

A large crowd gathered outside a popular Shorewood restaurant. It wasn't your normal crowd, but a group of die-hard bikers. It was too early in the riding season to guess who would have the fortitude to make it home... who would survive the grueling hours in the saddle, the relentless miles through deep gravel, the torrential downpours as the skies opened up and the dreaded GPS induced U-turns. They had signed up for this ride of their own free will. Had they known what lied ahead, perhaps they would have turned back. But no one did. This is the story of the...

“Northern Kentucky Ride”.

Fueled and ready to go. Seventeen riders on thirteen bikes lined up outside Matty's Restaurant in Shorewood. The ride started as many rides do... breakfast. Seventeen riders. Why was I counting eighteen people? We had Bob & Kathy, Charley & Dawn, Larry T., Larry Y., Lee G., Lee L., Tim, Michael, Bill & Linda, Jesse, John L., Ron & Tracy and me. Way at the other end, joining us for breakfast and a sendoff was number eighteen, Al H.

Everyone arrived well before the 8:00 KSU time and was enjoying their breakfast, signing the waiver and checking out the route maps when I heard it. What every Ride Leader wants to hear before the kick stands are even up... “Oh, he's going THAT way? I would go...”. Despite that, everyone did what they were supposed to do. Follow. Even following me on my left turn when I was supposed to go straight. I knew it was coming. I led the ride last year and for miles leading up to that intersection I had been telling myself not to turn left there. I didn't listen and received my first “strike”, the dreaded U-turn. I tried to tell myself I just wanted to see what Michael's new Victory looked like rolling, but even I wasn't buying it. No matter how hard you try, you can't disguise a U-turn.

Once we cleared Kankakee it was clear sailing down Route 45 on the same route I had used last year. Comfort stops and fuel stops all carefully planned out. What wasn't planned for was the Bridge-Out-Ahead sign which sent us on our first detour (if you don't count that U-turn). I knew I had to go a little south and a whole lot east, so on we went paralleling Route 45 until I felt it was time to go east. Our first comfort/fuel stop was in Milford, IL. Already past where I should have turned east, my original route was a thing of the past.

My recall is somewhat blurred as to the events that followed. I do recall a small patch of gravel road that according to my GPS was paved. How long can a gravel road last? In Indiana, the answer is forever. It could not have been more than eleven/twelve miles although some say it seemed like twenty-seven. I do remember at about ten miles into the gravel, seeing in my mirrors back through the dust cloud, twelve dusty bikes chasing one relatively clean lead bike and having the movie title “The Dirty Dozen” pop into my head.



We finally made it back to pavement and headed east. Note: “Gravel Virgin” John L. is now a seasoned gravel rider. The price he paid? His months-old Honda may never be the same.

Somewhere along the way, I think it was after the gravel incident (like I said... my mind is trying to block that out), the troops were getting hungry and we found a little restaurant where we had lunch. The look on the faces of the restaurant’s staff was priceless... as if they had never had that many customers at one time before. Next stop, GAS!!

The man at the restaurant told us where the nearest gas station was. My fault. I assumed he meant it was still there, not “where the nearest gas station WAS”. “Strike two” (I’m considering the gravel an adventure, not a strike). No gas station, so on we went. Bob was running on fumes and others were getting low as we drove on for another twenty minutes in search of a station. We finally found a station and stopped. Unfortunately, Bob stopped about two blocks short of the station having run out of gas. Bob, being Bob, had a small can of gas with him, so he put the contents in his tank and after a few minutes met us at the gas station.

Bob got to the gas station just as the wind and rain got there. We were all under the canopy staying dry except for Jesse who saw an opportunity to get a free bike wash and parked by the building.

The rain and wind kept us there for thirty minutes or so before it subsided enough for us to venture out into it. Skirting Indianapolis is bad enough on a normal day, but when you add rain and raingear to it, it makes for a miserable ride. Once we cleared Indianapolis, we aimed for I-74 to make up time we lost with the rain delay and gravel adventure. Eventually we made it to our accommodations in Florence, KY.

