

May 2022

Apex

Looking Through The Curve

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



Near Hungry Mother State Park

GOIN' SOUTH

By John Rice

(No, not the neat 1978 movie with Jack Nicholson and Mary Steenburgen, this is the mid-March 2022 trip with two geriatric riders on BMW 310's.)

This trip was the “consolation prize” after the planned two-week February bikes-on-trailer excursion got stopped by a COVID upsurge in the far southern states we had hoped to visit. So we picked this week in the middle of March to ride into the Georgia mountains, hoping for enough decent weather to allow some fun without freezing.

Jay comes over from Lexington in the cool morning air on his G310R, neatly packed for the journey. Grabbing my Darien pants cuff with one hand, I hoist my arthritic leg awkwardly over the seat of my G310GS and its duffel and then we are away.

(As we leave, I look over my shoulder and see Brenda, standing in the driveway holding Simon, the dog, watching her brother Jay and I riding away and recall that 42 years earlier, she stood in a different driveway, with a different dog, watching us leave on our first “big

trip”. Largely unplanned, it turned an excursion that took us up into Canada and across that country to the eastern US on two motorcycles quite ill-equipped for such travel. We clueless young men had all our belongings in plastic garbage bags bungee-corded on the seats. Jay was on an old muffler-less Harley Sportster, and I on a smoking Suzuki 500cc two-stroke twin with bottles of oil stuffed everywhere under the elastic cords like some traveling medicine-show barker. Our riding gear then was leather jackets over t-shirts, blue jeans and boots that absorbed rather than shedding water. We camped in my son's K-Mart issue backyard-use tent.)

We took familiar Rt. 15 down to Stanton, then went over the mountain on the sometimes treacherous 213, hooking up to 52 which follows the twists of ridgelines and flowing water all the way into Jackson. The roads are still whitewashed with salt residue and in one downhill left turn, my front tire slips sideways at least a foot or more, scaring me thoroughly. Jay says his bike is constantly sliding around, as if on sand. At Jackson, it is still a bit early for lunch, so we follow Rt. 30 through Quick-

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Deadline for submissions is the last day of the month.

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Join us at Frisch's on Harrodsburg Rd.

in Lexington, Kentucky on any Saturday, 8-9:00 a.m.

**BMW Club
Bluegrass Beemers**



sand and into Salyersville, where my father was raised in the earliest part of the previous century and now fast-food has driven out the local restaurants. We chose Subway as the lesser of evils...the "protein bowl" is actually quite tasty.

Rt. 7 goes straight...well, actually hardly a straight stretch on it...south to Neon Junction where 317 and 805 get us to the only efficient way over that mountain, a few miles of 4-lane Rt. 23. On the other side, our goal for the day, Rt. 83, begins its winding path through the Virginia hills. About 2 o'clock we began coming out of layers and the sweet sensation of cool air flowing through a jacket, without freezing the wearer, is wonderful. The 310's are doing their job marvelously, singing along

enthusiastic young clerk at the motel tells us about Valentino's, just down the street. He said to go there if we were not in a hurry and wanted an excellent meal.

Valentino's Restaurant is in a small, mid-50's looking building that could have had many uses over the years. Inside there are only a few tables. As the clerk at our motel, had said, it is a completely one-man operation. No wait staff, no other chef, no receptionist, etc. No one but him. He is perhaps our age or somewhat older, wearing a COVID mask so we can't see much of him. The white hair, stooped posture and quavering voice tell us that he's no spring chicken. The menu is extensive, but as per the motel clerk's warning, we get what "Valentino" has left on hand that

day when we arrive. Tonight it was tilapia for me, with a baked potato and cole slaw topped off by an excellent apple



without a hitch, keeping between 6 and 7,000 RPM as if it is the easiest thing in the world. Except for the salt residue making us nervous about traction, we are sweeping through the constant curves almost like we know what we are doing. Only occasionally we get behind slow traffic, but on these roads we usually can pass with some thought and planning.

