

Raising the *Curve to Mile Ratio (C/M)*



Slaying the Tail of the Dragon (Highway 129)

This year's annual "Ride of a Lifetime" was originally planned for Canada. But, due to the COVID19 restrictions, Canada was closed for the summer. Where do we go now? How about the Smokey Mountains area for some curvy road therapy? We've been doing a lot of iron butt rides the past couple years; it was time to wear down the sidewalls again!

So, we decided to use the Iron Horse Motorcycle Lodge as our base camp. This place is located in Stecoah, NC about 25 miles from Deal's Gap and 15 miles from Robbinsville, NC. Here they have about any type of accommodation

that you prefer: private rooms, semi-private rooms, camping sites for tents and RV's. They have a nice dining room where they serve breakfast and dinner. Plus, they have a large outside area with tables, chairs, fire pit for socializing and on special dates they bring in live music.



Iron Horse Lodge

Staying here would give us an opportunity to ride some roads we've ridden and some new roads too.



Tail of the Dragon

Highway 129 Deal's Gap/Tail of the Dragon is 318 curves in 11 miles. Although we have ridden this road numerous times over the years, we had three times to ride it again during our stay; Once pulling the trailer on our way to the Iron Horse Lodge and two other times without the trailer. We did see a lot of corvettes and other exotic sports cars. Nothing new here, just back and forth and back and forth for 11 miles. There are much better roads in this area with a lot more scenery.



Moonshiner 28

Highway 28 from Deal's Gap to Walhalla, SC (103 miles) is known

as Moonshiner 28. We've ridden this road many times. 5 years ago, Karen and I rode the entire length twice. Although we didn't ride the entire length this time, it was the main highway to get to the Iron Horse Lodge. So, we rode a short stretch of it several times over the stay. NC 28 is a wonderful road! It deserves an honorable mention.



Smokey Mtn National Park

Highway 441 between Cherokee, NC and Gatlinburg, TN runs through the Smokey Mountain National Park. On Saturday, July 4, Karen and I started the day riding up to Waynesville, NC, but we quickly noticed the lack of traffic. So, we decided to change our plans and ride through the National Park.

Any other time we've ridden through this park, it had been slow with bumper to bumper traffic. Not this time! Yes, there were cars and campers, but nothing like we had expected. It was a great ride at the posted speed limits. But, when we would reach the start of a trailhead, there would be cars lined up on both sides of the roads! People were definitely out hiking! I don't know how they could social distance! Oh

well, they're enjoying the park on this great holiday! Of course for us, it was a beautiful ride! Temperatures were comfortable that morning. We made it to Gatlinburg. Again, there were people, but nothing like the crowds we were expecting. We did a U-turn and retraced our route. We could tell traffic was starting to pick up as we rode back through the park to Cherokee. The temperatures were picking up too!



Sign of the Times

The town of Cherokee, NC was very restricted. A lot of businesses closed. We ate an Indian Taco and Bison burger at Paul's Family Restaurant. Some friends had mentioned this place, so we thought we would try it. They only offered carryout due to the pandemic. They did have a nice front deck where we sat to eat our lunch. We enjoyed a great lunch, then headed back to the

lodge to cool off before an evening of dinner, live music, and fireworks.



The Rattler

The Rattler is a 25-mile run on NC 209 from Ferguson's Market north of Waynesville to Hot Springs, NC. We didn't know it, but we had already ridden this road too! Maybe we rode it before it had a name! We remember riding through the towns of Luck and Trust. Another great road! We rode it both directions. Beautiful countryside that takes you through a valley of small farms. Plenty of scenery!



Now, here was a new road, the Devil's Triangle! A friend mentioned this area to me about a year ago. This is a 44 mile route that begins just north of Oak Ridge, TN at Brushy Mountain State Penitentiary on TN 116 from there you head north (or clockwise) to TN

330 and TN 62 which takes you back to TN 116. The first and second legs are the best! But, Brushy Mountain State Penitentiary was a hidden gem! Karen and I went back later to spend some time to tour and eat at “The Warden’s Table”. They also have a distillery named “End of the Line Moonshine”!



The Big House

Established in 1896, this prison housed Tennessee’s worst criminals until it closed in 2009. A self-guided tour was very interesting! We watched a 20-minute video that had several wardens and prison guards describing their time working there. This was the end of the line for most of the criminals incarcerated there. And, doing hard time meant mining coal and other various tough labor jobs. From a bird’s eye view, the prison was built in the shape of a cross. It was purposely designed that way!

James Earl Ray, who assassinated Martin Luther King, Jr., spent most of his time at Brushy Mountain until he was diagnosed with cancer. He was then transferred to a Nashville

special needs prison in 1998 where he later died.



