

# HIGH EXPECTATIONS

**A NO-BAD-ROADS TOUR  
OF THE APPALACHIANS  
IN NEW HAMPSHIRE,  
VERMONT AND NEW YORK.**

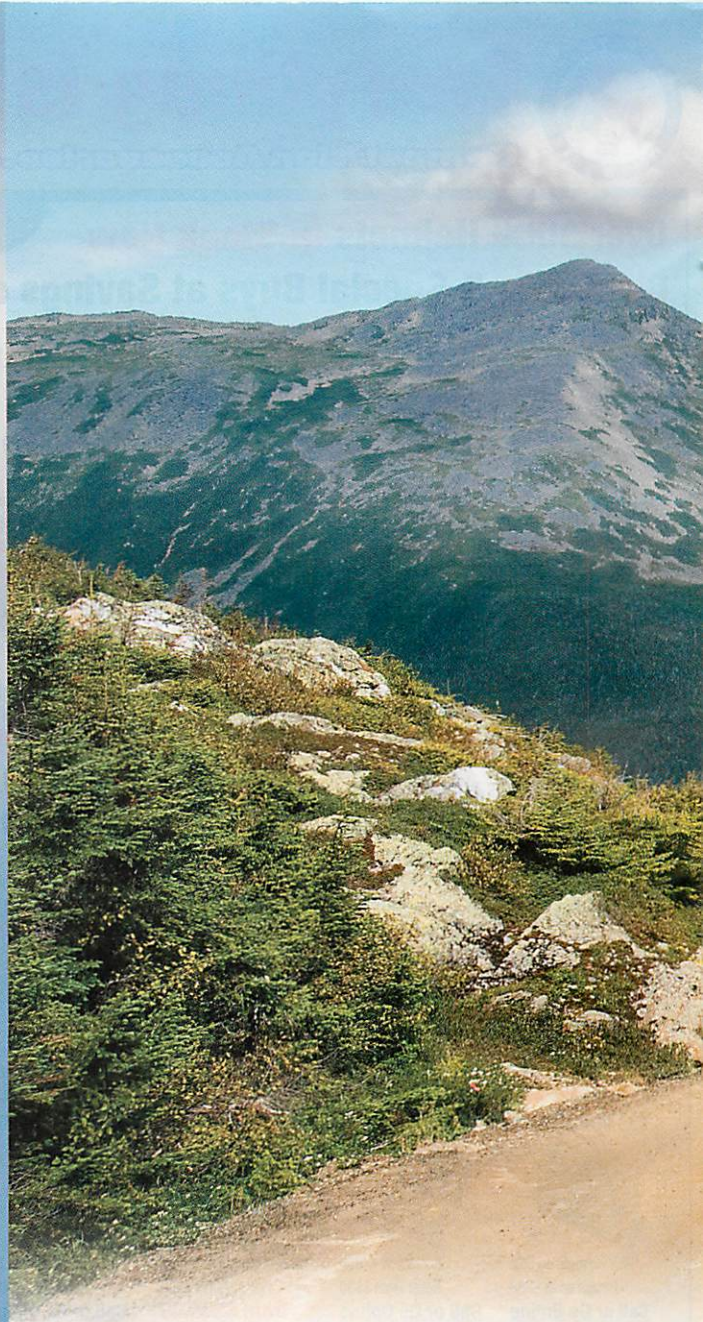
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**PHOTOGRAPHY BY THE AUTHOR**

**AND BOB MEADOR**



Whiteface Mountain is the fifth  
highest peak in New York state.



**V**isiting any portion of the Appalachian Mountains in the summer is a gamble with the weather—heat, humidity and rain—especially the wet stuff. But it's worth rolling the dice for a chance to see this beautiful and unique countryside and experience roads that draw tens of thousands of riders every year.

Our trip officially begins in Lake George, New York, a southern border of the Adirondack Park Preserve—but first we need to get there. Meeting our riding mates at a horse ranch in Bedford, we inspect and make final adjustments to the bikes before making the 220-mile, five-hour trek up State Highway 22.

## **FORT WILLIAM HENRY HOTEL**

It's hot and muggy as we ride into Lake George. Within 20 minutes of check-in, riders are in the hotel pool or Lake George itself. Bill Dutcher's Americade, one of the largest, oldest and best-run motorcycle rallies in existence, makes Lake George home. A rider who hasn't been to Americade is like a shopper who





The 7.6-mile road climbing up Mount Washington has an average gradient of 11.6 percent, is part gravel and features no guardrails—not a good place to be if you're afraid of heights.

hasn't been to the Mall of America—at some point, you just have to go. Rooms at Ft. William Henry during Americade are like courtside tickets to L.A. Lakers' playoff games.

