

Hoka Hey!



11,559 Miles in 14 Days, 2 Hours

What Is the Hoka Hey?

Trying to explain the Hoka Hey Motorcycle Challenge to someone who has never experienced it isn't easy.

On the surface, it is a motorcycle ride. But calling the Hoka Hey a motorcycle ride is a little like calling a marathon a jog.

The 2026 Hoka Hey Motorcycle Challenge covered approximately 11,001 miles across North America. Riders were required to compete on an American-made V-twin motorcycle—Harley-Davidson, Indian, or Victory.

But the distance alone doesn't define the Hoka Hey.

There is no GPS navigation and no opportunity to study or preplan the

route. Riders are given written, line-by-line directions and must navigate the route one checkpoint at a time. You don't know exactly where the road ahead will take you.

And these aren't simply 11,000 miles of interstate highway. With few exceptions, the Hoka Hey keeps riders off the interstates, sending them instead along secondary highways, rural roads, and backroads through parts of the country most travelers simply pass by. The roads themselves are part of the challenge.

Riders are expected to be self-sufficient. There is no support crew following along. At the end of the riding day, there is no comfortable hotel room waiting. One of the defining rules of the Hoka Hey is

simple: you sleep outside beside your motorcycle.

Then you get up and do it all over again.

There is also a purpose behind the miles. Each rider chooses a charity to represent, using the challenge to raise awareness and support for a cause meaningful to them.

An End of the Road Party is scheduled for Day 14, giving riders something to shoot for, but there is no actual time limit to complete the challenge. The real objective is not simply to get there quickly.

The objective is to finish.

And to finish, you must complete the entire prescribed route.

If you make a wrong turn or otherwise leave the route, you can't simply find another road that reconnects with it farther ahead. You must return to the exact point where you left the prescribed route and continue from there. Every mile of the Hoka Hey must be ridden.

Two Routes

The 2026 Hoka Hey would prove to be one of the most demanding challenges to date. Approximately 1,500 miles had been added to an already extensive and technically difficult route.

There were 273 riders on the starting line in Woodstock, Illinois. Before it was over, 46 percent (126) would drop out for various reasons, including accidents, illness,

mechanical problems, work obligations and family issues.

The riders were divided into two groups.

Group One left Woodstock and began a northern route that eventually took them to Warwick, Rhode Island, before returning to Woodstock.

Group Two headed south toward Southaven, Mississippi, and then returned to Woodstock.

Each loop was approximately 5,500 miles.

But returning to Woodstock didn't mean you were finished.

It meant you were halfway.

Once back at the starting point, each group received the directions for the *other* route and headed out again.

By the time a rider completed both loops, he or she would have traveled approximately 11,001 miles—much of it on roads most motorcyclists would probably never intentionally choose.

That is the Hoka Hey.



It's a Good Day to Die

One phrase is closely associated with the Hoka Hey:

"It's a good day to die."

Those words can sound disturbing if taken literally. But that isn't how I came to understand them.

The phrase is commonly associated with the Lakota people and is often expressed in the Hoka Hey community as "It's a great day to die." It isn't meant as a wish for death, nor is it permission to ride recklessly or take unnecessary chances.

To me, it represents something very different.

Live without fear.

Face uncertainty with courage rather than hesitation.

Accept that anything worthwhile may involve hardship.

Give your best effort and conduct yourself with honor and integrity.

And perhaps most importantly, be fully present in the moment rather than worrying about everything that might happen tomorrow.

That philosophy fits the Hoka Hey remarkably well.

You are traveling thousands of miles, often alone, through unfamiliar territory. You encounter heat, cold, rain, darkness, exhaustion, confusing directions and roads that seem to have been selected specifically because nobody in their right mind would choose them.

But courage isn't recklessness.

Sometimes courage means slowing down.

Sometimes it means stopping.

Sometimes it means admitting that you're tired and lying down beside the motorcycle because continuing would be foolish.

The Hoka Hey doesn't just test how far you can ride. It tests your judgment when you're tired, your determination when things aren't going your way, and your ability to keep moving forward when quitting would be much easier.

Over the course of the challenge, I began to think about the motto a little differently.

It's a great day to fully live.

Respect the journey.

Accept what comes.

Stay mentally strong.

And when it is all over, return home knowing you gave it everything you had.



How Did I Get Here?

My journey to the 2026 Hoka Hey Motorcycle Challenge actually

began more than a year before I ever rolled up to the starting line in Woodstock, Illinois.

At the time, the Hoka Hey announced that it would accept 100 new riders for the 2026 challenge. Those openings filled almost immediately, and additional applicants were placed on a waiting list.

I didn't apply.

I knew about the Hoka Hey. I knew what it represented. And as a long-distance rider, there was certainly something about the challenge that intrigued me. But for whatever reason, when registration opened, I let the opportunity pass.

Then, a few nights later, I couldn't sleep.

I tossed and turned, thinking about the Hoka Hey.

One thought kept coming back to me:

Am I going to regret not doing this?

I've learned over the years that there are some opportunities you can put off until another day. There are others that, once they're gone, may never come around again.

The Hoka Hey was beginning to feel like one of those.

By the next morning, I had made up my mind.

I was going to apply.

There was only one problem.

I was already too late.

I submitted my application anyway, hoping perhaps there might still be a way onto the waiting list. It didn't take long to get an answer.

My application was returned.

The 100 openings for new riders had been filled.

The waiting list was full.

In fact, they had received so much interest that they had stopped adding names to it altogether.

There wasn't even a waiting list for me to wait on.

As far as the 2026 Hoka Hey was concerned, I wasn't going.

I had hesitated for only a few days.

And apparently, that was enough.

At the time, I figured that was the end of the story.

It wasn't.

Re: 2026 Hoka Hey Motorcycle Challenge

Elizabeth Durham

[From:elizabeth.durham@hokaheychallenge.com](mailto:elizabeth.durham@hokaheychallenge.com)

To:Mark Campbell

Sat, Jul 18 at 9:39 AM

Hello again!

I'm writing to let you know that we've had a number of waitlisted riders decline the last minute invitation to join us this year so you're moving up through the waitlist more quickly than anticipated!!

I just need to know that you are still able and ready to ride this year? Please let us know **as soon as possible** so we know to keep you in the line up if a space should become available.

Looking forward to your speedy response,

Beth

The Email I Never Expected

A year passed.

I had pretty much accepted the fact that the 2026 Hoka Hey wasn't going to happen for me. The

original 100 openings for new riders had been filled, the waiting list had filled, and I hadn't even made it onto that.

But over the course of the following year, things changed.

For one reason or another, riders began withdrawing from the challenge. Eventually, the Hoka Hey worked its way completely through the waiting list.

Then, just two weeks before the start, an email showed up in my inbox.

It was from the Hoka Hey organizers.

They wanted to know if I was still interested in riding the 2026 Hoka Hey Motorcycle Challenge.

I couldn't believe what I was reading.

And where I happened to be when I read that email makes the story even better.

I was in Starkville, Mississippi, attending a Mile Monsters fundraising event organized by my good friend Jimmy Burns. Jimmy was preparing for his own Hoka Hey and was using the event to raise donations and awareness for Mile Monsters.

I was enjoying the event when I happened to check my email.

There it was.

After more than a year of believing the opportunity had passed me by, the Hoka Hey was suddenly asking:

Do you still want in?

My first reaction was probably somewhere between excitement and disbelief.

Then reality began to sink in.

The Hoka Hey started in two weeks.

Two weeks!

Preparing yourself for an 11,000-mile challenge would have been difficult enough. But I had another, much bigger problem.

I didn't own a motorcycle that was eligible to compete.

The Hoka Hey requires an American-made V-twin motorcycle. My BMWs might have carried me on countless long-distance rides, but they weren't going to get me onto the Hoka Hey starting line.

I remember looking up from my phone, somewhat dumbfounded by what I had just read.

And sitting directly in front of me was Jimmy Burns' 2024 Indian Pursuit.

Not just any Indian Pursuit.

A motorcycle already set up for serious long-distance riding.

I looked at the email.

Then I looked at the motorcycle.

Then I looked back at the email.

For more than a year, I hadn't even been on the waiting list.

Now I had an invitation to one of the toughest motorcycle challenges in

North America, fourteen days to prepare...

and the motorcycle I needed was sitting right in front of me.

At that point, there was really only one person I needed to talk to.

Jimmy.



The Motorcycle I Needed

As Jimmy's Mile Monsters event began winding down, I pulled him off to the side.

I told him about the email I had just received from the Hoka Hey organizers and explained the situation. After more than a year of believing there was no chance I would be riding in the 2026 Hoka Hey, I suddenly had an invitation.

But I had only two weeks.

And I didn't have a qualifying motorcycle.

I looked at Jimmy and then at his Indian sitting nearby.

"If I had a bike set up like your Indian, I'd ride in the Hoka Hey."

Jimmy didn't hesitate.

"You can borrow mine."

Borrow it?

For an 11,000-mile Hoka Hey?