By 4, we are in Clintwood, VA trying to find a room and a decent place to eat. The

Inside Valentino's

pie for dessert. Jay had wanted cod, or salmon, but instead got a veggie calzone. I asked our host if he made the apple pie himself and he replied, "I enhance everything I serve". My tilapia was the best of that fish I have eaten in a restaurant, prepared carefully and served hot on lettuce leaves. The potato was perfect. Jay said his calzone, though not

motel offers only "bags to go" and we aren't that desperate ...yet. However, a couple of hours of riding Virginia backroads informs us that, 1) the roads are great for motorcycles, and 2) the people here apparently do not go out for breakfast. There are no restaurants other than chain fast foods, where one can obtain sustenance. We end up at Hardees in



Tree inspection stop
somewhere in Virginia

what he had wanted, was good. Altogether it took about two hours for our meal to be served and eaten, but as he said, "I hope you're not in a hurry". It was worth the wait.

In the morning we manage to get out in the cold, about 8, in search of breakfast. The



Near Hungry Mother State Park

Grundy for biscuits decorated lightly with scrambled eggs.

The remainder of the morning is spent on VA 83, going briefly up into West Virginia, with its beat up and broken pavement, until we again hit the Virginia line where it becomes smooth once more. Still, the curves are continuous and offer lots of lean angle and chances to scare ourselves silly. It is, after all, the motion that matters, the sensation of swinging back and forth, the tilting of the horizon, the looking through the curve for the next one after. That is why we do this, like a lab rat pushing the pleasure stimulus lever until he passes out from exhaustion on the floor of the cage.

At the junction, Rt. 16 takes us up over the mountain range, down past Hungry Mother State Park, and over Mt. Rogers, one endless set of bends after another. We are slowed, and then stopped for a while for construction work, men cleaning out the winter's collection of leaves and silt from the ditches. Big dump trucks haul it off for use elsewhere, then rush back up the mountain for more, leaving a heavy coating of mud on the lane

they use when full. We followed one "empty" up a mountain for a bit, watching as the driver took the turns as if on a race track, using both lanes on blind curves, sliding and skipping the dual rear wheels in an impressive over steer. I'm guessing he gets paid by the load.

Lunch comes late in Marion, VA, at the Wooden Pickle Restaurant, selected after a search through the town. The young waitress tells us, when I ask and she goes to find someone who knows, that the name came from the 1930's when this building's predecessor was a wooden construction owned by a Mr. Pickle. When it burned to the ground late one night, the local paper's headline read, "Wooden Pickle Building Burns". The food in this later brick edifice is quite good, much better than the name suggests.

By 3 pm we are tired and ready to find a place to stay to weather over the storm that is



coming to the entire eastern US. At 4:30 we have selected Blowing Rock NC as the best option we can reach tonight, and check in at the Hillwinds Motel just off Main Street. Most of the restaurants in this tourist town are closed still for the season. The reliable Storie Street Grille is open and offers us a delicious salmon special with beers on draft to our liking. I even have dessert.

Breakfast for us was at the “Hellbender” bed & beverage cafe about 100 feet up the street. Limited selections for breakfast food, but better than the pouring rain outside. When asked about the naming of the place after a kind of salamander, the waiter said, “I dunno, just a cool name I guess.”

Later in the morning, we discovered that our

water had been shut off. A call to the desk indicated it was for maintenance and “I was supposed to call you”, but of course she didn’t.

