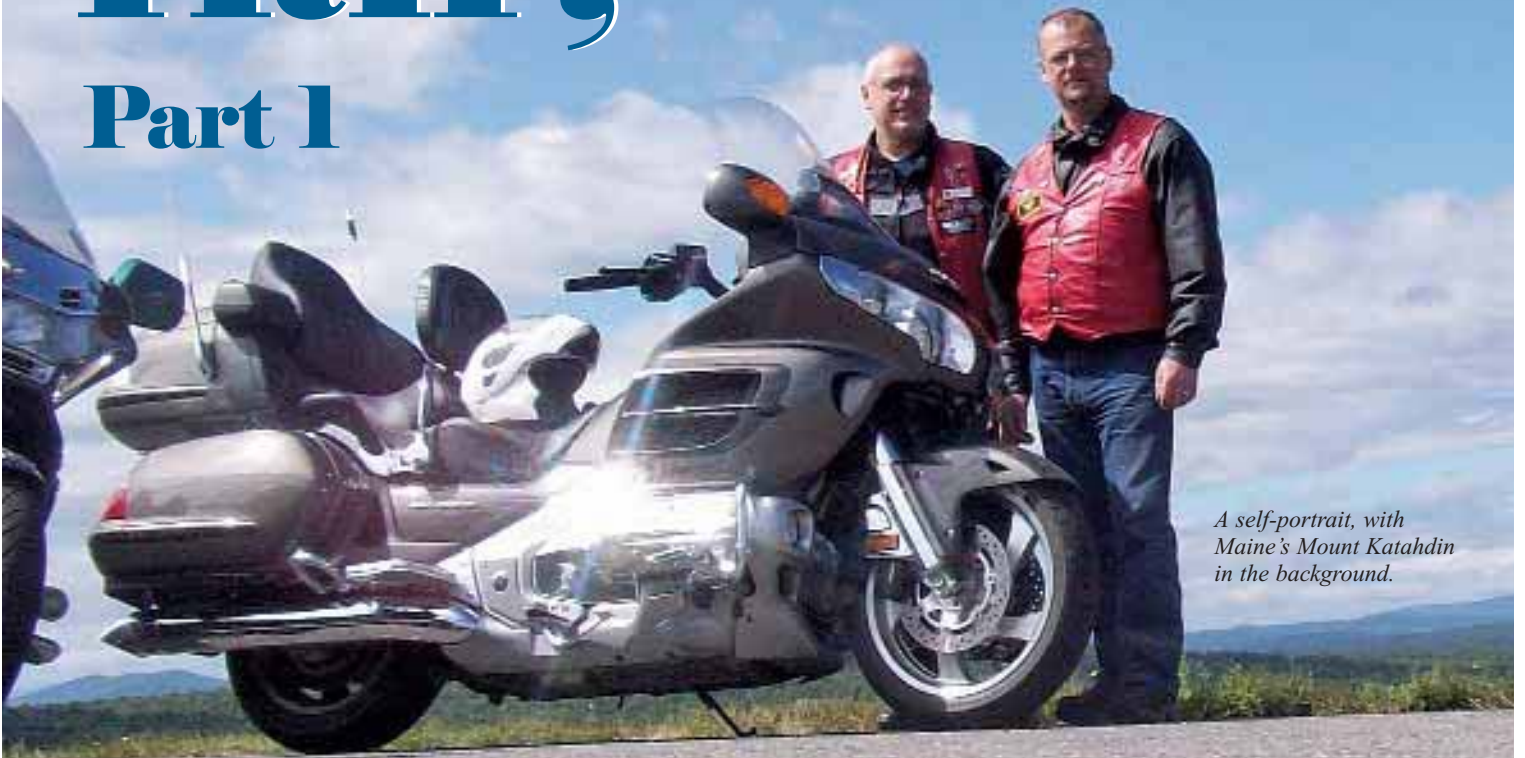


# CONNECTING THE DOTS OF OUR NORTHEAST TRIP,

## Part 1



*A self-portrait, with  
Maine's Mount Katahdin  
in the background.*

*By Robert Laford, GWRRA #126196, of Petersham, Massachusetts*

**Y**ou know how these kinds of trips start...you're having a wintertime cup of coffee with a riding buddy, and one of you mentions that you would like to ride to "X" someday. The other responds in agreement, and the planning soon begins!

