

# A ONE YEAR ODYSSEY IN SEARCH OF LIGHTHOUSES

# BIKES & LIGHTS

*By Charles (Chuck) Berry*

A few years ago I rode a National Parks Tour. It was great fun. Then I tried a SaddleSore 1000. Not so much fun! These rides require two different styles of riding and I'm just not cut out for timed distance challenges; I like to take too many breaks during a long day's ride to have a competitive average speed. When I heard about the Lighthouse Tour, I knew it was the right kind of long-distance challenge for me as it was simply a great excuse to travel the world (although I began by focusing my efforts on bagging lighthouses in the US and Canada).

This Tour would probably not exist if not for the U.S. Lighthouse Society; its Lighthouse Passport Program is similar to the IBA's Master Traveler Award. Reviewing the rules for the Lighthouse Tour, I found that they were simple enough even for me to follow. I invested in an Iron Butt Ride Flag, a SPOT Satellite Messenger and a new cell phone that could tag each picture with GPS coordinates before I started planning.

The premise of the ride is simple — just ride around the country (or world) on your bike and either take a photo of a lighthouse with your Ride Flag or document your visit by obtaining a stamp from the light-



*St Simons Island, Georgia*





*Nantucket Lighthouse Ship,  
Boston, Massachusetts*

house. The entry level award requires visiting 60 lighthouses in one year. You won't find any in Arizona, Wyoming or several other states. Most of these lighthouses are on the ocean coasts or some other body of water. For those hard-to-find lighthouses, there is a free program available called *Lights by Map* as well as cell phone apps available for both the USA and Canada.

There are other methods of documenting your visit. The easy way is what I did: I used SPOT signals sent to the spotwalla.com website to track my entire journey. You can set up an album with the pictures on any available cloud website and then post each picture to Spotwalla. This is unnecessary if your camera supports geotagging photographs. (Note: Being an Iron Butt Premier Member also allows you to submit the package via email and/or reference your pictures' website.)

This tour is structured with several higher levels of recognition. As mentioned above, Finisher status requires visits to 60 lighthouse sites. The next level, Bronze, requires visiting the same number, but adds the additional requirement of lighthouses on two different oceans. Silver increases the number to 120 lighthouses on two oceans, but gives the rider two years to complete it. The Gold level ups the ante quite a bit: riders have three years to collect 180 lighthouses with at least one lighthouse on the Gulf of Mexico, one on the Great Lakes and one in Canada. If you



*Point Robinson, Washington*

are truly ambitious, the Gold Extreme requirements are to do it in just one year! Finally, Platinum requires riders to visit at least 180 lighthouses on two different continents within three years.

Half of the enjoyment of long trips for me is the pre-trip planning phase. This includes selecting the route and time of year to travel, stops along the way, overnight accommodations and logistical preparation. Thinking about ways to maximize my goals for the trip and minimize travel expenses is always part of my planning algorithm. That said, at the end of the 2013 riding season I had several goals on the shelf that I thought could be reasonably combined in 2014 and 2015. They included finishing the Lighthouse Tour Gold, a Bun Burner 1500, attending the 2014 BMW MOA Rally and completing a 50cc Quest. I launched the first leg of my Lighthouse Tour from Mackinaw City, Michigan while on my way to the MOA Rally in

St. Paul, Minnesota.

In the off-season between 2014 and 2015, I made several short trips collecting lighthouses before I started my circumnavigation of the country on May 8, 2015. When I reached California, all the time I spent researching lighthouses started to pay off. The latitude and longitude of each are displayed on the Lighthouse Friends website and the phone app narrative gave me a feel for whether it was worth my time to try and get a suitable picture. Those were loaded into my GPS before departing, and then I just hopscotched from one to the next.

It made sense to start in late spring, as I had already collected pictures from most of the southeastern states and Canada. Once on the west coast and heading north I could escape the increasingly hot summer. Also, if something bad happened, I could at least return home with the requirements met for the Bronze award. Thankfully my plan worked.

Each lighthouse had its own unique challenges for photo access. Some prohibited access and others had physical challenges, but getting to each one was an adventure. I traveled through parts of the country that I would never have chosen without the Tour to motivate me. The itinerary was my tour guide. Some of the roads were as challenging as any that I have had the pleasure of riding.

Many lighthouses encourage visitors. I should note that most of the lighthouse docents are volunteers and any donations are used to help pay for the cost of lighthouse upkeep. The rules for the IBA



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Cape Henry,  
Virginia

Tour do not give us an incentive to visit the lighthouse, rather, they provide us with alternative methods to meet the documentation requirements — which is what I did at almost every stop. I really missed out by not going inside.

I experienced a lot of special moments on these trips. I had lunch at San Francisco's St. Francis Yacht Club and arranged a visit to their private island and lighthouse in the Sacramento Delta. I crossed the coastal range south of Big Sur, the most technical road I encountered on this ride. I didn't get enough of it the first time around, so I decided to ride it going back the opposite direction. I had many, many more Kodak moments.

If you like to set your own pace, visit friends along your route and travel to the end of the road, then the Lighthouse Tour Challenge is for you. You pick the time to go, the destination, the route to get there and take days off when the weather or mood dictates. The lighthouses are both the excuse to ride and the prize you get at the end of a day of lighthouse hunting.

For the July 2014 to July 2015 Tour year, I motorcycled over 20,000 miles to more than 230 lighthouses in the USA and Canada. The 2015 summer's trip alone was 12,000 miles with an average day's ride of 220 miles; the longest days were over 500 miles. More interesting, though, is that several days lasted for 12 or 13 hours. No wonder I aged. I was 76 when I started out and 77 when I finished the Lighthouse Tour Gold.

