

Remembrances

Dave Bucher looks back at some little gems of experience from his 45 years of riding and writing.

Hadrian's Wall

I recently read a fairly interesting book detailing how early Western civilizations eschewed the use of zero, both philosophically, as it represented the dreaded Void, and mathematically, since it screwed up so much in mathematics. Oddly, it got me thinking about one of my most memorable motorcycling sightseeing adventures.

Probably the best fortnight of riding I've ever done was on a tour around Great Britain.

It's hard to imagine that an island so relatively small by U.S. standards can have the variety of landscapes that this one offers. But among all the memorable aspects, from the ruggedness of the Scottish coast, the steep, sheep-filled slopes of Wales or the mysteries of prehistoric stone circles, the one place that stands out in my mind is Hadrian's Wall. We were taken to the Roman Army Museum near Haltwhistle, right in the middle of the island, just south of the Scottish border. Standing there and thinking about the occupying Roman Legions, who built it to keep the barbarians from the north out of this farthest reach of the empire, really made an impression.

The wall stretched 73 miles, sea-to-sea and, when completed about 130 A.D., varied in height



from 11 feet to 20 feet. There were towers and major garrisons at intervals keyed to the marching cadence of the Roman Army.

It was also more than just a wall, with parallel ditches and mounds providing added levels of obstruction. But what remains today is mostly that main wall, though much of it was later "quarried" for local building purposes.

The whole thing was very methodically planned and executed, likely under the most adverse conditions. And, to think, the Romans engineered this great project, and so many others—highways, aqueducts, great cities and beautiful buildings, too

numerous to count—using those clunky Roman numerals, and without the aid of zero in making their calculations.

It gives me a lot to think about now, but at the time it wasn't about thinking, only feeling. Just a still, sunny spring day, standing with my companions in the pre-tourist-season silence in the hauntingly sparse North Country. There was a good morning's ride behind us and days more ahead of us.

And that wall, as it stretched up and down those rolling hills, seemed to symbolize my place in the scheme of things. So small a part of everything, but so much yet to see.