CHAPTER NEWSLETTER, DECEMBER, 2016

As the year of 2016 comes to its tumultuous close, let us take a moment to think thankful thoughts for all of the good things that have happened. We are, for the most part, happy and healthy. No one has had any GREAT BIG bo-bos. We have a bed to sleep in, and food to eat. So…it could always be a lot worse.

There are, ahead of us, rides to ride, places to see and memories to make. The Washington, D. C., Rolling Thunder ride will be a fun time had by all who make that journey. We are proud that some of our members will be there to represent our Chapter.

We had a fun-filled Christmas party at NOLA Grill, in Slidell, with a lot of goofiness present.(Ray’s hat comes to mind, even though the camera REFUSED to take its picture.) The “Questionably Clean Santa” was fun, except for the people who had their good stuff stolen. The food was very good, and NOLA’s management did a good job of making sure that we had everything we needed.





We have a “Cold Butt Ride” planned for the first of January, 11:00 side stands up, travelling to the Hard Rock Casino in Biloxi, MS, but it looks like there might be heavy rain in the forecast. So, riding on two wheels may be a little iffy, but cage riding is welcomed.

We have an archived article about the Sturgis Ride that I have been asked to include. I know it was last year’s ride, but any news about riding to Sturgis is worth a second look…

**Sturgis 2015**

by Ray Gregg

After months of planning the big day arrived. It was 25 July 2015 and our HOG group was starting out for the Sturgis Motorcycle Rally. From Slidell, Richard and Valerie Dillon, Bob Saenz and Vickie Freeman, John Clifford and Karl Fox headed for a rendezvous point in Poplarville, Mississippi. There they met up with Rick Baker and Lara and me. Our goal that day was Jonesboro, AR about a 435 mile leg in what would be a leisurely five trip to Rapid City, SD. Our thoughts were that we would be fresh at the start of this trip and would put as many miles as possible the first few days and slack off the miles on day four and five. We made it to Jonesboro without any problem and it was there that we met up with my son Wayne. He had come from Cedartown, GA. We all had quick meal at the restaurant next to the motel highlighted by Vickie having a pitcher of iced tea poured down her back by a brand new waitress; then we all headed for our rooms.

 The next morning it was breakfast and off for another 400 mile plus day. Although not interstate, Hwy 63 is a good road with stretches of four lanes; then we took Hwy 60 through Springfield and up Hwy 13, 7 and 71 to Kansas City.

Kansas City, of course, has one of the Harley Davidson factories and so we all rode over that next morning to take the factory tour. Even though it was a repeat for some, it is always amazing to see the factory line in progress and to see the pains that Harley takes to produce an outstanding product.

 As discussed, after the tour, we made our way over to Leavenworth, KS but not before our first major incident. A fall off the bike gave Vickie a broken wrist (not diagnosed until days later). Vickie, being tough, continued to stay with the group although this would cause Vickie to leave the group sooner than planned and head home for medical attention. On to Leavenworth. As I am very familiar with Fort Leavenworth and the surrounding area, I knew of some great restaurants, but since some could not go with Korean food, we split into two groups for lunch. The Korean food was great!!!. Since we were only going to Omaha, 167 miles away, we had already planned to take all back roads. But the Kansas Department of Transportation decided we would take even more remote roads than originally planned because of road construction. I don’t remember the detour being more than 30 miles and it gave us the chance to go through the community of Kickapoo, KS…….yeah! Back on Hwy 73, we headed north and caught Hwy 75 and other roads to end up on I29 just south of Omaha. The Best Western in Council Bluff was our motel for the night and as we unpacked we asked about where the good food was. Dinner was interesting in that the motel van driver that brought us to the restaurant said to just call and he would pick us up immediately. Well, the number on the card did not answer so Vickie rode back with some nice ladies to tell the motel where we were. About 45 minutes later we got our ride back.

The next morning………..bad news; the weather had come in and it was terrible. Heavy rain and wind, so the decision was made to wait it out. Our original plan was to make the 250 miles early and see the Corn Palace in Mitchell, SD that afternoon, but that was out. The alternative was to go early in the morning. By now, we were starting to see many bikers. Our back roads had kept us off the main drag and limited the number of other bikers heading for Sturgis. But in Mitchell it was a different story. The motel was all bikers. The evening was spent getting to know the other bikers, telling stories, a few jokes and grabbing a few beers while we were at it. The one guy I remember had been to Sturgis 17 times already and he had a story (nothing to do about Sturgis) about how he didn’t know that you put Preparation H up your butt so he had ate some…………….but you will have to wait another day for that story, Karl can tell it better!

July 29th, up early, breakfast and then headed for the Corn Palace.

