

IBR 2017 July 08 Epilog Conclusion, celebration, recovery

Finished

The 2017 Iron Butt Rally concluded at 10:00 a.m. CDT on Friday, July 7th. With that tick of the clock, finality was served up by the harsh taskmasters of time and distance. Eleven days ago, 117 riders shared many hopes and dreams as they waited nervously for the start. 97 of the 117 made it back to Minneapolis before the final minute expired, collecting enough points to qualify as finishers, and realizing many of those dreams.

Unfortunately, some of those initial hopes were dashed during the last eleven days. The fact that the DNF rate for the 2017 rally was lower than usual is of no consolation to those who were unable to complete what they started. 20 riders did not finish the rally, some due to injury, and some due to mechanical issues. However, all riders were accounted for and those who suffered injuries were reported to be receiving treatment or on the mend.

No matter whether the individual outcomes were good or not, the results will be replayed in the minds of the participants and spectators for days, months, and years to come. In addition, keyboarders on the forums and lists always break down personal efforts and results into pages of faceless statistics. It is hard to blame them, they were not there and there is a lot of data available to parse. And endless oil and tire threads do get old, right?

Sometimes their data processing provides interesting conclusions; sometimes just meaningless numbers. When discussing some of the numbers being tossed out, even before the dust had settled, Jeff Earls noted that points-per-mile stats in the IBR are meaningless. Points-per-hour is the metric that matters in this game.

There will likely be evaluations of route choices made under pressure that failed to match the points an armchair rider came up with following ten hours of restful, off-the-clock sleep in their own beds. There will no doubt be protracted discussions about bike reliability. Astute observers may recognize that not very many IBR finishers get bogged down in such statistical manipulation, or even the endless better-bike-brand bravado. After all, they have been on the clock and done the miles, secure in the knowledge that it is the rider, not the bike.

Such understanding is often the result of participating in such a life changing event. Oddly enough, the term 'game' is often used to describe this event. That categorization probably helps keep everything in proper perspective for many competitors. However, making the mistake of thinking it is a game without consequences has caused many a novice to take their preparation too lightly.

Failure to seriously consider the potential consequences of mistakes or miscalculation during the IBR can have significant monetary, emotional, and physical costs. This applies to both vets and rookies. However, history indicates that the consequences of miscalculation for rookies tend to be more significant.

On the other hand, having the proper frame of mind, combined with thorough preparation, can lead to an experience unlike any other. The highs and lows, the friendships and respect, the decisions and disappointments, the regrets and victories, the sunrises and sunsets, the giant bonus critters and forest rats, the gas stations and roadside naps, the mountain chills and parched desert, the heat and humidity, the fires and rain, the roads and ferries, the bikes and people, all played out to the relentless tick-tock of the clock. Eleven days of amazing experiences and wide ranging emotions; all melding together to comprise the adventure of a lifetime.

MJC

Country Store
404 W Ramshorn
Dubois, WY

43.5342, -109.6372

0600-2100, Mon-Fri

0700-2100, Sat-Sun

Have a photo taken of you riding the Jackalope. Note for riders with passengers: Only one of you needs to be shown riding the Jackalope. The other can be standing nearby in the same photo.

Inside the Country Store you will find a big furry Jackalope all set up with a saddle for photo ops. Ask staff or another customer to take your picture riding it.



Tina Venters trying a different saddle ... anything for points!

By all accounts, Routemaster Jeff Earls designed a fun and challenging rally. The North American Safari accomplished his goals by offering fun destinations, multiple routes in multiple regions with multiple prevailing weather patterns to choose from; any one of them offering enough points to become a finisher. A challenging routing puzzle that did not require a spreadsheet guru to determine a high value route; and actually negated the value of some of the canned, spreadsheet-based routing tools relied on by many riders. The strings with multipliers were designed to make it very difficult to determine a maximum point route for any leg, but rewarded riders with the ability to “see” opportunities on the map screen, make a routing decision, and then ride that route successfully. In other words, a rally designed to allow rookies to find a way to become finishers, while at the same time being extremely challenging for any rider seeking a route to become a top finisher.

