

Photos at <http://www.flickr.com/photos/cog3k/>

Author's Note

As I reread this as it was originally penned nearly two weeks ago, I realize the state of mind I was in at the time was a very dark place. I am normally very upbeat during my rides; I enjoy the challenge and the camaraderie that exists. This was somehow different and I'm not sure why. Rather than glossing up what I wrote, I'm letting it stand.

Introduction

When I first entered the world of LD riding in 1999, I held the Iron Butt Rally competitors with the highest regards. They had achieved the pinnacle of the sport, enduring the grueling 11 days that constitute the Iron Butt Rally. My interest goes back all the way to 1984, when I had a chance meeting with a veteran of the very first Iron Butt Rally Chuck Augenbach. When they first set up the IBR, they weren't even sure it could be done. It turns out, it's the squidgy organic part in the saddle that tends to have the problems, not the bike itself.

To put this into some perspective, as of this writing more people have been into outer space (453) than have completed the Iron Butt Rally. More people climb Mount Everest every year (450+/-) than have ever finished the IBR and I was about to attempt to become one of those very few.

Due to work commitments, I was forced to make alternative arrangements for the beginning of the 2007 IBR. I rode my bike out to the St Louis area a week early and stored Hmmbie at fellow Moron's place, Glenn Nash. I then flew back to Baltimore, worked through Saturday the 18th, and returned to St Louis that evening to find Glenn had delivered my bike to the Double Tree earlier in the day. Yippee.

I have three goals: finish, finish well, and have fun. A top 20 finish would suit me just fine. Jean's goal is that I recognize her at the finish; I'm not real worried about that one, but it's nice to have a "chippie" waiting for you.

Turns out this "late" arrival has both a benefit and a drawback. It allows me to breeze through the registration/tech process in about an hour- there were only 3 riders left to do the full monty. The drawback is I am about a day and half mentally behind my fellow riders; this doesn't sound important, but it rears its ugly head later that afternoon/evening when the Leg 1 rallybooks come out.

Leg 1

The format for the 2007 IBR is different than in years' past. There are only 2 legs- one 4.5 days and one 6 days, with a forced layover of at least 7 hours in between. The Legs all start and end at the Double Tree Hotel in Chesterfield, MO- about 30 minutes west of the Arch on I-64. Sunday's dinner brought us our flags, Leg 1 rallybooks, a tide table (oh no, not again), and a projected points grid for various finishing positions with Gold Medal level being the highest at 100k points for this leg. I was awarded the last rider flag, #97, for "not reading the newsletter". In all fairness, and we all know this world ain't fair, I never got the newsletter in question- spam filters had trapped it. Jim Bain, rallymaster for the Cape Fear 1000, and I agreed to plan together and try riding together for a while- The Illegitimi we called ourselves. We divvied up the list into two parts and merged the files to yield one big one- 123 bonuses. Zoiks! The tide table was for two locations in Quebec and Nova Scotia. After about 20 minutes of debate, we decide the PQ-NS loop is too risk-reward oriented for our taste- in retrospect a poor decision (see above about mindset). The idea of an 1800 mile one-way trip for a 3 hour tide window



(which you only get one shot at) seemed pretty steep. I have a tendency to over analyze things. In this case, I looked at the "obvious" choice and said, it must be wrong, this is a Lisa Landry IBR; sadly I was misguided and sort of knew it. The obvious choices were as subtle as a Karl Rove push poll; you might as well have hit me upside the head with a 2x4, repeatedly. Unlike Team Strange events like the Buttlite, there are no surprises or tricks per se in the IBR. Its all about "sitting there and twisting that" for 10+ days with little critical thinking. Instead, we opt for an eastern, then southern route returning back to the Checkpoint on 4200 miles and 96,000 points- not quite the Gold Level as suggested, but a fairly conservative route with no real pain if any one or two locations had to be dropped due to time restrictions (and there were a ton of those). Mike Allen, my riding partner from Buttlite III, said you should have gone far northeast instead. Of course he's right, the little shit.

The Weather Channel revealed we would be riding in the rain, courtesy of Tropical Storm Erin, with the worst of it falling between Indianapolis and Columbus, but the rain would continue through mid day Tuesday.

