

NORTH TO THE BORDER

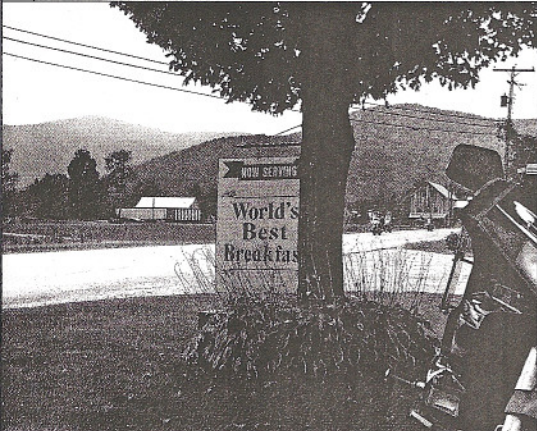
A late summer's ride through the north woods of Vermont and New Hampshire

Words and images: Robert Laford

Central Vermont has some of the most scenic roads available to ride, and if you draw a 100 mile circle out from that region, there are many miles of twists and turns, hills and valleys, villages and sites to see - all there to put a smile on the face of any rider. Consider a Vermont ride's starting point a few miles north of Killington Mountain in Pittsfield on Vermont's Route 100.

The sun is just starting to rise. Well rested and well fed at the Swiss Farm Inn (www.swissfarminn.com), home of "the World's Best Breakfast," we are standing next to the bikes looking north up the valley with the shadow of Killington Mountain to our backs. On this late summer's morning, it is a good day to go exploring and ride north into the northeast kingdom of Vermont and the north woods of New Hampshire, with the solitude of the road and the opportunity to be alone with our thoughts.

Northbound on Route 100 the road hugs the river's edge, where we can contemplate the generations past of Native Americans and early settlers taking advantage of the river's resources for fishing, transportation, and hunting. There are still current day uses of the river. Visitors to the region see it for its natural beauty



and use it for their recreation - sight seeing, tubing and canoeing on the river, along with the fishermen are all apt to be sharing the river's path with us as we pass by.

Turning west towards the Brandon Pass on Route 73, the sweeping corners along the river guide us towards the mountain and into the twists, turns, switchbacks, climbs and dives as we ride over the mountain. Route 73 meets Route 7 in Brandon and we enter the Chaplain Valley.

Back in the river valley the signs surround us of the soon to come changing season, with the summer greens beginning to change their color and the fields full of their last harvest. The golden tassels corn is being prepared for the taking by the farmers along with the fields of hay and other produce that is evident in the roadside stands. The rolling hills, meadows and pastures all pique the senses as we begin to move north again following Route 7 and then Route 116.

The early morning ride is spent between the riders, their rides, and the quiet sights and sounds that abound. It seems that only non-human inhabitants are accompanying us at the early hour. A flock of Canada Geese rests in a nearby field as they prepare for their day's journey and discussing amongst themselves their day's flight plan to decide if they truly wish to head south at this time. Dairy cows are making their way from the nearby barn to begin their daily labor in the green pastures. A young black bear sauntering out of the woods along the river bank, headed for the

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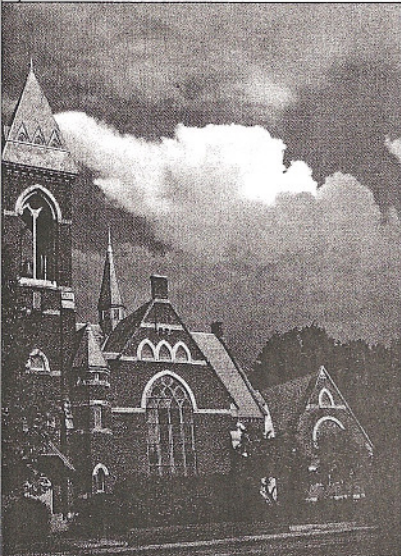
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farmer's cornfield to investigate what is waiting for him for breakfast.

The signs of the farmer are nearby with his equipment resting overnight in the field waiting for the workers to return as the morning grows longer. Looking at the farms, it is easy to see that many have been in place for generations. Today's farmers are those that were youngsters playing in the fields and the barns only a few decades ago. What generation is working the farm now? Only the age of the vehicles in the driveway and the satellite reception disc on the farm house are clues that can detect

which generation or even which century this painted scene is.

Small villages dot the landscape. Descending from the upper elevation into the valley below, we can find the church steeples poking from the tree tops as a guided target into the center of town. As we ride through the peaceful communities, children on bicycles stop to wave as we pass. All as



if the villages are staged in preparation for a Norman Rockwell painting.