I certainly wasn't expecting that answer.

But almost immediately another question came to mind.

Was that even allowed?

Jimmy wasn't sure either, so he told me I needed to call Beth, one of the Hoka Hey organizers, and find out.

Karen and I left Starkville and headed home on our BMW. During that ride, everything suddenly felt different. A few hours earlier, the 2026 Hoka Hey had been something I wasn't going to be part of.

Now there was actually a possibility.

Once we arrived home, I called Beth and explained the situation.

Her answer was straightforward: the motorcycle had to be registered in my name.

Well, that seemed to settle it.

Borrowing Jimmy's Indian wasn't going to work.

So I called Jimmy again.

This time the conversation wasn't about borrowing his motorcycle.

It was about buying it.

Once again, Jimmy came through.

He agreed to sell me the Indian.

There was just one catch.

I was also inheriting Jimmy's high handlebars and loud pipes!

It wasn't exactly how I would have set up my own long-distance motorcycle.

But at that moment I wasn't about to complain.

Without Jimmy's generosity, my Hoka Hey adventure might have ended before it ever began.

Suddenly, all the pieces that hadn't seemed possible just hours earlier were beginning to fall into place.

A year earlier, I had waited a few days too long to apply. I was told the event was full and that even the waiting list had been closed.

I had moved on.

Then, almost a year later, with only two weeks remaining before the start, an unexpected email arrived while I just happened to be standing at a Hoka Hey fundraiser, looking at a fully equipped American-made V-twin belonging to a friend who was willing to help make the impossible possible.

I had received the invitation.

I had found the motorcycle.

Re: 2026 Hoka Hey Motorcycle Challenge

Elizabeth Durham

[From:elizabeth.durham@hokaheychallenge.com](mailto:elizabeth.durham@hokaheychallenge.com)

[To:Mark](#) Campbell

Wed, Jul 22 at 1:35 PM

Mark,

It is my pleasure to inform you that your application has been processed, and you have been accepted as a participant in the Hoka Hey Motorcycle Challenge! [Congratulations](#) on being accepted as one of the elite warriors to be included in this epic journey. You will be joining us as Rider #1265 in the 2026 event.

I was going to ride the 2026 Hoka Hey Motorcycle Challenge.

There was just one problem.

I had fourteen days to get ready.



Rider #1265

The stars had aligned.

Just two weeks before the start, I had somehow been accepted into the Hoka Hey. Thanks to Jimmy, I now had a qualifying motorcycle that was already equipped for long-distance riding.

And then there were my rider numbers.

1265.

As unlikely as my last-minute entry into the Hoka Hey had been, the story behind those numbers made the whole thing seem even more remarkable.

Number 1265 had originally been assigned to a rider from the Netherlands. He had planned an ambitious summer of endurance challenges that included swimming around Manhattan, riding the Hoka Hey, and attempting to swim the English Channel.

Unfortunately, just before departing for the United States, circumstances forced him to reconsider those

plans. Although he actually boarded his flight, he ultimately had to get off the aircraft before departure. After initially hoping he could regroup and still make the trip, he eventually made the difficult decision to withdraw from the Hoka Hey.

His rider-number decals had already been shipped to the apartment in New York where he planned to stay. Since he never arrived, the package was marked "Return to Sender."

Once he learned that #1265 would be reassigned, he contacted the people involved and asked that the numbers be redirected to the replacement rider. He even offered to cover the tracker cost so his withdrawal wouldn't create an additional expense for whoever took his place.

At the time, he had no idea who that rider would be.

That someone turned out to be me.

Within days, #1265 decals were redirected to Hernando, Mississippi and waiting for me.

It was an incredible gesture from a rider I had never met and an early introduction to something I would see repeatedly throughout my Hoka Hey experience:

Pay it forward.

The stars really did seem to be aligning.

I had been accepted into the Hoka Hey.

I had a qualifying motorcycle.

And now, my numbers were waiting for me.

I was officially Rider #1265.



Ten Days to Get Ready

For the next ten days, my hair was on fire.

That's about the best way I can describe it.

On the eleventh day, I would leave home and ride to Woodstock, Illinois, for check-in and the preliminary Hoka Hey events. That gave me ten days to prepare myself and a motorcycle I had just acquired for an 11,000-mile challenge unlike anything I had ever attempted.

I knew how to ride long distances.

That wasn't the problem.

The problem was figuring out how to do the Hoka Hey.

I needed a way to mount the line-by-line directions where I could easily read them—not only during the day, but in the middle of the night.

I had to determine how I was going to sleep beside the motorcycle every night. What would I sleep on? What would I sleep in? How much time would I be willing to spend setting everything up after an exhausting day of riding?

Then there was clothing. I had no idea exactly where the route would take me, so I had to prepare for heat,

rain and potentially cold weather. What riding gear would I need? What tools should I carry? What could I reasonably repair beside the road? And what other items might become important while living off a motorcycle for at least fourteen days?

For ten days, those questions seemed endless.

Learning the Indian

There was another priority that was every bit as important as packing.

I needed to learn the motorcycle.

I had plenty of experience riding motorcycles over long distances, but this Indian Pursuit was new to me. Before attempting 11,000 miles on it, I needed to understand how it behaved.

And I wasn't particularly concerned about riding it down the highway.

I wanted to know what it did slowly.

How did it balance at parking-lot speeds? How tightly could I turn it? How did it feel stopping and starting? What about starting on a hill? How would its weight react during a slow maneuver?

And, of course, there were Jimmy's high handlebars.

So every day during those ten days, if I had an errand to run, I took the Indian. I deliberately sought opportunities to practice slow riding, turning, stopping, starting and riding through hilly terrain.

Mile by mile, the motorcycle began feeling less like Jimmy's Indian and more like my Hoka Hey motorcycle.

Navigation

One of my biggest challenges was figuring out what to do with those written directions.

My solution was decidedly low-tech—which seemed appropriate for an event that didn't allow GPS navigation.

I mounted an aluminum clipboard to a RAM mount on the left handlebar.

Ironically, Jimmy's high handlebars, which certainly weren't how I would have configured my own long-distance motorcycle, turned out to be perfect for the job.

The clipboard sat on the left side almost directly in my line of sight. Better yet, it was high enough that when I turned the handlebars, the bottom of the clipboard cleared the tank bag.

Suddenly, those high bars didn't seem so bad.

On top of the tank bag, I mounted a small whiteboard that I could write on with erasable markers. Inside the bag I kept the things I expected to need frequently while riding: eye drops, eyeglasses, snacks, ChapStick, pens, small bungees, extra gem clips for the clipboard, and markers for the whiteboard.

Everything needed a place.

More importantly, everything needed to be somewhere I could find it when I was tired, in the dark, alongside some road I had never seen before.

Packing the Indian

For the most part, I organized the Indian the same way I had

configured motorcycles for other long-distance rides.

The right saddlebag became my mechanical side. It held my tool bag, air compressor, tire-plug kit, compact jump pack and motorcycle half-cover.

The left saddlebag held my overnight bag. Inside were shorts and a T-shirt for sleeping, Dude Wipes, disposable toothbrushes and my daily medications. Plus, I had several extra pairs of LD Comfort base layer riding clothes.

The plan was simple: when I stopped for the night, I would set up my tent, grab that one bag and have everything I needed.

It was a great plan.

As I would discover somewhere down the road, reality had other ideas. That overnight bag spent most of the Hoka Hey right where it started—in the saddlebag.

The trunk contained the things I wanted readily available throughout the day: several pairs of gloves for different conditions—summer, cool weather and rain—an AirHawk seat cushion, microfiber towels for cleaning the windshield, lights and face shield, a USB charging port for my assigned Fleet Tracker, a shaving-kit bag, laminated sheets for protecting my line-by-line directions and various other necessities.

Then came everything that wouldn't fit inside the motorcycle.

On the trunk rack was a dry bag containing my sleeping bag and pillow.

I carefully packed both.

Neither one would come out of that dry bag for the entire Hoka Hey.

Strapped across the passenger seat was a quick pop-up tent, another dry bag containing all of my heated gear—electric jacket liner, shirt, pant liners and gloves—along with a pair of blue jeans, T-shirt and tennis shoes.

And finally, strapped to the passenger seat was perhaps the simplest piece of equipment I carried:

A roughly six-foot-by-three-foot eggcrate-style foam mat.

I didn't realize it when I strapped it onto the Indian, but that inexpensive piece of foam was about to become something very important.

It would be my bed for the entire Hoka Hey.

Ready as I Could Be

For those ten days, I was busy from morning until night.

I'd think of something I needed.

Pack it.

Change my mind.

Move it somewhere else.

Think of another problem.

Find a solution.

Ride the Indian.

Come home.

Make another adjustment.

Then lie in bed thinking about something else I hadn't considered.

I kept asking myself the same basic questions:

What am I going to need?

Where am I going to put it?

And how am I going to use it when I'm exhausted alongside some unknown road in the middle of the night?

That continued right up until the day before I was scheduled to leave.

