

## It's about the ride and the GWRRA family

It was about 7 a.m. when we got our act together and headed out of town on our two week ride that would take us about 2300 miles. The first portion of our ride would take us up through the west coast of Florida, from Clearwater to Chiefland then Live Oak. We would make stops in Douglas, Georgia and then an overnight stay in Dublin, Georgia. The route we selected took us on all rural roads where traffic was light, which gave us the opportunity to really enjoy the small towns and smell the fragrance of the farmlands that we passed by. The weather couldn't have been better. It was slightly overcast with the temperatures in the mid 60's. Upon arriving at Dublin it was only a short walk to a nearby eatery where we enjoyed a tasty meal and then headed back to our rooms.

Waking up the next morning was quite a surprise. It was a clear bright sun shining day with the temperature just hovering above freezing! Bundled up with grip and seat heaters turned on we headed up to Milledgeville, Madison and then up through Athens, Georgia. The bright sun felt good and by the time we reached Athens we shed our survival attire to more comfortable riding clothing.

We took a break at Tallulah Falls which enabled us to stretch our



legs, take a few pictures and down some liquids. Pressing on, we made our way up to Clayton then headed west to Hiawassee,

which would be our home base for the remainder of the week.



The hotel was a short walk away from a nice country style buffet where we would replace lost calories from long days of enjoyable mountain riding. To our astonishment our

nearby eatery was where chapter Georgia J held their monthly gatherings.

During the early stages of planning our trip, our senior chapter directors Tracy and Sharon Dunn contacted the chapter directors in Hiawassee, Georgia (Chapter GA-J) to see if they would be able to give us any ideas where some of the less known good rides could be found. Wow, in the true family spirit of GWRRA, Bob and Kathy Hill set us up with some of their members who were more than willing to show us their back roads. After contacting Sandy and Gordon Tumb, the ACD's of chapter J, we decided that maybe instead of heading out at 8:30 am the next morning, that 9:30 would be better so that the frost could burn off.



At 9:30 the next morning Sandy, Gordon, Tom, Jill, Roger, Dotty and Nester from chapter J showed up at the hotel ready to show us some lesser known roads.

We left Hiawassee and headed up to Hayesville on Rte. 69. The passing cold front had left the air crystal clear so the Smokies had lost the normal blanket of clouds and haze revealing their hidden beauty. Riding down the winding rural roads we were entertained with homes that were decorated with pumpkins and fall attire. The small lakes and

ponds were emitting steam-like clouds. Gordon, leading the group, did a great job of bringing our attention to all these sights and any wildlife that we came upon while Nestor or Roger watched our 6's. Outside Hayesville we took Rte. 64 eastward where we had the opportunity to stretch our legs at an overlook where we could really



see the leaves changing colors. As we were sharing our thoughts, an elderly man came up and was checking out one of the trikes. He inquired as to whose it was.

One of the ladies acknowledged ownership, to which his reply was "What is the world coming to, letting woman ride their own motorcycles?" As we were riding down the highway after leaving the overlook the gals offered a few descriptive comments about the old geezer.

A few miles down the road Gordon took a left turn onto Wayah Road. This was an eye opener. A lane and a half wide, beautiful scenery, twisties galore (a real chance to see where you are going and where you have been in less than ten feet). Did I mention that we could hear someone strumming on a banjo up one of the hollers? As we continued climbing through the trees we could see Nantahala Lake and then rode through Aquone. I think there was supposed to be a town there but I guess I missed it. As we approached the end of Wayah Road where it terminated into

Rte. 74 (Nantahala Gorge Road) we stopped at a beautiful park, where we all took a needed break.

We then proceeded down Rte. 74 which followed the Nantahala River. On the river many folks were enjoying the fast running water in canoes and kayaks.



After a while we came across the Nantahala Outdoor Center where we took the time to check out some local dining at an eatery on the river's edge. After eating lots more than what we should have, we continued along the river. We headed off to Highlands down through the thriving metropolis of Franklin. Following Rte. 64 brought us through Callajasa and then Highlands. This

particular route is known for its many stunning waterfalls. We

made a stop at Dry Falls where some of us took the footpath down to the base of the falls and were able to walk under the thundering water as it fell on the rocks just below us. We also stopped briefly at Glenn Falls where there is a narrow road that permits you to ride under the falls. We didn't have any takers for this opportunity.