The first bonus of the rally for nearly every rider was a visit to the Gateway Arch, with a receipt from the Arch parking garage. Riders that had visited the Arch before knew it had two entrances- the rest of us lemmings, faithfully queued at the north entrance for the metal detector. Eventually, we get our picture of the Builders exhibit. Now I have to back and see what it's all about, eh? From there it was eastward ho!! The rains started in earnest around Indianapolis as predicted. We stopped for a quick photo of the Honda plant in Marysville after swinging into an Advance Auto for some Dot 4 fluid for Jim's bike; he had warning lights for low fluid- sadly, the brake reservoirs for the K12 are under the seat area, and can be troubling to get to, especially if you have a fuel cell on the pillions mount. A very wet ride to Hoagey's Mile Eaters near Wheeling allowed us to reflect on riding in the incessant rain- it was ceaseless. I hate riding in the rain- someday I'll get that fancy laser eye surgery and it wont be as bad, but for now, its bad, especially after dark. We left Hoagey's in search of a motel- not really in our plans for night one, but the rain was getting the best of us. This caused us to ditch the next three boni- both in York, and the Winchester apple, but gave Jim a chance to refill his brake reservoir. No worries, it's only three stops roughly 5000 points. We run across Wizard, Carol Patzer and her son Tony here at the same motel- small world. We'd see them later in the day on the way to Cass, WV.

The southward swing was mostly uneventful, except for more rain as we go to the New River Gorge Bridge. The rain was so hard, you couldn't see the new bridge from the railbed below; this lack of "detail" would cause great consternation at the scoring table. I knew I was in the right place; I had been there; been there before, but the scorer's book had a picture of the new bridge that looked as if it had come from a postcard. Of all my trips to the New River Gorge, I have yet to see the new bridge as clear and pristine as the sample photo. After nabbing the closed up for the day early Grandfather Mountain bonus, we continued south. Somewhere in North Carolina near the Georgia border, Jim finds the cause of his brake fluid loss- it's a cut line, just above the caliper and its making a real mess of things.

He sends me on my way as he tries to figure out the best way to deal with issue. I head for the two boni near Augusta and then call it a night, taking my rest bonus here. At this point I notice the effects of all of that water collecting along the backs of my thighs, encased in a waterproof liner and Cordura- as it was so eloquently put "a Petry dish". The exposed skin rash is kind of scary looking and I decide not to put back on my riding pants and risk the light sweats that I carry as liners when it gets cold. I need to get the rash under control and thoroughly launder my riding clothes before I wear them again, otherwise I risk serious skin infections. Neosporin does the trick for dealing with the rash and by the checkpoint it has mostly cleared up.

In the morning, I'm off to the Georgia Guidestones, then Stone Mountain and the three or four locations in the greater Atlanta area. It's getting very hot, and moist, as I head deeper into the south. The Stone Mountain bonus description doesn't exactly match what is found at the location- in fact it looks so far off, I wind up contacting the rallymaster (Lisa) to help me through the bonus. As I'm leaving there, Tom Skemp pulls up and I give him the news that the bonus is actually outside on the patio, not inside Memorial Hall as described. I'll see Tom later in the day at a few more locations.

A trip downtown Hotlanta to the Varsity Diner for a hat and food receipt, plus a quick pic of the Olympic torch allowed me to move on to the Big Chicken in Marietta with

rapidity. Onward west, a few NASCAR establishments, BSA headquarters and a giant peach later, I'm in lower Alabama in 108d temps with 99% humidity- I needed a break from the heat and stopped into a local dive called the "Interstate Diner". This stop would cost me the Battleship Cove bonus, but I desperately needed the break. As I sat there in the AC, I realize how bad it's been- brutally oppressive. Living in Baltimore has taught me how to deal with extreme heat indices- this will be the highest temperatures I will face for the entire IBR- even the Mojave won't get this oppressive. Right about now, I hate everything. I hate riding; I hate the fact that I'm voluntarily doing this and spent all this time and money for something I'm really not enjoying one bit. I also know, I should have headed northeast and taken the potential stinky bait. I roll into Biloxi for the Katrina Memorial; a very depressing sight- buildings and homes just gone, skeletons of ruins, yet the casinos seem to be just fine. Reminds me on Atlantic City that way- the slums sitting just a few blocks from the gleaming casinos. Nothing seems to change just the location. New Orleans is next, and I fear the worst will be waiting there. I see a sign for a Best Western "open now" along I-10 and decide not to risk an existing sign and lack of building (which is very evident along the interstate), I take that option. Turns out most of the motels have been reconstructed and I coulda had the Motel 6 next door for about half the price I paid; no sign, but the motel is open. Didn't matter much, it was dark and the NO boni were daylight only.