For lunch we sloshed our way up on Main Street to the Mellow Mushroom where despite the pizza menu, I had salad and Jay the soup. We



Across from the Wooden Pickle Restaurant

Wednesday has been our “break day”, holed up in the Hillwinds Motel in Blowing Rock waiting out the massive storm that is covering the eastern half of the US. We would ride through something like this if we had a destination and a specific time to be there, but that isn’t this trip so we have the option of taking the day off and staying dry. We don’t even go out for a walk around in the constant down-pour, since Blowing Rock, usually chock-a-block with tourists is almost empty and many of the businesses are either closed “for the season” or don’t open until Thursday for the weekend visitors.

got into a discussion with the young man serving us when I asked about the stone building’s prior history. An older man, our age plus some, in the booth behind us chimed in and told us that it had been a service station in the 40’s and 50’s, with an oil burner stove for heat, made by the owner to use leftover oil from oil changes on cars. What is now the walled in atrium was the open forecourt of the station and where we were sitting would have been in front of the three garage bay doors. Looking around, we can see that those openings have been incorporated into the current setup. He said the Speckled Trout restaurant

across the street had been the Trailways bus station in those days. Later the building we were in had been an ice house, then a deli and an art gallery (which is the earliest iteration I remember) before becoming the Mushroom.

Our server, a young man of about 20-ish, is a college student in the interim between legs of his Air Force enlistment. He has a passion for old pickup trucks, the 1930's and 40's era, and proudly showed us photos of his latest acquisition. He told us that one of its features was the ability to set the throttle at low RPM and let the vehicle idle along in the ruts of a farm road, driverless, while the farmer and helpers could throw hay bales in the back as it passed, with the last person in line designated to reach in and shut it off. He plans to get it running well and "safe" for its era, but leave the outside patina alone.

After lunch, the rain slacked off just a bit and we walked down through town to see what, if anything was open. My oft-visited Tilley hat store was available, though staffed by one bored young woman who answered my inquiries about a particular item in monosyllables. I guess customers are so few in the off-season that they now constituted a nuisance. A few doors up, a shop yielded a dish that Jay wanted for Marimac, and the young woman there engaged us in a long conversation about where we were going and how we traveled. Her grandfather had been a motorcycle racer in his youth, but was injured badly, so the two-wheeled life was never on her radar. The thought of traveling on such a thing had never occurred to her. She said we were her fourth customers today, the second "old guys" but the first one was trying to convert her to his church and inviting her to prayer and pledge of allegiance session around the local flagpole. She told us she did both of those things, but in

different buildings and didn't accept his invitation.

Another store produced some tea for Jay and a conversation with the clerk who told us she lived here, and was familiar with the Parkway, but could only offer us warnings about the fog and rain. She opined that Blowing Rock "hasn't changed much" which must be how it seems if one is a resident, the changes coming slowly and incrementally. For those of us who only come occasionally over many years, the differences seem obvious. I guess it's that "boiling the frog" sort of thing.

By morning, the storm has passed through, leaving cooled air and clear blue skies. But the new tail bag, supposedly "water resistant" is thoroughly wet inside even though it was under the bike cover.

This now being Thursday, the start of the tourist's weekend, breakfast is available at the Famous Toastery across the street. A wonderful avocado omelet for me...we live a hard life now on bike trips.

Up to the Blue Ridge, where it is cool but not too cold and there is no fog, except on my face shield. The pavement is wet and a bit ragged, still showing the ravages of winter weather up here. Nonetheless, we take the bends as quickly as we dare, enjoying this most marvelous of roads, unique in our experience. I don't know where else in North America one could get nearly 600 miles of wonderful curves without a single stoplight.

Today, thought, the road is closed at Mt Mitchell, with no explanation why. We have to backtrack to Rt. 80, but that is little hardship since we get to do that part of the Parkway twice and 80 is a wonderful bike road as well, just not as clean or well kept as the BRP.



Early Spring, up on the Parkway

We pick up 70 for a while, until near Asheville it gives us the opportunity to ascend back to the Parkway. Sadly, Mt. Pisgah's restaurant is closed for the season. The high parts of the Parkway at this end are a bit of a concern—it is quite possible there is ice in the shady spots— but we buzz on without incident. We finally, reluctantly, leave the Parkway at 215 to head due south. This also is marvelous bike road, continuous head-swiveling turns following a creek. From there we pick up 64 and are rewarded with

much more of the same. Exhausted, we finally stop at the Lake Toxaway Grille and get inside two minutes before the 2PM closing time. The nice waitress does get me coffee and apple pie, with ice cream and a sort of Boston Cream pie (more like a cake), and iced tea for

Jay, which we enjoy while the staff is counting change and putting away the silverware for the day.

