

Gospel planted on 'The Tail of the Dragon'

By Lonnie Wilkey

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MARYVILLE, Tenn. (BP)--Each year, thousands of motorcyclists travel to Tennessee to ride "The Tail of the Dragon."

"The Dragon," as it is commonly referred to, is a stretch of U.S. Highway 129 that runs from the intersection of Highway 72 outside Maryville, Tenn., through the Great Smoky Mountains into Deals Gap, N.C.

The 11-mile stretch of road boasts 318 curves -- a motorcyclist's dream.

Last year, missions volunteers, working through Chilhowee Baptist Association's Camp Tipton in Maryville, began a ministry on that stretch of highway. Teams from Tennessee and other states passed out water or lemonade to cyclists at a scenic overlook along the route.

This year, volunteers added another element -- taking photos of the motorcyclists from an overlook with a breathtaking mountain view in the background, with the goal of sharing the Gospel.

"Our focus is to connect with people and allow the Holy Spirit to show us where we can present the Gospel to that person," said Kurt Bradley, a volunteer at Camp Tipton and member of East Maryville Baptist Church.

Andy Jordan, director of Camp Tipton, stresses to volunteer teams that they go to the overlook with "the frame of mind that you are going there to plant seeds."

If the opportunity to present the Gospel does not happen, however, all is not lost, thanks to the photography element of the ministry. The photographs have become a key tool in reaching the motorcyclists.

"A picture goes a long way," Jordan said.

Those who are photographed can go to the Camp Tipton website and download the photo for free, but in the process each individual hears a full presentation of the Gospel via a Billy Graham video clip. It also includes a clear invitation for the individual to profess faith in Jesus Christ.

"If we don't have the opportunity to present the Gospel face to face, they will have another chance to meet the Lord," Bradley said.



Kurt Bradley, a volunteer from East Maryville Baptist Church in Maryville, Tenn., prepares to photograph a group of motorcyclists while Dennis Scott (far right), pastor of Sand Hill Baptist Church in Gleason, Tenn., visits with motorcyclists taking a break from riding "The Dragon," a curve-filled 11-mile stretch of road in eastern Tennessee.



Andy Jordan (center), director of Chilhowee Baptist Association's Camp Tipton in Maryville, Tenn., talks with Todd Dodge (left) of Davenport, Iowa, and his brother, Jan Dodge of Hummlestown, Pa., who have come to eastern Tennessee to ride an 11-mile stretch of road known as "The Dragon."

Both Bradley and Jordan said motorcyclists have been very receptive to the ministry at the overlook site.

Church teams from various places have ministered on "The Dragon." In early July, a team from Sand Hill Baptist Church in Gleason, Tenn., traveled cross-state to minister at several locations in the area, including "The Dragon."

It was the first mission trip for the church and most of the 24 participants, Sand Hill Pastor Dennis Scott said.

"We had been wanting to do something like this," Scott said, noting the church made it a "family mission trip."

Nick Bowers, the church's music leader, has served on other mission teams, and he was excited about his church's participation in the East Tennessee trip.

"It's been a great week," Bowers said. "This has brought our small country church together."

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For more information about the ministries provided by Camp Tipton, visit camptipton.com. Lonnie Wilkey is editor of the Baptist and Reflector (www.tnbaptist.org), newsjournal of the Tennessee Baptist Convention.

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