

## Summer 2012 Bike Trip April 28-May 4, 2012

Falls of Rough, KY to Carbondale, IL 2 Miles

In the fall of 2011 my good friend Jake Wetzel started from Virginia Beach, VA to the Kentucky border, just to see if he could do it by himself. He invited several friends to do a section with him along the way. Rex Hoffman, Bob Barker and I jumped at the chance. Rex was to start where Jake left off at the KY/VA border to near Mammoth Cave, KY where I would continue to Springfield, MO, then Bob would pick up a section after that. At least that was the plan. Rex did his part, I made it to only Carbondale, IL and Bob couldn't make it at all.

Jake and Rex really had to work hard that first week. After an early spring of warm weather, they got hit with a storm surge of cold, rainy, windy weather along with the tough terrain of Western KY. Lots of low gear grinding up those "rolling hills". I was hopeful that the bad weather was over by my section. I had been riding 20 mile trips around Blk. Mt, Ridgecrest, Bee Tree areas a couple days a week for several weeks, but had no riding the week before this trip because Barbara and I took a week drive up to NYC to see Kevin as Huey in "Memphis" and Kara in "Newsies", stopping at Intercourse with Gordon and Gwen both ways. Patrick was able to join us from Boston to see both shows.

I had my annual physical exam just a few days before the trip and Dr. Dean said I was a "Go" for the trip. He is a cyclist too so he knew the physicality of a trip like this.



This is a picture of my test run to Ridgecrest and back to see if everything was AOK. The plan was to ride my vintage 1973, 36 pound Schwinn Super Sport, but Jake loaned me his Schwinn La Tour. It was just about as old but in much better shape and only 27 pounds. He also loaned me his old panniers. So.... Thus begins the summer 2012 saga.

**Day 1, Saturday, April 28:** Left home about 8:00 and took some scenic routes up to Falls of Rough, KY near Mammoth Cave. One was a little more scenic than I had planned when I missed a turn and ended up on a REALLY windy back country road. I stopped to ask directions from three women talking at a car wash. One of them looked

just like the banjo player in the movie "Deliverance". A round Charlie Brown head, a big gap toothy smile, straggly hair and straight nondescript dress. Probably a result of a little too many "close family relationships" in this valley!



Jake and Rex actually got to the campground before I arrived and had set up on a nice spot by the lake.

After we ate at the local café, we divided up the food for the next week and put Rex's bike on the Rodeo which he drove back to Blk. Mt. the next morning.

I slept in the back of the Rodeo. A good thing since Rex and Jake had a "duet" going most of the night.

**Day 2, Sunday, April 29:** (Falls of Rough, KY to Sebree, KY, 79 miles) Up at 6:30, had breakfast, then we cranked away to the West and Rex drove off to the South. The plan was to go the 52 miles to Utica (to give my body a chance to ease into longer days later) BUT the day was perfect... a nice breeze, cool morning, relatively easy riding.



A gorp and water break



Had lunch Crackers with BP & J in a park with a WWII tank and Caboose

We arrived at Utica at 2:30. Feeling good and looking at the map showing this was going to be the easiest terrain of my section of the trip, we thought we would "make hay while the sun shined". Jake called ahead to a church in Sebree that allowed cyclists to stay in the church. Violet, who turned out to be the preacher's wife, said come on and I'll fix you supper. She even asked if we were vegetarian.

We arrived about 5:45 when their church meeting was still going on and were met by a nice lady who showed us the basement youth rooms. Big kitchen, drinks, play room, shower, towels, washer dryer, mattresses, and all air

conditioned...YES! After showering, we went across the parking lot of the church to Violet and Bob's home where we feasted on chicken, lima beans, new potatoes, broccoli, macaroni and cheese, and corn bread. Both of us had double helpings of everything PLUS I had SEVEN (7) glasses of Tea/Lemonade... of course they were also refilled with ice each time. BUT...Violet was not finished with us. She brought us each a LARGE bowl of Ice cream topped off with whole fresh strawberries, THEN...gulp... she brought out a CAKE. And the amazing thing is that we ate it all!!!!