We continue with 64, which defaults to 4 lane for a short while, but then returns to its senses with more arcs and oxbows until we must take 175 down to Hiawassee, our selected destination for the night. Luck is with us, the Chatuge resort has a room, with lake-side view and a restaurant down the hill a



Pie Stop, The Falls Café & Grill

short walk. When we were here for the Georgia Mountain Rally several years ago, this was a rather upscale restaurant, but now it has been repurposed as a barbecue joint. The restaurant is crowded tonight, with a long wait for tables, because of COVID-induced staffing shortages.

Despite its “resort” status, there is no breakfast available at the Chatuge Lodge in the morning, only prepackaged sugary snacks. We suit up and make our chilly way into Hiawassee to the Sundance Grille which is packed with folks getting their cholesterol numbers up to snuff. Jay has virtuous oatmeal, while I tuck into the Heartstopper Special, eggs, fried potatoes bacon and grits. It was delicious. While I do not subscribe to the often quoted theory that food eaten over a sink doesn’t count against one’s diet, I do believe that excess calories taken in on bike trips are forgivable transgressions.

After breakfast, we began our trek south into the mountains we came for.

It is said in the legends of the Great North Woods that Paul Bunyon’s men once complained of the twists and turns in the logging road used to get their timber out of the woods. Paul simply hitched Babe, the Great Blue Ox, to the end of the road and pulled it straight. If that episode had taken place on the motorcycle roads of north Georgia, Babe would still have been straining in the harness three states over by the time the straightening was done.

Down 17 to 180, the winding bit that crosses by Brasstown Bald, the highest point in Georgia at 4,777 feet. We went up the 180 spur to reach the top, but found the shuttle station just shy of the summit was closed. I have been up there three times now, the first two were fogged in so that nothing of the view could be seen and now it is closed. Back down the

twisty road to the bottom, returning to 180 for more turns through the mountains. Near the end, we turned onto The Richard Russell Scenic Byway, Rt. 348, which has long been a destination road for lovers of bendy asphalt. Either the speed limit has been lowered dramatically, probably to keep the sports-bikers under control, or I just never noticed that there was one before. Now it is 35mph for most of its length, which does notch down the fun factor a bit, but it is still is worth doing.

That lovely road ends very near to the German village replica, Helen, GA, always an interesting place to visit, but since it was too early for lunch, we made a long counterclockwise circle of some two lane routes that looped back into town just in time for us BMW riders to have Teutonic food for the midday meal at Hofer’s German Restaurant and Bakery. I took some strudel for later.

We found our way south and then northwest to Rt. 60, which twists and turns over to Suches, where a stop at the Two Wheels Only Campground and Resort is mandatory, though our camping days are long behind us. There were some other “mature” riders stopping by, one on a brand-new KTM 890 Adventure, a most capable-looking machine for these roads.

We continued on 60 over to Morganton, more seemingly endless sweeping bends and switchbacks, and then into Blue Ridge to find a place to stay for the night. After wandering around the town for a while, we select, by default, the “Reid Ridge Lodge” on top of a hill for our sleeping place, mainly because it was getting late in the day and it was there. Our room at the Lodge is a standard-issue motel room, but with pine-paneled walls and doors giving it the lodge-y feel. The desk clerk is an enthusiastic woman, completely toothless, who seems excited to have us as her guests.



TWO in Suches, GA

She tells us that for supper, we can go to the Ingles Supermarket deli and have a lot of food for not much money. When we ask about other choices, she does confirm that the Chinese restaurant nearby can also serve the purpose. It is a long walk, for me, down a steep hill, but we are rewarded with pretty good oriental food and only a small surplus of MSG.

For weeks prior to this much-anticipated trip we both had been monitoring the Weather Channel apps and other sources, looking for the prospects of good riding weather. Consistently, the projections were for cool nights in the high 40's, days in the 50's and 60's, maybe even a 70 here and there, with minimal chances for precipitation.