As mountains were casting dark shadows across the roadways our tour guide lead us back towards the west and Clayton, Georgia. Heading



west on Rte. 76 on our way back to Hiawassee we took a subtle detour onto Germany Road, Devil's Branch Road and Persimmon Road, which greeted us with 12 more miles of twisties and beautiful foliage. It turned out to be a great day. Tomorrow we were on our own, but our fellow wingers offered us yet another adventure on the following day. The answer to their offer was a no-brainer-YES,

Whereas there was some talk about tired arms and butts that had not yet turned to leather, we opted for a later start and maybe a shorter ride. The early morning fog had to burn off – right?

Well, somewhere about 9:30 we mounted our iron horses and headed for Hayesville, then northward on Rte. 64 to Murphy. At Topton we exited onto Rte. 129 headed to Robbinsville where we took a short break. After emptying and then refilling we were off to Tapoco. Rounding a tight corner we exited the road onto an area to take some photos of one of the large dams that are located in that area. The area that was chosen to pull off was let's say an excellent place to check your riding skills when riding on marbles. No pictures were taken and somehow all of the two wheelers managed to stay upright. It's great when the rubber is still on the ground!

Next stop "the infamous Gap"- Deal's Gap or Tail of the Dragon. We pulled into the parking area where the "just did it or going to do it cyclists" were congregating. All of us but Chuck and Donna removed our gear. "Been here done that" was most of our reasoning for heading to the trinket shop and restaurant. Chuck took Donna for a ride. They really weren't gone too long because by the time we made it through the trinket shop and into the restaurant they were back. The only comments made were "Boy that was fun!" and "What was that scraping noise?"



After eating we paused to take a few photos and a quick look at the tree of shame where lots of pieces of OOPS parts hung.



Refreshed and with full bellies we departed the motorcycle resort and headed down Rte. 28 to Fontana Dam. This dam is part of the TVA network and provides hydroelectric power. During this time of the year all the water levels are

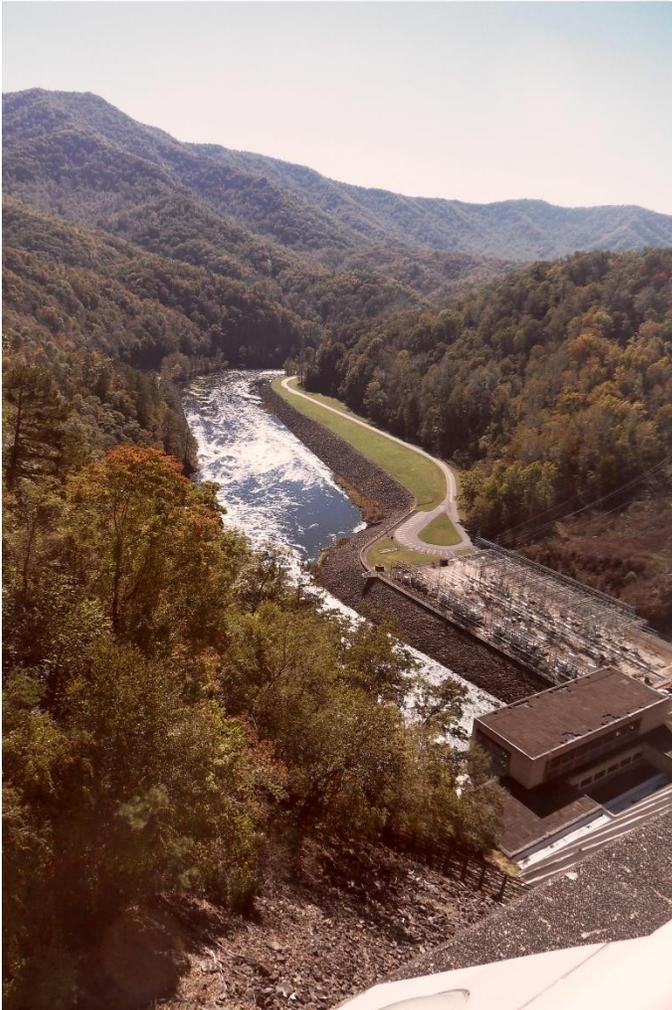


lowered in preparation for the spring runoff which will refill them the following year.