Reunion

By the time the final checkpoint opened at 5:00 a.m. Friday morning, the hectic Brownian motion of riders pursuing bonuses in all those available directions was coalescing; eventually returning to a near resting state as riders converged on Minneapolis. The parking lot at the Marriott was filled with family and friends as the riders completed their longest leg of the rally. Joy, excitement, and palpable relief were all evident on the faces of friends and family as the returning rider’s odometers were recorded by John Ferber and Bob St. George near the front doors of the Marriott.



Despite facing bug-encrusted helmets and rank odors emanating from weather worn jackets, hugs were offered and gladly received from wives, husbands, significant others, and friends. Bystanders stepped in to assist with a couple of bikes that experienced a sudden gust of gravity and succumbed to the need for a pavement nap at the finish, much like their road weary riders.

A few wives even got into the animal theme of the rally and cheerfully greeted their exhausted riders in costume.



Results of a sudden gust of gravity.



Mike Riley's best bonus.

Tick Tock

As the clock passed 8:00:01 a.m. local time, Bill Thweatt moved his clock-stopping check-in station outside the lobby to the hotel portico to save a few precious seconds for riders arriving inside the 20 point-per-minute penalty window. If you have never tried it, do not discount the pressure of riding all over the country for five long days, covering 5000 or more miles, using every minute available for maximum benefit, while needing to hit a tight, two-hour time window nestled in the heart of a major metropolis. The tiny time-to-arrival window on the GPS screens may as well have been displaying time-to-DNF as they tormented the riders still out on the road at the start of the penalty window.

The human brain is an amazing thing. Overwhelming fear and dread can change to elation in mere seconds. Riders, who just 20 minutes earlier may have been wondering if they had enough energy left to hold the bike up at the next red light on the way to the hotel, found themselves elated and energized by the supporters gathered around them shouting a welcoming chorus of cheers. The relief of being 'done' removes an unbelievable two years' worth of weight from exhausted riders.

Scoring

Compared to Legs 1 and 2, the extended length of Leg 3 resulted in a higher bonus count for many riders. Due to the anticipated additional scoring time per rider, additional volunteers were recruited to keep the scoring process moving for riders in desperate need of sleep and showers. Thanks to previous IBR winners Marty Leir and Derek Dickson, along with Dave McQueeney, Roger and Karen Van Santen, Ira Agins, Eric Vaillancourt, Cletha Walstrand, David

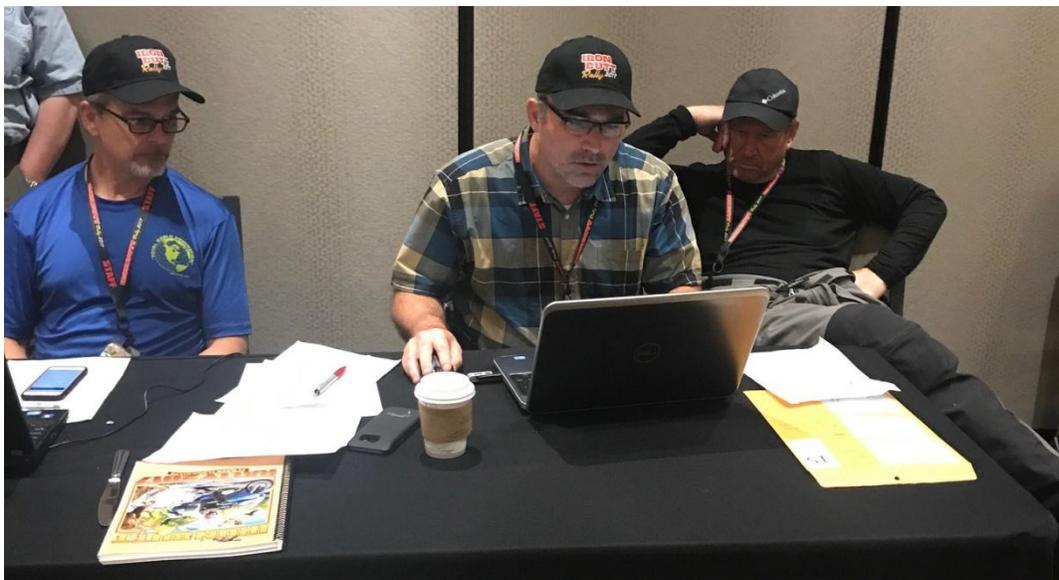
E.B. Smith, Kevin Craft, Jim Weatherhead, Andy Kirby, Dennis Bitner, Jim and Donna Fousek, Kevin and Mary Smart, Paula Behm, Alex Schmidt, and Tonie Cowan for a great job processing and scoring the finishers. Rider scoring was completed on time and no errors were found during the top ten audit process.