Friendships are renewed at the Lookout Café, trip shirts distributed and admired while the ride itinerary is reviewed over burgers. Dubbed the "George Washington Tour," ride planners promise to shift our club's traditional credo of "high miles, low expectations," by 180 degrees. It's a lofty goal for a group that rides as much as this. We shall see....

## ADIRONDACK MOUNTAINS

While technically not part of the Appalachian Mountains, even though they're just across Lake Champlain from the Green Mountains and a thumb and a knuckle from the Catskills on a map, the Adirondacks have their own unique geology—their deep, rocky slabs of exposed bedrock appear steeper and more rugged than their Appalachian brothers.

Route 9N north takes us to Lake Placid, home of Olympic winter events and the fabulous North Elba Show Grounds horse show facility. A daredevil in the group elects to take an

elevator ride to the top of the ski jump facility. The rest of us circumvent the horse grounds on the glorious River Road, catching Highway 86 for a 25-mile twisty ride to the top of Whiteface Mountain. Nearing the top, trees disappear and the landscape gives way to rocks and small, low-growing shrubs and herbs, grasses and nonwoody flowering plants. A walkway leads to the top through a visitor's center, or a 424-foot tunnel leads to an elevator and a ride to the summit. The tunnel is cool and damp and feels great after our hot and muggy ride.

Leaving Whiteface and heading to Ray Brook, we pass large pine trees that have grown so close together they've lost all their branches, except for the ones at the very top. They look like arrows shot down from a giant bow into a tight pattern along the road. Lunch at the Tail O' the Pup is on outdoor orange picnic tables. We soon learn that not everyone on one side of a picnic table should get up at the same time. After barbecued ribs, burgers and steamers chased down with copious amounts of IBC root beer and iced tea, we're back on our way. The afternoon is spent riding among crystal-blue mountain lakes in the Adirondack Park Preserve, making our way back to Lake George



Right: Enjoying the view of a rainbow from the veranda of the Mount Washington Hotel.

Below: Lined up in front of the Shelburne Inn with our eight BMWs, one Honda, two Harleys and one Suzuki.

Middle: A cog railway provides a faster way to the top of Mount Washington.

on Highway 30—Saranac Lake, Tupper Lake, Long Lake, Blue Mountain Lake and Indian Lake—before hooking up with the North River and North Creek, following them on Highway 28 as it joins with Highway 9, which ushers us back into Lake George.

## SHELBURNE FARMS

Riding north on Highway 9, the size and length of Lake George manifests itself as it refuses to let us go for nearly 40 miles. We finally bid good-bye just north of Indian Kettles. Eastbound on Highway 73 through the Green Mountain National Forest, we enter the actual Appalachian Mountain range. Near the top of the ridge, we head north on Highway 100 through Hancock, Lower Granville and Warren at the north end of the forest. At Irasville we head east on Highway 17, spending more than an hour on tight westward-leading twisties to Bristol. On the other side of Bristol, Highway 7 takes us north to Shelburne and the Shelburne Inn, our stop for the day. It is early and after a quick dip in the refreshing waters of Lake Champlain, a hotel van takes us to visit the Shelburne Museum.

Back at the Shelburne Farm, we're slack-jawed with awe at the horse-breeding barn. Dr. William Webb and Eliza Vanderbilt Webb created the farms in 1886 as a grand land use and animal breeding exper-

Right: The Mount Washington Hotel was completed in 1902 and is one of the last surviving original New Hampshire grand hotels.

Below: A walkway leads to the top of Whiteface Mountain.

iment. Frederick Olmsted, the landscape architect of Central Park in New York City, divided the land into farmland, forest and parks to create a picturesque setting reminiscent of the ornamental farms of 19th-century Europe. Construction of the breeding barn began in 1889 and was completed in 1891. At the time, it was

“We catch Highway 86 for a 25-mile twisty ride to the top of Whiteface Mountain.”



the largest and best-equipped building of its kind in the world. The main building is 107 feet wide by 417 feet long, with a two-story annex on the rear of the building. The roof is more than 86,000 square feet of complex dormers and an enormous central tower. It is said that the reflection of the recently refinished copper roof could be seen by astronauts in space.

Webb's idea for the barn was to create a new hackney horse that would be strong enough for a plow but elegant enough for a carriage, so it boasts an interior exercise ring that is 375 feet long. We're staying in the Inn, the original country home. Restored in 1987, it has 24 guest rooms, polished, turned woodwork, ornate period furnishings and a cozy library, as well as beautiful gardens and no air conditioning. After an incredible meal in a private room off the inn's main restaurant, we spend a warm, humid and somewhat sleepless night on the third floor of the hotel—the original staff quarters. The next morning we assemble for a group shot in front of this amazing home. The inn fills up months in advance, so if you plan to visit, book ahead.

