

RALPH AND BILL'S "TOUR AMERICA" MOTORCYCLE CLUB

In 1992, my friend of over 20 years, Ralph Stevens, and I met at a retirement dinner in honor of a mutual friend. We sat at the same table and reminisced about the "good old days". When the topic turned to motorcycles, Ralph said he had been thinking about "Touring America" on a motorcycle, when he was "RIFED" (Reduction In Force) from the Defense Contractor we both work for. I told Ralph that I was also getting a RIF and would be interested in the trip. To make a long story short, we both independently purchased ¹⁹⁷⁹ Yamaha ^{XS} SX/1100 bikes and in 1993 started planning "The Trip".

The first complication came along when we both received extensions on our employment and found we were both going to be employed through 1994. We weren't complaining about being employed, but it did get in the way of our 14,000 mile trip.

In May 1995, I traded in the reliable XS-1100 for a new 1994 Teal Aspencade and we decided to do a portion of the trip. In September 1994 we made a 3,600 mile, 9 state, 9 day, no rain, trip. *That Ralph prepared a newsletter to record the highlights.* Ralph finally retired in March 1995 but I received another extension. So, the trip I'm going to tell you about is the Southwestern states portion of "The Trip" we made in April 1995.

04/15/95 Saturday 7:00AM 50 degrees

"Beginning The SW Adventure"

We planned to leave my house in San Jose California at 07:00 AM sharp. I was running a little late and called Ralph to have him be at my house at 7:15. Ralph couldn't find his sleeping bag and he welcomed the additional time. We finally left my house at 8:00 AM. Ralph and I like to ride for a couple of hours before we stop for

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breakfast. This technique also gives you the impression that you had an early start. As we pulled away from my house, we welcomed the 50 degree temperature because we knew it would be much hotter as we went South and eventually East into Arizona, New Mexico, Utah and Nevada. (See map) ←, ?

We headed south on US 101 towards our "Day 1" destination, Santa Barbara. We passed through Gilroy, "**Garlic capital of the world**" and Castroville, "**Artichoke capital of the world**". I find garlic to be a very tasty addition to many dishes, but I am not a fan of artichokes. We stopped at Mickey D's in Soledad for breakfast then proceeded South ^{on} US 101. ← ?

We always keep a sharp eye on our fuel usage. Ralph's XS-1100 needs gas every 120-150 miles and my Wing gets thirsty at about 220-260 Miles. So I fill up every other time that Ralph does. We decided to get gas in San Miguel. Ralph had traveled 157 miles, a new world's record for Ralph. We decided to lower our cruising speed, for this trip, to 60 MPH and the improved gas mileage was one of the benefits.

About 70 miles north of Santa Barbara, the air became very cool, ^{but} we were well dressed and welcomed the cool temperatures. The closer we got to Santa Barbara the more exquisite the views of the Pacific Ocean became, they were breathtaking. I noticed that it was going to be a stretch for my Wing to get to my first planned gas stop, Isla Vista, so we slowed it down ^{to} about 5⁵ MPH. Well that did the trick, we arrived at Isla Vista about 2:00 PM and the Wing took 6.1 gallons, 282 miles, that's cutting it too close on a tank that holds 6.1 gallons.

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We were going to spend the night in Santa Barbara, but we were also going to visit my son Rob in Isla Vista. Rob is a student with a full-time job in Santa Barbara. I called from the gas station but he was not at home so Ralph and I removed a couple of layers of clothing and drove by my son's apartment to leave a note. On the way, I picked up a squeal coming from the front-end of the Wing. We went a couple of freeway exits and I decided, I had better take a closer look. We stopped at another gas station and I proceeded to pull the front rotor covers. Everything was tight and straight, so I reinstalled the covers and "Voile" the noise was gone. I must have picked up a rock or a piece of debris and when I removed the covers it fell out. As I was replacing the covers, Ralph thought it would be appropriate to take a picture of me in my "Hour of Misery", but Ralph's ^{35mm} camera was missing! We retraced our steps back through Isla Vista, but never found the camera. Ralph mentioned that the fanny pack containing the camera had a faulty clasp and it probably fell off somewhere along the way.

We made our way to Bill and Pam Elliot's house and after a super dinner at a restaurant close to the beach, a few hours of great conversation and a cup of Bill Elliott's well engineered espresso, we hit the rack with full bellies and windburned faces.

