



Castles and Caverns

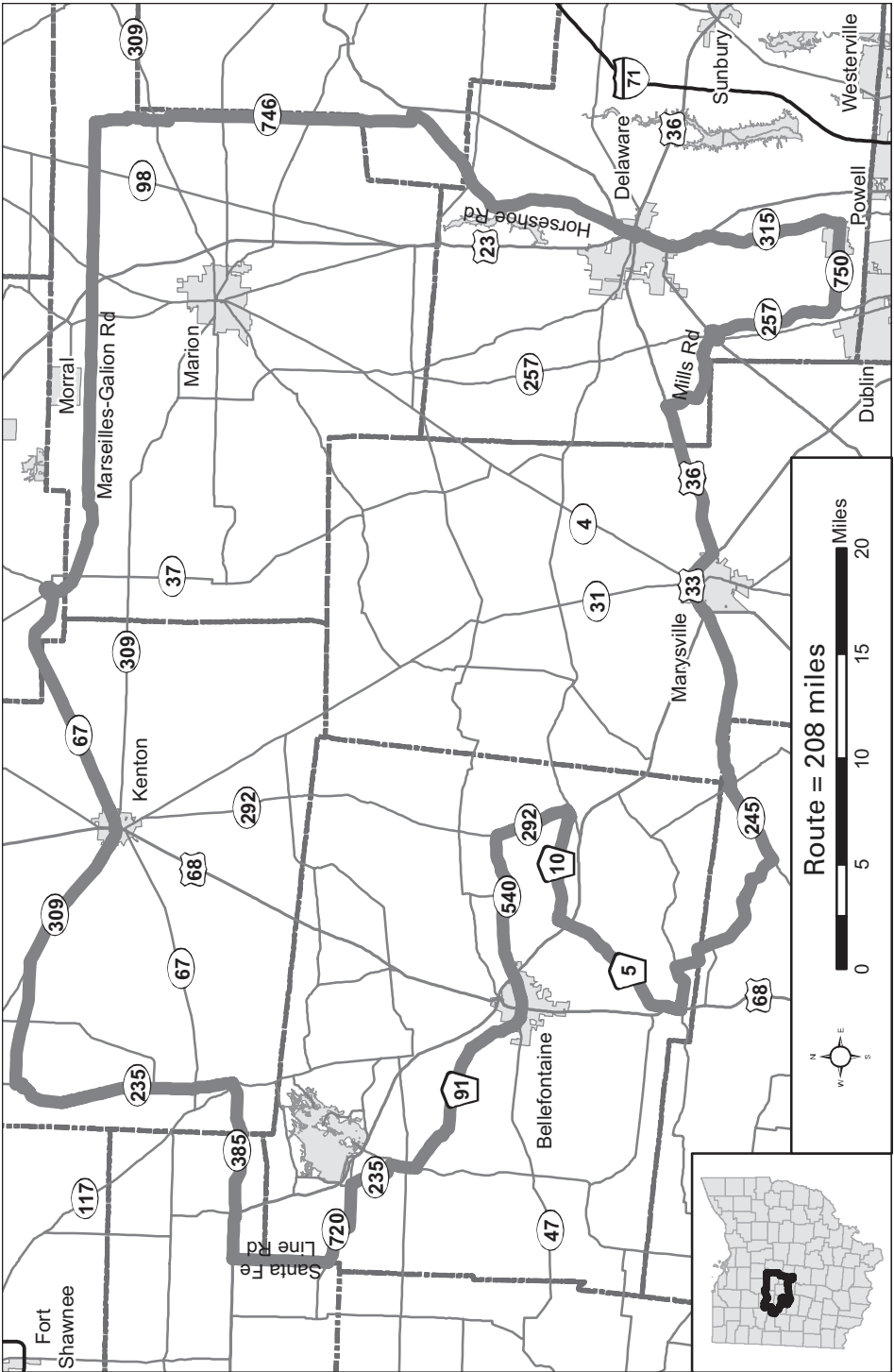
THIS TOUR MAY BE THE BEST introductory ride in this book because of its location. Situated in the area just north and northwest of Columbus, it's a region that most folks wouldn't think of as prime motorcycling country. Wrong! This ride takes you through beautiful countryside on marvelous motorcycling roads and to natural and cultural attractions that are just fantastic and that should be high on everybody's list of must-see places. It goes through a remarkable landscape rich in both beauty and history.

This particular tour is also a good place to discuss some of the behind-the-scenes issues involved in crafting the rides you'll find in the book. You may be thinking, for instance, that this and some other tours have irregular jogs or shapes, and couldn't I have made them a lot easier to follow, and wouldn't it have made more sense to just use roads that make a nice neat package without the twists and turns? Well, there are two reasons why these tours take the form they do: First, I hate taking straight and boring roads and avoid them whenever possible; and second and the most important, a great deal of thought has gone into these tours. I take you down roads and to places that are not only great fun on a motorcycle, but where you can see up close and personal the natural and cultural attractions that are fundamental to the character and history of Ohio.