## MOUNT WASHINGTON

We leave Shelburne and spend the day traveling the best motorcycle roads leading east into the Presidential Range, the very best peaks of the White Mountains and, perhaps, of the Appalachian Mountains themselves. As any peak-bagger (climbers who keep track of the mountain peaks they've scaled) will tell you, centrally located Mount Washington is the highest, at 6,288 feet, but gives nothing away to Mounts Madison, Adams and Jefferson, which rise along a massive ridge as the fifth, second and third highest peaks in the northeast.

We arrive at the base of Mount Washington and the Bretton Arms Inn, part of the Mount Washington Hotel complex, just before a boisterous thunderstorm dumps nearly an inch of rain on the area. The rain ends as abruptly as it starts, so we stroll up the hill to visit the main hotel. Massive verandas circle the gigantic main lobby area with its Tiffany stained-glass and crystal chandeliers. We forego the formal dining room with its daily menu changes and orchestra that accompany each meal. Instead, we walk back to the Bretton Arms where our group is served in a private room and have a dinner no doubt every bit as good as the meals in the hotel up the hill.

Bypassing a ride on the cog railway, we motor south on Highway 302, through Crawford Notch State Park. Following the twisting highway between the various peaks, the road so closely follows the landscape it appears as if it was created by pouring hot asphalt over the peaks as hot chocolate sauce might be poured over giant mounds of ice cream. The hot asphalt rolled off the mountains and settled in the valleys where it was flattened to make a highway.

We turn north on Highway 16 and eight miles later we see the entrance to the one-lane toll road leading to the top of Mount Washington. Signs caution anyone with a fear of heights to NOT drive but to take the guided van tour to the summit. Good advice, as we encounter one car driver frozen in a panic attack a few miles from the summit. She's clutching the steering wheel, unable to go forward or backward—in fact, unable to open her eyes. The 7.6-mile road climbs



Background: Expansive verandas circle three sides of the Mount Washington Hotel. Left: Tail O' the Pup in Ray Brook serves barbecue and seafood outdoors on orange picnic tables.



Above: A 242-foot tunnel leads to an elevator which takes us to the summit of Whiteface Mountain.



Left: Under the 86,000-square-foot roof of the Shelburne Farms breeding barn, stallions, yearlings and mature horses were kept in stalls around the perimeter. The interior exercise ring is 375 feet long.

4,618 feet with an average gradient of 11.6 percent. The road hosts a bicycle hill climb every year, considered one of the toughest in the world for cyclists. It features greater altitude gain and is steeper than bicycle races over Italy's Mortirolo Pass or Monte Zoncolan or the Alto de El Angliru in Spain and steeper than any of the famous climbs in the Tour de France.

Verbally cautioned to maintain a 10-mph speed limit and not to pass, some of us were happy that many cars pulled over and waved us by. The final few





Above: Looking down at clouds from the parking lot on Mount Washington. The highest wind ever observed by man was recorded at this summit in 1934 at 231 mph. Below right: New Hampshire's Newfound Lake from the top of Little Sugarloaf, looking toward Camp Pasquaney.

miles, we ride looking down at the tops of clouds on a steep, twisty, single-lane road with no guardrails and thousand-foot drop-offs to one side or the other—breathtaking fun!

We descend the mountain, avoid the traffic of Conway, New Hampshire's outlet shops and take the Bear Notch pass to the Kancamagus Highway (116). This incredible, 35-mile stretch of road runs alongside the Swift River through the White Mountain National Forest. We follow it until it joins with Highway 25 and then 3A takes us to our hotel overlooking Newfound Lake.

## NEWFOUND LAKE

Two riders take a hike to the top of Little Sugarloaf. Sweaty from the hike in these hot and humid conditions, we cross the road from our hotel and plunge into the crystal-clear water of Newfound Lake. At 2½ miles wide, six miles long and more than 180 feet deep, it is the third largest lake in New Hampshire. Underground springs completely refresh the lake's water every six months, resulting in stunning clarity and cleanliness.

## WOODSTOCK ABORTED

In the morning, with rain clouds gathering and forecasts of intense and sustained storms predicted for the area, we change plans, don raingear and race back to our respective starting places, abandoning our last day's ride to Woodstock, Vermont.

Arriving back at our Bedford, New York, garage starting point, we pull off our wet gear. I'm reminded of how much good friends add to the riding experience, especially when the friends have extensive knowledge of local roads and native history. Our great country started here. We can see the challenge, and we can see why it was met. The holy grail of "low mileage and high expectations" was certainly achieved. **36**

