VERMONT
Shamrock Tour®

TENNESSEE
Cumberland Curves

WYOMING
A Pioneer’s Passage

AUSTRIA
Conquering the Alps

REVIEWS:
2018 HARLEY-DAVIDSON LINE-UP
APRILIA SHIVER 900 AND DORSODURO 900
I’ve logged a lot of miles with my wife, Meredith, riding pillion, but I’ve never seen this before: she’s back there snapping photos of a straight, four-lane interstate, as if we’re riding God’s own highway.

“What’s up?” I ask.
“Well, it’s the most amazing thing,” she says. “I’m looking in front and behind, but there aren’t any cars appearing.”

Text: Geoff Drake
Photography: Geoff and Meredith Drake
Brattleboro, Vermont Shamrock Tour®

GREEN DAYS
“Vermont has had centuries of civilization to become as mad as California. Thankfully, it hasn’t.”
- Geoff Drake

This 19th-century house and former dairy farm in Reading, VT, is now a renowned modern art museum. The Hall Art Foundation is open by appointment only.

The Mohawk Trail (MA Route 2) connects the Bridge of Flowers in Shelburne Falls to North Adams and the Mount Greylock region.
S
he’s right. Where we come from, in California’s Bay Area, four-lane super slab is a form of purgatory. There have been moments when I’ve been tempted to insert my finger in the accessory outlet of my BMW and terminate the whole affair—and if it provided sufficient voltage, I might have. Don’t get me wrong: California is a beautiful place, but it’s continually exceeding its carrying capacity.

But here, we have the road to ourselves much of the time. To the east, the Connecticut River spreads out, dotted with occasional kayakers towing tiny barges of beer. To the west, we catch glimpses of ski areas along the spine of the Green Mountains. It’s important that we stay alert—but in this case, it’s for “swamp donkeys” (moose), not cars. On the rare occasions when we do see autos, the passengers wave.

The Fine Art of Porch Sitting
Northern New England has had ample centuries of civilization to become as mad as California, but somehow it hasn’t. The traffic is barely more frenetic than when Meredith and I lived in Brattleboro and Newfane, 30-plus years ago. Maybe four feet of winter snow creates a self-limiting population. Whatever the reason, I’m thankful for it.

On the first morning, we leave the Four Columns Inn in Newfane (15 minutes north of Brattleboro) and aim directly for two old favorites: the neighboring towns of Woodstock and Quechee. The latter is the home of the Simon Pearce ceramics gallery and its restaurant, The Mill, places that Meredith loves, verified by regular appearances on our credit card bill, with lots of digits on the wrong side of the decimal point.

In 2011, Hurricane Irene took out the historic covered bridge next to the restaurant. The side of the building is discolored at flood level, and it strains credulity to think the water rose that high. Back then, you’d have needed scuba gear to explore the ceramics furnace on the ground floor.

The longest covered wooden bridge in the U.S., the Cornish-Windsor Bridge spans the Connecticut River from New Hampshire to Vermont.
Farther south, the town of Wilmington was so isolated by the flood that it had to be supplied via helicopter.

We ride north on Route 12 to Barnard and a favorite swim spot: Silver Lake, where there's also a fine deli across the street from a public beach. It's an amazing place to don goggles and cap and swim to the far side, but today it also looks like a great day to be electrocuted and sink to the bottom in a charred mass. So, we retreat to the porch, and sure enough, the skies illuminate and the light show begins. I'm glad to be operating at normal voltage levels and enjoying a coffee under cover.

Turns out, porch sitting is a theme that will run throughout our trip. Almost daily, we find ourselves seeking shelter under the covered porches of grange halls and general stores throughout New England, waiting for storms to pass. And, serendipitously, our sitting around pays big dividends in conversations with locals happy to tell us about roads, attractions, and, most important, the locations of the best ice cream stands.