I purposely devised tours that take the rider down history-filled roads that started out as trails, such as the Sandusky Trail, the Bullskin Trace, Hull's Trace, and more. I planned the rides to include as many attractions as possible on each route, carefully crafting tours that take in the best attractions in the area (obviously not getting to all of them, but most!). So, when the route jogs or turns in ways that don't seem sensible, just be patient and remember there is logic behind the seeming madness and that wonderful roads and attractions await you around the next bend!

So, with the above thoughts in mind, this particular tour will make an extraordinary one- or two-day motorcycle trip with frequent stops to see the many attractions along the way. Let's fill up the gas tank (I'm serious) and begin our trip in the city of Delaware. Take US42 to the northeast corner of town, just past the YMCA Greenwood Lake Camp and turn left on Horseshoe Road. Horseshoe is an okay riding road but certainly not the best you'll experience during this trip. After

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CASTLES AND CAVERNS 208 MILES		
Miles	Destination	Total
0	Delaware	0
27	Caledonia	27
27	Marseilles	54
13	Kenton	67
25	Roundhead`	92
31	Bellefontaine	123
18	Zanesfield	141
31	Marysville	172
36	Delaware	208

a few miles, it forms the east boundary of the Delaware Reservoir Wildlife Area and has enough curves and scenery to keep it interesting.

At SR229 the road angles northeast and becomes CR156, which we'll continue on for four more miles to SR746. The state road jogs west a very short distance and then continues north through land that changes from wooded to mostly farmland as you approach the small town of Caledonia (the boyhood hometown of President Warren G. Harding). SR746 ends in Caledonia, but we want to continue straight north on what is now Caledonia–Northern Road. It makes a couple of small jogs just north of town but essentially goes due north.

From the north side of Caledonia, we go less than three miles to Marseilles-Galion Road and turn west/left. Hopefully, you took my advice and topped off the tank, because from here west you're going through one of the most wide open of Ohio's various wide-open spaces. This segment due west to Marseilles is probably different than what you had in mind. It's through farm country—some of the best farmland in Ohio. In fact, it's called the Grand Prairie, and you'll do a double take thinking you've inexplicably ended up in North Dakota. But this is Ohio—a part of the state that folks who commute on expressways each day don't see. This portion of the trip, while lacking hills and serious curves, is an experience in itself and something different than the routine. It's twenty-four miles due west to the village of Marseilles, which itself is merely a wide spot in the road. Marseilles-Galion Road isn't meant for speed, tempting as it may be, and of course, keep in mind that this is farm country so don't be surprised by farm implements sharing

the road with you. Just before reaching Marseilles, you join SR37 and follow it to town where you get on SR67 westbound—next stop Kenton.

One of the most famous characters in Ohio's colorful history is Simon Kenton. Explorer, frontiersman, Indian fighter, military officer, and woodsman—it's regrettable that his name and deeds aren't better known than they are. He is certainly Ohio's Daniel Boone (in fact, they were close friends, and in 1777 Kenton saved Boone's life), and while his name will be long-remembered, I don't believe the man himself gets his due respect. That's a shame because his story is a fascinating one. I know of no one today who possesses the courage Kenton had and who endured what he did. Kenton survived on pure grit, guts, and incredible tenacity. Amazingly, he survived running *nine* gauntlets while a prisoner of the Shawnee at various times (most men didn't survive the ordeal once), and he once traveled hundreds of miles through the wilderness after escaping captivity despite having received several broken bones during one of these events. He survived injuries that would have left most others in the grave. Kenton is buried in Urbana, where a life-size sculpture honors him.

The city of Kenton is as rock-solid as its namesake, located in the heart of an area with history stretching back to the late 1700s, though the town itself didn't have its beginning until 1845. Three miles west of town is where General Hull cut what was to be called Hull's Trace through the wilderness while on his way to garrison Fort Detroit in the early days of the War of 1812. It is also the location of Fort McArthur, which was built in 1812 to protect this vital supply route. (A monument marks the site—take SR309 northwest out of town and turn left on CR106).

An interesting story about the city of Kenton involves the famous cowboy crooner, Gene Autry, and his trademark silver six-shooter. The Kenton Hardware Company had once been the largest manufacturer of iron toys in the world. During the Great Depression they fell on hard times and were struggling to survive. The company's vice president believed that if they could produce a toy gun based on Gene Autry's famous revolver it would save them. The venture was so successful they couldn't keep up with demand. Today, Kenton celebrates Gene Autry Day and a wonderful mural graces the side of a downtown building at the corner of Franklin and Market Streets, along with a small park at that location. During the Civil War, Camp Simon Kenton, located at today's county fairgrounds, was a Union training camp.

