

## TO PLAN A VOID, OR, TO VOID A PLAN

OK, first, why can't a motorcycle stand up?  
Because it is two/too tired. Ba-da-bing.

Having had such a blast last year riding The Void endurance motorcycle rally, when the registration opened this year, I signed up. When the emailed bonus site locations arrived on October 2nd, I wondered if signing up was such a smart idea. There were 21 attachments to the email. There were somewhere north of 300 possible bonus sites situated from New York to the Gulf Coast, from the Mississippi River to the Atlantic beaches. Bonus sites were scattered across the east coast states and just about every single site had some sort of twist to it. Some were Friday only; some Saturday. Some had 24 hour a day availability; some had limited times available. Some existed in large numbers across each state, but you were only permitted to select one per state for the two day rally. Some were combinations so that you had to get three for the full point score, but only one of each kind per rally day. In total, there were 13 categories of bonus sites – so far. So far, that is, because we didn't have all of the information in that particular emailing.

My planning map of where I could go for bonus sites looked something like this:



We were given the latitude and longitude of the bonus sites. OK, you could map where you were going. We were given the point value of the bonus sites. OK, you could prioritize where you wanted to go. But we had to wait until Wednesday, October 7th, to learn what we needed to accomplish at each site. For your average endurance rally, you need to take a photo of some statue, building, plaque, or memorial with your rally flag. There was a hint in the information that this year, this rally would be different. Three or four of the categories of bonus sites had a

notation that we should consider adding 10-15 minutes per stop to each of these sites. But there was no hint as to why.

It rained all day on October 2nd at my house, so I sat at my computer and tried to develop a route or two for the October 9th start. The single highest point valued bonus site was down in the Kittyhawk area. That certainly was a draw. But since South Carolina was experiencing epic rains that were causing extensive damage and flooding, and indications were that the rain would push north, I also wanted to have a non-flood-prone route. I knew I'd be starting in State College, PA, and finishing in Fredericksburg, VA. So I developed one route down through eastern Virginia to the 6,000 point beach bonus, then back to Fredericksburg. I also developed one route vacuuming points up all across PA, OH, MD and VA. The northern route could not match the points of the beach assault. I created another southern route that headed down western VA into North Carolina then turning east to Kittyhawk.

The western Virginia route provided me the most potential points. Now I had to wait for the next email, due on October 7th, to learn the specifics of each bonus site and what we would be required to do. Hopefully, that email would not disrupt my plan too much because I needed to be on the road on October 8th to ride to State College for the October 9th start. (Queue the sound track for audience laughter here. I'm such a novice.)

Oh, speaking of queuing the sound track, did I mention that the theme to this endurance rally was Hollywood movies and television? When the email on October 7th provided the full rally book of all bonus sites, we learned what was expected at each site. There were Home Depot and Lowes in honor of Tim The Toolman Taylor of Home Improvement. There were trains, planes and automobiles for Del Griffith and Neal Page. (Although I think Bed Bath and Beyond would have been great sites for Del and his shower curtain rings). There were bowling alleys for The Big Lebowski. There was a ride to the top of Walton's Mountain, a stop at the Hopalong Cassidy Museum, a stop at the Laurel and Hardy Museum.... and so many more places giving tribute to many Hollywood folks and their shows/movies.

So once the rally book arrived on the 7th, we had the full picture of what we needed to do at each site. Plus, there were twists and changes. Wild card bonus sites were added. Combinations were announced. Sequels were permitted (re-visiting only some specific sites and no less than 8 hours in between visits – but the points increase

Bonus ID: FRT	Available: Friday before 10 p.m.	Lat:	Long:	Points: 150
Blazing Saddles				
Blazing Saddles is a 1974 satirical Western comedy film directed by Mel Brooks and starring Cleavon Little and Gene Wilder. The movie was nominated for three Academy Awards, (Best Actress in a Supporting Role for Madeline Kahn, Best Film Editing, and Best Music, Original Song) and is ranked No. 6 on the American Film Institute's 100 Years...100 Laughs list. The American film critic Dave Kehr queried if the historical significance of Blazing Saddles lay in the fact that it was the first film from a major studio to have a fart joke. To commemorate this "first", submit a picture of yourself farting. (no nudity required so keep your pants on)				

significantly). Heck, there was even a wild card bonus added in honor of Blazing Saddles.