Pretty soon, people are coming over to chat about the Indian Roadmaster. I must admit, I'm liking the momentary celebrity that comes with riding this beautiful motorcycle. The giant, valanced fenders, pushrod tubes as fat as your fist, and a glowing Warbonnet cutting through the fog imbue the Roadmaster with a charming, regal air; and when you roll up to Suzie's Soft Serve in the middle of Vermont on one, heads turn.

Today's ride includes a side trip to the birthplace and childhood home of Calvin Coolidge in Plymouth Notch. I have a special affection for this place, which speaks of a time when a president could be raised miles from civilization, at a dirt crossroad, and become the world's most powerful man by dint of intelligence and conviction (and the unfortunate passing of Warren Harding).

We can't stay long. With another storm on the horizon, I encourage Meredith to gear up, and we make a break down I-91 for the Four Columns Inn. A fiery orange sky portends the storm, but no actual rain falls. But no sooner are we inside the door than a huge thunderclap heralds our safe arrival, and the rain starts pounding down. By then, we're inside clinking wine-filled stemware and eating crackers topped with local Grafton Village cheese.
Stopping by Frost’s House on a Hot Summer Day

On the second day, we ascend Route 9 to Hogback Mountain, passing Marlboro, home to the Marlboro Music Festival. Just as quickly, we’re in low river valleys among farms and fields. Every 20 minutes or so, we roll into a town, marked by 30-mph signs, and without delay we’re back in open terrain. This is the essence of Vermont. It’s perfect motorcycling.

Our cultural stop of the day is Robert Frost’s Stone House in South Shaftsbury. One of his most famous poems, “Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening,” was written there on a hot June morning in 1922. The house museum seems to be run on a shoestring, but it nonetheless offers a fascinating glimpse into the life of what turned out to be a deeply troubled man. Despite the apparent optimism of some of his poems and all the literary prizes he garnered, he led a rather sad life in which most of his children and his wife preceded him in death. He would be irritated by the steady stream of trucks that now pass on Route 7A within yards of his home. But one can sense the bucolic inspiration that stirred him when he lived here. After all, two paths do still diverge in the woods behind his home.

In Dorset, we continue to refine the art of porch sitting, completely upending the day’s plans in conversation with a few locals on the front steps of the Dorset Union Store. We also befriend their twin labs, who look healthy as only Vermont dogs can be, having spent a lifetime roaming the woods and streams of the Green Mountains.

We ride down Route 100, which traces the spine of the Green Mountains, to the Vermont Country Store in Weston. Every tourist within 100 miles visits this cavernous place, opened in 1946, with good reason. It’s retained its charm through the years, with ample tastings. (If you don’t know the difference between light, amber, and dark maple syrup, you can find out here.) And it’s great fun to amble the wide-board floors and explore the warren of rooms offering food, Stopping for a dip in Weatherhead Hollow Pond on a “double-ninety” day (90 degrees and 90 percent humidity).

The quiet village of Plymouth, hometown of our 30th President, John Calvin Coolidge.

“Porch sitting” in the tidy little town of Dorset. If I could do this for a living, I would.
hardware, clothing, toys, and thousands of things that, thankfully, we can’t carry on a motorcycle, even one sporting the Indian’s size and girth.

It’s a meditative ride back to the Four Columns Inn, on small roads including the lovely and vertiginous Dover Road. The rapid, boulder-strewn rivers remind me of California’s Sierra. These mountains may be old, but they’re young in their veins.

**When Running Out of Gas is a Good Thing**

It’s early July, and there’s no lack of patriotism in the tiny towns. Banners and bunting hang from every light pole, in every community. There’s certainly no mistaking what country we’re in, and it’s nice to see.

As we go north from Peterborough, NH, the Indian’s fuel gauge gently scolds us. The display urgently and repeatedly asks: “Navigate to Gas Station?” We put our trust in the computer and aim for a station it tells us is just a few miles south, off our planned path. It happens to be an abandoned propane dealership. No joy.