Then something changed.

For the first time since that unexpected email had arrived, I looked at the Indian, looked at everything strapped and packed onto it, and couldn't think of anything else I needed to do.

The frantic preparation was over.

The motorcycle was ready.

And finally, so was I.



The Ride to Woodstock

Thursday morning, July 30, it was finally time.

Karen and I left home that morning headed for Woodstock, Illinois, but we traveled separately. I was on the Indian and Karen was in her car. We weren't intentionally trying to stay together, and for much of the day we traveled our own routes at our own pace.

For me, that was actually a good thing.

I needed some time alone.

The ride to Woodstock wasn't about making miles. It was my opportunity to mentally prepare for what I was about to undertake—to get my head into the game.

That was something I understood from my years competing in martial arts.

Before a tournament, I would find a quiet spot somewhere on the gymnasium floor, away from all the activity. I'd warm up and stretch, but the physical preparation was only part of it.

More importantly, I was preparing mentally.

I would shut out the noise around me, focus on what I was about to do and get myself into the right frame of mind to compete.

The ride to Woodstock became my version of that quiet corner of the gymnasium.

For mile after mile, I had time to think about the Hoka Hey.

The application I almost didn't submit.

Being told I was too late.

The email that arrived more than a year later.

Jimmy's Indian sitting in front of me when I read it.

Ten frantic days of preparation.

And now here I was, actually riding that Indian toward the starting line.

This was really happening.

Finding Karen

Eventually, my quiet ride north turned into something a little more practical.

Karen had shared her location and route with me through Apple Maps. When I looked at where she was headed, I immediately noticed a problem.

Her route was taking her toward Chicago.

That wasn't where I wanted her to go.

I called and told her to get off I-57 and work her way over to I-39 toward Rockford so she could avoid Chicago altogether.

I was only a few minutes ahead of her, so I stopped outside Bloomington, Illinois, and waited.

Before long, Karen caught up, and from there she followed me the rest of the way to Woodstock.

I was glad she did.

Long-distance motorcycling has been something Karen and I have shared for many years, but this challenge was going to be different. Once the Hoka Hey began, I would be out there on my own. Having her with me for those final couple of days before the start meant we could experience that part of the adventure together.

One Problem

When we reached Woodstock, we went directly to the Harley-Davidson dealership to see if I could get checked in that afternoon.

I parked the Indian, shut it down and climbed off.

And my ears were ringing.

Really ringing.

It took several hours before they finally settled down.

In all my frantic preparation, I had thought about written directions, sleeping arrangements, tools, clothing, heated gear, rain gear and just about every other problem I could imagine.

Apparently, I hadn't thought enough about Jimmy's loud pipes.

I told Karen, "I've got to get some earplugs. There's no way I can listen to this day after day."

This wasn't simply an annoyance. If I was going to spend fourteen days riding this motorcycle for thousands of miles, I had to solve the problem. Fortunately, the dealership sold a good-quality set of earplugs. I bought a pair and immediately realized they were exactly what I needed.

In fact, a little later I asked Karen to buy me a second pair—just in case.

Problem solved.

From that point forward, the loud pipes never bothered me again.

It was a small lesson, but one that would become familiar over the next couple of weeks:

Something happens. Figure it out. Fix it. Keep moving.





Perfect Timing

Then we caught another break.

They were still checking riders in.

Better yet, the long lines from earlier in the day had dwindled to almost nothing.

Perfect timing.

I checked in, received my assigned Fleet Tracker, completed the required motorcycle inspection and passed.

Just like that, one more major item was off my list.

That turned out to be more important than I realized. The following day, riders would be standing in long lines completing check-in and the other preliminary requirements.

I wouldn't have to.

For the first time since receiving that unexpected email ten days earlier, there really wasn't anything I had to rush around and accomplish.

Friday could be different.

I could relax.

I could enjoy Woodstock.

I could spend time with Karen and our friends.

And I could simply take in the experience of finally being at the Hoka Hey.



Friends Begin to Arrive

As the evening went on, the atmosphere around Woodstock began to change.

Riders, families and friends were arriving from around the country. Motorcycles seemed to be everywhere, and familiar faces began appearing among them.

Karen and I already knew quite a few people participating in the Hoka Hey, which meant she had no trouble finding someone to visit with.

Karen quickly became a little social butterfly.

While I took care of the remaining details surrounding the event, she was perfectly happy catching up with friends and meeting people.

That evening, our good friend Jimmy Burns arrived on his Harley.

Seeing Jimmy ride into Woodstock had special significance for me.

Only ten days earlier, I had been standing at his Mile Monsters fundraiser wondering whether there was any possible way I could accept

a last-minute invitation to the Hoka Hey.

Now Jimmy and I were both here.

Had it not been for him, there was a very good chance I wouldn't have been.

Our friends Don and Dee Yates also arrived. They weren't riding the challenge this year. They had come to enjoy the preliminary events, reconnect with their many Hoka Hey friends and see everyone off.

By the end of that first evening in Woodstock, I could finally look around and appreciate how much had happened in such a short period of time.

The motorcycle was prepared.

My gear was packed.

The bike had passed inspection.

My Fleet Tracker had been issued.

Karen was there.

Our friends were arriving.

And after spending much of the ride north quietly getting my head into the game, I felt ready.

Rider #1265 had made it to Woodstock.

For the first time in ten days, there was nothing left to prepare for.

Now I just had to find out exactly what I had gotten myself into.





The Calm Before the Storm

Friday, July 31, was a completely different kind of day.

For the first time since receiving that unexpected email, I really didn't have anything pressing to accomplish. My check-in was complete, the Indian had passed inspection, my Fleet Tracker had been issued, and most of my preparation was behind me.

So Friday became a day to simply enjoy being there.

We spent much of the morning at the Woodstock Harley-Davidson dealership visiting with old friends and meeting new ones as riders continued arriving and working their way through the check-in process.

There was an unmistakable sense of anticipation in the air.

These were people from different backgrounds, different parts of the country and, in some cases, different parts of the world. But for the next couple of weeks, we would all have something in common.

We were about to find out what the 2026 Hoka Hey had waiting for us.



Riding for a Purpose

At noon, Karen and I joined Jimmy, Don and Dee and drove over to Fire Bar & Grill for a Mile Monsters luncheon.

Mile Monsters was my charity of choice for the Hoka Hey.

Karen and I had participated in several Mile Monsters events over the years, and we had come to love what the organization does and, more importantly, who they do it for.

Mile Monsters is a riders' charity organization that sponsors seven boys with Duchenne muscular dystrophy. Within the Mile Monsters family, these boys aren't simply beneficiaries of a charity.

They're our Heroes.

The purpose of Mile Monsters is simple: help these boys live their best lives.

Sometimes that means providing experiences and opportunities. Other times it means helping obtain specialized equipment or other things that can make everyday life a little easier for the boys and their families.

For this particular effort, Mile Monsters was raising money to help

provide a special-needs van for one of the Heroes.

That gave all those miles ahead of us a little more meaning.

I wanted to finish the Hoka Hey for myself, certainly.

But I was also riding for something bigger than myself.



At the luncheon, Mile Monsters presented special bright-yellow riding shirts to all 59 Hoka Hey riders who were supporting the organization that year. They also provided everyone with a meal and, more importantly, an opportunity for all of us to come together before the challenge began.

It was part luncheon, part celebration and part send-off.

Riot, the founder of Mile Monsters, has a way of making events like this memorable while never losing sight of their purpose.

We laughed.

We ate.

We wished each other well.

And 59 riders left that luncheon knowing that when we rolled out of Woodstock Sunday morning, we would be carrying more than our own rider numbers.

We would be riding for our Heroes.



An Evening in Woodstock

Later that evening, the Hoka Hey held another gathering at Ortmann's Red Iron Tavern in downtown Woodstock.

Once again, it was an opportunity for food, drinks and conversation with Hoka Hey friends—both old and new.

Because we were already downtown, Karen, Don, Dee and I spent some time walking around Woodstock.

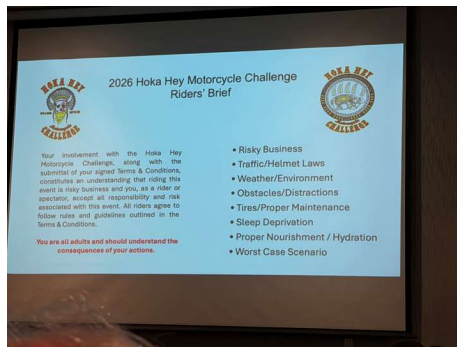


The town has an interesting entertainment history. Much of the movie *Groundhog Day* was filmed there, so we had an opportunity to see some of the familiar locations used in the film. Woodstock also has connections to Orson Welles and *Dick Tracy* creator Chester Gould.

For a few hours, we were simply tourists.

That felt good.

Because the following day, the mood would become considerably more serious.



The Final Briefing

Saturday, August 1, was our final day before the start.

