

The "Who Cares Anymore" Tour



It's been twenty two years of riding and many of those years have been to Utah to ride the Canyons. Many have been left at the roadside either due to injury, business or

family obligations, but many also remain in the saddle. Some would wonder whether apathy or ride fatigue had set s seems a topic worth examining this year as our collective attention is so highly distracted by the train wreck underway in Washington D.C.

When I had a house/ranch in Utah in 1994 I bought a used Honda Goldwing. It somehow felt like the right bike for riding the range. I took it on a Late May ride to Las Vegas, passing through Zion National Park and Bryce Canyon. That ride made me think that May was the perfect riding month and that Utah was the perfect riding venue. The Canyons inspire like few other places.

The next year I asked a couple of guys if they wanted to ride the Canyons with me in May. Only one was free to go, a lawyer named Gary, who rode despite his wife's concerns for his wellbeing. This is the same guy I had taken on a Malcolm Forbes Memorial Ride out of Bedminster, NJ and who had plowed a farm pasture with a Forbes Harley Police Special. That thigh raspberry notwithstanding, Gary was out on his own Goldwing (which he managed to keep upright) and we were riding the range from Moab through Canyonlands and down to Utah's SW corner. After that ride, Utah had its hooks in me and riding the Canyons in May became an imperative.

I decided in early 1996 to take the ride more seriously and cast a wider invitation net. Mostly I focused on a work buddy, Andy Forrester and a Cornell buddy, Frank O'Connell. Andy had just retired as a banker and Frank was in between CEO gigs (being a marketing guy par excellence). Andy invited his neighbor Arthur and Frank came alone. I also invited Larry from work, who was

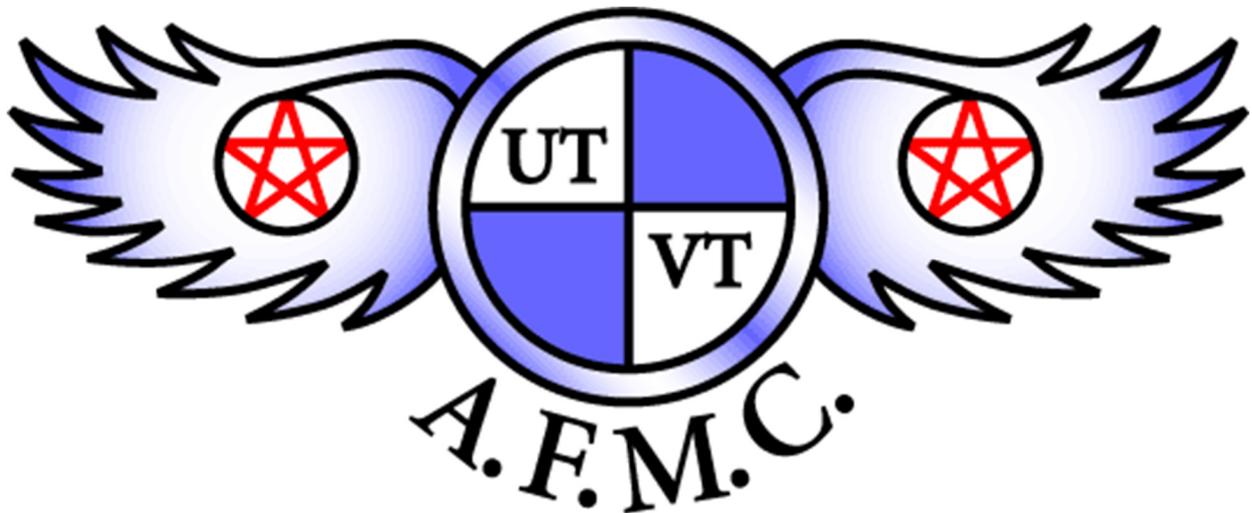
married to Brenda Buttner, the then CNBC anchorwoman. I rounded out this team by asking my Utah massage therapist, Deb, if she wanted to wrangle the group and give day-end massages. It was actually her suggestion so she was game. And thus was born the first CanyonRun.

