

American Flyer's Arts and Crafts Tour

An all BMW excursion in which we visit everything from Bratwust to Bierstadt
Woodstock VT and environs July 19 – 23 2006

The cast:

*Andy Forrester, Rob St. John, Urch St John, David Beilman, Walt Lynd, Arthur Einstein
Karl Beilman and associates (Bill Schumacher and Jeff Amber-Messick) with cameo appearances by
Barbara O'Connell, Frank O'Connell, Susan Frost and Stan Robinson in a supporting role.*

Chapter 1

Whoever said that getting there is half the fun must have had heading for Vermont on two wheels in mid-July in mind.

Andy and I left Katonah NY on Wednesday morning fully expecting to be in Woodstock by early afternoon. David Beilman had other ideas. He insisted on meeting us along the way and many cell phone conversations into the ride we agreed to rendezvous at the junction of VT rte 100 and Rte 11 in Londonderry. David was determined to lay on a full measure of VT hospitality. Only when he showed up did his not-so-ultimate motive surface – which was to exercise his recently acquired BMW K1200GT – a startling blue beauty which he rode with great restraint the entire trip.



We stopped to visit the house that David & Susan are building and had a bottle of wine in the front yard.

Woodstock is due North of Londonderry. We headed East, motoring casually through Chester, then north up 106 and into Woodstock by the back door. The long way home.

We three dined that evening in the tavern at the Barnard Inn (<http://www.woodstock-village.com/barnardinn.html>) and were well pleased with the beer and the menu. The Barnard Inn is definitely a 4-star AFMC venue.

Karl, Bill and Jeff arrived on BMWs from Philadelphia on Thursday afternoon. The St John's, on their red and Silver BMWs showed up on Thursday, too. Walt amazed all by arriving on his new R1200RT his bike of the future. Harleys are but a memory to Walt and some of us wonder if he really has unmolested epidermis left for a BMW rondel tattoo. Only Sandy knows for sure.



The old Richter Place up Pomfret way

Chapter 2

Several of us were billeted at Philip Richter's family homestead on top of a hill, at the end of a long gravel driveway, somewhere between Barnard and Pomfret. Philip's grandfather bought the

place in 1947 and while major appliances and a bit of plumbing appear to have been upgraded, not much else has. Andy, always a light sleeper, was kept awake at night by critter noises and a sign on the toilet warned that the lid must be kept down or the mice would drown. The place is a living museum and we were lucky enough to stay there. Thank you Philip for the opportunity to experience Vermont as it was 60 years ago.

Event #2. On Thursday morning David, Andy, and I (Arthur) met at The Woodstock General store. There we had an AFMC 4-star breakfast, and headed to Claremont NH. My



Bratwurst on the hoof

sister's nephew, Mike Satsow, owns and operates North Country Smokehouse there. It's a large hangar-like metal building across the street from Claremont airport which contains a couple million dollars worth of bacon-slicers, sausage stuffers, turkey-smokers etc. etc. Mike interrupted his meeting with a gentleman from Chicago who was installing a machine designed in Germany and built in Japan. I'm not sure what it did but none of us dared go near it. (www.northcountrysmokehouse.com).

An hour-and-a-half later we headed South out of Claremont, making a brief but edifying 10-minute visit at a factory that builds post-and-beam houses. Here David instructed us in the innovative possibilities of this construction method. We then headed for Walpole and a 4-star cup of coffee at Burdick's (<http://www.burdickchocolate.com/restaurant.asp>) – an elegant latte venue with what appeared to be the flakiest pastries in New England. From Walpole a jog over to Rte 10 sent us north for home-made ice cream on the shores of Lake Sunapee.

I am not quite sure how we found our way back to Woodstock, but the sun was out, the road was clear and dry, the pace was Vermontish and not designed to rouse the local constabulary who well knew that the BMW International Rally was being held in Essex Junction VT this week. In other words it was another glorious ride.

The entire crew had by now arrived and we gathered for dinner at The Corners Inn in Bridgewater (www.cornersinn.com) in the AFMC corner and wolfed down another 4-star dinner.

Chapters 3 & 4

The announce purpose of this ride was to attend the BMW Rally near Burlington. And that's where we pointed bikes after breakfast on Friday morning – with a plan to pick up David's friend Jon Deitcher near Stowe – and give the house David designed for him the once over. The house is an impressive demo of what David does for a living. We were pretty much blown away by the place which you can see at (www.beilman.net). Gables and cupolas notwithstanding, the garage was particularly appealing. It houses 3 or 4 Honda CBRs, a similarly uncomfortable BMW, a V-12 Benz SL, and a Ford GT. You get the idea.