Team Boge



Team Almond Joy



Three IBR winners at one table.

As onlookers circulated through the parking lot, some noting with amazement the condition of many of the returning bikes, riders grabbed a few hours of sweet rest. Air-conditioned rooms, hot showers, and comfortable beds were just the ticket to relax, remove days of accumulated sweat and grime, and get recharged in time for the finisher's banquet. No, the exact order of acquiring a room, shower, and bed is not a huge priority when you are that tired.



The Council

While the scoring team tabulated and audited the rider score sheets, the riders had a chance to get some sleep. Once the scoring audit was completed, the top finishers were summoned into the storied Lord Kneebone's "IBR Council"; consisting of Mike Kneebone, Jeff Earls, Ira Agins, Dennis Bitner, and myself (not in my role as scribe, but due to years of working and managing scoring). It can be a rather intense session for riders after eleven long days on the road.

During this meeting, each rider was interviewed about their respective rides. While questions from the council members varied depending on the rider and route they chose, the goal is always to give the riders a chance to review with rally staff how they did their route planning, any possible issues at bonuses, whether they rode with anyone else (and if so, who and when), what kind of help, if any, they received during the rally, and more.

It is notable that none of the top finishers lost their SPOT tracking bonus or earned other penalties during the extra long Leg 3. Unfortunately, the same cannot be said for some riders who finished lower in the rankings. Riding smarter, not harder, does have its rewards.

Party!

The evening of the finisher's banquet in the Marriott was simply amazing. Lisa Landry once again orchestrated a grand event for the riders, starting with a massive portable bar in the pre-function area and moving into a huge banquet room for dinner. The fresh and delicious three course dinner was great and the camaraderie even better. After dessert and coffee, it was time to get down to business, or in this case, awards.

Mike, Lisa, and Jeff each took to the podium in turn to entertain, recognize, and appreciate the riders, their families, and supporters. Special recognition and an ovation from everyone was

given to the army of generous volunteers who spent hundreds of hours scouting bonuses during the last two years to set up Jeff's massive Bonus Safari; and to those who tirelessly worked the rally during the last two weeks to insure it unfolded as smoothly as possible for the riders.

Getting "it"

The community represented by the people in attendance at the banquet is a very small and very special niche in the world of motorcycling. It is a privilege to be a part of it, for many different reasons. In this community, it does not matter if you wear Aerostich, Klim, First Gear, or something else. It does not matter if you ride BMW, Yamaha, Harley, or something else. It does not matter if you are white collar, blue collar, or retired. It does not matter if you have long hair, short hair, red hair, green hair, or no hair. It does not matter if you have great tats or no tats. It does not matter if you are very wealthy or just getting by. It does not matter if you have earned a doctorate or graduated from the school of hard knocks. It does not matter what corner of the world you call home. It does not matter if you prefer to call acts of friendly kindness 'Minnesota Nice' or 'Southern Hospitality'. It only matters that you understand "it". What is "it"? One way to characterize "it" would be simply *the lure of riding big miles to see great places while solving intricate puzzles in all kinds of weather*, but better descriptions have certainly been penned by the poets among us.

Everyone who packed the finisher banquet hall on Friday night seemed to get "it". There were, no doubt, various depths of understanding of "it" in the room, but that did not matter either. Everyone was there to recognize and support the most recent competitors in the IBA's biggest and best event, especially the riders that aspired to become "one of them" and persevered to achieve that goal. Even for accomplished vets of this game, there are few things better than being recognized and applauded for what you love to do. Especially when what you love to do is so far outside what is considered 'normal' by most people. This was a gathering of many of "it" crowd in our community and it was truly a great place to be.

Stories

Your scribe had plans to work the crowd and gather a few personal stories from the last days of the rally to put in this final report. Those plans were swamped like a Key West bungalow under a tidal wave as amazing story after amazing story was relayed to me on Friday evening by tired, but excited riders. There were far too many great stories to be told here on these few pages or to even do justice to if we had another week's worth of daily reports.

But these great stories do need to be told. So make sure you follow the individual rider's blogs, posts, and messages in the coming days and months. If you know a rider that has not posted something about their experience, encourage them to do so. I know I will.