Brushy Mountain

Not only does the penitentiary offer tours, a gift shop and distillery, but also concerts are scheduled out in the yard.



Little Switzerland, NC

The Diamondback is another new road for us! This is a 38-mile route that starts in Little Switzerland on NC 226A down to NC 221 then to Toms Creek Road, NC 80 and the Blue Ridge Parkway back to Little Switzerland. We had a blast! Again, more curves than you can imagine. There was some construction on 226, so be mindful of that when riding through here. NC 80 was very

curvy climbing up the mountain to the Blue Ridge Parkway. Just beautiful!



Blue Ridge Parkway

After that, we followed the Blue Ridge Parkway south for about 120 miles. If you’ve ever ridden the parkway, you will know it’s one of the finest motorcycle roads in the world! Beautiful scenic vistas all along the route! If you don’t ride any of the other roads, make sure to ride this one!

After our stay at the Iron Horse Lodge, we packed up and headed to Concord, NC where we had a great visit with Karen’s niece and her family. From there, we headed north to Virginia!



Popular Bonus Location

In Virginia, I wanted to take Karen to Burkes Garden. I had been there a year ago during the Rock n Ride

Rally. Also known as God's Thumbprint, a description of an aerial view of the valley floor within the surrounding mountains.

A Pepsi sign painted on the side of a craft store is a popular bonus location for long distance rallies (scavenger hunts). The lady working in that craft store told us to visit Mattie's Place for lunch. This little store/deli is owned by the Amish. Of course, this was the first time we had seen Amish driving cars and 4-wheelers!

We met a couple of gentlemen riding Gold Wings at the Pepsi sign. They had been following us for the past several miles. Once we stopped, one of the gentlemen opened his trunk and pulled out a drone. He programmed it to follow him and take videos as he and his friend rode around the area. How cool is that!

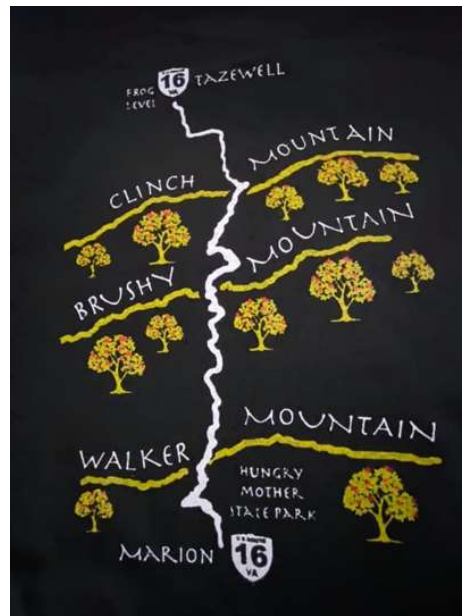


God's Thumbprint

We rode around the area and stopped at Mattie's for lunch. It was a great ride with beautiful scenery! Bright green farmland with hundreds of round hay bales and barns covering the valley floor. I'm

glad Karen enjoyed it as much as I did!

And, riding out of Burkes Garden was just as fun as riding in. Up the curvy mountain road to the top, then down the curvy road to the bottom.



Back of the Dragon

While planning the trip, I found "The Back of the Dragon" a 32-mile stretch of VA 16 between Marion, VA and Tazewell, VA. The BOTD includes 428 curves over three mountain ranges. This was a big surprise to us! Curvy riding up a mountain and back down, then a beautiful valley of farmland before doing it again two more times. If you've never ridden the BOTD, I highly recommend this great road!

Evidently, the BOTD is a relatively new tourist attraction. One of the locals, a retired Army veteran moved back to his hometown. After riding great roads while stationed in Europe, he thought that riders

would enjoy VA 16 too. Once he returned, he began promoting the road and even had a meeting with the Governor of Virginia. That meeting provided him with a grant to promote tourism in the area and build the BOTD visitors center and gift shop. I'm sure tourism will grow in this area as it is a beautiful place with great roads to ride!



Visitors Center and Gift Shop

Now, our vacation was coming to an end. All in all, traffic was pretty thin for our entire 9-day vacation. I attribute this to COVID19. We did end up riding over 2,700 miles.

Let's count just a few of the curves:

318 x 3 = 954 Tail of Dragon

234 x 2 = 468 Rattler

428 x 1 = 428 Back of Dragon

Those 3 roads accounted for 1,850 curves in only 90 miles! No doubt about it! We definitely raised our curve to mile ratio (*CM*) on our 20th Annual ride of a lifetime!

