

# Local bikers slither through the Rattlesnake

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- Ross Corder

Around 500 motorcyclists took part in the inaugural ride on “the Rattlesnake,” an officially-designated motorcycle route along Ky. 192 connecting Laurel and Pulaski Counties on Saturday. After about a 40-minute ride from either county, participants met at the Bee Rock campground and commemorated the historic ride.

The Rattlesnake made some noise this weekend. The much-ballyhooed motorcycle trail winding its way through both Pulaski and Laurel Counties saw its inaugural ride on Saturday, with around 500 bikers taking part.

Named “the Rattlesnake,” the 12-mile stretch of Ky. 192 connecting the two counties has been an object of promotion for local government agencies as tourism bureaus as yet another reason to come to this area and visit this summer.

“When they’re out biking, the kind of people we’re trying to attract, they like to see beautiful scenery, they like winding, curvy roads that make riding more of a challenge, more enjoyable,” said Steve Kelley, Pulaski County Judge-Executive. “It’s off the beaten path. They like to get away from the interstates and main roads, with lots of destinations along the way.”

Kelley and the county government’s community development director Tiffany Bourne were out spreading the word about the Rattlesnake at the Shaping Our Appalachian Region (SOAR) summit in Pikeville last week. Even before that, however, it seems buzz was spreading about the biker’s delight.

“At our initial meeting (about designating the roadway as a motorcycle route), we thought we might be able to get 200 bikers for the inaugural ride,” said Kelley. “We ended up with 500. We more than doubled

that.

“I think the publicity was there before the summit; (prior to that) we had over 300 registered,” he added.

The idea came about from conversations between Kelley and Charlie Simpson, owner of Somerset’s Dirty Deeds Bikes & Customs, who wanted to do something for the local motorcycle enthusiast community.

“Charlie and I had the discussion and took it to (Judge-Executive David) Westerfield over in Laurel County; he was on board,” said Kelley.

Bourne, executive director Carolyn Mounce of the Somerset-Pulaski County Convention and Visitors Bureau, and Chris Minton of Wildcat Harley Davidson of London were also then brought on board, in addition to Laurel County tourism officials.

“A special thanks to (all those parties),” said Kelley, also noting the escort offered by the Pulaski County Sheriff’s Department. “None of us could have done it alone.”

The Rattlesnake was officially dedicated in late May as a motorcycle-friendly route, with assistance from regional officials including State Senator Chris Girdler. The idea is for it to be especially attractive to travelers on nearby Interstate 75 as a scenic detour that draws people to town.

“Quite frankly, I think everybody had been waiting for this,” said Kelley. “The biking community knows about the road, what a beautiful road it is, and was waiting for someone to take the lead and lead the way.”

Given the road’s twisty shape and remote placement, one thing Kelley wants to make sure of is that the potential for accidents is lessened as much as possible.

“We’ve talked to the state about the condition of the road,” he said. “They’ve done some work on it. If we’re going to handle the tourism I think we’re going to see, it will have to be a high-attention road. We’ll have to keep that up. ... Our job is to keep everyone safe and not get crazy. It would ruin it for me if there was ever a fatality out there. I don’t think the road is unsafe. What you hope is that people will be responsible and not drive recklessly.”

The ride Saturday began at two points — Wildcat Harley Davidson in Laurel County and Dirty Deeds in Pulaski. Bikers gathered at 11 a.m. and took off from those two points at 11:30, then met at the Bee Rock campground site along the Rockcastle River, about a 40 minute ride.

Once there, riders received certificates, t-shirts, patches, and other goodies commemorating their participation in this historic event, before heading their separate ways — and contributing to the well-being of local businesses.

“I saw a lot of bikes at different restaurants,” Said Kelley. “I saw them going up and down U.S. 27 all day. ... I think we got what we wanted, to get people over here and spend a little bit of their money to help our economy.”

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