With a Day One like we had, what could possibly dampen the spirits of Day Two? Dampen is a poor choice of words. The on and off rain that escorted us since Indianapolis was still with us. Determined as we were, everyone but an optimistic Ride Leader put on the raingear and headed out. Two minutes later we pulled into a Speedway and I put my gear on, too.

The first scheduled stop was Rabbit Hash, KY. The ride to Rabbit Hash was nothing short of a delight. Just outside Florence on Route 18 the hills and curves begin and don't stop. We found a two-mile loop of one-lane road that took hills and curvy to the next level. The wet roads turned out to be a blessing because they slowed us down enough to be able to look around and take in the scenery that makes that area a great place to ride.



We can only imagine what it would have been like had the cloudy skies and fog given way to sunshine. Life moves at a slower pace in Rabbit Hash, so we had to wait a few minutes for the town to "open".





We then left the river roads behind us and headed east on some county roads. The roads did not let us down as much as my GPS did and I was awarded another “strike” for a U-turn. A wrong turn and a search for a “comfort stop” made us a little late for lunch in Falmouth, KY. John Bercaw had found the “Assembly Café” for the 2012 Kentucky Ride lunch stop and I liked it enough to make a return visit. Let’s just say you can’t please everyone all the time and you can’t please some, period.

The after-lunch route should have taken us southeast into Ohio for a visit to a State Park, but the weather was not cooperating and the skies were much darker to the southeast. We cut the ride short and headed back to Florence. A few detoured to see John and Cynthia Bercaw’s house since they did not get a chance to see it last year.

John and Cynthia came back to the hotel with the house visitors so they could socialize with the rest of us in the hotel lobby area before we all headed off to dinner. We all had dinner, but not all at the same place. Long story.

Day Two ended back in the hotel lobby for some unwinding.

We headed home at a decent hour in the morning of Day Three. A scenic route north on Indiana Route 1 led us to our first comfort stop where Bill’s headlight bulb decided it wanted to be changed. Lee G. got right on it... actually, under it. When the bulb became stubborn, Bill, Linda and the two Lees stayed back to finish the job. The rest of us ended up on I-74 and took it into Danville, IL for our lunch stop.

We found a family restaurant where we were split up into smaller groups. Michael, the two Larrys and I were at our own table and no doubt due to Larry T’s “friendliness” were soon dubbed the “Wild Hogs”. Our server Joey even called over other servers to see who was at her table and to introduce us. While we were having fun inside, Charley was outside dealing with a less than enjoyable predicament. His battery had somehow discharged while he was inside eating and now his bike was dead. Of course, the

“Wild Hogs” had to finish dessert before we went outside to assist, but once out there, Charley used Larry Y.’s jumper cables to get his bike going again and off we rode.

Following a gas stop, I thought it would be a nice idea to stop for ice cream and partake in the “Thanks for coming on the ride” speech.

I should not have promised clear sailing the rest of the way since we were almost “close to home” because within fifteen minutes I was leading us into another detour. That same bridge-out that got me on the way down got me again. I thought I was far enough north, but it was thinking that had gotten me into trouble before... so why not one more time. The detour wasn’t too bad and actually cut a few minutes from our route.

The final “scenic” route was Route 102 along the north side of the Kankakee River. We headed up I-55 toward Shorewood as riders started branching off and heading home.

It was a great ride mostly due to the group of riders we had... many of them eagerly awaiting next year’s ride.

Together we logged 16,065 miles, got wet, got dusty, went up hills, went down hills, went slow, went slower and saw a few roads from both directions on the 3-day ride.

Next year’s “Northern Kentucky” ride may prove to be just as adventurous, but might be renamed to the “Indiana R.U.G. Ride” (R.U.G. means Rain, U-turns and Gravel).

Ken Kutschke

Ride Leader – 2013 Northern Kentucky Ride