

## Shamrock Tour<sup>®</sup> – Helen, Georgia

# Land of the Blue Smoke



Motorcycle: Harley-Davidson VRSC Night Rod  
Helmet: Shoei Multitec  
Jacket: REV'IT! Off Track Jacket  
Pants: REV'IT! Dakar Pants  
Boots: Gaerne G-RT Aquatech  
Gloves: REV'IT! R59



Motorcycle: BMW K1200R  
Helmet: Arai Vector  
Jacket: Joe Rocket Supermoto  
Pants: Triumph Jeans  
Boots: Motophobia  
Gloves: Joe Rocket Speedmaster



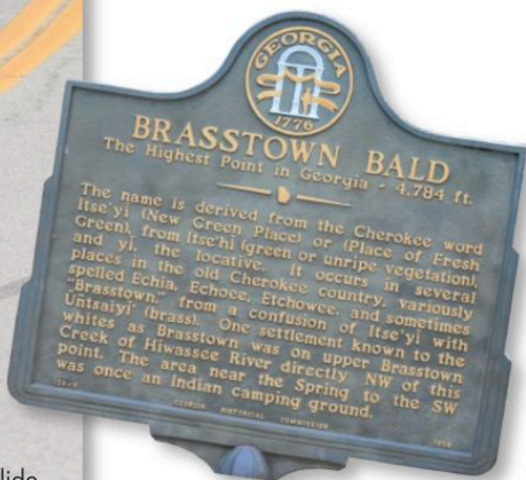
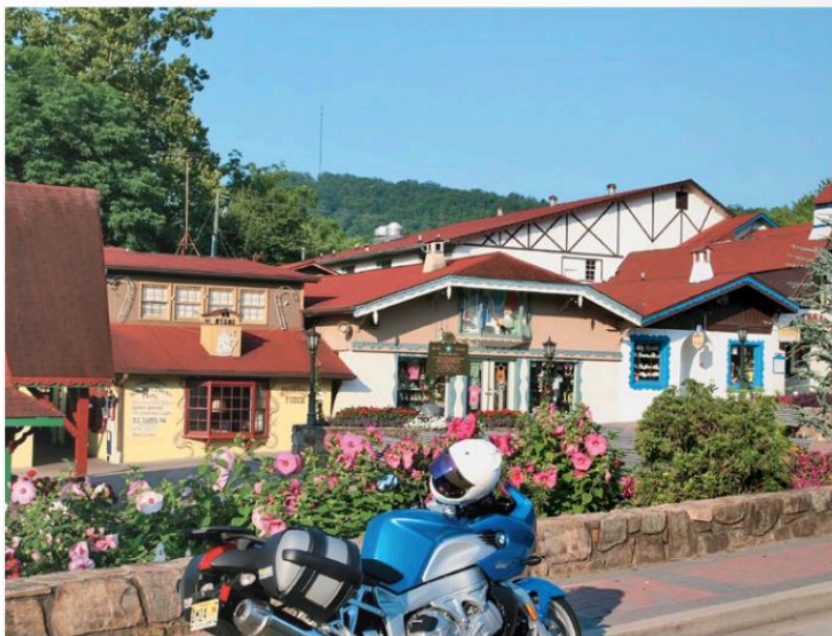
Smoky Mountain roads are quiet places, especially in the morning. Turn off the key and listen. Beneath the engine's cooling ticks, the subtle sounds of nature close in. The ever-present breeze dances with leaves above the clear streams tumbling from ancient mountains. Birds and crickets call, then answer. The grass sways. And above it all, clinging valiantly to the treetops, the night's foggy shroud is slowly pulled apart in the morning sun.

Text: Chris Myers

Photography: Neale Bayly and Florian Neuhauser



Motorcycle: Honda ST1300  
Helmet: Nolan X-801R  
Jacket & Pants: Olympia Airglide Mesh Tech  
Boots: Sidi Strada Evo Te-Por  
Gloves: Vanson Sporty







- 📍 *The Dragon's Tail curls all the way to Georgia.*
- 🗣️ *"Cheese, you say?" Not with my coffee, thank you.*



The Appalachian Mountains stretch along the Eastern Seaboard from New Brunswick, Canada to Northern Alabama. This near 2000-mile range is home to numerous extraordinary and beautiful places, but few regions cast quite the

spell of the Great Smoky Mountains. Despite modern man's best attempts to tame, exploit, and otherwise heap abuse on these majestic hills, the land's resplendent dignity prevails. The mist-cloaked peaks, lonely lanes, and quiet hollows

continue to capture the imaginations of all who enter this realm. As motorcyclists, we're always looking for magical places to ride, and this stretch of our country's oldest mountain range, comprising Northern Georgia and Western North Carolina, will always garner a helmet-muffled "Presto!" when we arrive. In these parts, the rugged landscape inspires a sinuous road design that brings joy to the hearts of two-wheel aficionados. There's no place quite like it to drop our bags and spend a few days riding.

