

# KEY WEST



There is rarely a statement like I am about to reveal that has ever been uttered from one motorcycle rider to another when sharing the exhilaration of a road trip. In fact, if you were to poll 100 riders, the statement is practically the antithesis of a good ride as defined by 99 out of 100 of those riders. In fact, in 2011 I was attempting my first official Iron Butt Ride, known as a SaddleSore 1000. This is 1,000 miles in 24 hours or less. Not to be confused with the nearly as popular, BunBurner of 1,500 in 36 hours.

The sane rider, attempting to reach such a milestone would logically take the straightest, "legally" high speed route they could find. One such route for Colorado riders is Denver to Chicago on the wide open I-80! A scenic wonderland of tractor trailer trucks and lowa corn! Depending on your exact starting and ending point this ride at about 1,024 miles and allows you to keep up a fairly quick pace. You can even ride out half way and come right back home if you want to save on hotel costs. All that is required is documentation and receipts to show proof of your route and your mileage.

Of course, when I planned and executed my ride I headed to Burns, Oregon, on my way to San Francisco. There was plenty of straight highway, but there was also plenty of the good stuff, the twisties, the turns and rolling hills. The formations that make your blood move a little faster as the adrenaline fuels your depleted body, as there is little time for food or rest. I knew I wanted to accomplish a documented SaddleSore, but I also

wanted to lean into some turns and see some places I hadn't seen before. Fortunately, I rolled into Burns with 15 minutes to spare, and found an open Gas Station that could document my finish time by way of a time stamped receipt.

I am a big fan of long distance riding, but I appreciate the freedom of riding without a timeline. I am glad I have, officially documented an Iron Butt, but, now that it is behind me (pun intended) and I am only looking forward.

Which brings me to the odd proposal that I uttered to a good friend regarding a recent riding opportunity. Hey, Bill, "How would you like to hop on some rental bikes and ride 200 miles in a straight line over the course of half a week, then turn around and take the exact same route back in the opposite direction?" Since we usually ride 200 miles before breakfast, or at the latest lunch on a normal day, taking half a week to cover this little ground would have been insane . . . until I presented him with one more detail. We would be riding from Fort Lauderdale down to Key West, some of the most beautiful stretch of roadway in all of the United States. Sure the only turns in our future would be the very rare gas station stop; and our floorboards might only drag pulling out of a clam shack, but we would be flanked by the sea and the sun would be shining. Looking out into the snowy Colorado night, I was able to get an easy "Yes" out of him!

Days later, we arrived in Fort Lauderdale. We saddled up on a couple of Heritage Softail Classics and with our postures upright and our eyes forward we were on our way. Not much more than a 100 miles had passed and we arrived in Key Largo. We were already half way done with the entire ride and it was only the first day.



We enjoyed the key whose namesake was made famous by Bogart and Hepburn in 1951 by the movie that stole its name. Turning our heads to the right we were greeted by the African Queen herself, heading out with some tourists for the day. The African Queen was originally built in Lythan, England in 1912. The famous iconic vessel began as a shuttle to missionaries, cargo and hunting parties around the Belgian Congo and Uganda before catching her big movie break and eventually retiring to Key Largo in 1982.

With our grueling 100 miles behind us it was time to relax with a couple of beers at one of my favorite overseas highway hideouts, the Seafarer Lodge and Resort. A collection of Robin Blue cabins all within feet of the water. It is off the beaten path and less expensive than many of the overpriced chains in the area. Hours later, only a few feet away a pelican and a manatee forgive our intrusion and gladly share their nightly sunset view with us. <Sunset\_2.jpg>For dinner, we walked over to the Island Café, for some locally infused Mojitos and Ahi Tuna nachos followed by a good night's sleep with the Ocean as the soundtrack to our dreams. Although it is hard to believe that our dreams could be the life we are living at the very moment!

Our second hundred miles will deliver us to the heart of Key West. But before we get there we get to ride through one of the most unique landscapes that the United States has to offer. The Atlantic over our port hand grip and the gulf starboard over our throttles as

we passed through many seaside towns gladly offering to help you part with your money. We limit our donations to the local economy in Marathon in the form of a marina lunch at Sparky's, being cautious not to offer any contributions to local law enforcement, by diligently adhering to the speed limits.

Soon after we approach the magnificent 7-mile bridge filled with walkers and fisherman flanked by



hungry seagulls hoping to scoop a catch. The bridge has been seen countless times in movies such as, License to Kill, True Lies and the 2 Fast 2 Furious, to name just a few. With views like this there really is no reason to go anywhere fast.



The last key is Cow Key off of Stock Island. Astute readers, may remember this from a previous Thunder Roads Colorado article as the place I was conceived. You could say I was returning to the scene of the crime! We are then presented with our first legitimate option to take a hard left or right since entering the keys. Turning right is the less attractive option, so left it is. Down along beach after beach for approximately 2 miles before arriving at the Southern Most point buoy. The lines and crowds make a photo with the motorcycles impossible. We continue up the road, past the famous six toed cats

ONE OF THE OLDEST BURIAL GROUNDS ON THE ISLAND HEADINGWAY BURIED HIS COCKHERE





that roam the Hemmingway estate and eventually arrive at the intersection of Flemming and Route 1, officially the end of the road. We squeeze our bikes between the other visitors for a quick shot before heading north two blocks to the famous Duvall Street, where it is a New Orleans party atmosphere already in full swing. With our bikes safely parked at

the Silver Palms hotel, we are ready to put on shorts and join the revelers.

Key West is known for its hospitality, food and of course the famous sunsets

on the pier. We spend several days enjoying what the city has to offer including visiting my brother in law's dad's gallery, Art Gone Wild, and enjoying a dinner with the unofficial mayor of Key West, the world famous photographer Vidal! But much like Oz, you must get

out after a few days or the magical allure of the keys may convince you to stay forever. With that in mind, we head back up the coast. The same way we came because there is no other land option. We do take a slight detour through the Everglades National Park to marvel at the alligators and pose in front of the Nike Missile site. A site established in the dark of night by American forces in response to Moscow's



clandestine plans to setup nuclear capable missiles during the Cuban Missile Crisis. We thank the veteran who volunteers his time sharing the history of the property and head back North to the Fort Lauderdale.

Flying home in a most fortuitous upgrade, Bill and I are in complete agreement that if you have to ride in a straight line there is little doubt that the Florida Keys can be beaten by any other road in the US.

