. To avoid the toll, truckers began using the ferry without permission. In September 1940, Deputy U.S. Marshal O'Connor was dispatched from Fairbanks and arrested 14 men.

Frontier Law



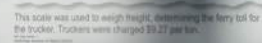
On October 14, 1940, while O'Connor was providing testimony in Fairbanks, truckers seized Deputy U.S. Marshal Dennis Doyle, took his shotgun and locked him in the scale house at McCarty. They moved ten loads of freight across the river before releasing Doyle and returning his gun. The Grand Jury in Fairbanks refused to charge the truckers with assault and the previously arrested truckers were acquitted. Shortly after, the ferry was removed from the water for the winter and the controversy simmered down.





Pirate Ferry

In June 1941, the truckers built a pirate ferry to avoid the government-owned ferry and toll. The government retaliated by erecting a gate, twelve miles up the road at Shaw Creek, where truckers had to show their toll receipts. The truckers reacted by pulling down the gate.


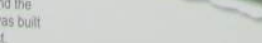
Conflict Conclusion

The ARC and the truckers finally agreed that fees collected would be placed in escrow until a consensus could be reached. The validity of the tolls was upheld in district court. With the onset of World War II, the railroad started making a profit and the Department removed all fees on the Richardson Highway in July 1942. A bridge was built across the Tanana River in 1943, making the ferry obsolete and ending the conflict.




snowplow vehicle I have ever seen, looking more like some sort of lunar transport device from a science fiction movie. We realize that this is a groomer for the snowmobile trails in winter, a specialized piece of equipment that will go anywhere in the deep snow and leave a wide smooth road behind it. The teenage boy that still lives in a part of my brain immediately wants to drive it.

The owners of this lodge complex are, like a lot of the Alaskans we meet, ex-military, a married couple, who came to this place after retirement from service. They spend part of the year in a warmer place, but are here in the snowy months for the winter tourists. The place is open most of the year; biggest tourism here is in winter when snowmobiles allow access to places inaccessible the rest of the time. "We can go anywhere then". A constant stream of hardy visitors comes here for the fishing, hunting, and snowmobile trekking.

After hearing our plans for the over and back run, the husband -owner, who also rides motorcycles a bit, tell us that the gravel is worse, deeper with more bad surface underneath, from here the remaining 90-plus miles to the Denali end. We have booked two nights here, but he says, "I'm not trying to run you off, but on a motorcycle the next 90 miles are not going to be any fun." Having found the previous 40-something miles to have been more that we wanted; we took his advice and checked out in the morning.

In the morning, we took the long nerve-wracking gravel route back down to Paxson and turned south, headed toward McCarthy. Route 2 is pretty much uninhabited along this stretch, just two lane blacktop bordered by endless pine forests with mountain peaks jutting above in the distance. Eventually we come to the town of Glenallen, at the cross-

roads with 4, where gas and food are available. There are two gas stations and the nice clerk at the one we choose tells us that there are three restaurants, of a sort, but she recommends "The Freeze" as being preferable. It is a modular-looking small building, much like an older style Dairy Queen inside, offering burgers, fries and, as an afterthought, salads for the wimpy southern visitors. At the table next to us are a couple of truck drivers, one as large as any two humans. I ponder how he gets in the cab of his truck, but discretion being the better part of valor, I don't ask him.

We miss the turnoff to Chitina the first time, later finding that the marker to this road is visible only coming from the south. Not sure what the thinking on that might have been at the DOT. We realize we've gone too far and make our turnaround right at the base of a cone-shaped mountain that looks almost exactly like an enormous ice cream sundae, with the streaks of snow as ice cream and the brown surface showing through as the hot fudge. Makes me hungry for dessert, which I might have ordered if we weren't a half day's ride from anyplace that might offer it.

Chitina, population 126, is reached by a dead end paved road of about 30 miles, bordering a long glacial lake. Where the pavement ends, the optimistically named McCarthy Highway begins, 60 miles of dirt, some not much better than single track trail. This was where the unfortunate Spanish tourist had wrecked the KLR we saw in the rental company's truck at the beginning of our journey and the place we were warned about as being the most likely spot for flat tires. Oh yes, and bears. Watch out for the bears. We fuel up at the unmanned single gas pump (as my son later said when we showed him the picture, "looks like an ATM for gas") and head into the breach.
(TO BE CONTINUED)

Unmanned gas station at
Chitina

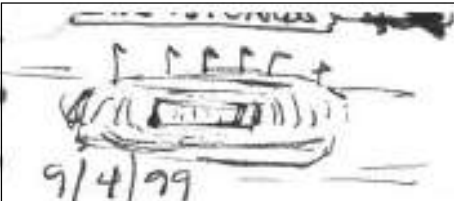


Rough Roads



What happens when you
leave your toys in the yard





Clear 66°

IT'S EARLY SEPTEMBER AND WHO CAN REMEMBER
THE LAST TIME WE SAW ANY RAIN,
THE CARDS ARE IN TOWN, THEY'LL LEAVE WITH A FLOWN,
WITH THE CATS PAW PRINT ON THEIR BRAIN...



- #1. Fran Root }
- #2. Steve Root }
- #3. Chester Martie
- #4. Paul Elwyn
- #5. Dale Bark
- #6. John Rice
- #7. Jim Brandon
- #8. Cris Warner
- *#9. Ryan King
- #10. Robbie Carter
11. Pete Galskis
- *#12. Boone Sutherland
- #13. James Struff
14. Ron Atkins
- *#15. Wayne Schneidknecht
- *#16. Jim Kouns
- *#17. Steve Bishop
18. Tom Sutherland
19. Danny Phillips (p.l.o.)

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