Personally, I was disappointed that none of the bonus sites hit on Monty Python's Holy Grail. Plenty of fodder for ideas related to shrubbery, coconuts, swallows, killer rabbits, and moose.

Keith reached out to me when the emails started to arrive. As I could get my head wrapped around what the rally masters wanted us to do, I began plotting my routes. Keith was a good sounding board for some of my questions and ideas because he has ridden a number of these Void rallies. We traded routes, comments, feedback and ideas. He created a couple of routes and I had my three options. But once the email on October 7th arrived, initial plans seemed to go out the window. I felt like I was playing right into the evil rally masters' hands at that point. I should have listened to that little voice that said not to do it, but I ignored it for the potential 20% more points that could be tacked on the total score. Where's that laugh track? Insert it here.

The final plan was to leave State College heading south, then zig west to Johnstown, zag east to Harrisburg, south to Baltimore, skirt to the north of DC going to up Frederick, then south to Roanoke and Lynchburg, back north to Staunton, and finally east over to Fredericksburg. That 957 mile trip, with its 23 scheduled bonus site stops and a number of wild card bonuses, would net over 42,000 points. Not a winning route by any stretch of the imagination but it would be an aggressive route for me.

I committed to the route. I loaded the route and 23 stops into my GPS, packed the bike and rode to State College. It was only a couple hours to get there so I stopped in Altoona for one Tour of Honor photo. The Wall That Heals is a replica of the Viet Nam Memorial located in DC. Those photos had to be off the camera before scoring The Void due to penalties imposed if you had non-rally photos on the camera at scoring time.

The hotel in State College was roughly central to the town. For the start receipt, we relocated to a gas station at the far east side of town – as did other riders. We all were required to obtain a computer generated receipt and then text that time to the rally masters. Upon their reply text, we could begin. But the receipt could not be obtained prior to 8:20am. It was at that point that each rider had 31 hours to complete their ride and complete their paperwork. No two riders probably had the exact same time. It was announced that there were 76 individuals registered for The Void this year. (Seventy-six trumbones in the big parade. Um, no mention of OOOOOK-lahoma in the rally book though). There was one starting town in Pennsylvania, one in Tennessee and one in Georgia. Everyone finished in Fredericksburg, VA.



My receipt showed 8:22:31am so I texted that to the rally master, got my reply and was good to go. I had 31 hours before the clock stopped, which would be 3:22pm on Saturday. Since we were already stopped, I got my photo for Blazing Saddles.

It was four lanes south to Altoona, east to Ebensburg and south to Johnstown. Those miles flew by quickly since traffic was light, state troopers were non-existent, and the rally adrenalin was pumping. The rally instructions said to photograph the Home Depot and to get a computer generated receipt within 30 minutes prior or 30 minutes after taking the photo, provided the receipt town name matched the Home Depot town. I snapped a photo and ran inside the Home Depot for an eye-bolt I needed for a project.



Stop #2 was shortly thereafter at a mural in Stoyestown. I'm calling this bonus site Comedy Central because this is where my opening joke enters in. I had checked this site on Google Earth and knew the mural was on the east side of the hardware store. Upon arrival, two other riders were there, parked in the alley. I pulled in and went past their bikes. As I parked on the sloped asphalt, the bike felt wobbly. Deciding to make it more secure by moving it to a different spot, I kicked up the kick stand on the left side of the bike. When I do this, I always tilt the bike ever so slightly to the right so the kickstand swings free of the ground. Where was my right leg? The bike was listing to the right further and further and then too much further. My right leg was flailing to find solid ground as I was screaming "NOOOOOO" at the top of my lungs inside my helmet (I guess I thought the bike would stop upon hearing my voice command if I yelled loud enough) and the bike went down for a nap. As it dropped to the right, I rolled off, having the earbuds that were connecting the GPS voice for directions to my ears yanked out through my helmet. One of the two buds remained on the wire while the other separated and sailed away. (After this bonus stop would come an Office Depot in Carlisle, PA, where I figured I'd get new earbuds).