It lasted 5 days, went Park City, Moab, Monticello, Torrey, Beaver and back to Park City. We had cold on Soldier's Summit, warmth in Price, magnificent vistas in Moab, near-miss gas outages in Monticello, pickle pie in Bicknell and snowball fights in Cedar Breaks. It was a hoot and at every stop Arthur proclaimed the wonders of nature as this had all been under water a million years ago.

Since then we have had twenty one more Utah (or thereabouts) rides in May. We have gone as far West as San Diego and Angeles Crest, as far East as Texas Hill Country, as far South as Bisbee, and as far North as Oregon. But mostly we ride in Utah and northern Arizona. Our launch point has shifted from Park City to Las Vegas. Our choice in lodgings has shifted from Best Westerns to The Lodge at Red River Ranch. But we still have Deb (ably helped by Mardie) and we still have Rich, Frank and Arthur. We lost Andy (as a rider, not all of him) to a cerebral hemorrhage in Zagreb (notably at the end of a great ride through Croatia). Larry dropped off years ago due to normal marital adjustments (beatings from Brenda and presumed displeasure from wife # 2).

Our group got named by Frank in the Fall of 1996 The American Flyers Motorcycle Club (AFMC). It's a hokey name evocative of geriatric bus-riders with Velcro sneakers, but it stuck. We have run through a half dozen

emblems, but the one tattooed on my upper left arm has now stuck:



The club roster has gone through many iterations over twenty two years with the coming and going with over fifty members at various times. People have come and gone. Riding venues have come and gone (many foreign trips and a good number of one-off domestic rides). Even club leadership has come and gone. The constants seem to be a core team of riders and the ongoing desire to ride the Canyons in May.

This year we have been whittled down to fourteen riders on nine motorcycles and two Sling Shots, supported by Deb and Mardie. One rider (Matt Yeterian is new to the group but, strangely enough, known to both Rich and Kevin through different avenues). We have lost seven riders this year due to injury or other priorities. We have had several members die (only one on account of motorcycling). Every once in a while someone quits motorcycling altogether, but those we chalk up to

abnormal psychology. Most often it is the joints that do us in. But then we see Arthur (aka - Living Legend or Arturo). In our formation gathering at Robinson Farm in Woodstock, Vermont on a cold October night in 1996, Arthur declared himself to be the oldest of the gang at 63 years of age. I was the youngest at 41 years old. Arthur is going strong at 85 (though riding Steve Larsen's Sling Shot this year) and I am now 63, wondering if I have a hope in hell of making it another 22 years to follow in Arthur's fine footsteps.

We are covering familiar, but much beloved territory on this ride. In fact, we are hitting most of our favorites. We will start in Las Vegas at the Green Valley Ranch. We survived the GVR and its parent company, Station Casinos going into and out of bankruptcy (AFMC appears prominently on the creditors list right next to American Express). We will ride north by Lake Las Vegas and Lake Mead past Valley of Fire and head up past Mesquite through the Virgin Valley Gorge. This will take us through the humbling Zion National Park and then down through the nether regions (meaning the polygamist areas) of southern Utah over to Page, Arizona.

After hardening back to our roots at the local Holiday Inn Express, we will ride the desolate norther Arizona desert (the place of many a past blinding sandstorm), north through Monument Valley and into Mexican Hat. Mexican Hat is an important spot to AFMC. It is a spiritual vortex of sorts and a place where Navaho fry bread and hanging steaks abound. There is a short reach through Blanding up to Monticello, where we will lodge at Inn at the Canyons.

It would always be our preference to stay in the metropolitan Moab with all its finer lodging and dining spots, but this was not to be this year as some gathering or other had previously booked the town solid. So, we will stay two days in Monticello and ride into all the spots like Arches, Dead Horse Point and Canyonlands/Needles and enjoy Moab as commuters.

At least that will give us a Sunday morning jump on our favorite ride across the Bicentennial Highway through Glenn Canyon, up to Hanksville (with its moonscape hills) and through Capital Reefs into Torrey. Just between Torrey and Bicknell we will stay at our all-time favorite Lodge at Red River Ranch. From the hot tub to the western lounge and the buffalo in the front yard, no place says CanyonRun better than the Lodge.