Spectacular house designed by David for Jon



Dinner The Corners

Jon suggested two possible routes to the BMW rally in Essex Junction - the scenic route through Smuggler's Notch won the voice vote. This little cowpath is closed in winter, which should have been the first clue. It's hardly more than a hiking trail at its narrowest (skiers; think double black diamonds) and snakes up Rte. 108 in a series of tiny switchbacks which present a special challenge when its not pouring rain – which it was. The folks with enough sense to stop and put on rain suits formed a pod of their own and never saw the rest of us till day's end back in Woodstock.

The wet and wild, Jon, David, Rob, Urch, and Arthur, had more or less dried out by the time we reached the BMW rally campground. We paid our dues and wandered among the exhibitors, marveling at how exhibitors contrive to separate funds from Rally-goers. The better part of 45 minutes was devoted to this ramble – quite enough for some but hardly sufficient for a serious shopper like me. I did manage to find Ian, Jo and John Fitzwater, our New Zealand tourmeisters (<http://www.gotournz.com/>) who send regards to one and all.

David led the way back down Rte 12, which was surprisingly clear of traffic and we arrived in Woodstock by 7:15. At 8 or we reunited with lost lambs for dinner at another terrific restaurant which will have to remain nameless 'cause I mislaid my notes. Just go out Rte 4 past the gas station and its up there on the right. Barbara will know. She made the reservations.

Chapter 5

At breakfast in the general store Friday morning we found that Bill and Jeff, had decided to take off early and hit the BMW rally in earnest.

The rest of us dawdled over coffee, casting about for a destination for the day. David began to spin tales of a fabulous painting by Albert Bierstadt, an American Master of the Hudson River School, in a museum up in St Johnsbury VT. And thus our itinerary was set.

The ride north on Rte 5, with the Connecticut River on our right met AFMC scenic standards in spite of overhanging clouds. As we approached St Johnsbury it began to sprinkle. With only one stop for directions we took a left off the main drag and wound our way up a steeply curved hill to reach the Fairbanks Museum where we supposed the painting would be. As we parked the bikes a woman who'd been following us pulled up. She claimed she once rode a BMW of her own and admired our ascent of the hill – and the fact that we had resisted the temptation of loud pipes – then offered free passes to the



At The Fairbanks Museum, St Johnsbury

museum if only someone would ride home with her to fetch them. David and Rob rode off with her to procure the freebies and were back within a half hour. You can't make this stuff up.

The Fairbanks museum (www.fairbanksmuseum.org) was founded by Mr. Franklin Fairbanks whose family made their money – and quite a lot of it apparently - in scales. Butcher scales, household scales, industrial scales. You name it they weighed it (<http://www.fairbanks.com/history.asp>). But the museum that bears his name is filled with thousands of birds he'd collected and glass cases containing badgers, raccoons, bears, pumas, wildcats and other assorted fauna. In its prime the collection must have sparkled. Today, more than a hundred years after most of these creatures left the taxidermist, the animals look sad and moth-eaten.

The Bierstadt we'd come to see turned out to be in the library - the St Johnsbury Athenaeum



(<http://www.stjathenaeum.org/gallery.htm>) which was just down the street. After lunch in a nearby diner, watching the rain hit the puddles in the street outside, we rode up the hill to the Athenaeum for a little cultural fix. The entrance is attractive and unassuming, but walk back through the stacks and you get a first glimpse of a monumental 10 feet by 15 feet landscape titled “Domes of Yosemite”. It's one of three Bierstadt in the collection, which includes 100 other paintings by 18th and 19th century masters. This gallery

is said to be the oldest in America that's still in its original form. The room is flooded with natural light from the ceiling skylight and is quite spectacular.

What constantly amazes me on our AFMC adventures are the gems we uncover in unlikely places and the glories of the small towns we ride through. St Johnsbury (pop. 7500) is typical.

The pitter-patter on helmets turned into a real downpour as we headed back down the slab (I 91) to Woodstock. Thoroughly rinsed we barely had time for a change of clothes before heading off to South Woodstock again and another perfect 4-star AFMC dinner on the porch of the Kedron Valley Inn. (www.kedronvalleyinn.com).

Everyone but Walt, who'd left earlier, split for home on Sunday morning under threatening skies. But except for a sprinkle near Manchester the weather was kind. This Vermont triip, which began as an informal ride turned out to be an AFMC event of the first order with new faces, great food, excellent roads, and enough rain to keep us humble.

They don't get a lot better than this one.