I was unhurt. My pride was crushed. One of the other riders there helped me upright my bike. Heck, this was only the second stop, how tired could my bike be that it already was unable to stand up? I was thoroughly rattled and needed to pause and take a break. I re-positioned the bike and took the needed photo. Then, knocking my helmet off the seat from where I set it only added to my frustrated state at that point. I could have used a bonus site from Seinfeld.... Serenity NOW!



One wild card bonus was for the rider to create his/her own bonus. There was an American Legion only a half mile away with an amazing display on its property. I wanted a photo of the Huey and M60 for potential future Tour of Honor submissions. I thought I could kill two birds with one stone and photo it for my bonus as well as keep one non-rally photo for the Tour of Honor. Ha. Got there, took the rally photo and forgot to take photos for the Tour.



With one ear plugged in to the GPS direction voice via the remaining earbud and one ear simply with an ear plug (wind is and evil silent deafening force, don't ride without protecting your hearing) the ride east on Route 30 through the mountains gave me the serenity that I needed now. The sun was out, the sky was blue, the Fall colored leaves were bright and beautiful.

On the ride to State College the day before, I tested my EZPass on the motorcycle. Laying the unit in my tank bag allowed the toll booth light to turn green seemingly well before it had ever turned green with the EZPass unit on my car windshield. I was pleased it worked since it was to come into play during the rally. And this next leg of the journey was to be on the PA Turnpike over to Carlisle. However, upon re-examination of the requirements, a receipt up to 30 minutes prior to photographing the Office Max would allow me to use the Turnpike receipt and save time. So, I stowed the EZPass and paid cash. Another however popped up. However, I needed to go into Office Max to buy new earbuds, which came into my noggin too late. I could have saved cash and used EZPass, because I got a receipt right at the Office Max.



In recognition of Tim Allen's role in Last Man Standing, the next stop was a Bass Pro Shop in Harrisburg.



Immediately next to that stop was a gas station. Got gas and used that receipt. Now south to Baltimore. At this point everything was on schedule, if not early. It was a ride south on I-83. Traffic was moderately heavy but moving well. Whether on two wheels or four, my approach to being in traffic is akin to paddling a canoe in moving water. One must paddle the canoe slightly faster than the water's speed so as to avoid the obstacles the easiest. I ride slightly faster than traffic to avoid the obstacles. I can see two or three moves ahead and anticipate what I'm going to do. I am not at the mercy of what the obstacles are going to do.

That strategy works as long as traffic is moving. Closer to Baltimore the highway added lanes. With those lanes came added traffic. Heavy traffic travels slower than light traffic. (I'm thinking there is a high school physics lab test in that last statement somewhere). The heavier it gets, the slower it gets until it stops completely. Funny thing about rallying though is that the clock keeps ticking. Traffic may stand still but time does not. In the lower corner of my GPS screen, an ETA is displayed for the next bonus. Typically when I am traveling, I am able to see that time go backwards, showing that I'll arrive sooner than expected. Here in Baltimore, at 4:00pm on a Friday, I watched the ETA advance more and more and more, as I sat still.



I was headed into Baltimore to photograph a bar frequented by Keanu Reeves and then just around the corner, M&T Stadium, home of the much hated Baltimore Ravens.



Traffic gave way and progress was made towards the sites. However, at the stadium, I checked the time against my plan and realized I was already supposed to be at the next stop at that very moment, and that stop was 12 miles away in that snail's race pace traffic. So, that next stop was dropped from the plan in favor of trying to reach stop #8 on its appointed time. Little did I realize that once the snowball starts rolling down that hill, it gets worse. Hardly ever better, seemingly always worse.