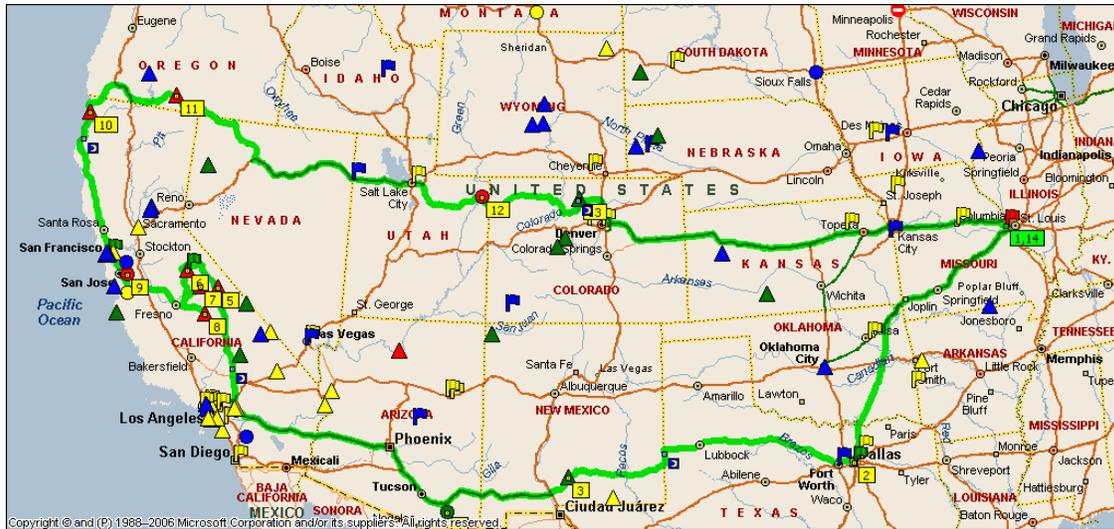
In the pre-dawn gloom, I head off to Bourbon Street. Even in this low light, you can see the devastation- it's mind boggling. I get to the French Quarter about 10 minutes before official sun up, but the pictures won't come out. So I opt for the Superdome and then return to the French Quarter- its worth too many points to screw up due to lack of light. Does Eat Place is next, but I see a place far too tempting to pass up on the way by- Kermit the Frog's birthplace; I see Jim Bain on his way into Does as I'm heading out- figure he's about 45 minutes behind me at this point. Jill routes me back to the interstate, rather than continuing north along the country highway- would have saved a bunch of miles on the way to Memphis. From here I headed due east towards Nashville, but I should have gone to Paducah then headed west for the northern Arkansas locations- more points to be had and its all about the points. Stopping in Nashville did net me a nice love note from fellow Moron Andrew Duthie. I hit Paducah, then Metropolis and a Laundromat - this is more important than any other item today, other than getting to the checkpoint on time; without my riding gear, I felt naked and vulnerable. I planned on being there around 1, got it at 1:30, well rested, but having to drop nearly 20,000 points in total really hurts. My mood is even fouler at this point as my chances for achieving a gold medal are slipping away and just being a "finisher" is going to be work. No one ever said it was going to be easy, but I never expected it to be quite this difficult either given my ButtLite experiences.

Scoring was painful- everything was under the strictest scrutiny. I get dinged for the Georgia Guidestones bonus for not taking a picture of the marker with the 6 languages on it rather than the 6 markers with the languages on it; I was obviously in the right place. I resolve to myself that in every case from now on where the bonus requirement doesn't exactly match what I find in front of me, I'm calling the rallymaster no matter how much public mockery I might take. Pissing away points like that cheeses me off (since it was a bigger bonus) and places me in a deeper, darker mood.

Jim rolls in a few hours later; the bastard bagged the KC bonus placing him a few thousand points behind me, but we are well back in the pack in the mid-50's. It is a place I'm not accustomed to.

Leg 2

No tide tables this time, but still 120+ locations to sort through. The stakes are higher and just getting enough points to be a finisher will involve bagging at least 2 of the major