There wasn't much left for me to do to the motorcycle. The gear was packed. The Indian was ready.

Now it was time to make sure the rider was ready.

That afternoon, all 273 riders attended a mandatory briefing at the host hotel in Crystal Lake.

If Friday had been about celebration and fellowship, Saturday's briefing was a reminder of exactly what we had signed up for.

Riding approximately 11,000 miles over the next couple of weeks was not something to take lightly.

Fatigue and sleep deprivation were real dangers.

So was failing to eat and hydrate properly.

The Hoka Hey might challenge us to push ourselves, but pushing ourselves didn't mean abandoning good judgment. If we were going to finish, we first had to take care of ourselves well enough to keep riding safely.

Beth Durham, Junie Rose and other Hoka Hey organizers addressed the packed room.

They also talked about how much the Hoka Hey had changed since its beginning in 2010.

What had started as a race had evolved into something very different.

Today, the Hoka Hey is much more of a personal challenge.

You aren't really competing against the rider beside you. You're competing against the route, the weather, fatigue, mechanical problems, your own decisions and, ultimately, yourself.

And for many of us, there was another dimension.

We were riding for a cause.

Across that room were riders representing charities important to them—organizations and people who gave purpose to the thousands of difficult miles ahead.

The Hoka Hey offered us an opportunity to use something we

loved—motorcycling—to draw attention to something greater than ourselves.

For me, that was Mile Monsters and our Heroes.



One Last Instruction

There had been one curious detail during the check-in process that I hadn't thought much about at the time.

Each rider had been given a small slip of paper with instructions for joining a Hoka Hey text-message group. Mine instructed me to text "Group1" to a specified number.

I followed the instructions and didn't give it much more thought.

Apparently, other riders had received similar slips instructing them to join Group 2.

At the mandatory briefing on Saturday, the significance of those two groups began to become a little clearer.

As the briefing came to an end, the organizers gave us our final instructions.

Be at the Woodstock Harley-Davidson dealership between 4:00 and 4:30 Sunday morning.

The 2026 Hoka Hey Motorcycle Challenge would begin at 6:00 a.m.

But when we arrived, we weren't simply supposed to form one long line as riders had done in previous Hoka Hey events.

We were instructed to line up according to our assigned group.

That was something new and unexpected.

For the first time, the starting field of 273 riders was going to be divided into two separate groups.

I knew I was in Group 1.

What I didn't know was why.

Where was Group 1 going?

Where was Group 2 going?

Were we riding different routes?

Would those routes eventually come back together?

At that point, we simply didn't know.

And that was exactly how the Hoka Hey was designed.

You weren't supposed to know what was coming.

The answers would be waiting in the written directions we received at the starting line.

That was it.

After more than a year of believing I wouldn't be part of this Hoka Hey...

After the unexpected email...

Jimmy's Indian...

Rider #1265...

Ten frantic days of preparation...

And two days in Woodstock...

There was nothing left to do but ride.

Karen and I returned to the hotel.

I made whatever final preparations I could, checked everything one more time and tried to get some sleep.

The alarm would come early.

And when it did, Rider #1265—Group 1—was going to the starting line.



The Starting Line

The alarm went off at 3:00 a.m.

The morning had finally arrived.

Karen and I were up, dressed and headed to the Woodstock Harley-Davidson dealership. By 4:00 a.m., I was riding into the starting area.

As instructed, I headed toward the Group 1 side of the parking lot.

Volunteers holding burning sage directed us toward our parking positions. In the darkness of the early morning, motorcycles slowly began filling the two designated areas.

Group 1 on one side.

Group 2 on the other.

For the next half hour, more and more motorcycles rolled in until the parking lot was filled with riders who had spent months—some of

them years—preparing for this moment.

For me, it had been ten days.

At around 5:00 a.m., we gathered beneath the huge American flag for a prayer.

Then came our final instructions.

At exactly 6:00 a.m., John Levins would lead Group 1 for approximately the first ten miles. During those ten miles, everyone was to remain in position. No passing. Once John peeled away, we would be on our own.

Group 2 received similar instructions with its own leader.

We returned to our motorcycles.

And then the volunteers began handing out what we had all been waiting for:

Our first set of directions.



Line	Distance	Turn	Road	Notes
1a	1	Start	Woodstock Harley Davidson	
1a	2	Left	IL-47 S Eastwood Dr	
1a	3	Right	IL-176 W	
1a	5	Left	IL-23 S	
1a	6	Right	US-30 W	
1a	7	Right	IL-84 N Weber Rd	
1a	8	Right	Clay St -- N 47 St -- Webster St	
1a	9	Left	N 56 St -- Sweeny Ridge Rd	
1a	10	Right	S Danvers Rd	
1a	11	Left	US-20 W	
1a	12	Right	IL-84 N	
1a	12	Right	W-30 S (Center Wisconsin)	
1a	14	Left	W-11 N W Fairplay St	
1a	15	Straight	W-35 N US-61 N US-153 N Great River Rd	
1a	16	Left	W-133 N East St Great River Rd	
1a	17	Right	W-81 E Davidson St	
1a	18	Left	W-35 N Canal St	
1a	19	Straight	CR-1	

Now I Knew

When the pages reached me, I finally learned where Group 1 was headed.

Our first checkpoint would be Ocean State Harley-Davidson in Warwick, Rhode Island.

Group 2 received a completely different destination: Southern

Thunder Harley-Davidson in Southaven, Mississippi.

Now the two groups made sense.

We were headed in opposite directions.

It was about 5:30 a.m., which gave me just enough time to prepare my directions.

I laminated the pages and mounted them to the clipboard on my left handlebar. As a backup, I took a photograph of each page with my phone. If something happened to the originals somewhere along the way, at least I wouldn't lose the route completely.

Then I put in my earplugs.

The Indian was ready.

The directions were mounted.

Rider #1265 was ready.



6:00 A.M. — It Was On

At exactly 6:00 a.m., Group 1 began rolling out of the dealership in a single-file line.

For those first ten miles, I deliberately followed every instruction on my route sheet even though I could have simply followed the motorcycle in front of me.

I wanted to learn how this worked.

Read the instruction.

Find the road.

Make the turn.

Confirm where I was.

Then find the next instruction.

For ten miles, we stayed in formation behind John Levins.

Then John peeled away.

And all hell broke loose.

It was on!

Motorcycles immediately began passing other motorcycles. Riders who had patiently maintained their positions for the first ten miles suddenly began working their way toward the front.

For a moment, it felt like one huge pack fighting for position.

I wanted no part of it.

Ride your own ride.

That was going to be my strategy.

I wasn't going to win the Hoka Hey in the first fifty miles. I had a couple of weeks and roughly 11,000 miles ahead of me. My job wasn't to keep up with somebody else.

My job was to manage my ride.

Stay safe.

Manage my energy.

Follow the route.

And keep moving forward.

The Pack

For much of that first day, I still found myself riding among a large group.

But the pack was constantly changing.

Someone would stop for fuel and disappear. Another rider would catch us from behind. Someone else would pull over. A few riders would move ahead.

The group expanded and contracted almost continuously.

Slowly, mile after mile, it began to dissolve.

Then we encountered our first serious reminder of what could happen out here.

The road ahead was closed because of an accident.

Riders began pulling off and waiting along the side of the road. Under normal circumstances, you would simply find a detour and continue.

Not in the Hoka Hey.

We couldn't leave the prescribed route without authorization. We had to wait for instructions from the organizers.

While we sat there, word began circulating that the accident involved a motorcycle.

Then we heard it was one of ours.

A Hoka Hey rider.

The mood changed immediately.

The excitement and adrenaline of the morning disappeared.

For approximately fifteen minutes, we waited quietly along the road until Hoka Hey officials gave us instructions for getting around the closure and returning to the prescribed route.

Later, I heard that the rider had attempted to pass and collided head-on with an oncoming vehicle.

Whatever the exact circumstances, seeing the aftermath so early in the challenge reinforced something I had already decided:

Ride your own ride.

I could understand how easily adrenaline could influence someone's judgment, especially when surrounded by other motorcycles. Put enough riders together and there is a temptation to keep pace, follow the person ahead or push just a little harder than you otherwise would.

Pack mentality is different from individual mentality.

I had experienced enough long-distance riding to know that I couldn't allow someone else's pace to determine mine.

The Hoka Hey was going to be difficult enough without me making it more difficult.



My First Rookie Mistake

It didn't take long for the Hoka Hey to teach me another lesson.

By this point, the crowd had thinned considerably. I was following

another rider as we approached an intersection.

The rider ahead of me went straight.

Without really thinking about it...

I went straight too.

About a quarter mile later, I happened to look in my rearview mirror.

The riders who had been behind me were turning right at the intersection I had just crossed.

What?

I looked down at my line-by-line directions.

Then I looked again.

I was off-route.

My first navigation mistake.

And it was a rookie mistake.

I hadn't missed a sign.

I hadn't misunderstood the written directions.

I had simply followed the motorcycle in front of me instead of following my route sheet.

