

JEFF PETERS TRAVELS WITH WATER BUFFALOS TO AWWA CONFERENCE

Greetings All,

I just returned from an outstanding trip to ACE11 in Washington DC. As you may know, ACE is the world's premier event where water professionals from across this great country of ours and from countries all around the world gather to share their knowledge and lessons learned with their peers in the water industry. Although attending ACE is quite a unique experience in itself, my fondest experience in connection with ACE11 was that of my trip to Washington DC and back home to Indiana.

I had the honor and privilege this year to join the Water Buffalos on their trek to ACE11 from points all across America. Here's a little background info on the Water Buffalos to lend some perspective to the rest of this message. The Water Buffalos originally started with a handful of water professionals located in Oregon, Washington and Arizona that also happen to be motorcycle enthusiasts. The inaugural ride for the Water Buffalos consisted of a leisurely motorcycle ride to ACE05 in San Diego, California. After the inaugural ride, the original group asked, "Wouldn't it be awesome if we could find more water professionals from across the country who are also motorcycle enthusiasts, and invite them to join us on the trip to ACE next year? And what if we used this as a means to raise money for Water For People?" Well, they did both and as word spread, the ranks of the Water Buffalos grew, and continues to grow today.

I first heard (no pun intended, well maybe a little) of the Water Buffalos from Jim Williams when he told me about his trip with them to ACE09 in Atlanta, Georgia. Jim told me several stories about his trip with the "Herd", which included riding on the back roads of Tennessee and Georgia through the Appalachian Mountains and the wonderful people he met in this group. Unfortunately, I missed the ride to ACE09 in Atlanta and ACE10 in Chicago, Illinois. While attending ACE10, I promised myself that I would be ready next year for the ride to ACE11 in Washington DC.

For me, the ride to ACE11 began in Indianapolis on June 8th. Joining me for the first leg of our trek was Jim Williams and Alex Hood. The three of us enjoyed a leisurely ride that first day through southern Indiana, traveling along some of the roads that I'm most familiar with (State Road 252 and 135 through Morgan, Brown, Jackson and Washington counties) and then into Louisville, Kentucky. The next day we rode to Chattanooga, Tennessee where we met up with seven more Water Buffalos. Before leaving Louisville, we charted a scenic route through Kentucky and Tennessee. The route we chose through Kentucky lead us by the birthplace and the boyhood home of Abraham Lincoln. In Tennessee, we took a little bit of a detour off the beaten path and paid a visit to Lynchburg, Tennessee (I'm sure most of you know what Lynchburg is famous for). While in Lynchburg, Jim, Alex and I took a tour of the Jack Daniels Distillery and bought a few items of what Jack is famous for before heading to Chattanooga (sober of course) where our ride ended for the day.

The following morning we departed Chattanooga, 10 Water Buffalos strong, and made our way to the Cherohala Skyway just outside of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park in North Carolina, after which we headed to a stretch of road about half an hour's ride away called "Tail of the Dragon". The mere name "Tail of the Dragon" conjures up mental images of a treacherous road wrought with danger and challenges, which it is, but I never imagined the extent of how challenging this road would prove to be. In short, the Tail of the Dragon is an 11-mile stretch of an old Tennessee Valley Authority road built back in the late 1930's/early 1940's. This 11-mile stretch has 318 curves from beginning to end, mostly switch-backs up and down the sides of mountains. From an engineering perspective, if a straight line was drawn between the beginning and ending points of the "Dragon", the distance is only 6.7 miles. Calculating 318 curves in 11 miles results in each curve being approximately 61 feet in length and spaced roughly 183 feet apart. The average turning radius of each curve is approximately 29 feet with an internal entrance/exit angle of 60 degrees. And then there's the challenge of the elevational changes as well. In this 11-mile stretch of road, I didn't get out of second gear more than twice. It was the most intense motorcycle riding experience I had ever had, and one I was glad to share with this seasoned riders of the group.

After the “Dragon”, we eventually made our way to Harpers Ferry, West Virginia the following day, taking a 100 mile detour to enjoy some of the Blue Ridge Parkway through Virginia along the way. At Harpers Ferry, we met up with the rest of the “Herd” where we all enjoyed a fun-filled evening of storytelling, camaraderie and making new friends. The next morning, 17 Water Buffalos saddled up, kicked up their kick-stands and rode into Washington DC as a group.

Once the Herd arrived at ACE11, we began to go about our various conference activities. A majority of the Herd regrouped at the Kenneth J. Miller Awards luncheon on Monday, June 13th, where the Water Buffalos were recognized for their Water For People fundraising efforts (along with Tim Hill, this year’s recipient from Indiana of the Kenneth J. Miller Award). This year the Water Buffalos raised over \$43,000 for Water For People. Since the inception of the Water Buffalos seven years ago, they have raised over \$340,000 for Water For People. All of this just from a group of water professional that like to ride motorcycles. Pretty impressive, eh?

I encourage you to check out the Water Buffalos’ web site the next time you’re surfing the internet. You can find them at www.Ridewithpurpose.org. Here you will find a host of information about the Water Buffalos, see photos of past rides and learn how to join in the fun for next year’s ride to Dallas, Texas.

Some of you might be asking, “What does a motorcycle ride to ACE11 have to do with AWWA and the Indiana Section?” My response is networking with our peers in the industry; it’s all about networking and building relationships with our peers in various professions that serve our industry. The Water Buffalos are comprised of operators, engineers, regulators, service providers and vendors who are not only passionate about water and motorcycles, but also about raising money for Water For People (three of my favorite subjects). So the next time you see me, please feel free to ask me about any or all, but be warned, I may drag you along next year for the ride of your life.

Your Chair

Jeff (Water Buffalo # 41)