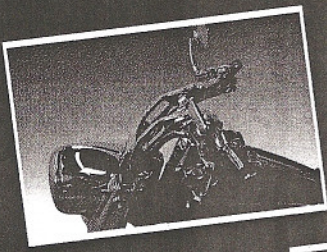
North of the city of Burlington, Vermont, the hills begin to flatten out and the ride becomes smoother as we again pick up Route 7. The view opens to larger fields and pastures that line the route. Cows and horses graze peaceful all the time swishing their tails as if to wave at us as we pass. The livestock share their pastures with nearby wind turbines as the farmers have taken advantage of Mother Nature's openness and constant breeze by harvesting her wind as well as her cultivated bounty.

One community is preparing for their harvest festival with flags and bunting in the ready and signs that encourage the visitor to return and participate on the big day. The town common in another village is filled with people, tents, and tables as they prepare for the day's farmer's market, all with smiling faces and laughter that beckon us to stop. Fresh vegetables, fruits, flowers, and home made jams and jellies are all on display and ready to be part of the freshly prepared meal that will be spread on dozens of local dinner tables this evening.

Route 7 passes through the center of St. Albans, Vermont. The tree-lined main street is guarded by beautiful Victorian era homes standing as sentries as the main street makes its way through the town - each with a finely manicured lawn adding beauty to the image. St. Albans, rests in the valley between Lake Champlain to the west and the Green Mountains to the east. The town has the distinction of being the site of the most



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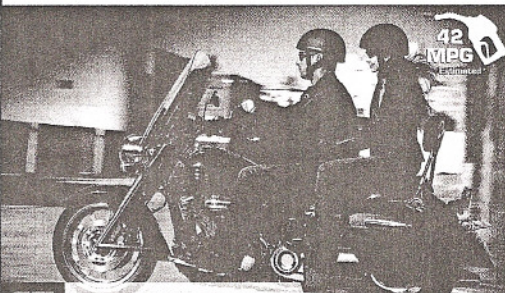


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northern battle of the civil war. In 1864 twenty confederate cavalrymen made their way down from Canada and took over the town. As could be expected it was a surprise to those living in northern New England that the battlefields of the civil war no longer seemed so far away.

We venture away from the center taking Route 105 to make our way northeast towards the Canadian border. Route 105 follows the Missisquoi River, a tributary of Lake Champlain, as it skirts the border between Quebec and Vermont offering changing scenery that alternates between woodlands, meadows, cornfields, and the rocky laden river. At each intersection we are reminded of the nearby crossing as signs with French sounding village names point us to Canada, one or two miles away.

As the road winds us in and out of the pastures edge we can see the cattle grazing nearby. On the distant hillside we can see glimpses of the herd biding their daily pastime in nearby Quebec as well. The question of the day is, "do those on this side ever stray over the border to visit the grass on that foreign hillside to see their Canadian cousins?"

As we ride near to the Canadian border, there seems to be miles of road that are shared with no other vehicles. It is just nature's beauty and the hum of the tires on the road that keep us company. The road parallels the nearby river as does a rail line. In a marshy area where the river bends a great blue heron setting has had his fill of fishing and takes flight over the rider.

The road leaves the low lands as Route 105 makes its way further northeast up through the Jay Peak area of Vermont. During the winter the ski slopes in this area of New England boast the most snow in eastern North America. In the warmer months the forests greens and winding roads are as inviting to the riders as the slopes are to the winter's visitors.

In the far northern reaches of New England the influences of the paper mill industry and the loggers with their need to continually manage and renew the forests is evident. There are times that the odor of fresh cut pines is powerful as if a reminder to a Christmas Holiday - but it is the logging industry that is creating the smells on this ride. Although many of



a diversion of window shopping and the quiet lake side park is a popular place for visitors and residents to spend some time.