We continue our trip by heading west on SR309. On the west side of Kenton is a railroad track, and six miles from this track, you'll come to where County Roads 90 and 95 intersect with 309. You want to take CR90 west to the village of Alger and SR235, heading south on 235 to the tiny village of Roundhead. If you happen to miss CR90/95, don't panic—just take SR309 to SR235 and proceed south.

Roundhead is a tiny village with quite a story to tell. It was the home of Detroit Wyandot Chief Stiahta—*aka* Roundhead. Chief Roundhead was fiercely opposed to white encroachment in the Ohio Country. He joined Tecumseh's Indian Confederacy and sided with the British during the War of 1812. Like other Native Americans allied with the British, Roundhead didn't give a damn about Great Britain and their empire, he simply believed that British enmity toward the Americans could be exploited for the Indian cause. Roundhead is most infamously known as the assassin of Wyandot Chief Leatherlips near present-day Columbus. Chief Leatherlips believed that the time had come to lay down the hatchet and try to live with the white man, and for this Tecumseh ordered him killed. Roundhead fought several battles in the War of 1812, including the Battle of River Raisin (Frenchtown) and the Battle of the Thames (Moravia) in Ontario, where he and Tecumseh were both killed. The village of Roundhead is also in the headwaters of the historic and strategically important Scioto River.

From Roundhead we proceed eight and a half miles west on SR385, past the village of New Hampshire to Santa Fe Line Road (CR17), and turn left, going four and a half miles to the tiny crossroads of Santa Fe. At this point we turn east on SR720, taking it southeast and then east four miles to SR235, where we turn right. Follow SR235 as it curves southeast past the Honda Transmission Plant and then straight south less than a mile and a half to County Road 91, where you turn left. County Road 91 goes southeast cross-country toward Bellefontaine. Just west of Bellefontaine, it joins CR130, which enters Bellefontaine as Garfield Avenue and then Sandusky Avenue through downtown. It's very simple to follow, just the road names change, not the route.

Bellefontaine is an historic and attractive city. You'll pass through the small downtown section, and I suggest parking the bike to admire the beautiful Logan County Courthouse and other buildings whose 19th-century architecture adds character to this very typical Ohio small town. In front of the courthouse is McKinley Street, which in 1891 was the first road in America to be paved with concrete.

Following Sandusky Avenue east out of Bellefontaine, it becomes SR540. Take route 540 east until it makes a T with SR292 and turn right. The area east of Bellefontaine is Ohio's high country. A stranger might expect that the hilly south of Ohio would be where one would find the highest land in the state, however that's not the case. Campbell Hill, the highest point in Ohio, is just east of Bellefontaine, and the entire region is wonderfully hilly with very nice geologic relief and beautiful scenery. Roads in this area are custom-made for motorcycling, with hills and curves aplenty dishing up top-notch riding for the most discriminating biker.

This area is physiologically different than southern Ohio because of glacial action. Glacial drift up to one hundred feet thick covers the preglacial sandstone



*Bellefontaine
Courthouse*

and limestone landscape, resulting in “softer” hills of clay and gravel as compared to the hills common in the south, where exposed bedrock is the common feature.

In a sense that gives this area the best of both worlds—the presence of high hills plus the Karst formation common in limestone regions. The first of several of the most obvious by-products of Karst geology (caverns) can be found along SR540 east of Bellefontaine at Zane Shawnee Caverns, which is open to the public for tours. Call 937-592-9592 for more information about tours.

Heading south on SR295 takes you through more wonderful countryside on the way to the village of East Liberty. The riding gets even more fun as you head



Mac-a-Cheek Castle

west out of East Liberty on CR10 along the Bristol Ridge to the town of Zanesfield. This is a grand road, and the last mile into Zanesfield, where you drop three hundred feet in elevation very quickly, is especially enjoyable. Once at Zanesfield you want to turn left, go past the very large boulder monument to Simon Kenton and Isaac Zane, and then southwest on CR5 to the town of West Liberty. Just outside of Zanesfield, you'll notice the Mad River Ski Area on your left. County Road 5 to West Liberty makes for a very enjoyable ride. On SR68 on the north side of West Liberty, notice the historical sign for Hull's Trace and Moluntha (who was the leading Shawnee Chief who surrendered himself and his family to General Logan but was murdered by an overzealous colonel).