Skipping #7 and heading for stop #8 was a slow torturous process. I'm OK with rush hour traffic as long as it is moving. Somehow I equate barely moving with not moving at all. The HOV lane on 270 northbound provided some relief. The traffic was moving at a good pace and avoiding huge bottlenecks to the right. But the obstacle of traffic was quickly replaced with the obstacle of weather. And I mean QUICKLY. There was nothing on the horizon of any note, or perhaps it was just not in my vision since I was concerned with traffic, and then suddenly it got dark. It was like losing two hours of daylight in an instant. I could see the rain ahead, but I also could see the exit to the Home Depot – to the right across about 6-8 lanes of traffic. OK, I'm trying to build the suspense here so you keep reading my story, but I know you know which came first – the rain or the exit.

While I thoroughly enjoy my riding coat and pants, they do not have a rain shell on the outside. I stop to put on my FroggToggs when it rains. Being in the HOV lane and crossing 6-8 lanes of traffic does not allow for such an event though. In anticipation of some light rain, I coated my coat and pants with Scotch-Guard before leaving home. Again, I'm trying to build suspense in my story here but I know that you know that the Scotch-Guard made no difference what so ever in this rain – and you are correct. This particular rain was more like a pelting of paintballs than raindrops. Huge drops. Intense force. Significant splatter. In fact, it felt like I had no coat on at all while I was being pelted. I felt that I was in a paintball fight but I could not shoot back and the attacker ignored the fact that I had been hit sufficiently to be out of the game. I wanted the attacker to go pick on someone else but I realized that all around me was a sea of cars wherein the other people were safe from being pelted over and over... and over... and over. While it wasn't long until I got to an overpass and was able to pull underneath it, pull over and put on my FroggToggs, it certainly was long enough.

Stop #8 was a Home Depot. We were permitted to get one per state. I did one in Pennsylvania as stop #1 and this was one in Maryland. It was only tenths of a mile off the interstate. The dense urban setting forced the developer to build a two story parking lot in front of the store, so parking in the lower level provided protection from the rain. But the photo needed the HD name in it and that was only from the upper deck, but the rain stopped. Immediately next door was a gas station, so gas and a receipt was the order of the day. Then there was no where to go. While the next points were up I-270 at Frederick, so was the lightning. This Shell station had a park bench



out front so that's where I sat for approximately 45 minutes. I needed the rest because I was overheated, dehydrated and emotionally drained. I didn't need the rest because I was behind schedule and the clock was ticking. The plan completely went out the window at that point. That's when I felt completely defeated. I was done. I wasn't moving until the lightning quit.

Earlier, Keith's "local knowledge" seemingly got us into more trouble than it got us out of when used, so when he suggested that with his local knowledge he could get to Frederick using back roads (to avoid traffic on I- 270), I was leery, to say the least. (OK, this is MY version of MY rally. You'll have to read his story to get his side. LOL). We put together multiple

possible scenarios but feeling so depressed and defeated agreed to go to one bonus site and then reassess. Then to the next and reassess. The back road ride was a pick-me-up. The roads were wet but no rain. It was dark but headlights penetrated that. The curves and twisties brought joy back into riding that was not experienced for the past few hours while on the interstates. Ah, "local knowledge" redeemed itself.

In Frederick, two planned bonus sites were within easy reach. One was a pawn shop that also bought gold, for Austin Powers in Goldmember. The other was a bowling alley, for The Big Lebowski.



The original planned route was being followed but well behind time with no way to make it up. If the route was not followed until at least midnight, the Trains, Planes, and Automobiles (TPA) combo would be lost. This combo was worth some big points, especially if you were able to get one each day. We could do one combo each day provided that we got a train bonus, a plane bonus and an automobile bonus all on the same day, and three different ones the next day. This route would capture one on Friday and one on Saturday – worth 5,000 points. So, I needed to soldier on to complete at least the combo for Friday, already having the Automobile portion from stop #2.

The next bonus was at a train depot. It was not the depot building per se, but rather a memorial next to it honoring three individuals. While it was tucked in the shrubberies and shadowed from the depot lights, my LEDs lights lit it up like daylight.