However, there were a few brief stories that must be included in this report. Most of you have read the accounts here, and in her blog, regarding the night that Kirsten Talken-Spaulding was missing during the rally, costing RallyMom Lisa an entire night of sleep. Kirsten was called to the front of the room to receive a gift from Mike Kneebone to memorialize her night spent in a vault toilet in rural Nevada. A vault located nowhere near her bike and the SPOT tracker still pinging 'Needs Help'. She was the trooper we have all come to know and respect as Mike bestowed the special keepsake. The token's suitability for office display may remain open for debate, however, everyone was relieved that she came through the ordeal safely and was able to recover and finish.

Top Ten

Well planned routes, using the string multipliers to maximum effect, served all of the top ten riders well.



L-R: Heitkamp, Coons, Lipps, Roth, Owen, Tong, Aman, Green, Meese, Crockett, Lilley

Back in the 2011 rally, Dan Roth finished one place ahead of your scribe, missing the top ten by only one place. His appetite whetted, he returned and managed top twenty rides in '13 and '15. Dan put in a very efficient ride for bonus strings in 2017 on his R12GSA and was rewarded with his first top ten trophy.

Mike Heitkamp dropped a few positions on Leg 3, but the rally format seemed to suit him and his R12GSA. Even without taking the ferry gamble, Mike found enough bonus combinations elsewhere to finish in 9th position, also his first foray into the elite top ten.

As noted in the Finisher Standings report, and it bears repeating here, *rookie* Ken Aman planned a very successful safari and assembled enough bonus multipliers to attain 8th place on his FJR, also without taking the long ferry rides. Not many riders choose to risk the possibility of a DNF in exchange for a high finish during their first shot at solving the IBR puzzle. Ken will be a rider to watch, should he choose to apply for another go, as a veteran.

John Coons, no stranger to the IBR top ten, nursed his old 1994 Beemer, as well as a fractured vertebra due to an unplanned off pavement excursion, to a strong 6th place. Coons perseverance despite a poorly running Beemer reminds me a little of Tom Loegering's determination to finish well the 1993 IBR, where he overcame a number of serious mechanical problems with his 1990 BMW to finish in the top ten.

Paul Tong and Peter Green, the first all male, two-up team (aka Team Almond Joy), also became the highest finishing two-up riders with an amazing team effort. There was a special trophy for top two-up team, which these two guys scored along with the 4th place trophy. The ability of these two accomplished solo riders to work together on an 1800 Wing for eleven days was remarkable. Completing the IBR while smiling and having a huge amount of fun was unbelievable. But doing all that *and* finishing 4th? Priceless!

Coons and the team of Tong/Green were the only riders to solve the Leg 3 puzzle well enough to break into the top seven spots without making the ferry trip to Newfoundland.

The Five

Five days ago, in Texas, it was clear to at least five riders that Newfoundland was the big, bold move needed on Leg 3 to go for the win. Sequestered in their Texas hotel rooms after the Leg 3 rider's meeting, they each decided independently to head to northeast to Newfoundland. More importantly, the five who intended to make the ferry ride across the Gulf of St. Lawrence believed they could make it work.

Doubtless, they all took the time to verify the correct categories for string multipliers were available to maximize the multipliers on the far northeastern island. Then they all planned enough of their routes to get to the first rest bonus. Each one of them packed up and got on the

road quickly; planning to work out the remaining details of their leg later. The distance they needed to cover to arrive at the ferry in time meant that there was simply not enough time to plan the entire leg before departing. It was a matter of seeing the points, checking the mileage, and making the decision to go. All five were on their bikes and exiting the hotel parking lot before sunrise early on July 2nd, not long after the Leg 3 rider meeting ended.



Jim Owen



Eric Lipps



Wendy Crockett



Bob Lilley

(Ken Meese was on the other end of the parking lot and left so fast, we did not his photo.)

Friday night at the banquet, as Jeff Earls presented the awards to the podium finishers; it became clear to everyone that catching the ferry to Newfoundland had not been a sucker play. Jim, Bob, Ken, Eric, and Wendy all accepted the uncertainty of the bold Newfoundland ferry gamble and it paid off.



The five on the ferry (photo provided by Mike Loomer).