Between mouthfuls of the mounds of food, we found out that Violet was one of 15 children, that her husband has been pastor of this same First Baptist Church of Sebree for 33 years, that she cooks meals for the hundreds of bicyclists that stay at their church facilities, that her sister lives in Brevard, that Bob knew the Grahams lived in Montreat and he once lived in Florida near the little private Christian school, Hampton Debois, where all the Graham, Barrows, Gustafson and Wilson kids went to high school. While we were letting the ice cream settle, they brought out laminated newspaper articles of amazing cyclists that stayed at the church: a unicyclist, two penny-farthing bicyclist, and a man with paralyzed legs pedaling with his arms, to mention just a few. All of them doing long distance travels across the US, Europe, Canada, etc. We waddled back to the church with full stomachs and a good memory of some special folks ministering to all the bikers along the Across America route. I slept from 9:30 to 6:30 when I heard Jake getting up for his devotions.



**Day 3, Monday April 30: (Sebree, KY to Cave in the Rock, IL 55 Miles)** Left church at 7:30 after



breakfast (using the church kitchen) Jake creates this mixture of oatmeal, nuts and something else each morning. The day was overcast and a little cool...just right for riding. We clipped right along until the long hills, and then it was low gear all the way up (3mph) and flying down the other side (maxed out at 37 mph). We laid down in the shade on a lawn at the top of one hill. It was not until we stopped in Marion for lunch that I noticed that my arms were covered with red chigger bites. This happened again two days later at another rest stop by Hidden Bay Lake. I lay down in the grass at home all the time with no bites.

In Marion the nearest filling station/store was closed for repairs, (so no life giving Gatorade). I filled my water bottle inside the county jail house then we lowered ourselves to eat a chicken sandwich at the AIR CONDITIONED McDonalds across the street. They had free drink refills which we abused with three ice tea refills! The rest of the 12 miles to Cave in the Rock Park on the Ohio River was mostly downhill. We got dumped on with rain for about 15 minutes. Was glad to have the BRIGHT yellow rain jacket that Rex loaned me.



At the dock, we watched the ferry operator as he expertly positioned the ferry barge to the very small loading dock.



The cave is just to the right of my head



The campground was above the bluff of the cave and had only one trailer besides us. We spread out our stuff on the picnic tables just in time to be relatively dry as a huge windy rain storm blew over. After it was over we ate chicken and rice as we watched a beautiful sunset. Just about dark the camp host showed up to collect our \$15 fee. The husband looked like he just finished his farm chores... overalls, straw hat, goatee and a mouth full of chewing tobacco. He kept spitting during the hour he sat talking to us. (In the morning we were sure to walk on the OTHER side of his spitting pool) He told of losing their house to the flood recently, also the history of the cave below us. Pirates used it to steal from and kill pioneers on their way West. His wife waited patiently in the jeep before they went off to eat their cheese-burgers. Since we had the whole pavilion to ourselves we slept on the tables. No rain during the night. I had no problem sleeping on the table. (Barbara says I can sleep on a rock) but I think Jake would like to have had a softer bed.

**Day 4, Tuesday, May 1: (Cave in the Rock, IL to Cedar Lake Camp near Simpson, IL 48 miles)** This was to be our toughest day. We started out in a light rain, but made time to go down into the large cave. Perfect for a pirate's lair and a set for a movie (it was used in "How the West Was Won" with Jimmy Stewart and Debbie Reynolds). The ride along the Ohio River had some really nice views of the river and horse farms on both sides of the road. The hard part was that the sun came out, the wind started and the hills began to get steeper and longer. The last big one before Eddyville, I had to stop three times and rest for 30 seconds...the only time on the trip.



We stopped in Elizabethtown and sat on the bank of the Ohio River and watched a barge go up stream as we chugalugged cold Gatorades.

We were so tired and we knew that there was one more big hill coming up, so we decided to call it a day at Cedar Lake Camp Ground a “not ready for prime time camp” near Simpson. There were only two trailers in the park, so we again set up in the pavilion and both conked out on the picnic table for about an hour, but since there was to be no rain we set up the tent for sleeping. I might say here that each night we were able to have hot showers and this night was no exception. It wiped all the hilly sweat off.

**Day 5, Wednesday, May 2 (Cedar Lake Camp, IL to Carbondale, IL 42 miles)** After the steep hills of the day before, we were NOT looking forward to the next “killer” hill just down the road that the camp owner told us about. BUT fortunately she thought we were going east. It turned out that we had already climbed the “Killer” hills yesterday. So it was just the sun, heat and wind that we had to contend with today



The section of the ride through the Crab Orchard National Wildlife Refuge was really nice. The trees shaded us and blocked the wind and it was an easy ride.