We will stay two nights and ride the Escalante Staircase down to Bryce Canyon and maybe run the Capital Reefs gauntlet again for fun. We will dine at Cafe Diablo one night and let Charlene and Dave serve us buffalo steaks on our last night.

We hustle back to GVR on Tuesday with those heading to Phoenix and Salt Lake City peeling off early. We wrap up and head home on Wednesday. Where in the past we would have ridden into Las Vegas from San Diego (the Mohave Desert being lonely but beautiful), now we pack up the bikes in the AFMC trailer and boogey back on the slab for speed and comfort after a week of riding the Canyons.

So a baker's dozen of us gather in Las Vegas for our kick-off dinner at Hank's. There will now be 7 bikes and one Sling Shot to start with another two bikes and a

second Sling Shot joining in Page. The ride up through Lake Mead National Park and then through Zion is as scenic as always. Not to undermine our theme, but how can anyone NOT care about the natural beauty and



palpable spirituality of Zion Canyon?

A typically ironic situation confronts me as I stop at the Zion toll booth. I am confronted with a conundrum. The cost for three motorcycles (myself, Jeff and Kevin) is \$75. The cost of a lifetime National Park Service pass (for

seniors of 62+) is \$10 with the ability to bring in three friends. Hmm, what to do. I care about the National Park System.....but I care about my children's inheritance as well. So I split the difference and give the ranger \$20 and tell her to keep the \$10 as a donation. Problem solved....and I have a free NPS pass to boot.

We all gather up at a small bistro in Kanab made famous twenty years ago when Karen Brine refused to dine there due to their lack of alcohol, a problem they have since rectified. Who cares? For reasons of wonderful shared memories, I care. Karen no longer rides with us, though we do ride up to Maine to see the Brines occasionally. But her staunch backbone in the face of



southern Utah temperance is something worth remembering and caring about.

The afternoon ride through the Kaibab Forest chilled us to the bone with a thirty degree drop to 34.7 Degrees at Jacob's Lake. There is something strange that we subject ourselves to all these weather-related hardships. It must imply that we choose to rough it, which is, any way to slice it, a sign that we care about being out there on "horseback" in this fine country. The views of Vermillion Cliffs made the route cold but clarifying by virtue of the



grandeur of it all.

After finding our hotel in Page and reconnecting with Arthur, Bob, Steve and Maggie, we hustled over to the Dam Bar and Grill for a long and friendly dinner. While

Rob had given us all our ride t-shirts the night before, Maggie surprised us all with an added gift of a handkerchief of The Who Cares Anymore Tour. It seems that we might care more than we thought.....

Friday is scheduled to be a sunny and warm (all the way up to 55) day across northern Arizona, which we will traverse as we head up to Monument Valley. We stop in Kayenta and enjoy a coffee break at a local Navaho watering hole. The ride through The Monuments is as stirring as ever. The sky is clear and big. These rocks of time remind us that a mere twenty two years of worship of such natural beauty is a primordial blink of an eye.

Mexican Hat lays out at our feet, virtually unchanged from 1996. The Swinging Steak restaurant is only open for dinner, so we get our annual ration of Navaho fry bread at the small cafe at the San Juan Inn. We can tell who the new guy on the ride is.....that would be Matt, out in the parking lot on the phone, pacing back and forth over some business problem that will go unremembered in the years ahead. What Matt will remember and care about in the future is that he missed out on trying the fry bread.

As we drive north we pass the famous Mexican Hat rock with its inverted sombrero.

Monticello's Inn at the Canyons is our destination and strangely, was our rest stop in 1996 (under a different name and management presumably). It still has the



heated indoor pool and spa that saw lots of AFMC use.
For dinner we rode a chilly seven miles north to the Line

Steakhouse, where Kim had found perhaps the one fine



dining experience that Monticello had to offer.

Today we pay homage to Canyonlands by riding up to Dead Horse Point and Arches. These are the picture postcard spots of Utah. We are chilled to learn that Zion has been closed on account of snow, and we are glad to be across the state from all that while the sun warms it all up for our return in a few days.