I’m trying to cultivate an attitude of calm, and imagine scenarios where running out of gas produces unique adventures. Sometimes this doesn’t work, and you just run out of gas. And sometimes you take roads you wouldn’t otherwise—and you don’t run out of gas. We pull down a driveway where a family is enjoying a holiday lunch outdoors, and they happily quiz us about our trip and relate a story about a distant relative “that once had an Indian, and by the way, are they still making those?”

After a bit more chitchat, our new friends direct us to Alstead, 12 miles distant. We got the impression they’d have found a red gas can in the garage if we’d truly been in trouble and sloshed the contents into the Indian’s tank.

Topped up, we’re treated to lovely roads around Lake Warren and get ice cream in Charlestown, where a rider on a Harley-Davidson insists it would be worthwhile to alter our plan and go farther north, to the home of sculptor Augustus Saint-Gaudens. The Harley rider lives nearby, has been there dozens of times, and has yet to tire of it, he says. I consider this the best kind of recommendation. If you live next door to a tourist destination for 25 years and still go there, it must be good.

We take scenic Route 12A, which traces the broad Connecticut River, and eventually turn up the gentle drive to the estate of the sculptor, which is now a National Historic Site. We arrive just before closing and the attendant waves us through with no admission fee. We’ve got the place almost to ourselves and wander the verdant grounds as though we’re Saint-Gaudens’ own guests.

The statue featured is the 12-foot “Standing Lincoln,” newly cast to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the National Park Service and the 50th anniversary of the Saint-Gaudens National Historic Site. I’m an Abe aficionado, so this larger-than-life likeness of the great man fascinates me. Saint-Gaudens’ fame arose from his work in the late 1800s, depicting the gravitas and tragedy of the Civil War, which claimed more lives than any other war in U.S. history. Meredith and I walk around taking photos of the grounds in respectful silence, with Mount Ascutney prominent in the distance.
Riding south, we go through the Cornish-Windsor Covered Bridge. It’s one of the longest wooden covered bridges in the world, at 449 feet, and a sign overhead cautions us: “Walk Your Horses or Pay Two Dollars Fine.” We blithely venture forward without incident.

On this, the final day of our tour, we repeat the short section of Route 9 over Hogback Mountain, and travel Route 112 along the North River, to Shelburne Falls, MA, the site of the Bridge of Flowers. I’m worried that today, on a Fourth of July weekend, it will be thickly packed with cars. But for some inexplicable reason, it’s not, and we enjoy an unimpeded ride over the Berkshire Mountains to the town of North Adams, with Mount Greylock, the highest point in Massachusetts, commanding the distance.

We’ve come to North Adams to see the newly expanded Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art, better known as MASS MoCA, which has sparked a renaissance and provided a lifeline to this long-suffering mill town. As we walk the many galleries, occasionally looking out the vast windows to the moat-like river beyond, it’s evident Vermont doesn’t have more cows than people, but it sure seems like it on isolated roads like this one.

The Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art (MASS MoCA) occupies a 26-building complex in North Adams.

**LODGING: Four Columns Inn**

We used to live on a dirt road one mile from the Four Columns Inn, and we have many fond memories of visiting during lush summer afternoons, crisp fall evenings, and trudging past hip-deep snowbanks for dinner by the warmth of a fire in December. The Four Columns has undergone many owners and iterations since that time, but we’re happy to report that the current incarnation is the best in its storied history. Owner Charles Mallory of the Greenwich Hospitality Group has created an inviting lodge that imparts modern comfort and amenities amidst historic surroundings; and over the years, it has hosted many luminaries, among them John Kenneth Galbraith and Henry Kissinger. There’s a swimming pool and babbling brook in the back, and the grounds are beautifully maintained. The inn’s Artisan Restaurant provides delicious, farm-to-table fare, including trout, venison, and scallops; while its less formal Tavern features occasional live music to accompany burgers and fries, and fish and chips. We found the staff to be extraordinarily friendly and accommodating. Find it at 21 West St., Newfane, VT, (802) 365-7713, www.fourcolumnsvt.com. $$$$
Silver Lake, just north of Woodstock, VT, has a beautiful public beach right across the street from an excellent country store.

that every piece of it is art—the galleries, the building, and even the ramshackle town—and that’s what makes it beautiful.