04/16/95 Sunday

"Ramp in Southern California"

On Sunday morning we bid a fond farewell to Bill and Pam and were on our way by 7:00 AM. We stopped for breakfast at Carrow's and headed south on US 101 in a light drizzle. We were heading for the city of Cypress to visit Jerry Wheeler, an old chum that went to High School with Ralph. Jerry and his family were heading for a

musical event?? RALPH AND BILL'S "TOUR AMERICA" MOTORCYCLE CLUB

graduation ceremony or something like that, so we didn't stay too long. Jerry brought out the "Yearbooks" and he and Ralph talked about old school mates, where they were and what they were doing. Jerry had been taking piano lessons and his son was an accomplished trombone player. So we were serenaded by Jerry on the piano and his son on the Trombone. After taking a final look at "Punky's" H.S. picture we took some pictures and left Jerry's, just as it started to rain *harder.*

Raining much earlier

Our next destination was Border Field State Park, the keystone of this entire trip, because it is the Southwestern most point of land in the USA. We went all the way to the Mexican border and never saw a sign or a turnoff for the park. We swallowed our male pride and asked for directions at a gas station. Apparently the normal entrance to the park had been washed out by the torrential rains they were having in this area. So we hung a U-turn and headed North, back to San Diego. We had to cross the Ultra-High Coronado bridge during a driving rainstorm, then go south towards the park. As the rain increased to a torrent, we stopped under an overpass and put on our raingear. We finally got to "The Park" on a miserable road covered with mudslides, water and potholes. We met a US border guard at the entrance to the park and he told us that the park was open but we should proceed with caution because of the condition of the road. We decided not to take the "Mudbog Dirt Road" into the park, instead we took a picture of the border guard, just as it started to rain again. Border Field State Park was very disappointing, but with the adventure of the trip ahead we turned North and headed for Escondido CA., our final destination for the day. On the way we passed by the Miramar Naval Air Station, "Fighter Town USA", made famous by the movie "Top Gun" that starred that guy that's married to

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Nicole Kidman.

We spent the night at a friendly motel in Escondido. The woman on the desk seemed a little reluctant about "The Motorcycles", but we reassured her that we would not race the engines at 6:00 am and wake all the other guests. We walked down to a local eatery, had dinner and retired for the night.. It was at this point that I really felt like we were taking a trip. We were leaving the familiar sights of California and heading for our next destination, Mesa, Arizona

04/17/95 Monday

We generally rise at 6:00 AM and today was no exception. We got an early start and headed across the San Bernadino Mountains for the Coachella Valley, "**Date Capital of the World**" I remembered the woman at the AAA office that prepared our maps saying, "Highway xx is a very winding road with a lot of curves and elevation changes and you can get there faster on Highway zz".

We opted for highway xx and as we approached the pass to get over the San Bernardino mountains, we got our first view of the summit. Six inches of snow had fallen during the night and although the roads were clear the air was very cool. As we descended the eastern side of the mountain range, the air became warmer and warmer and when we got to I-10 we pulled over and switched to warm weather clothes.

As we approached Chirachaua, California we came across the "General George S. Patton Memorial Museum", out in the middle of the desert heading East on Interstate 10. About 10 -12 Army tanks, armored personnel carriers (Some of them Made by our Company) and other military vehicles surrounded the museum and

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appeared to be holding the museum hostage in some sort of mock war games. Actually it was just a static display and people of all ages were crawling all over the vehicles taking pictures to show the folks back home. We made a stop in Coachella CA. to visit ^{ARIZONA} ARMTEK CORP. Ralph had worked there as an engineer in the 70's and just wanted to take a picture of the facility for posterity. While we were stopped in front of the main building, members of the ARMTEK security staff approached us and wanted to know what we were doing. Ralph talked to the two gentlemen and after asking if "old what's his name" was still there, "Old what's his name" came out of the building. Ralph spent close to an hour kissing, hugging and taking pictures of old cronies (Some of them were even women). It was like a class reunion. We were glad we stopped and finally got back on the highway after we looked for a place that made "Date Shakes". Ralph said, "you haven't lived until you've had a date shake. I had a "snappy reply" to Ralph's comment, but I let it lie as we accelerated on the onramp and again headed East on I-10 towards Mesa Arizona.