Christa and I are scheduled to meet up with our friend and freelance journalist, Neale Bayly, in the small North Georgia town of Helen. As is the case with any motorcycle trip, just getting there is half the fun. Having lived in the Asheville, North Carolina area, I know a few interesting roads that happen to be right on the way. Oddly enough, Christa and I don't often get to ride together,



so it's fun sharing some of my old tarmac haunts. She deftly handles the big Honda ST 1300 through the twists, dodging the sporadic showers of sparks cascading from the Harley-Davidson Night Rod's vertically challenged foot pegs, and we arrive mere minutes after Neale who also had a challenging ride up from the Charlotte, North Carolina area on his sporty BMW K 1200 R. Unfortunately, his trek involved rain, lots of rain. I'm glad we chose the scenic route.

### Highlands

We're greeted with a cool but humid morning as we suit up for our first day of riding. The incessant showers that plagued Neale yesterday have bypassed the area, and clear skies rule. Heading south from town, we barely hit a curve before braking at the Nora Mill Granary. Built in 1876, this fully operational, water-powered, gristmill still uses its 1,500 pound French Burr millstones to turn out corn and wheat meals. Picking up a few small sacks of Nora Mill's fresh ground wares is highly recommended for biscuit lovers like me.

Back under way, we shoot north on Route 255, eventually picking up Route 197 south toward Gainesville. Along the way, we stop at another riverside mill, only this time, instead of flour we find a passel of creatively turned clay vessels at The Mark of the Potter, a shop and gallery occupying the building that once housed Grandpa Watts' Grist Mill. Located on the banks of the Soque River, the granary ceased milling operations after a damaging flood in 1966. Mark of the Potter opened in 1969, and today it displays and sells the work of four resident artists and over 25 regional potters. Distinctive manmade creations aren't the only things you can see along this quiet, country lane either. Not a half mile down the road, Neale and I stop and trade stares with a rather

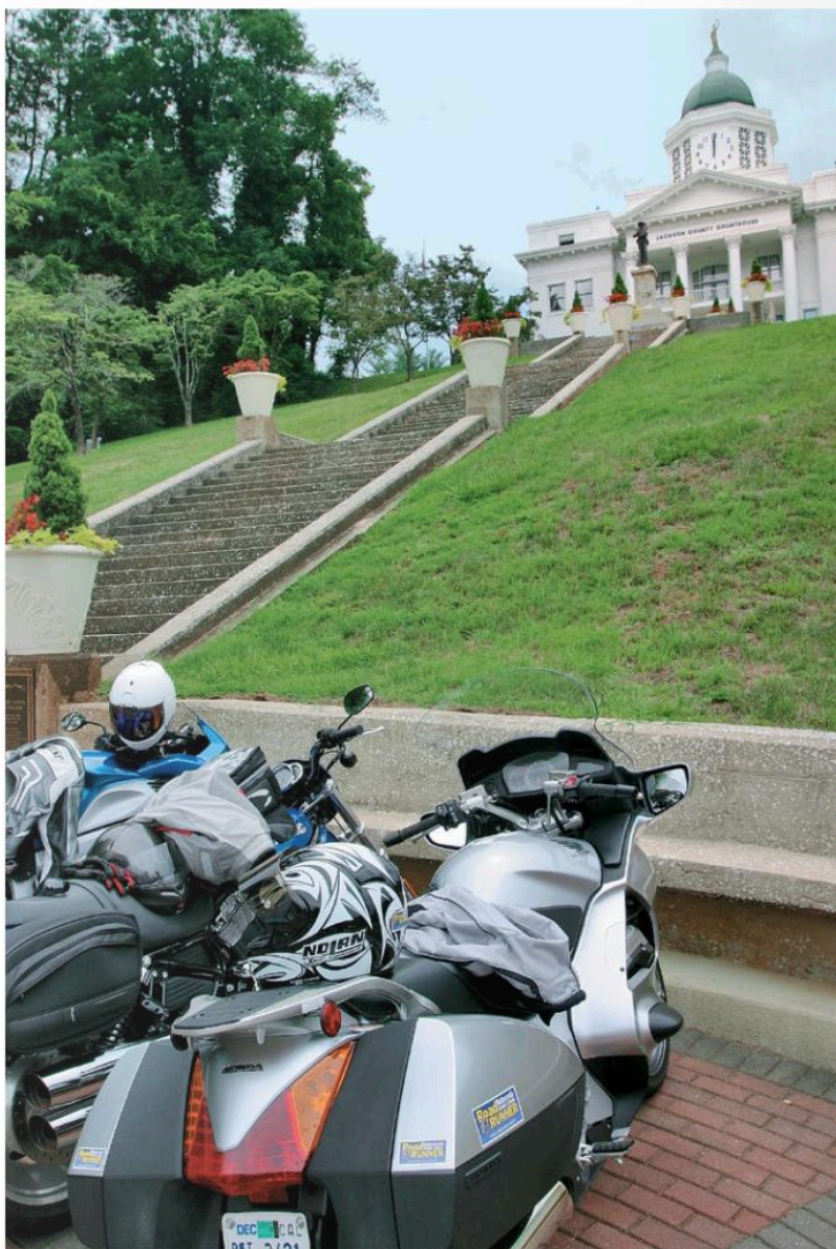
large black bear. Apparently camera shy, the burly bruin ambled back into the woods just in time to avoid our lenses.

