

Route 519, New Jersey

by Moshe Levy

IN LISTENING TO my fellow motorcyclists over the years, one can say New Jersey has gained a notorious reputation as a poor place to ride—unless one enjoys hopelessly congested highways chock full of inattentive drivers, paying tolls every few feet, the stench of ubiquitous smelly chemical plants and surrounding scenery which often resembles the wastelands of a “Mad Max” film. As a lifelong “Joisey” resident, I can tell you firsthand: The stereotypes are well deserved! Here, there are few routes of redeeming value that remain in the state for very long, except one in particular: Route 519, which snakes almost 89 miles along the western side of the state from Daniel Bray Highway (Route 29) in Delaware Township to the New York state line in Wantage Township, and runs almost directly to the aptly named High Point State Park, the highest point in the state.

To redeem my state’s worthiness, my trusty black 1974 BMW R90/6 and I set off to discover the best New Jersey has to offer. Heading west, one can immediately feel the air getting crisper and easier to breathe—no doubt due to the relatively rural setting of western New Jersey. One can pick up Route 519 anywhere by a quick glance at the map, but in actuality it starts to get interesting in Phillipsburg, with long sweepers and beautiful fall foliage in abundance. Nothing too technical, mind you, but a brisk pace can prove quite entertaining, especially if traffic is light. But remember, light traffic and New Jersey are mutually exclusive entities, so leave early if you want to enjoy this route! Passing through the various towns such as Belvedere and Newton, it becomes apparent that Sundays are antiquing and wine tasting days for the locals, and there is no shortage of related roadside stops, usually not far from an old-time restaurant to enjoy. This is a most welcome change, quite antithetical to the usual fast food strip malls that litter the rest of the state. “Is this really New Jersey?” I often asked myself in the confines of my helmet. Indeed, it was!

Approaching the town of Colesville, it’s time to leave Route 519, and head north on Route 23 for approximately five miles. There, nestled in the Kittatinny Mountains of Montague, Sussex County, is the entrance for the 14,000+ acre High Point State Park. Turn in and prepare to enjoy!

There are many trails and sights to investigate before finally arriving at the famed High Point Memorial, the ultimate attraction at the park. This 220’ high tower, built in 1930 to honor veterans, is made from New Hampshire’s finest granite and quartzite. It represents the highest point in the whole state of New Jersey—1803’ above sea level. I parked the faithful Airhead, dismounted, and admired the tower. At first glance, it resembles the familiar obelisk shape of similar American war monuments, such as Bunker Hill in Massachusetts. A \$1 fee buys you access to the tower’s lookout section, and offers absolutely spectacular views of the surrounding



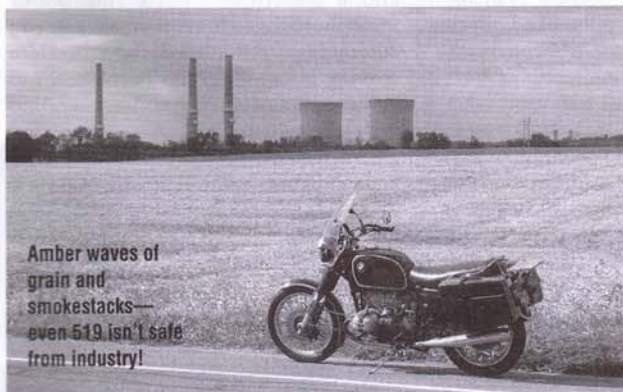
Local farm
off of 519.

wilderness, valleys, and farms. Three states—New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and New York—are clearly visible, as is the Delaware Water Gap, where the Delaware River cuts through the mountains, separating New Jersey and Pennsylvania. Any serious motorcyclist in the area has been through the famed Gap, but gazing upon it from this unique perspective is truly a sight to behold! Better still, the Pocono Mountains are to the west, the Catskill Mountains to the north, and the Walkill River Valley to the Southeast.

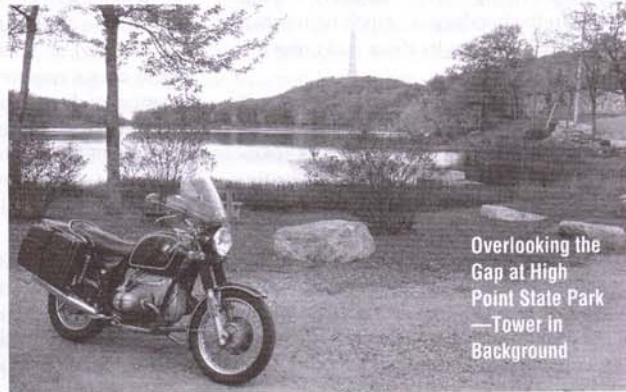
Naturally, all of this visual splendor only whetted my appetite for more riding, so I kicked the boxer motor over into its loping, quiet idle, and headed off to inspect the park in more detail. Apparently, not just motorcyclists visit: Hikers, campers, and fishermen were everywhere throughout, and signs advertised ski trails for those dreaded winter months when snow and ice halted the riding season for most. The relaxed layout and landscaping of the park offered another interesting tidbit: It was designed by Boston’s Olmstead Brothers firm, owned by the sons of landscape architect Frederick Law Olmsted, who designed New York City’s illustrious Central Park. Luckily for us, these Olmstead apples didn’t fall far from the tree!

My only regret on this trip was not packing adequate hiking gear. Next trip up to High Point, I’m packing a good set of lightweight boots, appropriate clothing, and some food, as there is plenty to see off of the bike as well. The famous Appalachian Trail alone, with its mountain ridge views and hemlock gorges, is worth the trip!

Who would have thought—all this natural beauty in New Jersey? But it’s true, contrary to popular belief, that this state does indeed have something to offer the adventurous motorcyclist!



Amber waves of
grain and
smokestacks—
even 519 isn’t safe
from industry!



Overlooking the
Gap at High
Point State Park
—Tower in
Background