It would not do the Palace justice for me to tell you about it in a few sentences; you need to look it up on the internet. But I will say that each year they decorate the building inside and out with different corn (different colors) with different themes (cowboys and Indians, wagons, buffalo, etc). One extra attraction was to get your picture taken at the controls of a huge harvester and/or a large tractor inside the building. Able to get on the road fairly soon, we all headed for the entrance to the Badlands, but not before we stopped at the Minute Man National Historic Site (MMNHS) along the way

 If passing on I90 and have the time the MMNHS is an interesting look back in our history and the cold war era. Then there was the Badlands; unique rock formations for approximately thirty miles…….again How, Why, When, you need to look that up. But it is worth the time to travel through this National Park. The exit from the Badlands leads you right into Wall, SD and the famous Wall Drugs. It was there that we met up with Judy and Bill Anderson. It was always planned for them to be part of the group but their move north made it impractical to come all the way south just to ride back with us. Ice cream was had by all at Wall Drugs and 5 cent coffee for some. Then it was on to Rapid City approximately 57 more miles.

That night was brutal. Bill and Judy had set up a mini bar in the motel lunch room and we all proceeded to partake of drink. After five days of traveling it was time to unwind and relax!! We had a great evening………thanks Bill/Judy.

The agenda for the first day once we reached Rapid City was talked about months before. A quick trip to Black Hills Harley and then on to Mount Rushmore. This was a first visit for some in the group and it would be best if you talk with them about what they loved about this national monument and the surrounding area. We all had lunch at the site and then ventured out for some mountain road riding. The roads were great, twisty, winding and full of bikes. There were several places to stop to get pictures of tunnels (Needles Eye) or streams or mountain peaks

The 31st of July, we headed for Sturgis. Since we had decided to go to Sturgis a week early, we were not expecting the crowds associated with the actual Sturgis rally dates, so you can imagine the lump in our throats when three miles out from the exit for Sturgis the interstate was jammed. We were thinking it was going to be hours before we even got into the town. But as we creped along and rounded the curve, we saw it was an accident and was being cleared quickly. In Sturgis, our leader Karl, having been there the year before, took us on some back streets to get as close to the center of town as possible before actually riding down the Main Street. We found parking places fairly quickly although not together; had our picture taken of the group and then it was every man (and woman) for themselves for shopping and to see the various vendors. Around 2:00 pm we all headed out for Deadwood. Again, Deadwood has a history that requires a person to research on the internet to understand all there is to know about this historic town. After taking in some of the Deadwood sites it was time to head for the motel. From Deadwood, there is a road called Nemo Road. Everyone needs to travel Nemo Road, even if in a four wheeler. Normally there is little traffic since it parallels I90 about ten miles south. It is approximately 45 miles and because of the twists and turns take about an hour and a half to reach Rapid C

On the 1st of August, we all returned to Sturgis for the official opening of the Harley Davidson Event Center. This turned out to be a circus. Harley Davidson was giving out a commemorative icon (Bar and Shield) to the first 1500 (or so) persons at the dedication. When the chain was cut for the opening, people swarmed over each other to get these icons. You saw the ruthlessness in people. In hindsight, Harley must know that they did not think that part of the ceremony correctly. But, with that finished the group headed for Devils Tower in Montana. But along the way (I believe on Hwy 34) and unknown to me was the Stonehouse Saloon and of course we had to stop. One beer (our limit when riding) and we were off again to the towe

At the tower, it was evident that most of us were getting tired as our attempt to climb the path to the tower base ended only a few hundred yards from the parking lot. We all decided it was nice just to look at the tower from ground level. After the tower we took a leisurely ride back to Rapid City through towns like Sundance and Lead. It was going to be our last night in Rapid City. It was also the day when where John and Vickie left the group…Vickie to head home and get an evaluation on her wrist and John due to previous commitments.

All packed and ready the next day, we headed for Cody, WY. Cody was to be our home base for the next few days. The Cowboy Village, a place recommended by Bill and Judy was an excellent choice. These were individual log cabins surrounding a swimming pool and outdoor patio. Being able to leave most of our bags and equipment at the Village made it much nicer traveling the next couple of days. And the first day was traveling up and through Chief Joseph Highway and the Beartooth Pass. Known to many bikers, the Chief Joseph Highway (Hwy 296) has incredible turns and an unbelievable drop and rise in elevation and then joins with the Beartooth Highway (Hwy 212) to make an even more spectacular ride to the summit of over 11,000 feet. This highway is closed most of the winter as you can imagine what the snow levels might be at that altitude. It was lunch in Red Lodge and then back to Cody to get ready for our Yellowstone ride

Yellowstone was an interesting and long day. Upon entering the park we encountered traffic stopped both ways……….and understandably so as there was a bear wandering very close to the highway. After a few minutes and ample pictures we were all moved on by the park rangers. A few miles further and we stopped at the Fishing Bridge General Store for coffee and a short break. Our next stop was on the south rim to see the falls. Most everyone took the trail to see up close, the falls, from their best viewpoint.