The shadows were getting longer, so we headed down the road to Almond and then back to Rte. 74 and Hiawassee.

The following morning, as promised, Gordon and some other members of Chapter J pulled into the hotel's parking lot and were eager to take us on another ride that they had concocted for us.

We headed back to Hayesville and rode west on Rte. 64 to Murphy,



where we followed Rte. 74 to Hothouse and then on to Ducktown for a brief stop for fuel and a much needed bladder break. Continuing westbound we passed the Ocoee White Water Center where the Ocoee River was used for the kayak competition during the 1996 Atlanta Summer Olympics. Unfortunately, it



was a weekday, so the flood gates were closed letting only a trickle of water into the rapids which normally posed a challenge to the rafters, kayakers and canoers. Following the river we continued westward and then turned onto Rte. 30 which took us to Reliance and a historic church on the banks of the Hiwassee River.

A short distance down the road we turned onto Rte. 315 (Tellico Plains Road) where we crossed the river and enjoyed a



lazy stretch of highway that meandered through the Tennessee countryside. By the time we reached Tellico Plains it was lunchtime and Gordon and his

chapter knew of a nice quaint place to eat – Tellico Grains Bakery. It is a small bakery located downtown with limited seating but superb freshly baked items. They even provide their baked goods to stores as far away as Knoxville.

Topping off our tanks we headed eastbound on Rte.165 for a few miles and then exited onto River Road, a narrow almost two lane road which has lots of twisties and shoulders that drop-off



directly into the stream below. As you cross a narrow concrete bridge there to the right are Bald River Falls. It was time for a few more photos and socializing with other visitors observing this very pretty sight.

Unfortunately the roadway beyond the falls becomes gravel so we prudently returned to Rte. 165. At Beech Gap it becomes Rte.143. It is there where it is commonly known the Cherohala Skyway. This stretch of highway travels for 25 miles through the Tennessee portion of the Smoky Mountains and an additional 19 miles into North Carolina. The roadway changes in elevation from about 900 feet above sea level around Tellico Plains to 5390 feet at the Santeetlah Overlook which provided us with spectacular leaf color changes. The bright cloudless sky created a myriad of bright colors which popped out at us. Above 4000 feet the trees had shed their leaves. At the 2500 to 3000 foot level the leaves were of almost any color you could imagine. Below the 2500 foot level there were pockets of beautiful colors and yet some areas where the leaves were just starting to change.

As we rode along the highway there were a few areas where we noticed on each side of the roadway to be tall wooden power poles with unusual cross arms mounted at the top. Gordon, our tour guide, must have been reading our minds because shortly after passing the first pair he came on the CB and explained their purpose. Apparently the forestry service had noticed a high mortality rate of flying squirrels in these areas. Their solution was to erect these structures so that the squirrels could glide over the roadway, safely clearing the cars below. Hum, I guess the squirrels were smart enough to use them. Wonder what they cost the taxpayers?

As we came to the junction of Rte.129 and Rte.143 we took a short rest stop. The remainder of the trek home would take us through Robbinsville, then onto Rtes 19/74 at Topton. The remainder of the route back to Hiawassee was the reverse of previous routes.

Chapter J members said a farewell as we headed back to Hiawassee. Gordon remained with us all the way back to Hiawassee even though he still had about an additional hour of riding to get home to Cleveland, Georgia. Upon entering the town limits of Hiawassee all the traffic came to a screeching halt. So Gordon and the rest of us took the by-pass to possibly get around the problem. Fortunately Gordon's route home took him off the roadway we were using to return to the hotel. We said our farewells and he rode off into the sunset. As for the rest of us, we managed to hit the same bottleneck at the other end of town. The police officer said the main street through town was totally closed down for the parade kicking off the town's football season. I suppose that was quite an important event for the town. Unfortunately, for us sitting in the parking lot of a Dollar General store for more than an hour as the sun set and the temperature dropped wasn't an uplifting experience. Welcome to rural America.

