

2011 ST. LOUIS ADVENTURE

The weather was MUCH more cooperative this year for the second annual John Conley led St. Louis Adventure, as we didn't see even one drop of rain the whole trip. We were compensated for the lack of rain by some EXTREME heat, but I'll get to that later on in the story. It all started on the last Saturday in July, after the completion of my 7 hour sentence at Fox Valley Cycles. After locking the shop up and missing our 5pm departure time waiting for my sister Chris to finish her pizza and get dressed, we started the trip with a bang at about 5:20pm. Actually, it was more of a crash, as that was the noise I heard as the GPS I borrowed from Jim Cromwell jumped out of its holder and skidded on down the road, just like Tracy Stewart's side cover on the Galena trip this year. We had made it about 1/8th of a mile, and I turned around as fast as I could to see if it could be recovered in useable condition. I stopped in the median just in time to watch 4 cars run right over it. Not a one missed it. Needless to say, it was dead, Jim. (Moment of silence for GPS) I had to revert back to how we did things in the old days, with directions taped to the dash of my super fast Honda Silverwing scooter. With a little piece of duct tape to mark my spot on the directions, we were back on the road. About 60 miles later we arrived at our first gas/rest stop, in the sprawling metropolis of La Moille. This is Jim Cromwell's hometown, and where he currently has his summer home. Jim took the lead for a few miles so we could visit the covered bridge that is in that area, and true to my form we crossed the bridge, turned around, and came back over it again. A few more miles up the road, Kellie snuck up on us with her arms crossed, apparently the universal sign for "I'm freezing and need to stop and put a coat on." Quick stop to get dressed for the cooler temps, and we were on our way once again. We showed up at the (not so) Super 8 at about 9:15pm, and met up with Bob, Kathy, Charlie, and Dawn, who had arrived earlier in the day. That brought us up to our grand total of 8 bikes-5 Goldwings, 2 cruisers, and some nut on a scooter. After a full 1/2 day riding (168 miles), we were ready for some food and beverage. After what we thought would be a short walk over to a restaurant/bar named Petey's, we ate and drank until we shut the place down at about 11:30pm. (Note to self for next year, the AmericInn we walked past on the way to Petey's looked MUCH more inviting than the not-so-Super 8.)

Staggering out of bed at 8 something in the morning for a 9am departure, we were greeted at the bikes by a couple of Monmouth's finest. Apparently, Stephanie had locked her fancy helmet to her bike and someone decided they needed it more than she did. Snip, snip of the helmet rings, and it was gone, along with her CB radio. After filling out a police report, we left about 20 minutes late (a recurring theme with me for some reason!?) and hopped over to the Farm King to pick Stephanie up a helmet. We were going into Missouri, and they have a helmet law, so it was necessary for her to have one. About an hour later, we had picked out a helmet and ride souvenir, and were back on the road for the day. Speaking of ride souvenir, Eddie found a plunger (miniature), as that is what they gave Charlie and Dawn when they reported to the front desk that their toilet was plugged when they got in the room. They even had to leave it in the hall to share with the people in the room next to them! We are definitely staying in a different hotel next year. The rest of the day went real smooth, following roads adjacent to the Mighty Mississippi, and soaking up the scenery. In downtown Warsaw IL, Water St., which was almost IN the Mississippi River last year, was completely dry and passable. We stopped for lunch in Hannibal, at the Mark Twain restaurant. Departing from Hannibal, we hit what I thought was the best stretch of roads down to Louisiana, Mo. Very scenic, twisty roads-even the 15 mile detour was nice, as it was full of roller coaster quality hills! Throughout the day, the temperature was slowly rising, and by the time we crossed back into Illinois and were getting close to our hotel, it was HOT. We stopped in Grafton, IL, as it was ice cream time. I know the heat was getting to us, as Kellie found a local farmer's stand and had a nice hot tomato instead of ice cream, and the next thing you know I look up and see Ken riding on the back of Stephanie's bike! It must be time to start drinking. I think it was another 20-30 miles and we were in our hotel. Unfortunately, it was another (not so) Super 8, and at this one Kellie left before most of us had checked in. Apparently she has a personal vendetta against cockroaches, and doesn't want to share a room with them. She and Stephanie went to the Holiday Inn right next door, and the rest of us settled in. We met in the parking lot a few minutes later and followed Charlie for about 10 minutes to a fine eating establishment that he sniffed out. After a good meal, we returned to the hotel where a few of us hung around the lobby to discuss the events of the day over a few rum and cokes. Finally, bedtime called, as we had to be up early to leave 20 minutes late in the morning.

Day 3 we went over to the St. Louis arch. Eddie, Kathy, and I wanted to ride to the top. Eddie said that he had watched them build the Arch over a couple years when he was younger (back in the 1930's?), but had never been to the top. We parked the bikes and went to get in the long line for the visitor's center at the north leg of the arch. Standing in the blazing sun got me a little queasy, as I was not only leading the ride, but also the rum and coke drinking the night before. I excused myself to take a walk, and I went over to the south leg where there was an entrance with no line! I entered the visitor's center, which was air conditioned, and walked over to the north leg entrance to wave through the window at everyone else who was still outside in the sun. Eddie, Kathy, and I were the brave ones (read: dumb enough to spend the \$10) who rode all 660 feet to the top of the arch. It was a beautiful view, except that the windows were slanted and you can look straight down. I highly advise against that, as it scared the hell out of me. I don't like heights. By the time we finished at the arch, a couple of people in the group wanted to eat and get home rather than venture further away to the motorcycle museum. I agreed, we took a quick vote, and home it was! The trip up I-55 showcased some of Illinois finest corn and bean fields, and thankfully that was the only thing worth writing about, besides the brutal heat again. I can't wait for the third annual next summer!

8 bikes- John Conley, Stephanie Stewart, Kellie Beckett, Ken Kutschke, Charlie and Dawn Mays, Jim and Chris Cromwell, Eddie Cullins, Bob Crawley and Kathy.

