



Back of the Dragon Wytheville VA

This trip started in the low country passing thru Okeefenokee Swamp, thru the Piedmont of the Carolinas; to the rolling hills and mountains of SW Virginia; Jefferson and Mt Rodgers National Forests. I chose to travel US 301 thru FL, GA and a part of South Carolina where I picked up US 601. My travels

took me thru a bygone era when US 301 was the route to Florida. The roadway was dotted with abandoned motels, repair shops, etc. It was lined with Southern Magnolia; and its large white flowers and also huge Mountain Laurels. Also there were just as many churches, too. My first day ended in Statesboro GA, home of Georgia Southern University. (381 mi.)

The next day was Sunday and many of the small towns I traveled thru, and there were hundreds, were decorated for the Memorial Day weekend. As I entered Virginia, I started to notice the hundreds of yard sales that lined the roadway and in every conceivable open space. I thought this rather odd. I passed under the Blue Ridge Parkway at Fancy Gap, I ended the

day in Wytheville VA and would spend the next 4 days using this as a base for my travels thru the mountains. (394 mi.)



On Monday (temp 48) I left for the Back of the Dragon, Route 16, in Marion VA. It travels some 32 miles to Tazewell VA and is very similar to The Tail of the Dragon except there are guard rails. There are many twists and turns like The Tail. I had to reduce speed a lot on the right turns, since the cagers had run slightly off the road scattering gravel into the turn.

The Back of the Dragon is part of what is called The Claw of the Dragon (clawofthedragon.com and backofthedragon.com). There are

names for each portion of the Claw; Possum Run, The Woolly Mammoth, Horn of the Cow, and Turkey Strut. I did portions of all of them. After I completed the Back, I continued on route 16 and entered West Virginia to WV 10. I knew this not because of a sign, but



for the coal mines and their above ground machinery, called tippers. These tippers were huge and so were the mounds of processed coal; waiting for rail cars to transport to electric plants. I



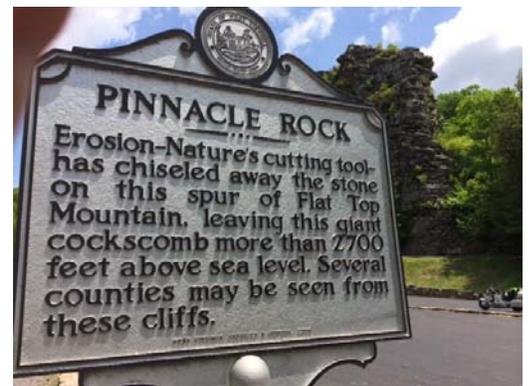
I ran across one such train; it was miles long. Further along my travels I was coming down a steep hill, slowing to prepare to enter a small town. I was alongside a stream/river and it was flowing toward me. Explain that. Elkhorn Creek. I headed south to Princeton WV and jumped on the I-77 for the 40 mile trip back to the hotel. (198 mi.)

On Tuesday I left the hotel heading north to Big Walker Mountain and a small country store located at the summit. There is also a tower there you can climb, for a fee, to view a 6 county area. It was foggy, so I did not climb the tower. Not that I would on a clear day. When I



got to the bottom of the mountain I picked up VA 42 This is a valley road and the ride was smooth and rambling. When I reach VA 100 I turned north, heading for Rich Creek and WV 12 which connects into WV 3. I stayed on WV 3 till it met WV 16 and rode this part of the highway to WV 10, thru towns named "Mouth of Wilson and Bud", and back to Princeton, I-77 and the hotel. (223 mi.)

On Wednesday I rode VA 52 which follows I-77 part way to VA 94 heading for the Shot Tower. This tower was constructed in 1807 and was used to make shot/ammunition for smooth bore weapons. The molten lead was sent thru dies for various size shot and floated to the bottom; enabling the shot to be uniformly round. After the Shot Tower I proceeded west thru Mt Rodgers National Forest to get to VA 16, southern portion and back to Marion VA. This was an easy riding day; only 143 miles. This was my last full day in the area as I would start home Thursday.



On Thursday I left Wytheville for home, but not before going back south thru Mt Rodgers National Forest; using a VA 21. This would cross the Blue Ridge Parkway in North Carolina soon, near Laurel Springs. I connected into NC 18 to Wilkesboro and got on NC 16 to Pumpkin Center to Goodsonville and US 321. I stopped for coffee and a breakfast sandwich and was approached by a woman, Lara Davidson, who was the local historian and archivist. She also was into ancestry sourcing. She asked me my name and where I was from and why I was in the area. She said she would turn it over to the local newspaper; published once a week. She didn't think they would print it, though. She told me about the important people from the town. I



asked where she was from and she said she was from Goodsonville. I asked how come she doesn't talk like others in the area. She laughed and promptly turned to the 6 guys sitting at the table next to us and told them what I said. One replied, "cause we are educated". A laugh was had by all. I followed US 321 till it ended on US 301. I continued on south and ended the day back in Statesboro GA. (397 mi.)

The final day of my trip I continued on US 301 to Starke FL, US 100, US 1, I-95 to Scotsmoor, US 1 and home to Melbourne. (387 mi.)

I did 1559 miles to and from Wytheville and 564 miles traveling in the area doing those twistys. My total mileage was 2123. I had no issues with the bike and very little rain. The only construction I ran into was in GA which stopped us and in Florida near Baldwin.

