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# Porsche club enjoys local hospitality, fine driving

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Members of the Porsche Club of America, Potomac chapter, headed down to Bath County again this year, with about 30 drivers taking to the region's roads. One stop included The Homestead, where they were welcomed to show off their cars as a group in front of the hotel. (Photos courtesy Alex Lunsford)

**WARM SPRINGS** — We just returned from our 11th annual Porsche Club of America Potomac Chapter trip July 20-22, and our seventh to the Virginia Highlands and Bath County, the only county in Virginia with no stoplights.

It involved 30 friends, a bluegrass band, a visit with the sheriff, the magical Inn at Gristmill Square, blown glass, a blown left rear caliper bolt, amazing roads, wonderful food and wine, plus some history, ignominy, notoriety, insobriety (stationary), and a couple extra laps for your host to pack out what I packed in (my Corvette, whose left rear brake succumbed).

As advertised, there were goofs, but we wouldn't have it any other way.

Thank you up front to all the beautiful people of Bath and Alleghany counties who are so much fun every year, and the almost 400 car and fun loving people who have participated in this event over 11 years. We've contributed over \$150,000 in tourism dollars to the areas we've visited over 11 years and we will be back again next year.



As I warn the uninitiated, this is a driver's tour. It's a solid two days of driving – usually six hours of nothing but turns at between 20 and 60 mph — so be advised. This is the point.

### **Day 1 – Friday**

We met at Haymarket at 10 a.m. and reviewed PCA policy, signed forms, assigned our lead (me) and tail car (many thanks Mark Fortune, Kristine Kelly, Mark and Laura Kissel), reviewed maps, and passed out radios.

Then we reviewed my rules — no whining, smiles mandatory, tops off when possible, and given a volunteer operation of this size and complexity, to expect goofs.

We headed west down 55, south toward Warrenton, then west on 211 toward Sperryville. We crested the Shenandoah National Park summit under a beautiful July day — 35 mph up and over in the park? C'mon man.

We stopped in Shenandoah for gas and break No. 1. Thanks to the nice folks in the laundromat behind who handled overflow parking. Next was lunch was in Staunton at the fabulous Depot Grille on Middlebrook Street. It has a gigantic bar shipped in by rail from New York worth seeing. We had a great meal as always – thanks to the Krissies, who are always so smooth.



Porsche club members enjoyed their stay, and meals, at the Inn at Gristmill Square. (Photo courtesy Alex Lunsford)

Then we headed next door to Sunspots to see Jason demonstrate Italian Murano glass-blowing techniques.

We turned west on U.S. 250 over three mountain ranges and what must be the most photogenic and sickest 270-degree hairpin turn in Virginia. Whoever you are or were, that bulldozer driver who cut U.S. 250 west just east of McDowell was an artist. Thank you.

We then headed south from McDowell toward Fort Lewis and began to feel like the animals wanted in on our parade. I counted 10+ deer, one bald eagle flying right above us in the gorge above Williamsville, one red tailed hawk following him, a dozen bunnies and chipmunks, and a skunk or two. Mercifully, we managed to avoid all.

We pulled into the Inn at Gristmill in Warm Springs, surprisingly right on time – 5:30 p.m. People met in the courtyard for drinks as Southern Rail Express, led by my friend Willie Smith and backed by Kenneth Lowry, Jim Almarode, David Cannaday and Ted Lawhorn, played bluegrass from Bath County. I had alerted Sheriff Plecker, who came by to meet everyone and welcomed all to Bath. What a showman. Thank you.

Dinner for 35 followed with appetizers (stuffed tomatoes were sublime), prime rib, fresh veggies, fresh breads, and homemade maple cake was exemplary. John and Kate Loeffler, proprietors of the Inn, and also operators of some of my favorite things in Bath County – Le Cochon D’Or and Sam Snead’s – were magnificent hosts as always. Thanks as well to Crystal, Mike, Ashley, Lindsay and all the Gristmill Square staff.

We enjoyed drinks in the wonderful Simon Kenton bar (seats eight, barely) until the wee hours and retired.

## **Day 2 – Saturday**

Gassed up in the only place with 93 octane (thanks, Sunoco), we headed on our counterclockwise rotation through Bath and Alleghany counties. We needed to avoid Clifton Forge and Covington on Saturday morning, as the Alleghany Gran Fondo 100-mile bicycle race was under way on the same roads.

