

Tropical Wings

FL1-A rides the overseas highway to Key West

The ride started out nicely if not a little early, kickstands up at 7:00am in Tampa. Six (6) FL1-A bikes headed south on I-75. Jeff on his yellow 1800 with his co-rider Debbie was our road captain and Bud on his white 1800 trike with his co-rider Ginger was our tail gunner.

Riding in formation we made excellent time as we proceeded down the west coast of Florida. Due to the smaller gas tank on my GL1100 we had to stop every 100 miles or so for gas, the first time in Punta Gorda and then again in Naples just before Alligator Alley.



The temperature was well into the 90's and it was quite warm.

After about three and a half hours driving time we arrived at Rick Case Honda in Miami where we captured the "Region A Wanderer" from The Miami Wings FL2-E. They provided us with cheeseburgers, hamburgers, hotdogs and drinks and a number of nice raffle prizes.

We picked up four (4) more FL1-A bikes that had come down the night before and headed south again to our motel destination for the evening in Homestead.

When we started out again it seemed as though we were going to have a conflict over which route and who was going to be road captain between Jeff and Bob. I thought we were going to have a new "Road Captain Reality Show" and have to vote one of them off the ride but this was worked out quickly using Bob's route with Jeff as road captain and we headed down the back roads to Homestead.

At this point the wind started to gust and we could see rain squalls moving in around us and we all thought we were going to get wet, our road captain did us good and guided us between the rain drops as we rolled into the motel under stormy skies just moments before the torrential downpour. This would not be our last brush with the weather this weekend.



After walking next door for dinner with the riding all done and the key's put away we had a party out by the pool. An interesting couple showed up at the motel with a vehicle that was a cross between a car and boat that had an outboard motor that you could ride like a bucking bronco.



The next morning after breakfast we headed down US 1, the overseas highway with ten bikes and 21 people for Key West. We had quite a mix with Jeff and Debbie, Curtis and Kathy, Bob and Nan, Paul and Tina on GL1800's Bud and Ginger, Bill and Wilma, Joe and Sandra, Chuck and Barbara on GL1800 trikes, Pedro, Vanessa and Jean on a Valkyrie with a side car and Peter and Darla on a GL1100.

With the sun shining on a perfect Keys morning we headed out from the mainland over the Card Sound Bridge to Key Largo.



The traffic was light for a holiday weekend as we proceeded down the 121 miles of bridges and islands stopping in Marathon for gas. The tropical views of the islands and palm tree's and blue green water was nothing short of spectacular as we headed out to sea on our Wings. Talk on the radio was at a minimum as we all took in the scenery. The goldwings must have felt at home as we rolled across Bahia Honda Key.

After such a magnificent ride it was a bit of a let down as we maneuvered through the bumper to bumper traffic in downtown Key West finally getting to our parking area across from the US 1 Mile Marker 0.



After agreeing when to meet back at the bikes we all wandered off down Duvall Street looking in all the T-shirt shops and stopping in Sloppy Joes to see if Earnest Hemmingway was still there. Right next to where we parked the bikes was a 30 foot tall statue of the American Gothic. We went into the Hogs Breath Saloon and had a mahi mahi fish sandwich. All too soon it was time to head back to the mainland.

Leaving Key West we once again saw the people with the boat car.

When we stopped for gas on Stock Island I reluctantly paid \$4.59 a gallon for gas. The traffic was a little heavier on the way back.

As we approached the Seven Mile Bridge we could see across the ocean as a couple of nasty looking squalls closed in on us. It was actually clear when we got onto the Seven Mile Bridge. The squall hit just as we got to the hump on the bridge. Within moments it was raining so hard we could barely see then the wind gusts hit. Blinding rain driven by 50 + MPH wind gusts is not what I would call good driving conditions. Stopping on the bridge was not an option. It was all I could do to follow the taillights of the bike in front of me. Slowly we made our way off the bridge in some of the most extreme driving conditions any of us had ever been in. At one point my bike was blown completely sideways into the breakdown lane.

We stopped a half mile from the end of the bridge at a gas station. We were all relieved to see everyone had survived.

Jean was looking particularly waterlogged and we were all entertained when Pedro showed us the four inches of water that had collected in the bottom of the side car. If it had rained anymore Jean would have been swimming.



Twenty minutes after it had started the sky was nice and sunny and we were once again on our way back down the keys toward Homestead. We survived the minor issue of a couple of miles of bumper to bumper traffic near the Tiki Bar at Holiday Isle. It was smooth sailing the rest of the way back, with temperatures in the 90's we were soon dry again.

After a long day of riding we came back over the Card Sound Bridge from Key Largo just after sunset.

At Jeff's suggestion we stopped and procured a gourmet meal at Wendy's that we brought back and ate at the motel. Most were in bed asleep early.

The next morning, Monday, Memorial Day we split into two groups. One group Captained by Jeff headed back express via I-75. I stayed with the other group Captained by Chuck and we headed home via the back roads. This turned out to be a fantastic decision with some great riding. The first leg took us across Route 41 also known as the





Tamiami Trail a two lane ribbon of asphalt that cuts straight across the Everglades with a sprinkling of alligators, indian villages and lots of swamp. It looks as though they scooped the dirt out of the swamp on one side to build up the road on the other. Darla spent most of her time looking into the resulting canal running alongside the road telling me every few minutes,” There’s an alligator, oh and there’s another alligator.”

We crossed one serious accident scene where two cars were smashed and another one was up on its side just off the side of the road. The sheriff on scene directed us through pretty quickly.



The rest of the ride brought us up through the center of Florida on two lane roads that had just the right amount of twisty turns and had little if any traffic on them, seemingly roads known only to Chuck and Bob. We came close to Lake Okeechobee and drove through towns like, Immokalee, Arcadia, Limestone and La Belle. As I mentioned earlier my bike has a smaller gas tank and a more limited range so I need to start looking for gas at about a hundred and twenty miles so, after fifty or sixty miles Chuck would say over the radio,” Let’s play it safe for Pete and Darla and stop for gas.” The second time we did this I mentioned that I could go at least twice that distance. That’s when I was lead to believe that maybe it was because Chuck had a few saddle sores from spending at least 8 hours a day riding for the last few days. So I just smiled and took advantage because I might have been a little sore myself.

We found ourselves back up in the Tampa Bay area around supper time and fueled up one last time before we separated from the group in Picnic, Florida arriving home around 6:30 pm. After a thousand miles in three days I am pretty sure that our fearless steed the 81 GL1100 was happy to be home, I know we were. It was a wonderful long weekend of excellent riding and many thanks to our road captains and tail gunners for keeping us happy, safe (mostly) and entertained.

Peter & Darla Flynn
GWRRA #276040
FL1-A Tampa, FL