- -Blythe CA. 60 miles to Blythe about 60 degrees in the high desert. 4.2 gallons
- 12420 180 miles
- 140 miles to phoenix.
- Goodyear, gas, 80 degrees
- -Phoenix, Hit Phoenix ^{ARIZONA} at rush hour and it was pretty hectic going. Met with Joe

Stark, a former employee at our plant, and got the grand tour of his "Ranch". Joe is really enjoying his retirement with his kids and we enjoyed the hour or so we spent

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with Joe and his family. Next stop is Mesa Arizona. Joe's directions said just follow 44th Ave to University Ave. In Tempe. I had lived here for 4 years and if I found Tempe, we were all set. Somehow we "zigged when we shoulda zagged" and spent 20 minutes trying to get out of Sky Harbor Airport. We finally got to Bruce Johnson's house and realized we had not yet crossed into another Timezone. So it was 8:30 p.m., not 9:30. We went out with Bruce and got some Pizza ^{and beer than} and settled in for a short snooze about midnight. Bruce was heading to his job at a southern Arizona mining Co. and was leaving at 5:30, so Ralph and I got up at 5:00 AM and got a very early start.

04/18/95 Tuesday

A Durability Test Day

I had been stationed outside of Chandler Arizona in the mid-1960's with the USAF, so we decided to take a side trip to Williams Air Force Base to take a quick look at the base. Well the military is pretty much out of the base. There are several private businesses occupying some of the buildings. I had also heard that "Willie Patch" as it was affectionately called, would be the site of an air race later this year. Arizona State has an extension here and the Superstitions Mountains are still a very familiar backdrop to the Base. The "Lost Dutchman Gold Mine" is purported to be hidden somewhere in the Superstitions and many a modern day prospector has lost his life in the pursuit of the gold. We had breakfast at Mickey D's in Apache Junction and proceeded North on highway 60 heading for globe and Miami on our way to Holbrook. Stopped at the Magma Mine in Superior so Ralph could reminisce about the years that he had worked ^{with the Bureau of Mines and Bruce Johnson} ~~as an engineer~~ at the mine. As we rode through the beautiful Arizona countryside there was a solid overcast as we passed through 3000

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ft. We turned North on highway 77 and headed for Showlow. We stopped at one of the many "Vista Points" and talked with two Harley riders that had stopped to shed some clothing. "The temperature was in the high 40's to Low 50's, but got colder as you approached Showlow", they told us. They also said that Showlow had received 6 inches of snow during the night and it was about 10 degrees colder. Ralph and I cinched up our jackets and pointed the bikes towards Showlow.

By the time we got to Showlow Arizona, 6300 ft in elevation, it was snowing lightly and the temperature was in the 20's or 30's. We stopped at Burger King for Pie and coffee, analyzed our options and decided to continue towards Holbrook.

We gassed up at Holbrook, 5,000ft elevation, the temperature was in the 30's and it was raining. It was only 100 miles to Gallop New Mexico and we had traveled in the rain before so we jumped on the freeway. We went 10 miles east towards Gallop, hit freezing rain, turned around and headed back to Holbrook. We pulled into a Best Western Motel and discussed our options while we stood in front of a roaring fire in the lobby. After watching the weather report on TV, we decided to spend the night at ^{The} a very nice Best Western Motel, we ate at Denny's (Not Ralph's favorite eatery, Ralph is a "Fast Food" man, no tipping required at fast food restaurants), went back to the motel and started to talk about contingency plans for the rest of the trip. ^{The weather report was} 31 degrees, 11 degree wind chill ^{and} 1-5 inches of snow is eminent.

We gassed up in Holbrook and in spite of the rain, 31 degree-temperature, 11 degree wind chill factor and forecast of 1-5 inches of snow, we headed east on Hwy. 40 for Gallop New Mexico. Gallop was about a 100 miles away and we were dressed

Dupe

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for the cold weather. We got 10 miles east of Holbrook and the rain had turned to freezing rain and we decided to return to Holbrook to spend the night.

04/19/95 Wed

Held up in Holbrook,

We got up at our regular time, 6:00 AM, and found that it was 28 degrees and snowing. We had a leisurely breakfast, packed up our bags and at about 11:30 we headed east on Hwy. 40 again, slight rain, 35 degrees, 11 degree wind chill factor.