We have no fewer than four GPS devices onboard, but Meredith still prefers a paper map, and I’m okay with that. Today, she’s a navigational wizard back there, taking us down a few roads I didn’t know existed, to the tiny “town” of Leyden; and from there, we cross back into Vermont, at Weatherhead Hollow, where a long, thin lake and boat launch appears like an apparition.

It’s hot, a humid 94 degrees, so I pull over, strip down to my cycling shorts and contemplate diving in. As I vacillate, balancing on the boat ramp, the decision is made for me when my feet slide out from under me on the moss-covered surface.

Intercom Banter:
Always a Good Sign
For the rest of the ride, Meredith provides a near-constant narration through the Sena 20S, noting farm stands, grange halls, and concentrations of cows. I know from experience that the pace and volume of her banter can indicate extreme comfort or good scenery. In this case, it’s both.

As the saying goes, “Happy wife, happy life.” I could get used to this. We both could.

GPS files are available for download in each digital issue purchased or included in your subscription. Log in at www.roadrunner.travel.
**Facts & Information**

**In General**
Anyone driving north from the congestion of the New York metropolitan area can’t fail to notice the marked change at the Vermont border. The expanse of forests widens and deepens, and life assumes a more sedate rhythm. From Brattleboro, day rides to New Hampshire, Massachusetts, and New York are easy outings on scores of two-lane roads, and many accommodating dirt roads if you’re so inclined. If you stray from the roads shown on these pages, don’t worry: you’re unlikely to encounter a bad road or a bad town. Just go with it. Summer is best, but stalwart riders also enjoy touring amidst the fall splendor. Heated gear recommended.

**How to Get There**
Brattleboro is on I-91. The closest large airport is Bradley International in Hartford, Connecticut (1½ hours from Brattleboro). It’s a 3.5-hour drive from New York City, and a two-hour drive from Albany. Motorcycle rentals are available throughout New England from a variety of providers. We’ve rented from MotoVermont, a company that supplies a variety of BMWs, as well as off-road bikes, and leads tours in the area.

**Food & Lodging**
Microbreweries, artisanal bakeries, and incredible restaurants are plentiful; and farmers’ markets proliferate in summer. As for lodgings, you’ll find hotels and motels in every sizable town throughout southern Vermont, and numerous choices among historic inns or old colonial homes, many with easy access to local hiking trails and swimming spots. The summer months, as well as “leaf-peeping” season (October) are usually busy, so book well ahead.

**Roads & Biking**
Vermont’s two-lane roads are unfailingly quiet and nice to ride. Even the major north/south super slab, I-91, is a pleasure to ride, with sweeping views of the surrounding mountains and the Connecticut River Valley. Winters are harsh, which occasionally results in frost heaves and road buckling; so, as we say in my motorcycle safety classes, “keep a firm but relaxed grip on the handlebar.” There are three fine arterials running the length of Vermont for motorcyclists: the famed Route 100, along the spine of the Green Mountains; Route 3, along the Connecticut River Valley; and I-91.

**Books & Maps**

**Motorcycle & Gear**
2017 Indian Roadmaster
Helmet: Shoei RF-1200
Jacket: Aerostich Darien Light
Boots: Aerostich Combat Lite
Gloves: Aerostich Competition Elkskin Ropers

*Always consult more detailed maps for touring purposes.*

**Resources**
- MotoVermont
  www.motovermont.com
- Vermont Department of Tourism
  www.vermontvacation.com/things-to-do/recreation/motorcycling