The five selected different string sequences and multipliers, and not all of their plans worked perfectly, but listening to each of them recount the timing and effort needed to make the ferry, collect the needed strings, and get off the island in time to make it back to the finish was amazing. I will not steal their thunder and will leave the telling of those specific details to them.

Wendy Crockett made it to the island and then back to ferry to get off the island with the four guys. But as she rode her FJR through the night in big critter country, looking for more points, she endured the haunting knowledge that one string on her Newfoundland route did not work out as planned. She probably expected to drop from her 7th position on Leg 2 as a result, but her massive 13,083 mile ride in 11 days garnered enough points to hold 7th overall.



To say that the Mom of Tess is a fierce competitor would be a serious understatement.

Two years ago, Eric Lipps finished the 2015 IBR in 4th place, one position ahead of Jim Owen. He finished Leg 2 of this rally in 2nd position, right behind Jim Owen. So it should be very clear that Eric understands what it takes to not only route, but also ride, in the Big Dance.

Eric did not let the high-side ejection from his FJR in the south Florida rain, or the resulting injured wrist, stop him from going to Newfoundland. Despite the discomfort, he remained focused, riding a 'Big Dog' route to maintain a top five position, coming in 5th overall.

Ken Meese is a strong and determined competitor. He overcame the loss of the rear brake pedal on his BMW early in the rally. He has learned to be somewhat patient and played the hand he was dealt on Leg 2 wisely. Meese has been within 24 hours of finishing two IBRs only to crash before the end both times, so that history had to be in the back of his mind as he headed northeast into the heart of moose country.

After chasing various bonus critters for points during the last 10 days, Ken collected a live critter on the last night of this rally. Considering the miles of moose country he rode through on the way to the finish, one might even be thankful that *if* he had to hit *something*, at least it was a 120 pound deer and not an 1800 pound moose.

Even so, the front of his BMW was crushed. The exhaust pipe was mashed where the carcass apparently spun around the side of the bike. There were deer pieces cooked onto hot parts and splattered on everything else. But somehow Ken rode it out after the impact and was able to continue. His perseverance was rewarded, earning 3rd place on the podium.



It was great to see Meese able to complete this IBR, especially after seeing him in the hospital after the 2011 crash and checking out the miserable condition of his BMW in the 2017 parking lot. He joins a few other riders in this rally that owe their guardian angels a well deserved rest.

And then there were two

In one of the most exciting IBR finishes ever, the top riders used as much of the non-penalty time available as possible. They knew the caliber of their competition, knew the final rankings would be close, and they grabbed every available bonus, taking nothing for granted.

Bob Lilley overcame a fuel fitting leak on his BMW earlier in the rally. He made a major push for the top spot on Leg 3. It required an early start and left him with just a 30 minute cushion arriving at the ferry. Not only did Bob get to Newfoundland via bonuses in New York City, he made his last string work by looping into the Adirondacks of upstate New York and then crossing back into Canada, successfully plunging into downtown Ottawa on Thursday afternoon. Bob successfully stacked strings and bonus multipliers to accumulate the most points of anyone on a single leg in this rally, ultimately logging a total of 13,124 miles in 11 days.

Bob was just ahead of Jim on the road coming back into Minneapolis. Bob knew he had generated a great set of strings on Leg 3, but when he called Jim from the bike headset to check on his friend, he did not yet know where he would place. All Bob knew was that Jim was just as tired as he was ... and he wanted to make sure Jim was OK as they approached the heavy traffic and construction near the finish. Fierce competitors and good friends, it just does not get any better than that.

WGS

Giant Squid Interpretation Site
Glovers Harbour Road, 1.3 miles west of NL-350
Glover's Harbour, NL

49.4538, -55.4828

24 Hours

Take a photo of the giant squid.

In 1878, fishermen near Glovers Harbour landed a giant squid that was 16.7 metres (55 feet) long. In 2001, to mark the occasion and increase tourism to this tiny hamlet, a replica was commissioned and built near the site of the capture.



Jim Owen bypassed the huge bonus of the giant squid at Glover's Harbour, NL, while carrying a handful of air and land bonuses collected on the island, in order to set up a bigger string multiplier on the mainland during the return trip. After leaving 6700 points on the scoring table in Leg 2, Jim was prepared to push the envelope and use every minute of time available to him for gathering points on the final leg.