My statement—made over that literal cup of coffee—was that I would like to see the Four Corners Memorial in Madawaska, Maine. I wanted to see the granite stone that my Red Knights chapter had purchased, at the memorial site. My riding buddy (and fellow Red Knights and Gold Wing rider) who was present at the time, Rick Oliver, said, "OK, when?"

### The Planning Begins in Earnest

We started talking about leaving on a Thursday evening after work so that we could get into southern Maine that night yet, then make the rest of the trip up on Friday. We figured we could be back home by Sunday, and it sounded like a good plan—at first.

However, a few weeks later, Rick said that he had a friend in northern Vermont who had been after him to come see his new place up there. So I looked at the maps and figured that, if we left on *Wednesday* instead after work, we could do that, too.

With that in mind, if we were to draw a line from Rick's friend's town of Newport, Vermont to our final destination of Madawaska, Maine, it would go *right through* Moosehead Lake, where an old friend of mine lives. Then, a few days after *that* discussion, I remarked that, since we'd be traveling so close to New Brunswick, Canada, we really *must* stop to see our mutual friend Hal....well, you get the picture. As you can see, our trip had grown legs of its own and had backed our departure even earlier, into *Wednesday afternoon*.

The final piece of the puzzle came about a week before we left. Rick made a remark that he had never ridden his bike on the

Kangamangus Highway in the White Mountains. Riding it would add about 150 miles to our first day. "Can you leave at 7 in the morning, instead?" I asked. With his confirmation, we were off!

Each of these places and friends became a waypoint on our wish list, and the squiggly lines between them became our riding adventure. Each person we visited, each road we took, and each area we rode in had distinct personalities; each added color to our day and fun to our riding. Plus, our anticipation for what lie around the next corner helped make every moment exciting!

### The Ride Begins

On the first day, we met at our rendezvous spot, fueled up, and were on the road first thing in the morning. Rick was ready to add some miles to his 2009 GL1800, and I was ready to do the same on my 1996 GL1500. Since the trip began mid-week, there were still thoughts of work and other obligations on our minds as we began to ride.

We left central Massachusetts and headed for New Hampshire's White Mountains for our first "dot" in our "connect-the-dots" plan. Instead of major routes and highways, we'd chosen a number of small, winding lines on our map. These serpentine roads, which run along New Hampshire's rivers and through her grand mountains, offered a sensory relief from our previous days of routine. But the aggressive curves also challenged us physically and mentally as we warmed up our riding skills. This need to focus and concentrate on our riding, create proper cornering lines, and be in tune with visual, situational awareness helped to work our physical and mental muscles. The stress of the obligations of daily life began to melt away, and all that was left in our rearview mirrors was our ride.

My riding partner's only rule on the road was "No 'chains'"—our stops had to be the "mom and pop" operations, the small country stores, farm stands, and local businesses that give each community their individual flair.

Our first break on the road came at a small coffee shop in Newport, New Hampshire. We found it amusing because our destination for the day's end was Newport, *Vermont*! We joked about how we could even map a route to catch Newport, Rhode Island if we wanted to, but that it would take a bit longer than we had time for.

After coffee, we found a winding route through some mountain notches and made our way to Lincoln and the west end of the Kangamangus Highway. For those who don't know, the Kangamangus weaves its way from Lincoln to North Conway along a 34-mile east/west



*Rick enjoys his poutine, knowing it will cost him on the treadmill when he gets home!*



*Me, somewhere in New Brunswick, on my GL1500.*

cut through the White Mountains and climbs to a 3,000-foot elevation that offers some wonderful views of New Hampshire's mountains.