The next day we were on our own again. Today we were heading out to Helen, and then Cleveland, Georgia. We started out



around 9 am with our sights on Helen. The cool morning ride was invigorating and the twisties leading into Helen were a good way of

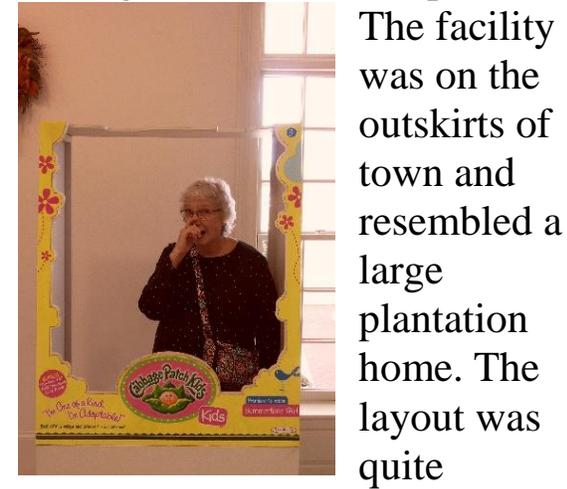
practicing our riding techniques. Fortunately we got into town before the masses of people came in to celebrate Oktoberfest. Parking was a breeze and the streets were mostly empty. Chuck and Donna headed out to visit a friend of Donna's who had worked with her for many years. They were able to connect with



her at the restaurant that she owned. As the noon hour approached we joined Donna and Chuck at her friend's restaurant where we enjoyed terrific German food

and pleasant conversation.

The town was starting to come alive as we headed towards Cleveland, Georgia and the Cabbage Patch Doll Hospital.



The facility was on the outskirts of town and resembled a large plantation home. The layout was quite impressive. Of course the girls toured the establishment and we found time for a few photos. The afternoon sun was starting to dip beneath the high peaks as we rode back through Helen,

returning once again to Hiawassee.

Today would be our last day to enjoy the mountains of northern Georgia and North Carolina. Unfortunately mother nature didn't want to cooperate because we were starting to see the remnants of tropical storm Patricia coming our way. With raingear tucked in our saddle bags we set out to Brasstown Bald, Georgia's highest peak at 4784 feet. We took Rte. 17 towards Helen then turned on Owl Creek Road. Even though the skies were black with clouds, the color of the turning leaves were as beautiful as anything the we had encountered during the preceding days. The colorful leaves were but an arm's reach from us.

Owl Creek terminated into Rte. 180, which we followed a short distance where we turned onto the 180 spur that continued up a steep grade to Brasstown Bald National Park. ( Good time to use your national parks senior pass – then it only costs two dollars to take the bus to the top).



We took the a few moments for a few photo ops at the parking lot level and then boarded the bus that took us to the top and literally into the clouds.



The wind and the passing clouds gave a ghost like appearance to our surroundings. Occasionally there would be a small break in the clouds revealing the roadways, lakes and farms below.

Upon leaving Brasstown Bald we descended out of the clouds back onto Rte. 180 and headed to Blairsville on Rte 129.

It was getting close to lunchtime when we rode into the town square. There were a few restaurants that dotted this area, one of which caught our eye. Today we would dine in at Blairsville's historic diner "Hole in the Wall". Don't know how historic it is but

the food was good and the prices were reasonable. After finishing our meal we headed out of town on Rte. 19 to Ivylog where we browsed through the Biker Barn, a motorcycle store. With the clouds becoming more threatening, we decided it was time to head back to Hiawassee and prepare for our ride tomorrow which would take us to Lake Point Lodge and the Region A annual Convention/Rally in Eufaula, Alabama.



It had been a great week. We had seen many unique, beautiful sights. The riding conditions were almost ideal. Most of all, we gained lots of great memories because our new friends

from Chapter GA-J were willing to share their hidden treasures with us. To us they exhibited the true spirit of GWRRA's motto "Friends for Fun, Safety and Knowledge". This week was what owning and riding a motorcycle is all about.