2018 Midwest Iron Dog Ride

Jean and I live in Annandale MN about 50 miles west of Minneapolis and up until February 23rd we did not have enough snow to go riding. Our trail system was still closed so we were looking forward to our Mid-West Ride. Guess we prayed too much because on the Friday before we were to leave we got 6 inches of snow. So Saturday morning I got the driveway plowed and got ready for another storm that night. The second storm was even more snow so Sunday morning I was plowing again before we could leave for Babbitt. The snow was so pretty on the trees and landscape that Jean and I kidded “hey we can stay home and ride”.

​We had an uneventful 5 hour ride to Babbitt and drove into the parking lot of the Junction Inn. I got out of the Jeep and looked back at my trailer and couldn’t believe what I saw. My trailer axel was bent and my wheel was at an angle. There was no way I could drive back to Annandale.

​Les Ollila greeted everyone as they arrived. Les was the head honcho who set up this ride along with the assistance of Ron Potter and DeLyle Pankratz. I showed Les my dilemma: his response was “Ed I don’t live here but I know a club member who might be able to find someone to fix your trailer”. In no time I was talking to our local guide Curly. Curly seemed to be connected with everyone so he got on his cell phone, dialed a number and handed it to me. I was talking to a guy from the area who was a skilled welder and fabricator. He told me he had a friend who had a shop and he didn’t know why they couldn’t repair my trailer to get me home.

​The next morning while we were out riding they picked up my trailer and had it repaired by noon. I talked to the fellow by phone and asked, “How much”. He said, “Nothing, I am glad we could help”. That’s what we call Minnesota Nice.

​Now let’s talk about the ride. Les, Ron and DeLyle did a fantastic job of planning this ride. Our accommodations at the Junction Inn were simply the best for a group like us. Plenty of room for our trailers and sleds, most accommodating staff, lovely rooms and the free use of a meeting room for us to congregate. They even provided perfect temperatures for us.

​The Iron Range got even more snow than we did so the trails were great. The club trails we rode on were manicured. You think someone may have told them we were coming?? Curly, our guide took us off a groomed trail for a trip through deep virgin snow with beautiful scenery, something we don’t get to do very often.

One highlight was a tour of Tower Soudan Mining Museum. These super organizers had the museum open just for us as they are normally closed in the winter. We went down a mine shaft over 2,300 feet below ground level, that’s almost half a mile. Thank goodness they have an elevator. We rode on underground rails and got a good understanding of just how difficult iron mining was and perhaps still is. Before this mine shut down it was known as the Cadillac mine because it was the safest and most advanced. There is still plenty of iron down there but it’s just too expensive to mine it now. Another highlight was a visit to the Wolf Center in Ely. I am not a great fan of wolfs but what an incredible facility that is. This tour was also specially arranged because they are not open week days in the winter. While some toured the Wolf Center, others went to the Dorothy Molter Museum. She is better known as the “Root Beer Lady”, one of the north woods most colorful individuals.

Tuesday night the Babbitt ATV and Snowmobile club hosted dinner for us at their club house and we got to thank some of the many people who do so much for our sport. I got to meet one of the guys who repaired my axel and he still refused to take any money. Finally he accepted on behalf of his friend a small token to pay for the channel iron that was needed to repair the axel. Snowmobilers are like that, they are always there to help out and expect nothing in return.

So who got the Crapper award or the toilet seat award on this ride? Can you believe it was yours truly? We were riding across a lake about 50 miles an hour. I was following Jean and because of her snow dust I didn’t see her swerve at the last moment to avoid a snowbank. I hit the snowbank at an angle and was thrown off. They tell me I was really air born. Lucky for me it was powder because my 80 year old bones are not as flexible as they used to be.  I didn’t hurt MUCH and drove the rest of the day. Tuesday I still felt good but by Wednesday my bones where aching. Embarrassed I accepted the award Wednesday evening.

I was pleased we had riders from Iowa, Minnesota and Ken Stewart all the way from South Dakota. Ken is a diehard Dog and always does his best to take part in the Midwest Ride.

In summary we were treated royally everywhere we went, the scenery, trails and food were great and we have come away with very fond memories of up North Minnesota and wonderful friends. Don’t be surprised if we return in the near future.