

Remembering When

It was shortly after sunrise when I climbed aboard my new 1976 Goldwing. I intended to get an early start in order to get ahead of the summer heat that would shortly become oppressive here in Clearwater, Florida. I had all my goodies packed, jacket, additional clothing, tent, rain gear, camera, and canned foods.

My wife and newly born daughter would travel in her parents car and meet me at their family farm located north of Charleston., WV.

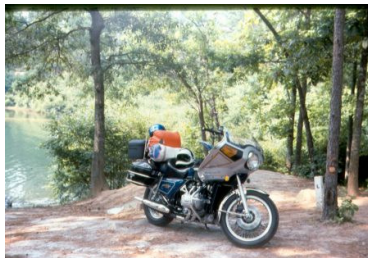
I headed up I-75 where traffic as almost non-existent, so locking the throttle at a little over 55 (the lawful speed those days) wasn't a problem. Time passed quickly, and it was about noon time when up ahead I could see a rain shower ahead. No problem I thought. I pulled over and went for my rain gear that I'd stored in the left pocket of the Vetter fairing. Oops, it was locked and where was the key ? Back home of course !

Slightly wet I pulled into a locksmiths establishment in Macon, Ga. . Fortunately, he was able to open the cover and I acquired two keys at a reasonable price.

At Macon I took to route 129 and enjoyed the rural beauty of that part of Georgia. Miles upon miles of beautiful rolling countryside. It was late afternoon when I reached my destination for that day, Stone Mountain Campground on the south eastern part of Atlanta.

I check in and selected tent camping site overlooking the lake. In that the parking for vehicles was located in an area above the terraced sites, I decided that there was sufficient room to put my bike on the terraced area next to the tent.

That shouldn't have been a problem except that the slope from the parking area to the site was rather steep and was covered with leaves. I succeeded in getting the bike down to the site, however when I turned it to face up the hill, gravity and the leaves began to influence the direction me and the bike would ultimately go. With the front wheel locked, the engine running, the bike and I headed down towards the lake backwards, and at a great neck speed ! I succeeded in avoiding running into the numerous trees between the site and the lake, but my options to end this day without totally ruining this day and my trip were rapidly running out. My boots on the slippery slope were keeping me upright but I had make a decision,..... and without any further hesitation. Was I to dump the bike and hope there would be minimal damage to the saddle bags and the bike, or should I pick up my right foot and jam on the



rear brake and hope I'd stop before I got to the lake. But maybe I should pick up my left foot and jam the shifter into gear. Both of the latter options might mean that I could dump the bike.

I lifted my left leg and jammed the shifter into gear and put my foot back on the ground as I let out the clutch. Fortunately, the bike and I stopped just short of the lake, and remaining in an upright position.

With my heart still pounding , I scanned the surrounding sites, which were still unoccupied. Fortunately nobody was rolling on the ground having observed my keystone kop comedy act. I successfully maneuvered the bike back to the site and set up for the night.

The next day I continued to follow 129 northbound through Athens, Georgia and then onto 441 to Cherokee, NC. This day turned out to be uneventful and the cooler mountain air made it an enjoyable ride. Arriving early in the afternoon I was able to visit some of the local tourist spots. As the sun slid behind the mountains

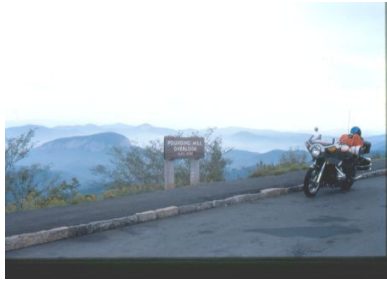


it was time to head up Big Cove Road to the campground where I'd spend that night. As I rode into the campground, the air was damp and very still. The site that I had been assigned was bordering on the creek that ran down through the campground. Down about five or six sites was a couple of guys, who too were camping with their bikes. As I was setting up my tent I noticed that they were having difficulty getting their camp fire to start due to the damp conditions. I noticed one of them going over to his bike and ran a little gasoline into a bowl that he carried over to where they were attempting to start the campfire. He poured the gas over the damp wood and moved away from the fire pit. Just then, his buddy lit a match and threw it over the wood. What then happened wasn't good. The gas ignited and started the wood to burn. But, the gas fumes that led back to the motorcycle acted just like a fuse and in an instant the gas tank on the bike was on fire. If it weren't so serious it would have been funny , as it looked like a Chinese fire drill.



One ruined sleeping bag and a few towels later the fire was out and the two guys were packing up to head to a motel. Bet they don't try that again !

The next morning was overcast, so I decided to pack up and leave the cooking to the restaurant back in Cherokee. Cooking wasn't my bag and I just couldn't think of a better excuse.



After eating my fill I headed out to the Blue Ridge Parkway. As I weaved my way along the road the true meaning of the "The Smokey Mountains" became apparent. The beauty of the treasured portion of Appalachia was showing it self to me. As I got closer to Ashville the clouds were becoming much darker and the mountain tops were poking up into them. It wasn't long before the beauty of this area was lost in clouds and I found myself riding in an erie fog.



Having ridden a few hours in these less than enjoyable conditions I pulled off into one of the few rest areas that had fuel and a restaurant. To my surprise a group of other bikers pulled in beside me and we quickly stuck up enjoyable conversation.. They had been riding the Parkway and were heading back to their homes in Charlotte.



After sharing a few stories while we had a quick lunch , we headed eastward until they waved good-by and exited the Parkway. They would be home tonight. As for me, I would find my way along the parkway in a drizzling rain only to exit the parkway and spend that night in a campground on the outskirts of Wytheville, Va. . Hopefully tomorrow would bring a sunny day.

To my delight the daybreak brought the warmth of what would be a sunny beautiful day. Being a "Flatlander" the ride today was very enjoyable. The rolling hills of Virginia turned into a motorcyclists dream as I entered into West Virginia. The four lane highways became two lane winding roads that laced themselves up each of the hollows. North of Charleston the highway became a narrow two lane road the was just wide enough to run along



the stream at the base of each hill. Passing an occasional farmhouse or country store brought back images of what Loretta Lynn sang about when she sang "A Coal Min-

ers Daughter". The beauty, yet rugged land that these folks have called their home for many generations. It was late afternoon when I topped the rise and there before me was my destination, the family farm.

Over a thousand miles of riding over a few days and my Goldwing never missed a beat. This was truly the reason why this bike is considered a true touring bike. Some thirty years later I still own a wing. It's larger and heavier with lots more creature comforts, but the old wing still remains in my fond memories.

Paul

My '76 Wing



My 1800