• Gallop, New Mexico, Pie and coffee, (ATM) nasty cold, nasty clouds, low 30's it just snowed. Exit 20 route 666 1:50 PM heading for Shiprock, New Mexico. Shiprock is named after a very, very, very large outcropping of rock that is visible for many miles before you hit the Shiprock city limits. About halfway to Shiprock we went through one helacious blizzard, 35 MPH crosswinds, left to right horizontal snow, mid 20's. We really had to hang on. Rain and snow storms were all around us, it was really beautiful, we even stopped to take pictures. In an instant the sun came out, and created a dense, low to the ground, fog. We had to slow down to about 35 mph for visibility.

We pulled into Shiprock about 3:30, gassed up and went searching for a motel. There are no motels in Shiprock, We went from one end to the other, no motels to be found. Proceeded 30 miles east to Farmington for the night. The only motel with outside doors was a Motel Six (Ralph's favorite). We got a room, parked the bikes and proceeded to unload. We both noticed the many, many signs above the doors to almost every room stating, "We are not responsible for your stuff". We looked at each other and then also noticed what looked like a set of railroad tracks with a lot of people milling around about 40 yards from the motel. Ralph went back to the lobby

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and asked if we were in a high crime area, he was told that we weren't and we decided to stay. We walked over to the "Tracks" and found to our delight that it was a beautiful "River Walk" with people just enjoying the view.

04/20/95 Thursday "Forest Gump, where are you?"

We left Farmington New Mexico heading East towards "Four Corners". At Tec Nos Paz we gassed up and turned North. There was a cold, 33 degree wind whistling past our helmets. ^{when we} Got to four corners, ^{he said} wind ^{was} blowing ^{at} about 35 MPH ^{and} Tribal meeting going on, ^{there was} not too many trinket sellers, ^{nor} not too many tourists, ^{so we} took pictures, ^{and} took off for ^{scouted} Monument Valley.

North on 191, we entered the loop that will take us through "Monument Valley". We had to pull over twice to let fast moving, West to East, storm cells pass. As we hit the top of the loop and turned South, we were unable to avoid the storm cells and took a shellacking for about 20 minutes as we passed through a storm of freezing rain. As the storms subsided the skies were filled with dark brooding clouds that looked like the sun was setting. It was too early in the day for sunset, it was the red sandstone reflecting a shade of pastel pink off the bottom of the clouds, what a beautiful site. As we came over a rise there was a stunning view of the sandstone giants that populate Monument Valley. I stopped and in the 36 degree ^{temperature} snapped a picture. I later found out that this was the exact spot in "Forest Gump" where he decided he had run far enough. I didn't see the movie until after our return, and sure enough there it was, "Forest Gump, where are you?"

- -Kayenta got a little wet, got a lot cold, a little snow, a little rain, a lot of fun. Heading for rain storm, 6,000 feet

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- South on Hwy. 89 30 miles to Flagstaff, high 20's Snowing, 7100 ft.
- Flagstaff, snowing for the last 30 miles or 40 minutes of our time. It snowed really hard, ^{and we each} had almost two inches of snow on the windshield when we arrived at the HOJO Motel in Flagstaff. We could not have gone on much further, even though we were dressed for cold weather, it was just a little too much to bear for much longer. Hands and feet were quite cold when we finally got into the motel. We met two or three other riders on Harleys, ^{too} They were coming from Albuquerque ~~and were~~ heading for a big rally in Laughlin Nevada. Ralph and I really agonized over the prospect of not going to the Grand Canyon in the morning, but good sense prevailed and we decided to head east to Kingman in the morning. We would have had to go over an 8,000 foot pass to get from Grand Canyon to Zion National Park in Utah and the thought of even the slightest amount of snow persuaded us to head east.

04/21/95 Friday Flagstaff Arizona

Winter Continues at Grand Canyon

When we arose in the morning, the bikes were covered with 6-12 inches of the fluffy white stuff, no it wasn't chicken feathers, it was snow. Flagstaff schools were closed because of the snow. As we returned from breakfast, it began snowing again, not heavy, but any additional snow was going to mean an added delay to departure. I got out the precious "Goldbook" and called a fellow "Winger" Norm Braun. Norm suggested renting a truck, loading up the bikes and driving to Kingman. We called a local renter and it was almost \$200 to rent a truck, thanks, but no thanks. While we were waiting, Ralph trekked through the snow to a local drugstore to get a "Pseudo Gift" for his daughter Kelle to symbolize the trip to Grand Canyon that we never