Next there was a roadside historical plaque to find. Again, this one I checked on Google Earth while in the comforts of home. Using their street view effect, I knew where it would be located. That turned out to be a smart move on my part because it was pitch black at that location when arriving. It sat on the side of the road where it was difficult to use the bike's lights to help take the photograph. The plaque honored the fact that Orvil's and Wilbur's mom was born in this town.



With the first day's TPA combo in hand, and some good back road riding under my belt, I felt a second wind coming. Being two or more hours behind the original plan was disheartening, but at least there was something to salvage of the plan. Everything else on the route was south on Interstate 81 and there were at least 70 miles to go before any next planned points.

The planned rest bonus was supposed to be in Roanoke, as a turn around point. Heck, in reality the rest bonus came around 11:00pm and just barely over the line in Virginia at Front Royal. The rally rules stated a minimum three hour rest was required, awarding 25,000 points. But if you wanted to rest longer, you could gain up to 26,800 points for a rest of six hours. Knowing my rally style, I was gathering more points per minute at rest than I would be attacking the route. The rest stop started just after 11pm but it felt more like 3am.

After six hours of rest and some well deserved sleep, Saturday didn't seem much different than the Friday I had just gone through. A bowling alley in Woodstock with a well hidden sign was the first stop for the day. It was less than a quarter mile off I-81, so it was low hanging fruit on the way to bigger points.



So far behind in time and points, the entire southern portion of the plan was dropped. It was a significant loss of points, but there was no way to salvage them. The single TPA combo for the day would need to stay in the plan due to its sheer point size. The Auto portion of that combo was Woodrow Wilson's Pierce Arrow. The museum was not open but the garage door was. You could see the car through the glass.



To this point, Saturday still had the overtone of Friday. The southern skies were as gray as a Confederate's uniform. Rain was threatening. Temperatures were cold. The roads had been interstate. That was about to change. A ride up Walton's Mountain was next on the list. The ride woke up the bike and lifted my spirits as well. Having almost 1000cc engine displacement allows the V-Strom to eat interstate miles for breakfast but it's not a fun healthy breakfast that you'd want daily. The curves and twisties up and down the mountain reminded me why I ride. As my spirits lifted, so did the cloud cover. The sun started coming through and the temperature rose.

One Saturday-only, after 8am bonus was a self portrait. I'm sure the rally masters knew how bad we'd look by then. And my photo did not disappoint. So in honor of Blazing Saddles, the photo was for the well known phrase, "Badges, we don't need no stinkin' badges." We had no identification badges for the rally, but we had our pictures. Hey, it was 789 easy points.



After summiting Walton's Mountain, there were hours of back roads to the next few bonus sites to complete the TPA for the day. Riding was a blast again. There was a plaque memorializing a horrific train wreck.



And the next stop was a West Virginia National Guard jet at a small Virginia airport. The jet was totally gutted so that all that remained was the outer shell as a static display. Verification that it was the correct bonus site came by checking the tail numbers on the jet.



The ride back to the hotel was to cover 60 or so miles, as the crow flies. The route was fast moving secondary roads until deposited onto I-95 southbound one exit north of the rally hotel. At that point, seeing the I-95 traffic, I was quite happy to not have launched out on my initial plan for Kittyhawk. I certainly didn't do as well as I thought I was going to do on this route, and traffic ate my lunch. I'm guessing that the ride to and from North Carolina's outer banks would have been worse traffic than I had experienced.

During the ride back to the hotel, a crop-duster was doing aerobatics with his plane over a field of dried field corn right along the highway. Based on the brake lights of the cars in front of me in both lanes, either they didn't see the crop-duster until he was inches off the top of the corn or they thought he was landing on the highway. I don't know what he was spraying, but he knew how to handle that plane!

At the hotel we were to assemble all of our paperwork and photographs for scoring. I arrived before my 31 hour deadline specifically to check everything. Last year I left points on the table by being dyslexic on one or two entries. So when I arrived at the hotel, I sat in a quiet place upstairs from the scoring tables to meticulously comb through entries. I checked each bonus ID making sure the cryptic string of initials they used for each bonus name was in fact correct on my log. I checked each time entry on the log with the receipt. I made sure I did not transpose any numbers this time. I ensured each receipt had the required information. I went through my photos and deleted everything that did not apply. I ensured there were no more than two photos per site, as stated in the rules. I was meticulous and determined in my pursuit of the highest score I could salvage out of this ride.