## LESSONS LEARNED

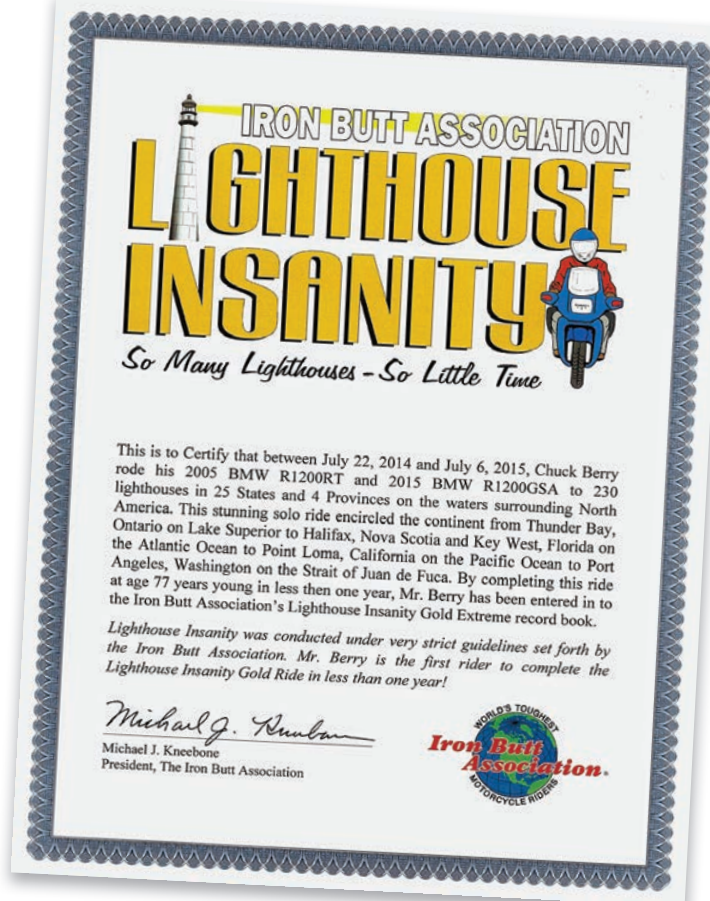
Being in shape is important on extended rides like this. I trained hard over the winter — or at least as hard as a 76-year-old male cancer survivor with six cardiac stents and other after-market parts could. I think the longest day I rode, chock to chock, was over 13 hours — and there were several of those. Of the 63 days I was away from home, I rode 58 of them.

I have a BMW Navigator V on my 2015 BMW R1200GSA. It has *some* redeeming qualities, but I feel much more comfort-



Quebec, Canada





able with my old GPSmap376 or 378, so I mounted one on the right handlebar for not only XM entertainment, but for XM NEXRAD radar to avoid storms. For unplanned excursions, I went old school: a Rand McNally Road Atlas. It is a valuable reference, especially when I want to see the big picture.

I plotted every lighthouse's position before I left home. They were strung out around the country and I followed my GPS from point to point, *unless* I got lost, usually due to construction. Be prepared and be flexible.

It should be obvious, but it bears emphasis that many lighthouses are located at the end of unimproved roads. A lot of out-and-back rides are required. Also, trying to identify a place from which to take a suitable picture is not always easy. In those cases, I would take more than one picture. My first priority was to meet the documentation requirements, and sometimes that was all I could do. When possible, I would try to compose as beautiful a photograph as I could, given the location and conditions. To keep the ride interesting I would look for subjects other than lighthouses and routes that would be fun to ride, but my quest to find lighthouses always came first.

When I started the Lighthouse Tour, I didn't realize how all-encompassing it could become. Getting those first 60 pictures was not difficult because I chose a lighthouse-rich environment for the first trip. As I continued to plan subsequent trips, I realized the only way to efficiently complete the Tour was to stop the out-and-back trips and plan a longer, linear trip. By the end of 2014 I met all of the higher order requirements except lighthouses on the west coast. My plan was to ride across the southern states to California, then up the coast and around the country became the plan. Once I obtained a west coast lighthouse all I needed were numbers — 120 lighthouses from anywhere. —



*Chuck Berry has been an IBA member since 2006 and has completed the National Parks Tour, Master Traveler Award after earning a National Parks Tour Gold in 2007 (still the oldest member to complete this award at 67 years), SaddleSore 1000 in 2014 at 76, and Lighthouse Tour Gold in 2015 at 77. Former careers include 20 years service as Naval Submarine Officer serving on both diesel and nuclear submarines, followed by 20 years as professional corporate pilot and aviation safety seminar leader at FAA-sponsored seminars throughout the country.*

## WEBSITE LINKS & REFERENCES

**Iron Butt Association Lighthouse Tour Challenge**  
<http://www.ironbutt.com/lighthouse/>

**Lighthouse Friends locating map by states**  
<http://www.lighthousefriends.com/maps.html>

**Iron Butt Forum Lighthouse Tour discussion**  
[http://www.ironbutt.org/forum/forum\\_posts.asp?TID=6953&PN=3](http://www.ironbutt.org/forum/forum_posts.asp?TID=6953&PN=3)

**The Lighthouse Directory** (18,600 of the world's lighthouses)  
<https://spotwalla.com/tripViewer.php?id=e1c455aa44c148307>

**Lighthouse Friends phone apps**  
 US Lighthouses  
 Canadian Lighthouses