We headed west on Route 39 under surprisingly dry and patchy cloudy weather. With cooler temps, we made even more than our typical 6500 hp, and what better place to put it to good use?

We arrived at Lake Moomaw Marina for a stop at the naturally greenest and most empty Virginia lake you will see in mid-July.

Then I coaxed all to go off road with probably \$2 million worth of cars (and 100 miles from a dealer) through the Richardson Gorge to see the beautiful Moomaw headwaters.

We cruised to Lake Moomaw beach via the Coles road and suffered our first and only mechanical failure in my 11 years at this. And it was my car!

A left rear caliper bolt on my Corvette broke or dropped out, letting my caliper drag on the rim. I do my own brakes, so I have no one to blame but myself. I had no serious tools or the part, so we left it and piled into a friend's car to lead the trip as passengers.

Goofs will happen, and fun is impatient. Thanks to the park for not towing my car Saturday night.

Thanks as well to my 17 other German car drivers who chose not to pile on too much about the fact that the only car to succumb on this Porsche trip was my bright red Corvette. Especially after all the ribbing I have served up to my German car-owning travel mates about fragile German reliability. Ugh. The shame. Karma drives a Porsche, it appears.

After a brief tour of Moomaw Beach, we paused at Gathright Dam, one of the largest earthen dams in Virginia at 257 feet tall and holding back 40 billion gallons of Lake Moomaw. Thanks to the Army Corps for this awesome dam.

Next we headed to a fantastic custom lunch at Fudge Street Café in Covington, which opened two hours early for us. Wonderful service and meals. Thank you to Donna, Brittney and the entire staff for coming in early. We hope to see you each year!

### **The airport**

OK, so here we get serious about driving. Airport Road going uphill from the backside of Clifton Forge (elevation 1,083 feet) to Ingalls Field at the summit (elevation 3,792 feet) may be the toughest, most interesting, fun, nutty, beautiful, sneaky, strip of asphalt in Virginia.

Imagine Deale, N.C.'s "Tail of the Dragon" except mostly empty, with tighter turns, while gaining 2,709 feet of altitude!

We hereby dub this road Virginia's "Tooth of the Dragon."

My driver for this leg, Ragnar "Rocky" Borgh of Sterling, in his pristine e39 BMW M5, is a 777 United pilot and former Swedish Airforce. He has driven the Alps many times and said this was on par. What a road. What a drive.

At the top, I had pre-arranged with Ingalls Field airport manager Jim White and assistant Rob Casler to get a tour of the field and its impressive 5,600-foot runway. Jim was out of town, so Rob did an expert job leading us to the end of the runway with 40 miles of visibility across God's favorite valleys for superb photo opportunities. Thank you to Jim White and the staff of Ingalls Field.

The sales manager for The Homestead, Richard Ross, also happened to be there and he gave us a history lesson on Ingalls Field and The Homestead.

From there we headed to The Homestead for ice cream and a quick tour. Huge thanks to James Deboe, the transportation manager, who managed to let us park 17 cars briefly in front of this 252-year-old grand spectacle for a wonderful photo. We always come back because of the generous hospitality.

We arrived back at the Inn at the Gristmill about 6 p.m., then showered and split up for separate dinners at area restaurants.

Late night we ended up in the Gristmill bar and sampled wines from the fabulous cellar we cannot even find in Northern Virginia, including a rare Loretta vineyards' Cabernet from the Walla Walla, Wash., region.

My co-pilot Virginia St. John and I got up early to rescue my Vette, so we headed back to Northern Virginia with a friend, got my truck and trailer, went back to Lake Moomaw to retrieve the car, and then dragged it home in the same day. A sincere thank you to Virginia, who chose to accompany me across 600 more miles, and three trips between Bath and Leesburg, in one day. She's a keeper.

We have already booked the Inn again for the 12th annual trip, July 19-21, 2019, so get ready Bath – we're already planning.

Thank you to everyone in Bath County — my family's home for 70 years — for your hospitality, and thank you to God for making the prettiest county with the prettiest roads I've seen.

In sum, 35 great friends, 6500 HP, 15 Porsches, some Audis, a BMW, and Mercedes — and my beloved Corvette on a trailer.

Priceless.