central California bonus locations (5 in total) or a trip to Homer Alaska. We build a rough route around making the Lick Observatory bonus on Tuesday morning (called the big red one) and head towards the Dallas-Fort Worth metroplex for two quick stops along the way (a giant driller man and the the OK City Bombing memorial). We get Southfork as dark settles, and gobble up the remaining area boni as we head west towards the White Sands National Monument for another 8k points. I'm still pissed off at life and the riding in general; I think its starting to wear on Jim. On the good news front, my rash is under control. After a delightful ride into White Sands, a highlight of this entire rally, where I drop off my Buttlite III postcard, we continue west to the Schifflin monument near Tombstone. We stop for a quick meal and this I believe is the end of The Illegetimi. In retrospect, we should have first gone to the monument then gotten dinner. No difference in time but more points. Jim doesn't like "winging it", but this is exactly what we've been doing for the last day and half as we try to get to San Jose by Tuesday. On the way to a few 24 hr boni, we encounter the rare double rainbow- the remains of Hurricane Dennis are all around us and have provided many night time displays to enjoy. At Kingman, we split up. I head west and north while Jim heads north west into Death Valley- we wish each other happy hunting. In Lake Havasu City there is a museum of history- the town was founded in 1964, how much "history" can there be? I also expected more ornamentation than just a plain bridge, when I find the London Bridge. I was looking at it the whole time but had no clue it was the rather ordinary stone structure in front of me.

I'm hoping to get both Sequoia and Mono Hot Springs this day, overnight near San Fran and grab all the ones there as early as I can before going to Lick. Once I clear the

General Sherman tree (elevation 7000 feet with a half mile walk, up hill to the parking area) I punch in Mono- looks like I'll be at least 30 minutes late for daylight there and chose to try it after hitting Yosemite on Tuesday. I motor towards SF and stop in Hayward for an attempt at a rest bonus; can't get a good receipt anywhere and the hotel's receipt is useless. At 6:20am I take my picture of the north viewing area of the Golden Gate bridge- a lovely sight with the TransAmerica Pyramid poking through the fog. But there is no time to dawdle and off I go to the five downtown boni- boom boom boom they go and I see another rider at Lombard Street. The low sunlight on the flowerbeds is gloriously breathtaking. After the Cupid Arrow, I make my way, lane splitting on a wing, to San Jose for the ride upto Lick. I should have filled my tanks here, but decided against it. Somewhere on the final ascent, my warning light comes on- roughly 35 miles left and I'm 55 from my next bonus or 30 back tracking to San Jose. So backtrack I do after seeing Dean Tanji and getting documented there.

Still in a foul mood about the whole thing, but getting better as I can see the downhill side of this ride finally, I head for San Jose for fuel, Livermore for the ancient light bulb and off to Yosemite to some serious time with trees, rocks, elevations and of course, rain. As I approach the Glacier Point parking area, there is a sharp left hand turn in the road with no apparent restraining devices on the right to prevent any unwary vehicles from plummeting the nearly 5000 feet back down to the lodge I was just at in the valley below. As much as it is tempting to just take a peak, motorcycles go where your eyes are aimed, and I really didn't want to back down the mountain the quick way. Again at some serious elevation, I get my picture of Half Dome Rock. Now I punch in Mono Hot Springs- I've been warned about this road by several riders. The comparisons to the ride into Burkes Garden are made, except without the cars in trees bit. I'm not worried really, but Jill Garmin says I'll be close this evening with a few minutes to spare. As I approach the road into Mono, I see a forest fire in the distance. Looks new and fresh- in fact, there aren't even any fire helicopters or bombers active yet. The closer I get, the bigger it gets and I finally see smoke jumpers doing their thing around the fire- flame retardant, etc. The turn back to Mono is blocked by the CHP; "Road Closed Due To Fire" announces the message board; quickly, I ask a CHP officer to hold my flag by the road closed sign. Reluctantly she agrees and then looks at the rally flag she's been holding. "The Iron Butt Rally", she says "who else would have to get to Mono Hot Springs out of season, I should have known" as she laughs under her breath.

I ask Jill for a 15 mile detour; she can't find one. I then try the east/ south on my own and Jill tries mightily to route me past the fire only to find myself in driveways and ranches. After 30 minutes of this nonsense and the clock ticking away on arrival at Mono, I break down and call the Rallymaster. She informs me that if there is another way in, I must find it and use it; I state that I'll take my chances since I've given Jill every opportunity to route me around the conflagration. This is my third, and hopefully, last call to Lisa. In retrospect, I should have run these boni in reverse order and headed towards the Ancient Bristle Cone Pine Forest for that major location- I see this option in the post rally analysis.

I head back into the heat of the Mojave and try for Barstow for the rest bonus, I get only as far as Bakersfield before I call it a night. Yes, I should have at least tried for Mojave near Edwards AFB (made famous by the movie The Right Stuff, one of my favorites), but it was hot and I was tired of riding in the heat. I really needed to secure the correct

receipts for the rest bonus this night; I knew Bakersfield was good as I had used it in BL III.