We stopped at the Little Grassy Lake for a cheese and cracker lunch. A restful time on the grass, BUT found out later that my arms were again covered with chigger bites.

Our next...and last stop for me... was Carbondale. While in an air-conditioned quick stop drinking yet another Gatorade (before our next trip, I am buying stock in the company) I found out that the city had an Amtrak and Bus station. One of my many options was leaving Jake two days later from Farmington and ride alone two days up to St Louis to catch a train (48 hour trip), bus (12 hour trip), plane or rental car (both two costly). There was no other town until Springfield, MO that had any of these opportunities. So I checked at the Amtrak station which was supposed to have the Greyhound bus station across the street. Of course the station had closed a month ago and the only bus STOP was five blocks down the road at a BP station (which also was also closed last month) Not good vibes. But Jake noticed an Econo Lodge a half block away from the BP bus stop, so we splurged and got a room. I

rode back to a bike shop across from the Amtrak station where they gave me a bike box. It was a hoot trying to bungee that big box on the back of the bike. It stuck out about 5 feet from my seat. I made it a half block, before it slid off going around a corner. While I was trying to get it back on, a lady tapped me on the shoulder and asked if she could help. She was with her son in a top down VW bug convertible and said I could put the box in the back and they would meet me at the Econo Lodge which was on their way. I was really "booking" it down the road after them and got there just a minute after they arrived. I thanked them profusely and said that it was people like them that made our trip so worthwhile.

At the motel I asked the desk clerk what she could do for two tired overage bicyclists. She first said \$40, but then we must have looked as tired as we felt and she charged us only \$35 (if we did not tell anyone about it). I called Greyhound about buying the ticket and they said I would have to pay the driver of the bus and the bike box would be my free luggage. The phone connection was terrible and the Latino accent on the other end was worse and I thought he said it would leave the BP station at 8:30am. It was fortunate when I used the motel's computer, that I noticed that it was 8:30PM.

We had a time trying to get the bike in the box, because we could not get the pedals off. The box looked a little pregnant, but the next day I bought some duct tape to hold it together from an Auto Zone around the corner from the BP station(When I pulled it out of the bus in Asheville, both pedals broke through and were sticking out of the box!)

**Day 6, Thursday, May 3 (Bus trip home)** Jake took off in the morning after he had the bike shop do a few adjustments on his bike. The manager let me stay in the room until Noon, and then allowed me to store the bike and my two panniers in her office while I roamed around the mall about 6 blocks away. (She was really surprised when I gave her a Thank You Card!) After a supper at a KFC also within a block of the BP and Motel, I waited outside for the bus an hour. Since there are no reservations, I was certainly hoping that there would be a seat for me.

I was feeling pretty good when a lady pulled up to wait for her husband to come on the bus so that would be one seat available, BUT then a little later there was also another lady waiting to get on. The bus was full and fortunately **two** got off and we two got on. I got the last seat. BUT the driver would not take my money and said that the bike would cost extra when I paid in Paducah, KY which were both opposite of what the ticket agent on the phone said. So in Paducah, I bought my tickets and did not have to pay anything extra for the bike. **The bus was full again. Whew!!! I just made it.**

The bus trip was quite an experience in itself. I think I was the only one that had above a high school education (including the first driver) My aisle seat mate was a huge farmer type that fell asleep with his head against the seat in front of him, but he kept sliding his head between the cracks of the two seats with most of his weight on ME. I tried to push him over, but he would just slide back again. Fortunately it was only a 3 hour ride to Nashville where we changed buses to Knoxville. This time I had the aisle seat and could not get to sleep. I think my seat mate was a relative of my Penland Cove Rd neighbors that are missing a gene somewhere, because he could hardly talk, so we didn't...talk.

In Knoxville, I chose to sit next to a guy that had done a lot of talking from Nashville on, BUT he was so tired now he SNORED constantly all the way to Asheville. So no sleep for me again. In Asheville, by the time I got the bike out of the box and put together, Barbara was there to pick me up. Then home. It was a great trip, good company with Jake, wonderful country scenes, good people along the way and a confirmation that I could still go a distant bike trip. BUT no more BUS trips!