When we pulled into North Conway it was lunchtime, so we grabbed some sandwiches and decided to use the nearby Whitehorse Gear as our lunch stop. Pulling into the parking lot, we were enthusiastically welcomed and invited into the warehouse to browse the thousands of items that are listed in their catalog. They must receive a few like-minded people into their store because a picnic table was also waiting for our use while there.

Following Route 302 back across the "White Mountain state", we passed by Mount Washington. At an elevation of 6,288 feet, it is the highest peak in the northeastern U.S. Our route also passed by the entrances for the "Mount Washington Auto Road", the "Mount Washington Cog Railway", and the "Mount Washington Lodge". The road was very welcoming—with its curves, climbs, and descents—as we passed through the area.

*Mount Katahdin in the distance.*

Route 302 crosses into Vermont, and we soon found a great road that was constructed with two wheels in mind. Route 232 is a connecting route between Routes 302 and 2, and its well-banked and challenging corners were all along a newly resurfaced road. It was a road that created big smiles inside our helmets as we dragged a few pegs over this 10-mile "shortcut"!

Over the past two years, The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act has put a lot of construction programs on the road. This public funding means there are a lot of construction projects underway, and it seems you will find them all while traveling on two wheels. However, it being late in the summer meant that many of the road projects were nearing completion for the year (at least in the northeast) and that the roads were recently resurfaced. We found many new sections of pavement just beckoning for us to ride over them during our six days on the road!



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Then again, we also found some dirt, some detours, and some wait times as well. Some construction projects were still in full swing in order to get the work done while the weather was still cooperating. But, after all, patience is a virtue—and sitting on a motorcycle in a line of traffic, waiting for the flag man to wave you by, is still better than sitting at work.

## Heading North

We met up with Vermont's Route 100 and worked our way north to Newport, Vermont—which lies on the Canadian border—for the end of our first day's ride. Newport rests along the shores of Lake Memphremagog and shares the lake with its Canadian neighbors.

Throughout the day, we had seen warning signs for moose and deer along this golden wilderness. But, that day, the only wild souls that had joined us along the way were the wild turkeys and Canada Geese.

Our first visit with friends was at their home, buried in the woods of Vermont. It is three miles off the blacktop and down a dirt road, so it is removed from all traffic, schedules, and thoughts of work. As guests in their nearby cabin, our view was of Vermont's Jay Peak, across one gorge, and of Canada, on an adjacent ridgeline. The only sounds that we could hear were the sounds of "peace and quiet".

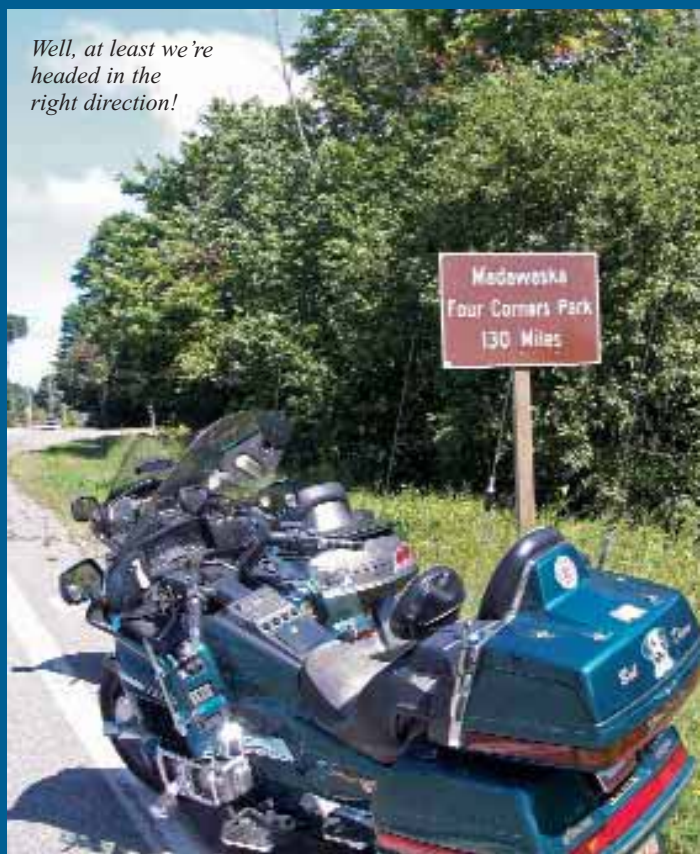
However, shortly before dawn broke the next morning, the serenades of the coyote population were rather eerie as dozens of coyotes started to howl and answer each other from around the valley and nearby mountaintops. Then, when we stepped out of the cabin to walk the path back to where our bikes were parked at the main house, there were fresh deer hoof prints in the dirt around the cabin. Either the neighborhood watch had been keeping an eye on us or, being this far north, maybe it had been a summer evening's round of "reindeer games"!