Having planned our day to see as much as possible in a single day, we had to move on. Next up was the Paint Pots and then on to Old Faithful. It was at Old Faithful that our day started to turn bad.

 After seeing the eruption and saying “Goodbye” to Bill and Judy (they were leaving us at this point) the sky turned nasty. Wanting to put some miles between us and the bad weather, we headed for the fuel station. But weather had knock out the internet and therefore the pumps would not work. They won’t even take cash??? What to do? Although we were low on fuel, we decided to try for Grant Village and the fuel pumps there. That stretch was horrible; the rain was so intense that it was extremely difficult to see the bike in front. But we did make it though without incident, thank goodness. After about a half hour there, the skies started to clear and we headed back to Cody. It was night when we finally made it and we all agreed that we had definitely had a full day. The next morning we would be leaving Cody.

It was now August the 5th and today was to be a travel day; about 435 miles to Fort Collins, CO and mostly back roads. Hwy 120 and 20 were good roads and brought us to Casper, WY, then south on Hwy 220 until Hwy 487. Here is where the quality of road started to deteriorate. Then I turn off 487 onto Hwy 77. Here is where the group must have thought I was mad. This road was rough and there was absolutely no signs of civilization at far as the eye could see in any direction. I was just trying to shave a few miles off our route and add a little adventure, but have to admit, this was not a place to have any breakdowns.

Back on Hwy 487 we made it to Laramie and then down Hwy 287 to Fort Collins for the night. Fort Collins is where we lost more of our group. Richard and Val determined that because of Richard’s medical condition, it would be necessary for him to head straight back home. Fort Collins is also where I found missing exhaust nuts and broken exhaust brackets. Finding a hardware store to purchase nuts was not a problem, finding a welder for the bracket was another story. Heading out of Fort Collins was also where Karl lost his muffler bracket and so we again had to find a store to buy the proper hardware. All patched, up we proceeded to Rocky Mountain National Park (RMNP). The road into the park (Hwy 34) had twists and turns the whole way and even more so once we enter the park. It was because of these roads and the ones in the previous days that caused a re-injury of Rick’s shoulder. It was impossible for him to continue this type of riding. He stopped the group and said he would be heading for home. He knew that interstate travel would not give him the pain he had been experiencing the past few days. Bob offered to accompany Rick back but Rick did not want to put Bob out and said he could make it on his own. We said our goodbyes and continued into RMNP.

In the park, it was cold………very cold and windy. We were above 10,000 feet when we pulled into the Rainbow Curve parking area and then we saw it; a back up on the road because of road construction. As much as we could determine, the backup was over two miles. Bob went to check it out and when he came back said it was a nightmare. We saw later that the opposite side traffic was backed up over five miles. The traffic started moving. Karl, Wayne, Lara and I moved with it. Bob remained at the parking area. At the Continental Divide, we stopped and waited for Bob to catch up, when he didn’t, we continued down to Grand Lake to have lunch and wait for Bob there. After fueling in Grand Lake, Karl decided to backtrack to see if he could find Bob before having lunch. It was then that he received a text message from Bob saying he wasn’t having fun anymore and was heading home.

We are now down to four people on this trip. Because of the construction and time in the park (Hwy 40’s challenge south of Winterpark….check it out on a map), we did not make our planned destination of Canyon City but settled for Silverthorne off of I70. It was the LaQuinta motel that proved to be interesting and a good choice. First, upon registration, we were told repeatedly the even though marijuana was legal in Colorado, we could not smoke on the premises……..okay we could handle that. What made this a good choice was that there was an Old Chicago co-located with the motel and we were able to sample some local beers and not be more than 100 steps from our rooms.

The next morning we were up and heading for Royal Gorge near Canyon City, CO. There is a lot of history about Royal Gorge; too much for this article. I will say though, that much of the park is brand new as a fire took out about 90% of the buildings and associated structures back in 2013. The only thing not rebuilt was the tram that brought you to the very bottom of the gorge and that is ashamed since I went on this years ago and feel it was one of the more exciting attractions to do at Royal Gorge. The zip line across the entire gorge was a bit more adrenaline rush than Karl, Wayne, Lara or I cared to experience. So we settled for a walk across the suspension bridge and an ice cream cone before leaving.