I immediately turned around and rode back to the intersection.

Sure enough, the directions called for a turn there.

I made the turn and continued.

The motorcycle I had followed was already out of sight.

I couldn't help wondering:

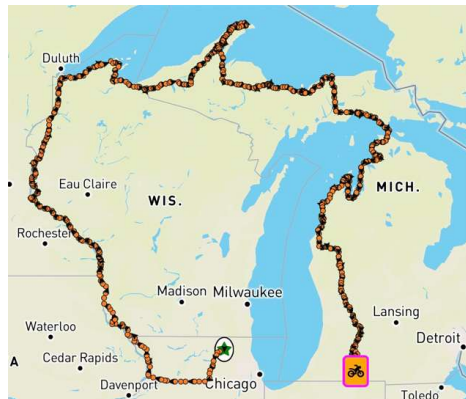
How far is he going to ride before he realizes he's off-route?

I never found out.

But I had learned my lesson.

Nobody else was responsible for navigating my Hoka Hey.

I was.



Own the Mistake

That certainly wouldn't be my last wrong turn.

Over the next 11,000 miles, I would make plenty of navigation mistakes. Some would be minor. Others would add considerably more mileage to my ride.

But there was one rule I would follow every time.

Own the mistake.

If I left the prescribed route, I turned around and returned to the exact point where I had left it.

No shortcuts.

No finding another road that happened to reconnect farther ahead.

Go back.

Correct the mistake.

Then continue.

Those extra miles were mine.

And before the Hoka Hey was over, they were going to add up.

Outside My Comfort Zone

Of all the things about the Hoka Hey that concerned me before the start, one bothered me more than anything else.

Where was I going to sleep?

The Hoka Hey requires riders to sleep outside beside their motorcycles.

Sure, Karen and I had camped on motorcycle trips before. But those trips were different. We knew where we were going. Campgrounds were selected ahead of time. We arrived knowing that was where we intended to spend the night.

The Hoka Hey was more like:

Well, I guess I'll sleep here.

That bothered me.

Not necessarily because I was afraid to sleep outside, but because it went against almost everything about the way I normally approach long-distance riding.

I am a very structured person.

When I plan a major ride, I do it methodically. I create spreadsheets detailing the route, mileage, fuel stops and overnight locations. On most of my long-distance rides, I can tell you fairly accurately where I'm going to be and about what time I'm going to be there.

There is comfort in that structure.

The Hoka Hey took it away.

I didn't know where I would be sleeping that night.

I didn't know where I would be the following night.

For that matter, I didn't even know exactly where the route would take me beyond the directions in front of me.

The Hoka Hey was way outside my comfort zone.

And when I really thought about it, that was one of the reasons accepting the challenge had been so important to me.

I already knew I could ride long distances.

What I didn't know was how I would handle not knowing.

Just Ride

The first night, I began looking for somewhere to stop.

I pulled into a couple of roadside rest areas, thinking one of them might work.

They didn't.

Both were dark and secluded, and something about them just didn't feel right to me.

So I left.

There was another problem anyway.

I wasn't tired.

I had experienced adrenaline during other major riding challenges, but nothing quite like this. The Hoka Hey felt different.

Maybe part of it was the simplicity of what I had to do.

There was no spreadsheet to consult.

No hotel reservation waiting for me.

No predetermined meal stop.

No schedule telling me where I needed to be at a certain hour.

There were no mandatory rest or meal breaks dictating my day.

There was just a route.

Follow the directions and ride the route.

That was it.

Everyone in my group had the same prescribed route in front of them. How each of us managed ourselves along the way—when we ate, when we rested, where we stopped and how we dealt with whatever happened—was up to us.

That's the Hoka Hey.

And strangely enough, once I accepted that, I found a certain freedom in it.



I Guess I'm Sleeping Here

I continued riding.

Eventually, the adrenaline wore off.

By approximately 11:00 p.m. the second night, I had been awake for roughly 44 hours, and there was no question anymore.

I was tired.

At that point, I wasn't looking for the perfect place to sleep.

I was looking for the next place that felt safe enough to stop.

Then I saw it.

A closed gas station alongside the road.

More importantly, it had something I immediately liked:

A bright security light.

Perfect.

I had learned from those dark rest areas that I didn't want to sleep somewhere secluded where I couldn't see my surroundings. If something woke me during the night, I wanted to open my eyes and immediately be able to see what was around me.

So that security light became my deciding factor.

I parked the Indian, pulled the eggcrate foam mat off the passenger seat and laid it on the ground beside the motorcycle.

That was about it.

No tent.

No sleeping bag.

I didn't change clothes.

I didn't even take off my boots.

After ten days of carefully thinking through my sleeping arrangements, my first Hoka Hey campsite consisted of an eggcrate mat on the ground beside a closed gas station.

And you know what?

It worked.

At some point, someone stopped and woke me. They were concerned and wanted to make sure I was okay.

I told them I was fine.

They left, and I went back to sleep.

It would be the only time during the entire challenge that anyone disturbed me while I was sleeping.

A couple of hours later, I woke up ready to ride again.

There was only one problem.

I was wet.

It hadn't rained.

The overnight dew had settled over me and soaked my riding clothes.

Lesson learned.



My Hoka Hey Hotel

From that point forward, I had my system.

And it was considerably simpler than the sleeping arrangements I had spent all that time planning before leaving home.

When I was ready to stop, I looked for someplace that felt safe and preferably had a security light.

A closed gas station worked.

A church worked.

A spot near the beginning or end of a small town worked.

I would park the Indian beneath or near the light.

Pull the eggcrate mat off the bike.
Use one of my dry bags as a pillow.
Then I added one more item after learning my lesson about the dew:
My waterproof motorcycle half-cover became my blanket.
That was it.

The tent stayed strapped to the motorcycle.

The sleeping bag and pillow stayed packed.

The overnight bag I had so carefully organized remained mostly in the saddlebag.

My entire sleeping routine had been reduced to a foam mat, a dry bag and a motorcycle cover.

Stop. Unroll. Lie down. Sleep. Get up. Ride.

The thing that had bothered me most before the Hoka Hey had suddenly become one of the simplest parts of it.

Finding My Rhythm

Most nights, my main sleep period ended up being roughly three hours, generally sometime between 10:00 p.m. and 2:00 a.m. One night I believe I slept close to five hours.

But I also learned that my body didn't always care what my riding plan was.

On several mornings, something happened around sunrise.

I'd be riding along when the yawning started.

Not an occasional yawn.

The yawns.

I'd become groggy and could feel the fatigue setting in.

I wasn't going to try to ride through that.

When it happened, I would find a roadside park or another suitable place, get off the motorcycle and lie down for 45 minutes to an hour.

Those short morning naps made an enormous difference.

I'd wake up, get back on the Indian and continue riding for the rest of the day.

I probably did that about five times during the challenge.

I wasn't following a predetermined sleep schedule.

I was learning to pay attention to what my body was telling me and manage the ride accordingly.

Finding My Routine

Sleeping wasn't the only part of my normal routine that changed during the Hoka Hey.

Eating did too.

On that first day, I realized I hadn't eaten anything all day. Somewhere near Lake Superior, I stopped at a bar and grill and ordered a chicken sandwich.

It took quite a while for the sandwich to arrive, but I really didn't mind. The break felt good.

When the sandwich finally came, I discovered something else.

I really wasn't that hungry.

I knew I needed to eat, so I took a couple of bites. That was about all I wanted. I was satisfied, paid the bill and got back on the road.

The next morning, I stopped at McDonald's for an Egg McMuffin. Later that afternoon, I stopped at Subway for a sandwich.

Without really planning it, I had stumbled onto a routine that worked for me.

McDonald's in the Morning

McDonald's became more than just breakfast.

It became my morning stop.

I'd eat something and take my overnight bag into the restroom to freshen up. Many of the restroom stalls had a fold-down baby-changing station, which made the perfect little shelf for my bag.

I'd clean up, brush my teeth with one of my disposable toothbrushes and get myself ready for another day.

Nothing fancy.

But it worked.



Subway in the Afternoon

By afternoon, especially when the temperatures were climbing, Subway became my other regular stop.

I'd order a sandwich, get off the motorcycle and spend a little time in the air conditioning.

The food was important, but so was the break.

It gave me a chance to cool down, relax for a while and get out of the heat. By the time I returned to the motorcycle, the sun would soon begin getting lower and the temperature would usually become a little more manageable.

Then I'd settle back into the ride.

My Hoka Hey Schedule

By 10:00 or 11:00 at night, the little towns along the secondary roads we were traveling would begin shutting down. That became my signal to start looking for my Hoka Hey Hotel.

And just like that, I had developed a routine.

McDonald's in the morning.

Subway in the afternoon.

My Hoka Hey Hotel at night.

Everything in between was simply riding the route.

It wasn't the kind of schedule I was accustomed to.

But it worked.

Familiar Roads

As I rode through those first couple of days, much of the scenery was surprisingly familiar.

