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Riding New Jersey



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Fall foliage in abundance at nearby Washington Crossing State Park

High Point

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In listening to my fellow motorcyclists shoot the breeze over the years, one can say New Jersey has gained a notorious reputation as a poor place to ride. Unless you enjoy 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, it is known as a place to avoid. 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. In addition, 519 runs almost directly to the aptly named High Point State Park, the highest point in all of New Jersey.

To redeem my state's worthiness, my trusty black 1974 BMW R90/6 and I set off on a Sunday to discover the best it 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. You can pick up Route 519 anywhere by a quick glance at the map, but in actuality it starts to get interesting in Phillipsburg,

Approaching the town of Colesville, it is 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-plus 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 foot high tower, built in 1930 to commemorate war casualties, is made from New Hampshire's

finest granite and quartzite. At 1,803 feet above sea level, it represents the highest point in the whole state of New Jersey. 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 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 Wallkill River Valley to the Southeast.

Naturally, this entire 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

Left: Entrance to Washington Crossing State Park. Below: An old farm on Route 519



with long sweepers and beautiful fall foliage in abundance. There is nothing too technical, but a brisk pace can prove quite entertaining, especially if traffic is light. Remember, light traffic and New Jersey are mutually exclusive entities, so do 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. There is no shortage of related roadside stops, usually not far from an old-time restaurant to sample some local cuisine. This is a most welcome change, quite antithetical to the usual fast food strip malls littered throughout the rest of the state. "Is this really New Jersey?" I often asked myself in the confines of my Arai. Indeed, it was!

High Point

just motorcyclists visit. Hikers, campers, and fishermen were everywhere throughout, and signs advertised ski trails for those dreaded winter months when snow and ice halt 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, and these brothers were 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

Right: Trail leading up to that farm off of 519. Below right: Another shot of the cooling towers. Below: Another shot of High Point State Park



Left: Heading towards Beemerville. Below: Even Route 519 isn't safe from industry!



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? It is true, contrary to popular belief, that this state does indeed have something to offer the adventurous motorcyclist!

Moshe K. Levy bought his first BMW (a 1973 R75/5) in 2003. The stable has since grown to include a 1974 R90/6 and a 2004 R1150RT. Moshe is an active member of the AMA, MRE, BMW MOA, BMW RA, and IBA. When he's not riding, wrenching, or writing about motorcycles, he serves as General Manager of Nova Electric in Bergenfield, New Jersey.