Leaving the Royal Gorge, we headed for the Owl Cigar Shop in Canyon City and had lunch before traveling. Our destination was Las Alamos but was not able to make that destination (second time in as many days). Clouds start gathering that made travel seem iffy. We stopped at a motel in Monte Vista only to be told they only take reservations and even though there were vacancies, we could not get a room. Very Strange!!! We were thinking it may have been one of those by-the-hour motels although it did not look like one. However, as luck would have it, next door to this motel was a motorcycle and off road repair shop. With just a few minutes before closing time, I asked the owner if he would weld my exhaust bracket. He said sure…..great guy. As we waited for the bike, Karl and Wayne went to find another motel. Then it happened, finishing up with the welding, a storm came up and had winds exceeding 60 miles an hour! It was pushing bikes and cars all over the road. Karl had texted me as to what they had found …..the Best Western Movie Manor. This motel was built next to a drive-in movie and each room had large picture window that faced the movie screen. Then the sound was piped in to each room. For the price of a room you got a free movie (or two if you stayed up that late). We watched the movie The Fantastic Four while eating pizza and drinking beer!!! Very unique.

Next morning, Wayne wanted to sleep in and said he would catch up with us later, so Karl, Lara and I started for Los Alamos and the Bradbury Science Museum (Named after Dwight’s Uncle). There we learned about the history of the laboratory and what is going on there now. Very high tech and somewhat scary as to what the mission is. They are dealing with how to use nuclear energy in a safe and peaceful manner. Again the details of this require a visit or research on the internet to learn more of what they do. Both Lara and I felt that this museum requires a full day to tour and will be returning sometime in the future.

After lunch, it was off to Madrid, NM, the location of the Wild Hogs movie. Wayne had made contact and would meet us there. In Madrid, we cooled down with a beer or two, took the usual pictures of the restaurant (Maggie’s) constructed for the movie and other familiar houses in the movie. Maggie’s diner was given to the town after the movie. It is now a tourist trap containing the usual memorabilia and other costly souvenirs.

Then it was off to Tucumcari, our planned stop for the day. But again, weather made us rethink that and so it was in Santa Rosa, NM that we stayed.

Next morning we headed out on Interstate 40. This and the next day were to be hard riding to get home (over 1050 miles). However we still had time to stop off at the Cadillac Ranch a little west of Amarillo Texas, where several Cadillac’s are buried in the ground. Over time, people have left their mark on these vehicle resulting in hundred of coats of paint.

Although we were trying to make the best time and beat the heat, we still needed to eat. As we fueled up in Clarenden, TX, we asked for places to eat. Bar –H-BBQ and More was suggested (or we found it on Google) and headed for it. Standing room only as we walked in the door and while standing was also told it would be a while before served. Seems the kitchen was way behind in their orders. Not thinking it could take that long we stayed. After about 15 minute we were seated. However, it was over two hour before our food was brought!!!! With assurances we would get our food at any time during those two hours and as there were very few place to dine, we figured that it was a blessing to sit in the air conditioned instead of riding in the noon heat of the day. Unfortunately when the food did come, it was not anywhere up to standards. Do not eat in the “Bar –H-BBQ and More” if passing through Clarenden, TX!

By now the day had heated up and the going was beginning to take its toll. The heat index was reaching 124 this day and into the next. We decided to be safe and stop every 80 to 90 miles to cool down and rehydrate. Lara took to putting plastic bags with ice on her head at stops and around her neck while traveling, even though we had purchased the hydrating jackets from Harley Davidson. The jackets are helpful, but within an hour or so they were completely dry and offer no more than an extra layer of clothing. That evening after approx 534 miles of miserable heat, we stopped in Bonham, Texas for the night.

As the last day was to be another long one, we started early for home. For Wayne, it was easier to break off from us at Shreveport. He continued across Interstate 20 and 59 to Georgia and home in Cedartown. Karl, Lara and I took I49 down to Lafayette. Luckily after Alexandria, some clouds moved in and the last three to four hours of our ride cooled down somewhat. In Hammond we fueled for the last time and said our goodbyes to Karl. At Covington we split off for Bogalusa and Karl for Slidell.

And so ended our 17 day (5300 mile) adventure to the 2015 Sturgis Motorcycle Rally and all the other places along the way and the return trip home. Hopefully readers have enjoyed the recap and highlights of our group’s ride. If anyone has any questions, ask anyone of the group, we all would be more than glad to share our experiences.

Even though this is a long read, aside from Vicki’s broken wrist and the terrible weather, this is just another example of what we can do as a riding club…fun times.

Happiest of New Year’s to us all!