In Clarkesville, it's north again on Route 441. As we pass by the Tallulah Gorge State Park, I feel one of those creepy movie shivers crawl up my spine. In the nearby gorge, the Tallulah River tumbles over 350 feet in a one-mile

span, creating the falls and rapids used as settings for numerous scenes in the disquieting 1972 film *Deliverance*.

Reaching Clayton, we hang a right on Warwoman Road. This enjoyable stretch of tarmac, sweeping across quiet farmland and beneath canopies of oak and maple, suddenly erupts in a carnival of twists, sending us caroming in and out of heavily

**👉 If you want to explore Sylva's historic courthouse, you have to take the stairs.**







📍 *You'll never run out of quiet, peaceful places to drop the kickstand.*

wooded ravines. With nary a break in the curves, we shoot left on Route 28 and begin the steep and spectacularly serpentine ascent into the town of Highlands, North Carolina. If you're hungry, there are certainly worse places to land. Thanks to a comfortable summer climate that only occasionally posts temperatures in the low 80s, this small mountain town has long hosted many a well-heeled tourist intent on beating the heat. Countless restaurants catering to all sorts of tastes can be found up and down the small but exclusive main drag. But we're keeping it simple today: a satisfying pizza at The Pizza Place fills us up without breaking the bank. And since no visit to Highlands is complete without playing beneath a waterfall, we detour a few miles west on Route 64. Just outside of town, you'll see the final 60 feet of 120-foot Bridal Veil Falls plummeting from atop a sharp, rock outcropping. At one time Route 64 ran behind the falls and the old road is still there. Most waterfalls

require viewing from a distance, or at least a fair hike to get up close, so it's neat to find one that's so accessible.

**W**e turn back east on Route 64, wind our way down the mountain into Cashiers and swing right onto Route 107, another ribbon of zigzagging tarmac that plunges out of the mountains to upstate South Carolina. With the sun waning, we make our way back west into Georgia, find Route 17, and soon get back to Helen.

### Sylva

**A**fter a quick coffee meeting at the nearby Huddle House restaurant, we quietly wheel out of a slowly awakening Helen. A friendly wave from the lone street sweeper sends us on our way. It's a good thing: caffeine, because you need to be alert and bushy-tailed just north of town when route 17/75 reveals its rapid series of tire-tilting curves. The

stirring music of this road is best played in a peg-scraping staccato rhythm, and thanks to several strategically placed passing lanes, slower drivers can be dispatched with ease. A little wrung out by it all when we reach Hiawassee, a vacation town on the shores of a placid Lake Chatuge, we recharge our cells with some frothy cappuccinos at the Mystic Mountain Coffee House.

**T**urning north on route 175, we cross into North Carolina and turn east on Route 64 toward Franklin. Though considered a highway, 64 isn't typical: it's a real riding treat. Almost perfect asphalt winds across steep mountains, affording incredible, panoramic vistas from several locations. Don't get suckered in by the scenery though; these are curves that can really sneak up on inattentive riders. If your concentration is divided – torn between the business at hand, the riding, and the pretty pictures – go ahead and pull over to enjoy the views.