The year before, I had completed the Iron Butt Association's Ride Around Wisconsin, so I recognized portions of the river road along the western side of the state.

Once we reached Michigan's Upper Peninsula, I was back in familiar territory again. Karen and I had ridden the Lake Superior Circle

Tour years earlier, and many of those sights brought back memories of that trip.

Then came the Mackinac Bridge.

I especially enjoyed riding across it. Years earlier, while planning one of our motorcycle trips through that part of the country, I remember researching the bridge and learning some interesting facts. Now, here I was crossing it again—this time in the middle of the Hoka Hey.

The places might have been familiar.

The riding wasn't.



Relentless Roads

I love curvy roads.

Put me on a motorcycle and give me a good winding road, and I'm happy.

But there is a big difference between enjoying a few hours of curves and riding them day after day after day.

The Hoka Hey route was relentless.

On most of my long-distance rides, cruise control is one of my best friends. Once I'm on a long stretch of highway, I can set it, relax my throttle hand and settle into the ride.

Not here.

The secondary roads and constant curves meant I was continually working the throttle.

Accelerate.

Roll off.

Curve.

Accelerate again.

Another curve.

Then another.

And another.

By the end of the first day, my right forearm was cramping.

The second day, it happened again.

I wasn't accustomed to working the throttle that continuously for that many hours. The mileage itself wasn't necessarily the problem. It was the technical nature of the mileage.

There was very little opportunity to simply sit back, set the cruise control and let the motorcycle eat up the miles.

These roads demanded my attention.

After three or four days, my body seemed to begin accepting what I was asking it to do. My forearm was still sore, but the cramping wasn't affecting me the way it had during those first couple of days.

I was adapting.

The roads, however, weren't getting any easier.

Checkpoint One

By the time I finally reached our first checkpoint at Ocean State Harley-Davidson in Warwick, Rhode Island, I was ready for two things:

A real shower and a couple of hours off the motorcycle.



The dealership treated us like royalty.

They had just about every personal-hygiene item a tired Hoka Hey rider could need, along with snacks, fruit, a warm meal and other supplies—all available to us at no charge.

I gladly took them up on the shower and hot meal.

It was great.

After days of sleeping beside the motorcycle, cleaning up in McDonald's restrooms and eating whenever it fit into the ride, something as simple as a hot shower and warm meal felt pretty luxurious.

But this was still the Hoka Hey.

There was another set of directions waiting for me.

Back to Where We Started

I received my next route sheet and looked at the destination.

Woodstock, Illinois.

We were going back to the starting point.

By then, I had heard that Group 2 was also returning to Woodstock after reaching Southaven.

Now it made sense.

We were riding two loops.

Group 1 had ridden the northern loop first. Group 2 had ridden the southern loop. When we returned to Woodstock, we would switch.

Eventually, every rider would complete both.

I mounted the new directions, climbed back onto the Indian and headed west.

And the twisties continued.

Day after day.

Where Am I?

The twisties continued on the way back to Woodstock, but a couple of roads stood out from the others.

One was Ohio Route 555—the Triple Nickel.

I had read about the Triple Nickel several times over the years. It's one of those roads that comes up in conversations among motorcyclists, and I had always wanted to ride it.

Now, thanks to the Hoka Hey, I finally was.

I enjoyed it.

Another road stands out for an entirely different reason.

I couldn't tell you exactly where it was. I believe I was somewhere in Pennsylvania.

It was nighttime, and I found myself on an old, narrow asphalt road that looked as though it had been resurfaced over and over again through the years. Layer after layer of asphalt had built the roadway up until there was an immediate drop-off along the edge.

There was virtually no shoulder.

The road was narrow.

It twisted.

It climbed and dropped.

There were tight turns, hills, loops and intersections where the road seemed to make abrupt turns at stop signs.

And it was dark.

It was one of the most challenging roads I encountered.

There was also something eerie about it.

Maybe it was simply riding it at night. My headlights illuminated only the piece of pavement immediately ahead of me. Beyond that was darkness. I couldn't see what was over the next hill or around the next curve.

I slowed down and took my time.

This wasn't the place to push anything.

I remember thinking that I would have loved to ride that same road during daylight, just so I could actually see where I had been.

But that wasn't the Hoka Hey I was riding.

My Hoka Hey took me down that road at night.

And for whatever reason, of the thousands of roads I traveled during those 15 days, that one has stayed with me.

Somewhere in America

As the miles accumulated, I began noticing something else about traveling almost entirely on secondary roads.

Most of the time, I really didn't know where I was.

I remember riding through Pennsylvania.

Then Maryland.

Virginia.

West Virginia.

Back into Virginia.

Kentucky.

Tennessee.

Then back into Kentucky again.

But between those state lines, much of the time I couldn't have told you exactly where I was.

That's the thing about secondary roads.

If you travel the interstate system, the signs constantly give you a sense of place.

Chicago — 120 miles.

Nashville — 75 miles.

Memphis — 40 miles.

You recognize the cities. You understand the general direction you're traveling. Even without looking at a map, you have some idea of where you are and where you're headed.

The Hoka Hey was different.

No interstate signs pointing toward familiar cities.

No carefully planned route giving me the big picture.

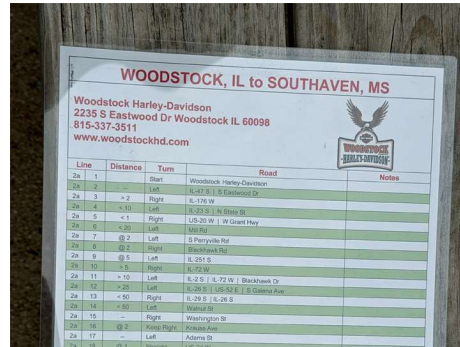
Just the road in front of me and the next line on the page.

For 15 days, I rarely had a real sense of where I was or where I was going.

And eventually, I stopped worrying about it.

For days at a time, that was my world.

The road in front of me and the next line on the page.



Halfway

By Day 7, I finally made it back to Woodstock.

Pulling into the Harley-Davidson dealership felt different this time.

Seven days earlier, I had left that same parking lot not knowing what was waiting for me. Now I was halfway through the Hoka Hey.

Waiting at the dealership were Beth, Junie, John Levins and several others from the Hoka Hey crew, checking in riders as we completed our second checkpoint.

It was around 7:00 in the morning, and the dealership wasn't even open yet.

John was cooking breakfast in the parking lot—sausage and eggs.

After a week on the road, those sausage patties looked pretty good. I ate several of them while taking care of the Indian and preparing for whatever came next.

I checked the oil.

Good.

Then the tire pressures.

Both needed a little air, so I topped them off.

That was about all the Indian needed.

Considering what I had already put that motorcycle through during the first half of the Hoka Hey, I couldn't complain about that.

Familiar Faces

There were a couple of tents set up in the dealership parking lot.

Inside were Rolo and Raindrop, getting some sleep before continuing.

I had been leapfrogging with Rolo for the previous couple of days. That's how relationships seemed to develop during the Hoka Hey. You might ride with someone for a while, lose them at a fuel stop, see them again hours later—or maybe the next day.

Everyone was riding their own ride, but certain riders kept reappearing.

Rolo had become one of those familiar faces.

Then it was time to find out where I was going next.

I received another set of directions.

I looked at the checkpoint.

Southern Thunder Harley-Davidson.

Southaven, Mississippi.

So it was true.

Group 1 had completed the northern loop.

Now we were switching.

I was headed south.

The Other Half

There was something especially satisfying about seeing Southaven, Mississippi on that sheet of paper.

That was home territory.

I had spent the previous week riding through places where half the time I didn't even know what state I was in, much less recognize the little towns I was passing through.

Now my next checkpoint was practically in my own backyard.

I was halfway through the Hoka Hey Motorcycle Challenge.

The northern loop was behind me.

Approximately 5,500 miles down.

Approximately 5,500 miles to go.

The Indian was running well.

I was feeling good.

And by now, I had figured out how to live within this crazy challenge.

Seven days earlier, I had left Woodstock wondering exactly what I had gotten myself into.

This time, I didn't have that feeling.

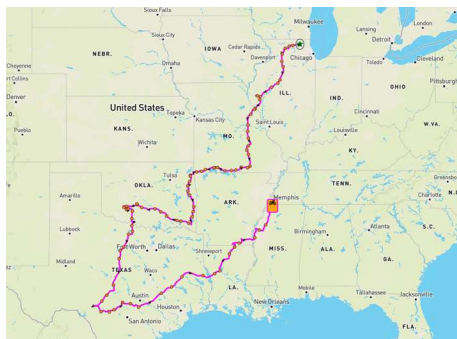
I mounted the new directions to my clipboard, got back on the Indian and pointed it south.

Halfway there.

I was headed home.

Well...

Almost.



Heading South

Leaving Woodstock, the route carried me south across Illinois, into Missouri and eventually west into Oklahoma.

The character of the ride began to change.

The roads weren't quite as relentlessly curvy as they had been on the northern loop.

But the heat made up for it.