Do you recall that massive construction project around the start/finish hotel, mentioned earlier in the daily reports? As the staff watched on Spotwalla as the remaining riders approached the finish, Jim's track indicated that he took a wrong turn. As hard as it was to watch this happen as the minutes ticked away and penalty points mounted, it was certainly understandable. The detours were not well marked. Traffic was heavy. Jim was deep into the penalty points, tired from a massive ride to Newfoundland and back, and no doubt feeling the pressure of the clock. Jim did exactly what one would expect a professional pilot do in such a situation. He calmly worked the problem. Jim corrected his routing error and came in to the finish with just 20 minutes left before being classified as a DNF. That is what winners do. Or in this case, the only two-time winner.

A few hours later, Jim and Bob stood together in the banquet hall, side by side, as the winner was about to be announced. The room seemed to hold its collective breath, along with the last two riders, as everyone awaited the placement call from Jeff. Their handshake and sincere congratulations upon the announcement of the winner was classic sportsmanship at the highest level.



Aftermath

The next phase of the rally starts now. Oh, you thought the rally was over? Technically, yes, it has ended. But the after effects have not, at least for many of the participants. They will react in different ways, but it will likely affect them for a long time. Perhaps those who pushed their personal envelopes the most are likely to have the strongest reactions.

The focus needed to place well in the IBR is difficult to describe to someone who has never experienced it. It results in a level of detachment, which can make it seem as if the entire world has stopped for eleven days. The evening news reports designed to generate hysteria and hand-wringing have no influence. The closest most riders get to news reports during the rally is the regional weather forecast. Work-place issues and project deadlines are forgotten. Broken toilets at home become someone else's problem. What arrived in the mail is irrelevant, unless it is a package at the next checkpoint containing a needed spare part or fresh change of clothes. The entire focus becomes the road, the plan, and the clock.

Emerging from that depth of focus can be unsettling. For the next few weeks, some will jump up from deep sleep, convinced that they are about to miss a bonus time cutoff. Some will rethink poor routing choices and marvel at how they could miss what now seems so obvious after a good night's rest removed their fatigue induced tunnel vision. Some will focus anew on better ways to prep their machines, or consider changing to a different machine, perhaps one better suited to the task of multi-day rallies.

Some may seek solace by writing down what they felt or went through during the last 72 brutal hours of the rally, just to make sure they never forget what it was like to reach so far and dig so deep. Some will resolve to push themselves harder if given another opportunity. A few may decide that this was enough. Some may have difficulty coping with delving so deep into their psyche, looking into the ultimate window of their soul, especially if they still have the proverbial monkey on their back. But many riders will be quietly pleased with the strength and fortitude they discovered within themselves and their ability to rely on it to persevere through their darkest hours.

Some will even feel depressed afterwards, in spite of experiencing great joy at the finish. It comes not from anything that went wrong, but as a result of coming off the emotional rush of being in the company of so many like-minded riders, or just the incredible high of finally becoming "*one of them*". Such fleeting moments of success and ecstasy make great memories, while at the same time making a return to the routine of the everyday world a bit of a letdown. No worries, it is a rather common emotion and things will return to a more even keel soon enough.

To those who did achieve their goals, congratulations. To those who did not reach your goals, best wishes for a quick recovery and hopefully another chance. It will be time to start preparing for the 2019 IBR in just a few short months.

Next

I will close this epilog with a couple of quotes from the man that won the 1997 IBR, Rick Morrison. If I don't get it exactly correct, I am sure Rick will let me know, but you will get the meaning. He once said the IBR may be "*the single most selfish thing you can do.*" He went on to say that during the rally, riders should focus most on getting safely back to family and friends by always making "*the choice that gets you home.*" That was great advice 20 years ago and was still great advice when Jeff Earls repeated it in the rookie rider meeting this year.

Jeff relayed one of his own aphorisms to the rookies at the start of this rally:
"*Ego is just a population control algorithm.* "

Hopefully all of the riders who plan to submit entries for the 2019 Iron Butt Rally will keep these words of wisdom at the forefront of their thoughts and plans.

John Harrison

#203

IBR Scribe

Iron Butt Rally©



Postscript: Thanks to Mike, Lisa, Jeff and Kathy for your assistance during the rally. A special thanks to Mike and Lisa for giving me the opportunity to serve as the 2017 IBR Scribe. It has been an honor and a privilege.