I double check all my mileages and times for the return loop, satisfied, I'm off for a quick 4 hours of sleep. Up early again and off to Baker for the world's largest thermometer (89d), then to Vegas for two quickies, before my big bonus of the day, the Grand Canyon's North Rim. A stunning ride in through an older forest fire (the Roosevelt Fire according to the maps) reveals another road closed due to a fire- this one is a controlled burn however. After documenting the road closure, I head to the lodge for cell coverage for hopefully my last call to Lisa. She answers the phone with "What are you on the 'road closed' rally?" Haha, we shared a good laugh since this is now my third road closed, but I assured her this was not intentional. I rerun the mileage back to the barn and decide to head south, against the advice of Gary Stipe who has been keeping a close eye on my progress via my Star Traxx unit. He reckons I could have headed north into Colorado and yielded a ton more points on similar miles; I was stupid and didn't take his advice even after I was under way. I stubbornly head south for the Ray, AZ bonus that Jim and I should have gotten on the outward leg. Then on I push into the night; stopping only once for a 45 minute nap, I roll into Greensburg Kansas, roughly a year after my prior visit.

The damage is incredible; the photos on TV can not prepare you for it. The well has apparently collapsed upon itself and is being rebuilt. The only thing really open is the local gas station; the diner Mike Allen and I stopped in is a mere memory. Most every building is gone or so severely damaged you cant tell what it used to be. Among this chaos, a man is mowing his yard; proof we as humans look for some order regardless of the situation. Now it's time for boogying; Olathe, home to Garmin, awaits. It is here I catch up with Kendall again. He and I met on the way into Lick along with Brian Roberts (who I met in Missoula during the BLIII for the Virgin Mary bonus). He pulls up from one direction as I pull up from another. "Where's your next stop?" goes out the call. "Columbia and the barn." We agree. So we press on- one bonus stop left at MIZZOU and a miserable one it is. The requirements call for a photo of the distinctive Ionic columns that are the symbol of the university. Fine, being a Penn State grad, I understand symbols; ours is the Nittny Lion. He's much easier to take a picture of in the dark with a Polaroid than a bunch of dimly lit columns on a mound in a quad are. Miserable bonus. I contact the rallymaster- last time honest, since we can't fulfill the bonus as required (see Guidestones fiasco) and she says do the best you can, and we did. Over and out, back to the barn at 12:45am where Jean awaits; I recognized her- that was her goal. Mine has been achieved; if all my points hold I should have a gold medal and I am a finisher of the Iron Butt Rally.

Scoring is a breeze this time; Don Moses is brutally efficient and I retain all my points; IBR staff has verified that at the time of my attempt of Mono Hot Springs, the roads were indeed impassable. Apparently earlier in the day, a detour was in place. Riders that had gone through the following morning saw the evidence of a significant fire and crews still working along the fire line in case of flare ups. It is time for sleep.

Epilogue

At the finishers' banquet, surrounded by my fellow riders, I feel better about the whole ordeal; it still sucked, but I do feel better. Jean and I have dinner with fellow Moron Rick Rohlf of Round Rock, Doug Bailey, a couple I can't recall (sorry), and George Barnes' wife and daughter. George was attempting to become the first rider to win the IBR twice in the modern era- a valiant effort but it fell short. I knew my place; gold medallist and I was hoping for that top 20 I had set out as my initial goal. Bob Higdon entertained the masses with his story of "carnal knowledge of a duck, but it was consensual" and I'll let it go there for him to explain how he got off the charges. There I am, 27th place. Yes, I could have done better; had I gone to New Brunswick on Leg 1 or turned north after the Grand Canyon on Leg 2, I would have been much higher in the standings- with both, mid teens. It doesn't matter; I have finally achieved that goal; I am a finisher of the Iron Butt Rally and so awarded with IBA number 342- a number less than those who climbed Everest this past spring, a number all of us who strive for, the magic three digit IBA number denoting the IBR finisher status.

I am pleased.

Like most post rally rides, it is time for decompression and reflection; yes I hated it. Nearly every damn minute was hated in fact, but I did it. Maybe the hatred will wane with time, but for now, it's someone else's turn. A fellow rider commented that it took a great deal of mental toughness not to pack it in after the first leg's disappointment; I agree. I have only a few strengths as a LD rider and the one I count on is my brain to get me through the tough spots. The other is Honda's engineering. And this was the time for mental toughness, that squidgy organic part mentioned at the outset; the Honda did just fine.