By the time I was riding across Oklahoma, the temperature had climbed above 100 degrees.

This was going to be a different kind of challenge.

I recognized the Talimena Scenic Drive as the route took me through that area. It was another road I was familiar with and enjoyed riding, even under Hoka Hey conditions.

From there, the route eventually carried me toward Medicine Park, Oklahoma.

By the time I reached the area, it was dark.

The roads around Medicine Park were slow going at night, and by the time I finally made it through town, it was late.

I needed some sleep.

Near the edge of town, I came across Bubba's, a gas station and convenience store that was closed for the night.

It looked good enough to me.

I pulled up beside the building, threw my eggcrate mat onto the pavement and went to sleep.

My Hoka Hey Hotel for the night.

A few hours later, I was awake, back on the Indian and headed south.

Familiar Territory

As I crossed into Texas, something changed.

I started recognizing towns.

That felt good.

Karen and I have ridden thousands of miles across Texas over the years, participating in long-distance rallies and Iron Butt rides. After spending so much of the northern loop riding through small towns and backroads without really knowing where I was, I finally had a sense of familiarity again.

I knew this country.

The route took me through the Texas Hill Country and onto one of the famous Twisted Sisters, then eventually through Luckenbach.

I have always enjoyed riding Texas.

Well...

Except for the heat.

And there was plenty of it.

Dressed for the Heat

The heat became the biggest challenge of the southern loop for me.

My answer was probably the opposite of what someone watching me ride through 100-degree temperatures might expect.

I kept my KLIM riding gear on.

All of it.

Including the big, heavy jacket.

To me, that gear isn't just protection from cold and rain. In extreme heat, it also provides a barrier between my body and the sun and hot air rushing past me hour after hour.

Over the years, I've come to believe that good riding gear helps protect my body from the elements and allows me to recover better after one long day in the saddle and prepare for the next.

So while it may have looked crazy to see me completely covered in heavy motorcycle gear in triple-digit temperatures, I kept it on.

It worked for me.

From Hot to Steamy

From Texas, the route carried me into Louisiana.

If Oklahoma and Texas had been hot, Louisiana added another ingredient.

Humidity.

It was off the charts.

Then I continued north into Arkansas.

Late that night, the temperature was still around 88 degrees, and the humidity was so thick you could almost cut it with a knife.

Hot.

Steamy.

The moisture hung in the air and was visible in the late-night fog.

When I finally stopped to sleep that night in Arkansas, I made one adjustment to my established Hoka Hey routine.

The jacket came off.

I hung it on the motorcycle to air out while I slept.

Apparently, even my Hoka Hey sleeping wardrobe had limits.

The next morning, I was back on the road.

And this time I was headed somewhere that meant much more to me than just another checkpoint.

Southaven, Mississippi.

Home Territory

The following day, I pulled into Southern Thunder Harley-Davidson in Southaven.

Waiting there for the Mile Monsters riders were Karen and Toni, Jimmy's wife. A few other friends had also come out to see me—Chris O'Neal, Bill Oberst and his wife, Josie.

I was glad to see all of them.

But I was especially glad to see Karen.

There, I received my next set of directions, laminated the pages and mounted them to my clipboard.

Since I was only a few miles from home, I went there and took a shower. My second and final shower during the Hoka Hey.

On the way back to Southern Thunder, I stopped and picked up a

couple of sub sandwiches for Karen and me.

Then we sat down together in the dealership waiting room and ate our sandwiches.

Nothing fancy.

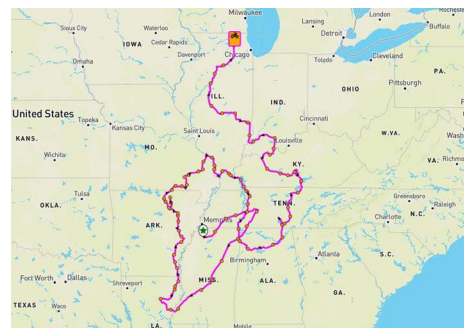
Just dinner with my wife.

But after everything I'd experienced during the previous week, it was nice to sit there with her, eat a sandwich and enjoy a few minutes together.

Then it was time to go.

I said goodbye to Karen, walked outside, climbed onto the Indian and looked at the directions on my clipboard.

Then I headed for wherever the next line told me to go.



The Road to the Finish

Leaving Southaven, the directions sent me toward Nashville on secondary roads and eventually toward the Natchez Trace Parkway.

Before reaching the Trace, I decided to stop for the night at a church.

I wanted some sleep because I knew what was ahead, and I wanted to enjoy it.

I was back on the motorcycle in the wee hours of the morning and soon entered the Natchez Trace.

For the next 450 miles, I followed it all the way to its southern end in Natchez, Mississippi.

After everything I had been riding for the previous week, the Trace felt wonderful.

I set the cruise control.

Sat back.

And enjoyed the ride.

My right forearm especially appreciated the break.

After days of curves, throttle work and technical secondary roads, those long, flowing miles were exactly what I needed.

But reaching Natchez didn't mean I was getting closer to Woodstock.

At least not yet.

I crossed the Mississippi River and entered Louisiana again. Then the route carried me north through Arkansas and into Missouri.

I remember thinking:

I'm heading north again!

Maybe this was it.

Maybe I was finally headed toward Woodstock.

Nope.

The directions turned me east into Kentucky and then south through Land Between the Lakes.

South again.

Tennessee.

Mississippi.

Then Alabama, where I eventually stopped for another night's sleep at a church.

The Hoka Hey Mind Game

Those constant changes in direction could really mess with your mind.

By this point in the challenge, I knew Woodstock was the finish. Naturally, every time the route pointed north, part of me started thinking:

This is it. I'm headed back.

Then the next directions would send me east.

Or west.

Or south again.

The finish line might be north of me, but that didn't mean the Hoka Hey was ready to let me go there.

When I woke up in Alabama, I headed north again.

Tennessee.

Kentucky.

Then finally...

Indiana.

Now I was really beginning to believe it.

I was getting closer.

"I'll Be There Tonight"

When I was near Tell City, Indiana, I called Karen.

I told her I was coming.

"I'll be there tonight. I'm not going to stop and eat, so please have a sandwich ready for me."

At that point, Woodstock seemed close enough that I could almost taste the finish.

Well...

"Tonight" turned into all night.

The Hoka Hey still had some riding left for me.

A Hoosier's Complaint

After all the incredible scenic and technical roads the Hoka Hey had taken me over, I have to admit I was disappointed when I reached the Hoosier Hills.

The road was in the process of being repaved.

And in my opinion, it wasn't going particularly well.

After thousands of miles of memorable roads across the country, here I was back in my home state expecting something special from the Hoosier Hills—and the road was a mess.

And I say that as a Hoosier.

Come on, Indiana.

You need to up your game!

Moonshine, Illinois

From Indiana, the route carried me back into Illinois and eventually to a place that was very familiar.

Moonshine.

Karen and I had ridden to the Moonshine Lunch Run many times over the years. We knew Terry Hammond back when he was hosting the event, so riding into that area brought back a lot of memories.

Except this time it was dark.

And naturally, the Hoka Hey didn't simply take me through Moonshine and send me on my way.

The directions had me wandering around those little backroads nearby, seemingly making circles through the countryside.

As I followed one turn after another, I remember thinking:

Whoever designed this part of the route knows this area.

Later, I learned I was right.

Junie was originally from Mattoon, Illinois, and knew the history of the Moonshine Lunch Run. It predated the Taco Run held today in Medicine Park, Oklahoma, a popular event with Hoka Hey riders and started by John Levins.

Once again, there was more behind the roads we were riding than I realized at the time.

But by then, I wasn't interested in solving any mysteries.

I wanted Woodstock.

One More Night

Finally, the directions were taking me north.

This time, I really was headed toward Woodstock.

It was getting late.

Really late.

I considered pulling over and getting some sleep.

Then it started raining.

So I kept riding.

The rain continued.

And so did I.

Hour after hour, through the night, I followed the directions north.

The sandwich Karen had waiting for me “that night” was going to have to wait a little longer.

Morning arrived.

And finally, so did Woodstock.



The Finish

At approximately 8:00 a.m. on Sunday, August 16, I pulled into the finish at Woodstock Harley-Davidson.

It was day 15.

Fourteen days and two hours after I had ridden out of that same parking lot.

I had made it.

The End of the Road Party had ended about 12 hours earlier.

Only eleven riders had made it back in time for the party.

By the time I reached Woodstock, I was the 17th rider (unofficially) to return.

There was no big finish-line celebration waiting for me.

The party was over.

But there was one person who was still there.

Karen.

She was waiting for me.

After riding through the rain all night, after all those miles, wrong turns, secondary roads, heat, humidity and everything else the Hoka Hey had thrown at me, seeing

her there meant more to me than any finish-line party could have.

I had made it.

Fourteen days.

Two hours.

11,559 miles.

I couldn't believe it.

I had finished the Hoka Hey.

And I had made a strong run.