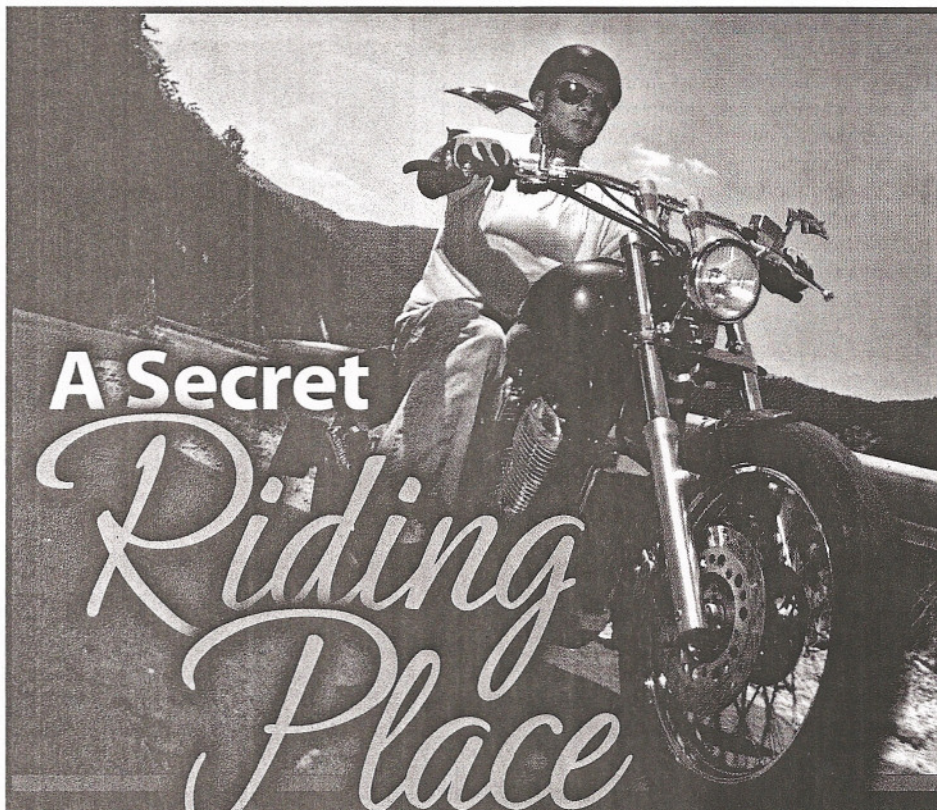
A stroll along the pedestrian walk that is at the calm water's edge draws hello's and smiles from the other visitors to the welcoming park. A handful of boats are resting at the marina waiting for their next venture into the open lake. While chatting with the marina's attendant, we learn that the majority of the marina's business is gasoline sales to the boat operators coming from the Canadian side of the lake - "because our gasoline is so much cheaper in the U.S." The prices we pay are high by our perspective, but not high in comparison to others!

It is apparent that the Canadian visitors that frequent the town are not foreign visitors, but rather they are neighbors from the next town. Throughout the town it is evident that the local shops and businesses support this welcoming cooperation with displays of both the American flag with its stars and stripes and our neighbor's home flag with its maple leaf. Historically these sister communities and their shared lake have been involved with this cooperative commercial trade for centuries, as the lake stretches as a transportation channel used by past generations of Native Americans



the paper mills have closed over past decades, the paper industry still holds many millions of acres and manages the use and the rights to those many square miles of forest that cover Vermont and New Hampshire. These industries continue to be stewards of the deep green tracks of land that are such a valuable resource to us all.

The route takes us into Newport, a Vermont community that shares the shores of Lake Memphremagog with their Canadian neighbors. The name of the lake comes from the Abenaki Indian word meaning "beautiful waters." The town's shops are a place that offers



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Our northern track ends as we turn around at the border at the northern tip of New Hampshire. A few hundred yards south of the border we make a stop at Connecticut Lake #3. A lone fisherman sits on the lake enjoying his time alone with nature from his boat. These same waters will kiss the shores of the Connecticut River as it makes its way through New Hampshire, Vermont, Massachusetts, and Connecticut, feeding the many farms and fields that rely on its nourishment along its route. The same route we must take south to head back home.

The final stop on today's ride is at the Lady of Grace Shrine on Route 3, just south of Colebrook, New Hampshire in Columbia. It is a stop to continue on our introspective thought process that the solitude of riding brings us. The Lady of Grace Shrine is the gathering place of hundreds of motorcyclists each June for the annual New Hampshire Blessing of the Bikes (<http://nhblessingofthebikes.tripod.com/>). The shrine is also home to the "Motorcyclists in Prayer" memorial. Our Lady of Grace is designated as the Patroness of Motorcycles and the sculpture was dedicated at the 10th Annual Blessing of the Motorcycles in 1984. The sculpture is made of white granite that comes from the quarries in Bethel, Vermont and is of a man and woman kneeling in prayer next to their motorcycle. The inscription in the book they are reading says, "Lord, thank you for the marvel of the motorcycle, a machine of tremendous possibilities. Help me to achieve the skill to control it wisely, like a tool, shaping a better life for me and those around me. - Be friends with one another, and kind, forgiving each other as readily as God forgave you in Christ." (EPHES.4:32). More thoughts and words to consider as the ride leads us back home.

and early settlers to pass from New England into Canada and beyond.

Moving away from Newport the ride turns onto Route 114 in Island Pond and again makes its way close to the Vermont border with Quebec. The road becomes more and more of a place of solitude where the rider and his thoughts can be alone with the hum of our machine on the road. Crossing into New Hampshire the ride turns further north following Route 3 where we pass the forty-fifth parallel - half way between the equator and the North Pole. Heading toward the northern most point of New Hampshire we pass through the town of Pittsburg, New Hampshire and through the Connecticut Lakes State Park, where the Connecticut River begins its voyage to the Atlantic Ocean in southern New England. Route 3 is a wide, very well-maintained two lane road that appears to be built just for us and today's ride. In the twenty-five miles from Pittsburg to the Custom's Station at the border there is virtually no traffic as the road weaves in and out of the shores of the Connecticut Lakes. There are many signs that warn of the prevalent moose population, but at this time we find neither Bullwinkle nor Bambi sharing this passage with us.

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