At the scoring table I was awarded with the dread DNF award – Did NOT Finish. I royally messed up. I was time barred. As I sat upstairs checking my log sheet to ensure all was accurate and that I would not lose points at the table for a mistake, the clock was still ticking. I went over my 31 hour deadline by a few minutes and lost it all.

**The Void 10 Closing Credits  
Oct 9-10, 2015**

Rider	Score	Miles	Points per Mile
<b>State College, PA</b>			
Billy Connacher	51,414	1168	44.02
Rick Snyder	49,516	1184	41.82
Dylan Spink	48,909	1483	32.98
Peter DuDeck	48,686	1210	40.24
Jeff Wilson	47,349	1244	38.06
Gregg Lenentine	46,149	1161	39.75
Rachael Kim	44,542	1109	40.16
Chuck Snyder	43,513	788	55.22
Patrick Hochberg	42,663	1030	41.42
Mona Repp	41,513	779	53.29
Darrin Volk	41,509	1416	29.31
Joe Ruddy	41,289	1068	38.66
Keith Nusbaum	38,789	874	44.38
Robert Reid	37,953	785	48.35
Andrew Byrd	37,349	976	38.27
Steven Rufo	36,060	1046	34.47
Bob Vincent	33,759	659	51.23
Brian Church	30,441	1443	21.10
Ken Aman	25,104	1500	16.74
Eric Mckinnon	4,806	1277	3.76
Igor Zikus	4,276	1131	3.78
Marco Angelsio	DNF		
Dave Gula	DNF		
Guy Paquin	DNS		
Joe Yarebinski	DNF		

All I could do was laugh. Such a silly blunder took me from a potentially 9th place of the State College starters to a position of not even being scored. In my effort to salvage any bit of a modicum of success from a completely failed rally plan, I only succeeded in snatching defeat from the jaws of success. Ah, the best laid plans of mice and men. All I could do was laugh.

The post rally banquet was extremely entertaining. The rally masters, Scott and Gary, could hold their own as stand-up comedians (provided they had more material to do a stand-up routine for more than one night – which is all that the rally antics of 76 riders provides them). The meal was well done by the hotel's caterers (of course, the meal at 7pm Saturday was the only real food I had eaten since breakfast in the hotel on Friday morning, not counting the extremely healthy high protein snack bars my wife baked specifically for this ride). And the fellowship of the riders was extremely encouraging. Folks were laughing, telling some tall tales and carrying on with a renewed energy now that they had food and libations.

So sleep came easy that night. The ride home on Sunday was all back roads through the mountains of Virginia, West Virginia, Maryland and Pennsylvania. The Appalachian Mountains are oriented so that they stretch from southwest to northeast and punish road builders trying to go southeast to northwest (which was the direction I needed to go). So the interstates follow the valleys while the motorcycle oriented roads go into attack mode on those very mountains, up one side of the mountain and down the other. Very little straight stretches, but miles of curves in the road bringing smiles to the faces of the riders. It may take longer than going by interstate, but the journey IS the destination.

I hope to be back for the 11th running of The Void in 2016. They have already told us the theme will be based on the board game, Monopoly. So prepare to Pass Go !!

As always, there are 'Notes To Self' after these events. I learned some new things to try to apply for next year.

- when some one starts a sentence with “I have local knowledge, trust me”, it's time to ensure the GPS is on and routing. LOL.
- my side case for carrying my flag and clipboard helped, but using the top trunk as a stand-up desk at each stop may be more efficient, provided I can adapt the Givi lock to have the key removable when unlocked.
- a riding coat that doesn't need an outer rain coat shell would certainly be preferred
- make sure the bike is not napish at any point along the route
- load more than just the bonus points on the one route you are committed to in the event you need to change your route on the fly