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made. Flagstaff is a great city, but one night was all we wanted to stay. Ralph found a serving tray in the room that was obviously put there to be used as a snow shovel and we proceeded to shovel a path for the bikes to get out of our parking spot. The wisdom of our decision to head west was complicated by the fact that the roads were covered with snow. The sun broke through and began to melt the snow and by 11 am, we said good-bye to Flagstaff and headed out on the wet, slushy and deeply-puddled city streets towards I-40. It was a welcome pleasure to see that I-40 was as dry as a bone when we made the turn to the ^{west} east and headed for Williams and Kingman and lower altitude. Although the road was clear it was bone-chilling cold and the newly fallen snow was swirling across the highway as we made our way toward the last high pass. As we crested the 7,000 ft. "Arizona Divide" we knew it was downhill all the way to Kingman.

At about 2:00PM, we stopped for our traditional pie and coffee in Kingman. It was cool and overcast. About 70 miles south of Las Vegas as we turned North on State highway 93. We were about 40 miles from Boulder Dam. There were hundreds of Harleys everywhere, sometimes they were in front of us, sometimes they were behind us and sometimes we were right in the middle of a group of twenty or thirty of them as they rumbled past us to overtake slower vehicles, like us. There's a big rally in Laughlin, I'd like to see that, but the call of Las Vegas is stronger, have fun guys, adios.

It was 5:00PM when we arrived in Las Vegas as we headed for the Silver Saddle Stadium where 100 of my closest friends were engaged in a 4 day 1/8 scale, gas, radio control car race. For those of you that have never seen these "Road Rockets,

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they are about 20 inches long, 5-5 1/2 lbs., 2 wheel and 4 wheel drive, 1, 2 & 3 speed automatic transmissions and reach speeds in excess of 70 MPH actual speed. The Las Vegas race was being run by the oldest, and maybe the largest continuous 1/8 scale gas car club in America. The RAMS have been racing since 1968 and are stronger than ever.

Well, I took a wrong turn somewhere and we never got to the stadium. We finally gave up and headed West towards Barstow California, our final destination for the night. On the way out of Nevada, I just couldn't resist and stopped to try my luck at The last bastion of chance on I-15, Whiskey Pete's hotel and casino. After 20 minutes and getting back to my original investment, we said so long to Nevada and headed for Barstow.

We arrived in Barstow about 8:15 at night and it took 3 stops at various motels before we settled in at the Best Western. We unloaded our gear for the last time, and headed for dinner. We had fish this evening and probably too much as we meandered back to the motel to watch a little TV and got to bed about 11:00 PM.

04/22/95 Friday 6:00AM

"TAKE ME HOME"

What a treat it was to look out the motel window in the morning and discover it wasn't snowing or raining. It was our last day on the road, a comfortable 51 degrees and light traffic as Barstow fast disappeared in our rearview mirrors. As we headed West on highway 58 we passed Edwards Air Force Base, ^{the} West coast alternate, and often used, landing site for the space shuttle. It's about 55 degrees, almost a heat wave. We stopped for breakfast in Tehacapi at a diner style restaurant that had a railroad motif and atmosphere. The booths were fashioned after what you might see

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in a railroad car many years ago. The menus were unique, they resembled a newspaper of the period and had not only the choices for breakfast but some interesting stories about the region and its link to the railroad.

Bakersfield here we come.

- Final leg 220 to San Jose, clear 60 degrees, gas at Buttonwillow, 14060, 233 mi. 5.5 gals 125 miles to go should be home by 3:30. As we made the turn onto Hwy. 152, we were within an hour or so of San Jose and as we came upon San Luis Reservoir it was really a sight to see it full to the brim with water. Capacity is about 2 million acre feet and about 365 feet at its deepest point. 4.50⁰

As we made the turn on Meridian Ave. and wheeled into my driveway, I couldn't help but feel like it was over before it began and I was almost ready to do it again. After being greeted by Sherma, we gave her Ralph's video camera and we went around the block so the video would look like we had a camera crew waiting for our return. Ralph and I did the customary handshake and took a long look at the bikes, which had performed beautifully throughout the trip. Ralph is getting ready to do the rest of the country, by himself, so if you see a 1979 Yamaha XS-1100 tooling down the highways of America, it may be Ralph. Give him a wave and directions to the "Fast Food Row" in your locale. See ya.