This area lies within Logan County, which has a rich Native American history. Many tribes hunted here and several, including the Shawnee, Wyandot, Seneca, and Mingo, established villages. Zane's Town was a Wyandot village, and Wapatomica, which was the capital village of the Shawnee and the Seven Tribes, was also located near present-day Zanesfield. In 1786 General Benjamin Logan led a contingent of soldiers in a concerted effort at moving the Indians out of the Ohio Country. Many atrocities followed, including the burning of entire Indian villages. You're truly riding with the ghosts of those who came before you in this fascinating part of the state.



Mac-o-Chee Castle

For such a tiny town, West Liberty has an astonishing amount of history—too much to detail in this book. A camp located immediately south of town even served as a training base for soldiers during the Spanish-American War and World War I. Today, West Liberty may be best known for two fabulous homes built after the Civil War by two very gifted brothers—Abram and Donald Piatt.

From West Liberty take SR245 east. Just outside of town you'll notice the sign for Mac-A-Cheek castle. There is also an historical marker at this site explaining the history of the Shawnee villages in the Mackachack Valley. Machachak is a Shawnee word meaning “smiling valley,” and what a beautiful valley and home for generations of Native Americans this must have been!

Take Township Road 47 a very short distance to Mac-A-Cheek castle, the first of the two Piatt Castles. A mile farther east on SR245, where the road turns south, is Mac-O-Chee Castle. Both of these palatial homes are open daily, 11:00 am–5:00 pm, for self-guided or group tours. Even if you don't do the tour, it's a

wonderful stop to walk the grounds and gaze upon and appreciate these marvelous labors of love. Call 937-465-2821 or go to www.piattcastles.org for more information on tours and events at the Piatt Castles.

Upon leaving the castles, SR245 heads south, and shortly you will see signs for Ohio Caverns. These are the largest and perhaps the grandest of the caverns in Ohio and make an enjoyable stop—assuming you're not claustrophobic. From April through October, daily tours are offered from 9:00 am–5:00 pm. At this point SR245 is running generally south and just past the Caverns is Tabor Hill, with a cemetery and church at the peak. This spot provides a wonderful panoramic view of this beautiful area. In fact, the entire stretch of route 245 in the Mingo area provides fabulous scenery and motorcycling as the road dips and weaves and takes you along for a most enjoyable ride.

Enjoy SR245 all the way east to US33, where you can skirt around Marysville, and then continue east on US36 for seven and a half miles to Ostrander Road. Go south on Ostrander Road a total of a mile and a half, which takes you through the village of Ostrander and over Mill Creek, where you will come to Mills Road. Take this enjoyable county road east as it curves alongside Mill Creek to its juncture with SR257. Follow SR257 as it turns east across the river and then about six and a half miles south along the east shoreline of the O'Shaughnessy Reservoir to SR750/Powell Road. The Columbia Zoo is at the northeast corner of the 257/750 intersection.

Take Powell Road east four miles through a rapidly developing area of yuppie housing to SR315/Olentangy River Road. This Ohio Scenic Byway hugs the shore of the Olentangy River and is a very pleasant ride. About midway to Delaware, you'll see signs for the Olentangy Indian Caverns, located just west of SR315 on Home Road. It's an easy intersection to spot—just look for the large 1810 Liberty Presbyterian Church on the corner. The Indian Caverns are very interesting. There is evidence that Native Americans used the caverns for many years prior to their discovery by white settlers in 1821. Site operators claim that Wyandot Chief Leatherlips was assassinated in 1810 at the entrance to the caverns, though others claim the killing took place about three miles to the south. Associated with the caverns is Ohio Frontier Land, where a replica frontier town teaches today's visitors about frontier life. Between April and October, cavern tours are offered daily from 9:30 am–5:00 pm. Call them at 740-548-7917.

Finish the tour by taking SR315 north to the city of Delaware, a thriving city of 30,000. Delaware derived its name from the Delaware Indians who lived in the region in pre-Columbian times. A great time to visit Delaware is September, when there are week-long events surrounding the Little Brown Jug harness racing event—a very popular race that is part of the triple crown of harness racing. A hot

air balloon festival is also held each September. Perhaps more in line with your motorcycling interests is the Love America Cycle Expo & Rally—a fun motorcycle event held in mid June each year at the Delaware County Fairgrounds. Call 614-893-3311 for more info.

Delaware was the 1822 birthplace of President Rutherford B. Hayes. It was also a major player in the Underground Railroad, with nearby Africa Road a legacy of that era. It has many historic homes, and its downtown historic area is a fine place to park the bike and take a walk.

And there you have it! A fabulous ride through wonderful scenery, down roads that deserve distinction as great motorcycling routes, through locations of compelling historical significance, and to natural and manmade attractions that must be seen to be appreciated. This tour in the heart of Ohio really does have it all.