

If You (Re)Build It, They Will Come (Back)

The Restoration Of Zoar Moto Park

Part One: In The Beginning, How It All Started

By Ed Abdo

Zoar Moto-Park was a motocross track located on the outskirts of Springville NY located about 30 miles south of Buffalo. It was created out of a man's desire not to have to travel with his sons all over the

his home that he said would be a great place for a track. The Owner of the property, Bill Bylbie and Kessler came to an agreement to let Don build a track on the natural hills and valleys of his property.

Zoar was born at the absolute perfect time. Motocross was in its infant years and at the same time that Zoar came to life, the sport of motocross grew like no other motorsport in the history of time. The idea of Zoar came about in 1972 and it opened for its first local race event in May of 1973. It was immediately named one of the best tracks on the East coast at the time where tracks were opening almost weekly to keep up with the so many riders wanting to start racing in this new and exciting sport.

During Zoar Moto-parks opening season (1973), both a Trans AMA 500cc International and 250cc National race were held and promoted by Edison Dye, who met

Kessler through a mutual friend. The first season at Zoar not only had a tremendous number of local riders just starting in the sport but also the best riders of the United States and the best riders from around the world. The track's all natural hills and valleys and GP style layout was an immediate hit with not just the local riders but also the fastest and best riders up and down the east coast as well as Canada, not to mention the best riders in the world. The following year, A 500cc Inter-AM and 125cc World GP race was held at Zoar. From there on, Zoar held Motocross, SCORE off road, Hare scrambles and BMX races until the last event which was held in 1983.

For Ten years, Zoar was in operation and brought the sport of motorcycle racing into the lives of thousands of riders. The track touched many people in ways that cannot be explained but the memories of being there as a racer, worker or a spectator were held deep within people. I suppose it was all about timing. As the sport mushroomed during those first years that it opened, motocross kept so many of us

involved with this new sport and some out of jail(!) as we spent so much time getting ready to race and ride instead of looking for trouble.

After a hare scrambles race in the fall of 1983, Zoar was shut down and closed for good. Literally walked away from and left to sit. For 40 years. Most tracks that close become just a faint memory to those that rode there and had some fun and become housing developments or sold off as gravel pits or whatever. But Zoar was different. The property sat in a location that was surrounded by farmland and the property owners had no intention of selling it off as the land had been part of the same family since 1812. There were also some disgruntled feelings from the owner to the promoter for various reasons that made it virtually impossible to ever think that a motorcycle would ever be allowed on the property again. But the dream was there.

The people we met back then became lifelong friends and even though we moved on with our lives and did not see one another for years and years those memories of Zoar and Motocross held a spot in our hearts and were embedded in our brains.