Every Mile

Of course, I didn't always ride the route perfectly.

The prescribed Hoka Hey route was approximately 11,001 miles. When I finished, the odometer on my Indian showed that I had ridden 11,559 miles during the challenge.

That doesn't necessarily mean I rode exactly 558 unnecessary miles.

But I didn't need an odometer to tell me that I had ridden extra miles.

I knew I had.

There were missed turns.

Wrong turns.

Times when I traveled several miles before realizing I was off-route.

And every time that happened, I had to turn around and ride those same miles back to the exact point where I had left the prescribed route before continuing.

Those mistakes added up.

I don't know exactly how many additional miles I rode because of navigation errors, but I know it was several hundred.

And I certainly wasn't alone. Other riders made wrong turns and accumulated extra miles of their own.

That was part of navigating the Hoka Hey.

The important thing wasn't whether you made a mistake.

The important thing was what you did when you realized it.

Turn around.

Go back to where you left the route.

Then continue.

No shortcuts.

Those extra miles didn't replace any part of the Hoka Hey route.

They were simply miles you earned the hard way.

The Lesson

For years, I had approached long-distance riding with a plan.

A spreadsheet.

Fuel stops.

Meal stops.

Hotels.

Mileage goals.

I could usually tell you where I expected to be and about what time I would get there.

The Hoka Hey took all of that away.

I didn't know where I would sleep that night.

I didn't know where I would be the following day.

Half the time, I didn't even know what state I was in.

All I had was a motorcycle, a clipboard and the next line of directions.

And somewhere along those 11,559 miles, I realized something.

That was enough.

I didn't have to know where I would sleep.

When I got tired, I would find a place.

I didn't have to know where I would eat.

When I needed food, I would find something.

I didn't have to know where the route was ultimately taking me.

I only needed to know the next turn.

The Hoka Hey was tough.

But in many ways, I made it tough.

Nobody told me how many miles I had to ride each day. Nobody told me when to eat, when to sleep or how quickly I had to finish.

There was only one thing I absolutely had to do.

Ride the route.

So that's what I did.

One line at a time.

One road at a time.

One day at a time.

Until eventually, there were no more lines.

I had finished the Hoka Hey.

After the Finish

Now that it was over, my body seemed to know it.

I was exhausted.

I was hungry.

It had been days since I'd had a shower.

And I had ridden throughout the night to reach Woodstock.

Karen and I headed back to the hotel.

Remember that sandwich I had asked her to have waiting for me the night before?

It was still waiting.

While Karen warmed it up, I took a long-overdue shower.

When I finished, I sat down and ate about half the sandwich. That was all I wanted.

What I really needed was sleep.

I had been awake all night, and after fifteen days of riding, my body had finally reached the point where it was ready to shut down.

I laid down.

And slept.

A Real Meal

Later that afternoon, I woke up and took another shower.

Two showers in one day.

After the Hoka Hey, that felt downright extravagant.

Karen and I headed into Woodstock and went to the BratHaus for a much-needed meal.

Afterward, we caught up with Toni.

Jimmy was still somewhere out there on the route, but he was expected to arrive that night. We wanted to be there when he finished. Toni told us she would let us know when he was getting close, and

Karen and I returned to the hotel for the evening.

I didn't last long.

I went back to sleep.

Sometime after midnight, Karen woke me.

We had missed Jimmy's arrival.

But he was still down at the dealership.

That was enough to get me moving. We jumped out of bed, got dressed and headed back to Woodstock Harley-Davidson.



Full Circle

Jimmy had arrived with Rob Serafin.

Seeing him standing there as a Hoka Hey finisher meant a lot to me. There was a little history behind the two of us being there together.

In 2022, I had introduced Jimmy to long-distance riding. That year, Karen invited Jimmy and Toni to join us on a trip to the Taco Run in Medicine Park, Oklahoma.

While we were there, I introduced Jimmy to several Hoka Hey riders. He was curious. He started asking questions about the challenge—what it was like, what it took to

finish and why these riders kept coming back.

He wanted to do it.

Shortly afterward, Jimmy and Toni completed their first Iron Butt ride together. Jimmy continued doing more long-distance rides over the next couple of years, preparing himself for the 2024 Hoka Hey.

And in 2024, he did it.

Karen and I rode to Homer, Alaska, to meet Toni and watch Jimmy finish his first Hoka Hey.

Now, two years later, we were standing together at the finish of the 2026 Hoka Hey.

Only this time, I wasn't there just to watch.

I had ridden it too.

And there was another twist to the story.

The guy I had introduced to long-distance riding four years earlier was the same guy who had made it possible for me to ride the Hoka Hey. When that unexpected invitation arrived just two weeks before the start, Jimmy had the Indian sitting there ready to go. When I learned the motorcycle had to be registered in my name, he sold it to me.

Without Jimmy, I probably wouldn't have been standing there as Rider #1265.

I had helped introduce him to long-distance riding.

And in the end, he helped lead me to the Hoka Hey.

Funny how things come full circle.

Sometimes the student teaches the teacher.

Now we were both Hoka Hey finishers.

That was pretty special.

Time to Go Home

The following day, Karen left Woodstock and headed to Indiana to spend a few days visiting a cousin before returning home.

I decided to stay one more night.

After fifteen days on the Hoka Hey, I wasn't in any hurry to begin another long ride. I could use another day to recuperate.

Besides, Jimmy would be leaving the following day.

I wanted to ride home with him.

So I rested.

No directions to laminate.

No clipboard to study.

No checkpoint waiting somewhere hundreds or thousands of miles away.

No wondering where I would sleep that night.

For the first time in more than two weeks, there was nowhere I had to be.

The next morning, Jimmy and I would point our motorcycles south and ride home.

This time, we could choose the roads.

This time, we knew where we were going.

And this time, when I got there...

I could stay.

Our Hoka Hey was over.

What had started with an unexpected email, a friend's Indian and ten frantic days of preparation had ended 11,559 miles later in the same parking lot where it began.

Jimmy and I had both made it.

It was time to go home.

Hoka Hey!





Three words that describe you on the road



In my element



Bucket list ride or dream destination
Prudhoe Bay

If your motorcycle could talk, what would it say about you?
Determined, yet relaxed



What's one quirky item you always pack on a trip
An angel from Karen



Best piece of riding advice you've ever received
Ride your own ride



BE EPIC



BE EPIC



BE EPIC



BE EPIC



BE EPIC

BE EPIC

BE EPIC

BE EPIC

BE EPIC

BE EPIC

BE EPIC

BE EPIC

BE EPIC

BE EPIC

BE EPIC

BE EPIC

BE EPIC

BE EPIC

BE EPIC

BE EPIC

BE EPIC

BE EPIC

BE EPIC

BE EPIC

BE EPIC

BE EPIC

BE EPIC

BE EPIC

BE EPIC

BE EPIC

BE EPIC

BE EPIC

BE EPIC

BE EPIC

BE EPIC

BE EPIC

BE EPIC

BE EPIC

BE EPIC

BE EPIC

BE EPIC

BE EPIC

BE EPIC

BE EPIC

BE EPIC

BE EPIC

BE EPIC

BE EPIC

BE EPIC

BE EPIC

BE EPIC

BE EPIC

BE EPIC

BE EPIC

BE EPIC

BE EPIC

BE EPIC

BE EPIC

BE EPIC

BE EPIC

BE EPIC

BE EPIC

BE EPIC

BE EPIC

BE EPIC

BE EPIC

BE EPIC

BE EPIC

BE EPIC

BE EPIC

BE EPIC

BE EPIC

BE EPIC

BE EPIC

BE EPIC

BE EPIC

BE EPIC

BE EPIC

BE EPIC

BE EPIC

BE EPIC

BE EPIC

BE EPIC

BE EPIC

BE EPIC

BE EPIC

BE EPIC

BE EPIC

BE EPIC

BE EPIC

BE EPIC

BE EPIC

BE EPIC

BE EPIC

BE EPIC

BE EPIC

BE EPIC

BE EPIC

BE EPIC

BE EPIC

BE EPIC

BE EPIC

BE EPIC

BE EPIC

BE EPIC

BE EPIC

BE EPIC

BE EPIC

BE EPIC

BE EPIC

BE EPIC

BE EPIC

BE EPIC

BE EPIC

BE EPIC

BE EPIC

BE EPIC

BE EPIC

BE EPIC

BE EPIC

BE EPIC

BE EPIC

BE EPIC

BE EPIC

BE EPIC

BE EPIC

BE EPIC

BE EPIC

BE EPIC

BE EPIC

BE EPIC

BE EPIC

BE EPIC

BE EPIC

BE EPIC

BE EPIC

BE EPIC

BE EPIC

BE EPIC

BE EPIC

BE EPIC

BE EPIC

BE EPIC

BE EPIC

BE EPIC

BE EPIC

BE EPIC

BE EPIC

BE EPIC

BE EPIC

BE EPIC

BE EPIC

BE EPIC

BE EPIC

BE EPIC