This morning, after some unexpectedly cold riding yesterday, the Weather Channel headlines read, "Snowflakes may fall in north Georgia!". It occurs to me, with our history of bringing unexpected bad weather to wher-

ever we ride, that in the Great Celestial Weather Bureaucracy there are at least two or three functionaries whose total job is figuring out where Jay and I might end up going and dragging the inclement weather to that locale. Somewhere in the ranks of meteorologists here on earth, someone is trying to use mathematical models to make sense of these sudden, illogical swaps of good weather for bad that seem to follow paths of curvy roads.

Pressing family matters required us to head back a bit early. In the morning, we take GA 5 out of Blue Ridge which then becomes the twisty-turny TN 68 on its way to Tellico Plains where the Cherahola Skyway starts. Along the way we pass first a fleet of Mini-Coopers headed south to enjoy the curves, and then a few minutes later, a herd of Can-Am three wheelers appears, doing the same thing. We wave at the Cherahola, promising a return visit, but keep on going north.

These past several days have been, in a way, a blur. A constant stream of curving asphalt seen from the seat of the bike.

It is here that I feel most alive, most at home in my skin. Much of my life has been spent this way. Now in my old age, I can feel it slipping away, and some, “outsiders” who have never been fortunate enough to have something that makes them feel this way would say that I am foolish to keep going, that it is not safe and that I probably will get hurt or in their view, “worse”, meaning die, in the attempt to keep this feeling. I cannot disagree with them using logic. They are right about the risk of harm, but our perceptions of the outcome isn’t the same.

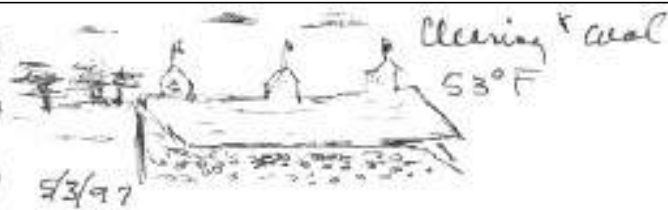
In my view, at this age, dying isn’t the worst thing that can happen. We all will do it sometime. There is an old cliché, several versions of it, the gist of which is “he died when he was 25 and was buried 50 years later”. For

me, this feeling, the view of the world moving in front of me, tilting this way and that, the feeling of searching for traction through my fingertips and feet and the press against the seat while the equations change with each second, that is living.

Psychologists, both real professionals and the ubiquitous armchair practitioners who must for their own reasons explain the lives of other people who do things they don’t understand, can have a wonderful time analyzing such individuals as me and, I suspect, those of you who are reading this now. There are thousands of us who do things that give us the feeling we must have, something the brain’s wiring requires. Some dismiss it as “Adrenalin Junkies”, some would have it be pathological since they don’t understand it. I’m not sure I understand it, but I am so happy that I was fortunate enough to be one who had it, and still has it now.



R75/5 at the 2007 BMW MOA National Rally in Wisconsin



THERE'S JULEPS TO RUN FOR, THERE'S ROSES TO SIP,
OR SHOULD THE TWO BE REVERSED,
ONE WILL BE RICH AND FAMOUS TODAY,
THE OTHERS' BUBBLES WILL BURST...



Here's the group for today:

- 1). Clester Martin
- 2). Chris Warner
- 3). David Sparkman
- 4). Boone Sutherland
- 5). Pete Galskis
- 6). Paul Elwyn
- 7). Jim Breardon
- 8). Hubert Burton
- 9). Phillip Bangh
- 10). Mary Beard
- 11). Drey Neel
- 12). Mike Gill
- * 13). Randy Scott
- 14). Ben Bennett
- 15). Tom Keller
- 16). Bill Voss
- 17). Jennifer Voss & Jessica
- 18). Bob Goss

Boone

* Randy gets a
free breakfast!!

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