We soon waved adieu to our first night's hosts and looked forward to saying "Bonjour" to Quebec. However, we first stopped to fill up with fuel in nearby Derby Line before crossing the border. Gasoline in Vermont was \$2.74 per gallon; across the line, it was \$1.04 per liter (\$3.93/gal).

Quebec offered welcoming straight roads with rolling hills; it also offered large green tracts of farmland with grazing livestock and fields of corn. The route we chose was dotted with small villages and a few larger towns—all with tall steeples and names, like St. Martyrs, St. Joseph-de-Coleraine, Notre-Dame-des-Pins, and St. Georges, that seemed to announce their welcome and offer their French Catholic heritage.

As mid-day approached, we stopped in Beauceville along the Riviere Chaudiere, where we found a riverside park that looked inviting. There was a young lady tending a small vegetable stand there, and we picked up some fresh fruits and vegetables for our break. My poor and limited high school French brought a smile to her face; afterward, she replied with better English than some American teenagers I know!

Back on the road it was apparent, as we traveled along the "Route de President Kennedy", that—even though there may be some differences in languages—our countries have a shared culture. And soon, large tracts of evergreens began to replace the open farmland. We began to share the road with logging trucks and others who support the commercial lumber, pulp, and paper operations of that area.



*Well, at least we're headed in the right direction!*

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## Heading Back South

Before crossing back into Maine, we made a point to stop and enjoy some culinary specialties—especially some poutine! We could feel our cholesterol levels jump 30 points as we enjoyed this specialty of French fries topped with melted cheese curd and gravy. But it was worth every sit-up we knew we'd have to do later!

Crossing the border into Maine, the roads became a bit more aggressive as the mountain range came closer. The tree line showed a patchwork of evergreens and hardwoods. The hardwoods have started to grow in where logging operations have cleared away the pines. This late summer's ride, surprisingly, gave us glimpses of early autumn colors starting to show on some of the trees.

We worked our way around the mountain lakes and, eventually, met the shores of Moosehead Lake, where our second night's stay was with friends in Greenville, Maine. Greenville sets on the southern banks of the lake.

Our host couple told us that the town is tourist-based throughout the year; it gives welcome to the lake vacationers in the summer and the snowmobile riders in the winter. One can tell that the lifestyle there is a little different than that of home. For instance, even the police cruisers

are four-wheel drive pickup trucks; that's what is needed for the many miles of off-road terrain in the area. Plus, the town and the businesses are accommodating to the traffic patterns of the snowmobiles in and around town. The number of sled routes and signs we saw were evidence of the popularity of that winter sport. In fact, both of our hosts are very active in the local and state snowmobile associations.

We dined at the Black Frog restaurant, located on a barge that is docked on the edge of the lake. There we learned that, in the winter, the snowmobile riders traverse the lake into town and park their snowmobiles along the frozen moorings, in place of the boats that we saw during our visit.

***Watch for Part 2 of "Connecting the Dots of Our Northeast Trip" soon!***

*Just a few, short thousands of miles to the other end of Route 1 in Key West, Florida.*

