

Beemerville USA via The Natchez Trace Parkway



Several times in the past I had had the occasion to ride portions of the Natchez Trace Parkway, but I had never had the opportunity to ride it in its entirety, 444 miles through three states, Mississippi, Alabama and Tennessee. Beemerville USA, the BMWMOA 2005 National Rally, give me the opportunity to do just that, and it was well worth the wait. I had been discouraged by many that riding the Trace would be no walk in the park because of the low speed limit, 50 mph, which many people assured me was strictly enforced by the Federal Park Police. That proved not to be accurate with the help of the proper equipment, but we did not tempt fate too harshly and kept our speed down to where the Park Police had better things to do than attempt to corral six (6) motorcycles.

Beemerville USA, the site at Lima, Ohio, for the 2005 MOA National Rally, looked to me like the right place to use the Trace as an access route, and joining me on this venture was my son Michael, my brothers Larry and Gary, together with Robert "Bob" Cromby and Jim Soper. The DeLorme mapping system told me that it was 1322 miles using all 444 miles of the Trace. I had never been north of Jackson on the Trace, and found that the best of the Trace was the last 20 or so miles near Nashville, which is laid out in not one straight line, just an endless supply of 180 and sometimes 360 degree curves laid out over an absolutely smooth surface



The Natchez Trace is the story of people on the move, of the age-old need to get from one place to another. It is also the story of Natchez, Chickasaw, and Choctaw Indians following traditional ways of life, of French and Spanish people venturing into a world new to them, and of people building a new nation. At first the trace was probably a series of hunters' paths that slowly came to form a trail from the Mississippi over the low hills into the valley of the Tennessee. By 1733 the French knew the land well enough to map it and showed an Indian trail running from Natchez to the northeast. By 1785 Ohio River Valley farmers searching for markets had begun floating their crops and products down the rivers to Natchez or New Orleans.

Because they sold their flatboats for lumber, returning home meant either riding or walking. The trail from Natchez was the most direct. Growing numbers of travelers tramped the crude trail into a clearly marked path that is still visible today. By 1810 many years of improvements

had made the trace an important wilderness road, the most heavily traveled in the Old Southwest. As the road was being improved other comforts, relatively speaking were coming to the trace. Many inns – locally called



stands – were built. By 1820 more than 20 stands were in operation, though most provided no more than basic food and shelter. Thieves added an element of danger to a catalog of hazards that included swamps, floods, disease-carrying insects, and sometimes-unfriendly Indians. Soon thereafter, however,

steamboats arrived in Natchez, and people preferred the comfort of travel on the river to the walk along the trace. Soon the bustle of the trace had quieted to the peacefulness of a forest lane.



Started in the late 1930's the modern Natchez Trace Parkway parallels the old trace. In 1995, in recognition of its historic significance and scenic qualities, the National Scenic Byways Program designated the parkway an All-American Road. Today 95 percent of the parkway is complete, giving present-day travelers an unhurried route from Natchez to Nashville.

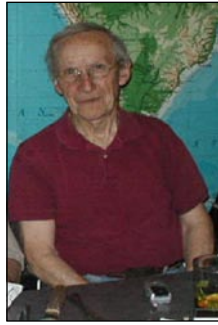
Our group left Austin on Wednesday the 20th at 6 AM. We rode steadily and the hardest part of the trip was through Louisiana. We went through Bryan, Madisonville, Jasper, Louisiana, and finally Mississippi. We arrived at the Trace at about 2 PM, and stopped for a photo opportunity. We were feeling pretty happy about finally being on the Trace after the hustle and bustle of traffic in Louisiana and Mississippi. The impression you immediately have of the Trace is that it is like a Park, and looks manicured like a Park. The other thing you immediately notice is the absolute lack of traffic, and the solitude of the Trace since there are no advertisements or billboards or commercial traffic of any kind. Even though you cannot run at normal highway speeds on the Trace, you still make good time due to the lack of truck traffic. We made it to Tupelo, Mississippi that night and settled into a motel and dinner after riding about 740 miles.

The next day we rode the rest of the Trace, including those magical last 20 miles of the North end near Nashville, and reluctantly left the Trace for the normal highways

and byways. We arrived at Beemerville and Lima, Ohio, around 5:30 PM and found registration still open. We registered and went directly to the camping area where we set up our tents and went to dinner. As we left for dinner on the bikes, the skies looked threatening, and while we were eating, a serious thunderstorm struck our campground which left Bob Cromby's tent, which was not staked down, about 100 yards away. We retrieved the tent and his belongings and hit the sack.

Beemerville turned out to be a major draw for the BMWMOA alumni. A record 8200 plus people registered for the Rally, and the selection of vendors was greater than I have ever personally witnessed. The BMW truck was giving demonstration rides on all the new models, and the selection of seminars was unsurpassed. The food was even good and plentiful including homemade ice cream. The weather held off after the initial thunderstorm with the only downer being the temperature, which was nearly as warm as it was back home.

After enjoying the Rally all day Friday and Saturday, we got up early Sunday morning and headed for home. Bob Cromby and my son Mike got home Monday evening, and the three Grosenheider boys got home Tuesday evening after stopping to visit relatives in Illinois. Jim Soper went off on his own generally heading for West Virginia and points east. I am happy to say that all of us had not one mechanical problem and we received no performance awards from the law enforcement establishment. A good time was had by all.



~ Del Grosenheider - Riding Blackie - 95 R1100RSL