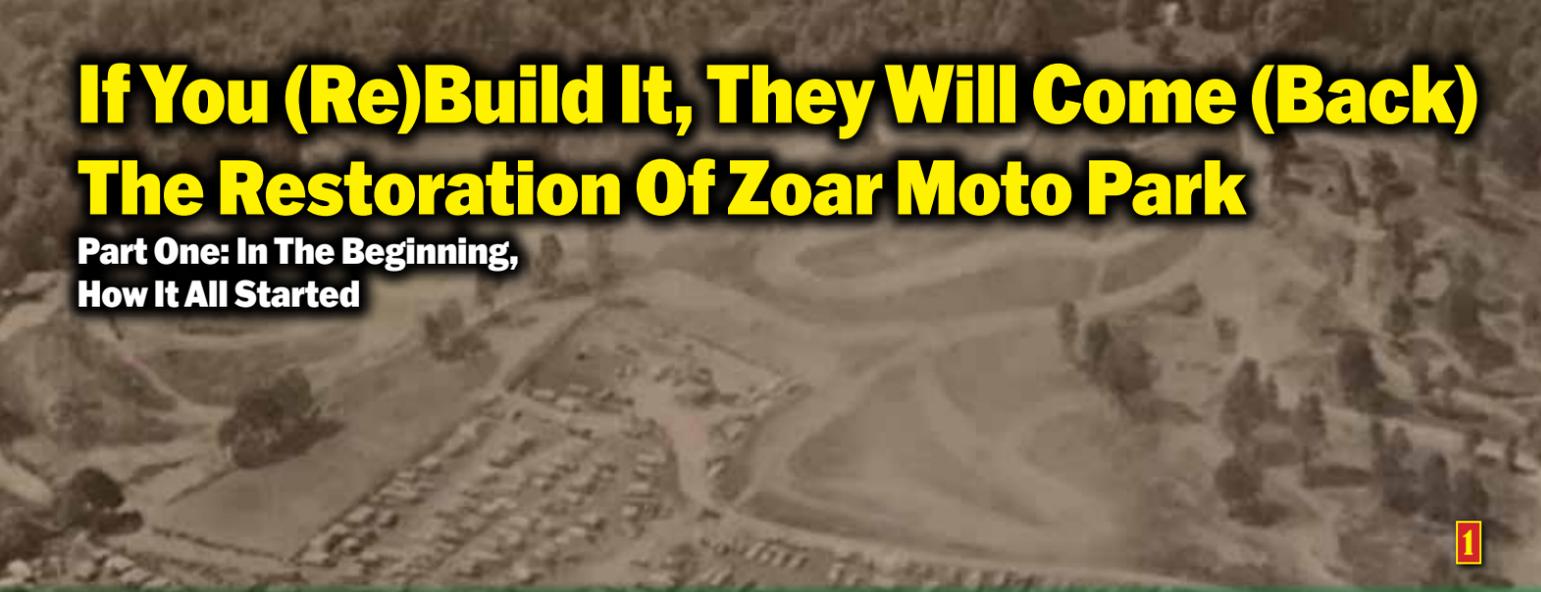
Fast forward to 2008. I just moved back to the Western New York area after working in the motorcycle industry around the country and opened a small shop right back in Springville in the same building that

I started as a floor sweeper in 1971. I was working on a bike and a guy came though the shop door and I heard a voice that I had not heard in almost 30 years but immediately knew who it was. 'Hey there Captain Ed, I heard you came back!' Mike Bender. I had not seen Mike since 1980 or so as that was my last race at Zoar and we started talking as if we were together the day before, not 28 years ago. The first subject was my last race at Zoar on a 1979 XR500 that I modified and raced there. Getting back with Mike was truly like a time machine.

We talked about how it would be so cool to bring Zoar Back but also knew that if the word motocross was mentioned to any of the owners of the property, the possibility of a gunshot wound was very likely! It was that bad. We had heard that it was an impossible idea and to be honest we believed it. Shortly after meeting up with Mike again, I was approached by a magazine editor asking me about Zoar and if I would be interested in writing a story about its history as his dad raced there and told him stories about it. I was happy to do so and sent it in to the magazine. It was never

published as it was quite long and I suppose just had too many words for the allotted space, A few years Later Mike passed away from Cancer but our dream of bringing back Zoar was always a great thing to talk about and kept him smiling.

Every so often I would post the original history article on my social media page, and it always got a few likes and some great comments about the love people had of



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IMAGE DESCRIPTIONS

- 1: An overhead view of Zoar in 1973 during the first International event.
- 2: The sign up and announcing tower at Zoar stood 50 feet high and was built with the trees cut to access the tracks land. (Photo: Paula Reid Rosen)
- 3: A local event at Zoar from 1973 (Photo: Deborah Schwabel)
- 4: The "A" Hill at Zoar in 1973 was well known for its difficulty to master. (Photo: Deborah Schwabel)
- 5: One of the spectator areas in 1973 at Zoar. (Photo: Paula Reid Rosen)
- 6: 1974 picture from the first turn during the 125 World GP event. Note the spectators win the background.
- 7: Local events like this in 1974 brought many spectators to see the action at Zoar. (Photo: Paula Reid Rosen)
- 8: One of the hills at Zoar that riders would fly over (Photo: John Mullet)
- 9: The last event at Zoar in 1983. Added was a grandstand and removed was the original tower. (Photo: Thadd Cotter)

country to race but instead to have people come to him instead. Don Kessler asked his son Dave if there was a place local to their house that a track might be built. Dave trail rode on a 50cc Harley Davidson back then and had a spot just a couple from miles from



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