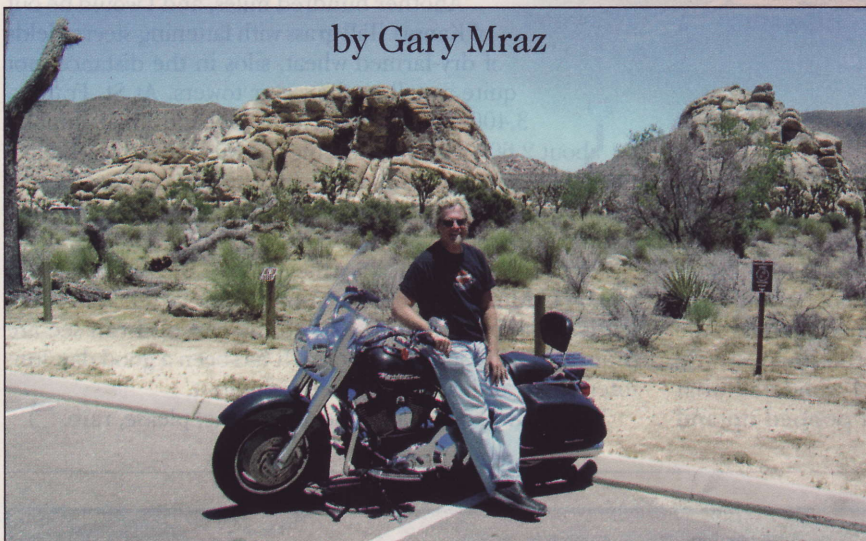


Joshua Tree

An American mystery

by Gary Mraz



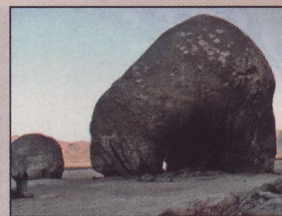
I have never done a River Run, Sturgis or even the Love Ride. I've always wanted to, but the task seems daunting. So I decided to kickstart those jitters with a ride to Joshua Tree National Park in the California high desert. I decided that I would own the road! Just for safety sake on my first 200-miler, I invited a riding partner, Jeff, who lives in Palm Desert and rides one wicked Ducati 749 twin.

I've heard a lot about Joshua Tree. It seems to have some ancient mystery about it. Native Indians claim the trees are spirits of dead Indian warriors ominously guarding their desert domain; there is an energy dome built in the 1950s to commemorate some extraterrestrial race; and it's home of the largest freestanding boulder in the world and the oldest living organism on the planet, the creosote bush. U2 must have had some reason to call their popular album *Joshua Tree*, so I want to get out there and see for myself.

As we pass Desert Hot Springs I remember hearing about the Cabot Yerxa Pueblo. Yerxa homesteaded here in 1913 on Miracle Hill and discovered the now-famous natural hot springs. There's this amazing four-story, 35-room Hopi-style pueblo and a 40-foot Indian sculpture outside that was hand-carved by Peter Wolf Toth. In his "Trail of the Whispering Giants," he has placed one of these majestic sentinels in every state of the union.

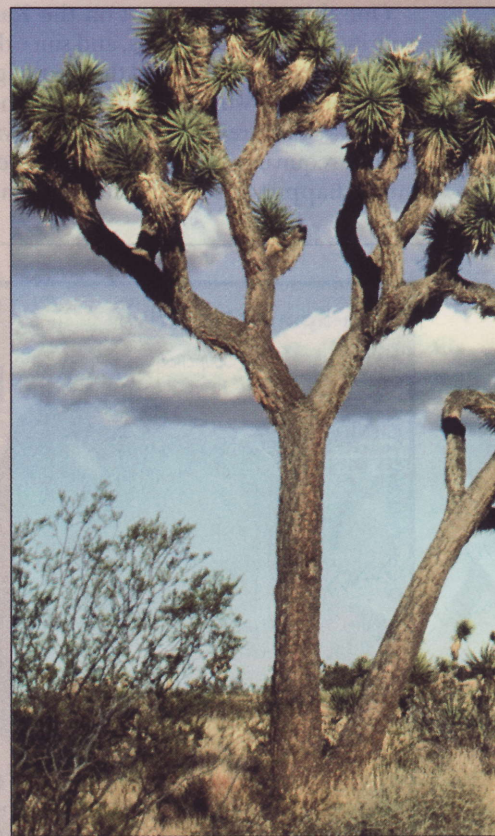
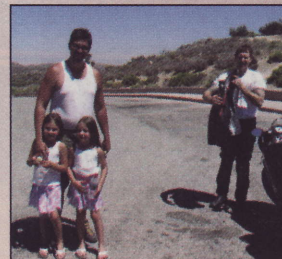
Onward to Highway 62, we pass the wind farms. They stand eerily out of place, as if some alien race of gargantuans had left their toys behind. The run up the base of Little San Bernardino Mountain can be very windy. Sudden gusts can put you into another lane. My heavy Road King is a real advantage here.

We stopped at Yucca Valley, home of Hutchins Harley-Davidson with its attached Highway 62 Diner. With a '50s décor, each booth has a Seeburg 100 jukebox selector. The diner serves breakfast all day. We checked out the cool menu and ordered



Is this the largest freestanding boulder in the world?

Were Ray and his daughters sent by heathen Ducati gods to rescue Jeff's superbike?



Are Joshua trees the spirits of the dead guarding their arid desert domain?

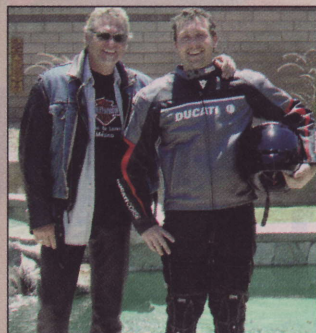




What provoked Gary and Jeff to spontaneously embark on a 200-mile adventure ride? Did they unravel the secrets of Joshua Tree? Will their travels lead them to mythical Sturgis?



Are these mere toys left behind by giant intergalactic aliens?



the Road Kill and the Panhead breakfast. Hutch also has a vintage Harley museum in his dealership that is a must-see.

Back on 62, we pass by the Joshua Tree Inn. That's where Gram Parson (of the band The Byrds) died. It's a really bizarre true story made into a movie called *Grand Theft Parsons*, starring Johnny Knoxville—definitely worth a watch.

Off the highway is Old Woman Road leading to Landers, home of Giant Rock and the Integratron. Giant Rock is thought to be the world's largest freestanding boulder. Dr. George Van Tassel was one of the leaders in the UFO movement of the 1950s and held annual "Spacecraft Conventions" at Giant Rock for 25 years. He built the Integratron, a 38-foot-high, 55-foot-diameter, all-wood structure originally designed as a rejuvenation and time machine. Today you can have a neuroacoustic sound bath, attend a UFO symposium or participate in an Unplugged Goddess retreat.

We cruise through Joshua Tree National Park and the scenery is surreal. The rocks take on a strange liquid-like form as if floating gravity-free. Armies of Joshua trees loom before us, defending their arid empire. It's an absolutely beautiful drive. We head up to Keys View, and at 5,575 feet, the vista is staggering—we can see Mexico 300 miles away. We are truly in the middle of nowhere.

Somewhere in this nowhere-ness the bolt holding the shift lever of Jeff's bike fell off. I had tools in my saddlebags—in fact, I had sunscreen, maps, food, water and a flashlight. I was prepared for any form of disaster, but I couldn't help him and his \$14,000 superbike. We soon discovered there's no cell service and no AAA. As fate would have it, up rumbles a monster truck driven by a guy named Ray, with every nut, bolt, and tool available in this quadrant of the known galaxy. With a little tinkering we securely fixed the problem and thanked Ray and his two daughters for their miraculous appearance.

The loop back out of the park on Pinto Basin Road through Cottonwood Pass was fantastic, 40 miles of downhill grade, grand vistas, continuous curves... and we did own the road! Ultimately we are spit into the eight lanes of Highway 10. Finally we're back in Palm Desert, 215 miles later, 5,575 feet lower, and 100 percent wiser. With this trip under my belt, you will be seeing me at Sturgis. ☺

What's your 200-mile story? Tell us about your 200-Mile Adventure Ride aboard your Harley. If you can provide good pictures, we'll consider publishing it. Send to American Rider, 2575 Vista Del Mar Drive, Ventura, CA 93001; or e-mail your submission to dude@americanrider.com (digital images must be 300 dpi). If your story is published, we'll give you an American Rider button-down staff shirt.