

The *Railroad* RAGBRAI XXXVI

2008

It was a fast short bus ride to Missouri Valley just north of I 80 and our first stay is at 1st Lutheran. It was the sanctuary for sleeping until after the meal they are serving. Missouri Valley is a town of 3000 people and a big hill going to the church. In fact, it was a very hilly town.

Sunday was off to Harlan 58.9 miles with 3800 ft. of climb. And that ride was hilly but the temp was mellow and, all and all, a great ride. None of the towns stood out, but Shelby had bicycles of all types to greet us. They made an effort in Harlan, and the town was made for RAGBRAI with its central courthouse and what appeared to be a thriving business district. Everyone was talking about Monday because of its 82 miles and over 5200 ft of elevation. It's as if everyone is looking for a reason to not do well (It always makes you feel better when you *do* do it). The Methodist church where we stayed was large and the riders dispersed in any number of rooms. The room I stayed in looked like it was out of the sixties with multi colored shag carpet and stripped yellow, pea green, orange and teal walls. Slept well though!

Monday the ride to Jefferson was 82 miles. Jefferson is a town we haven't seen since it was a layover on my first RAGBRAI in 2001. I remember that one because that was the first time I had seen *square-dancing* tractors (old two-cylinder John Deeres with hand brakes that made them able to turn on a dime). Well, it was hilly!! But the weather wasn't too hot (mid 80s), and only a little wind that affected us. But last night they must have had a terrible wind outside of Coon Rapids because there were trees down everywhere. One person said they had 80mph winds. Even the corn was flat. The town of Coon Rapids was fortunate because by the time we got there everyone was tired (55 miles). They were really into the spirit with excited kids and lots of food. It had been 16 miles since the last stop, and that helped also. We had two firsts today for me. One was a hardboiled egg on a stick and the other was a rest stop that was really a cell phone tower!! We are at a Methodist church tonight and things were very comfortable. As usual they are serving a meal (chicken and noodles, potatoes, and pie). Sounded so good I tried it. As usual, the sun showers are working thanks to the new one. (I still managed to get a cold one). After a scare early in the evening, Jefferson (pop.4600), was able to have all of their programs come off. They also seem to have a healthy business district.

Tuesday we were off to Ames and our first larger town at 50,000 pop. The ride to Ames was the first cruise of the year. Not a cloud in the sky, not humid and under 1400 elevation. And almost all of that was in one hill coming into Boone. It was long but not too bad. Ogden was 29 mi. out on a 57 mile trip, and they seemed to be having the most fun. There was live entertainment in at least three locations featuring dancers, singers (including Elvis). After settling into the Unitarian church, I did enjoy the margarita I had (not at the church, but a couple of miles away). Jerry Harrington and I thought they were good enough that we went back with a big car-full a couple of hours later.

Something I forgot to mention about Jefferson last night. In the courthouse square (or beer corral), they honored Mr. Pork Chop upon his retirement from 25 years being a vender on RAGBRAI. When he spoke, his voice brought back memories, especially when he did his *Poooooork Chaaaap* call like he did for all those years while the bikes went by. Back in Ames we were spread over three floors in the modernistic church. And again, air and plenty of room. I also had my first watermelon of the year today. I don't even mention pie because I am beginning to have my fill and more.

It was Tama and 78 hilly miles with wind from the east that was irritating the last 7 miles. But otherwise the weather was great with the humidity low and the temp in the low 80s. There were seven stops along the way but none stood out. Our stay in Tama was at Lincoln Savings bank (a first) basement. It was tight as far as accommodations, especially because we had only 2 bathrooms for 65 people. It was also hard for anyone to sleep outside because they would be on a cement parking lot in downtown Tama, and next to (about two ft.) a double track mainline railroad. And those trains seemed to be coming by every 15 min. from either way. Since we are staying in Tama, and Toledo is where the festivities were, it seemed remote. Being so crowded, we got a little relief when the bank opened a store room that was more like a bomb shelter (at least we couldn't here the trains). Tama and Toledo overlap, but seem so distant. That evening had quit a few from HBA going back to Rube's steakhouse where you grill your own steaks. The reviews were mixed but a goodtime was had.

Thursday we headed for North Liberty and the distance about the same as Wednesday, with 76 miles and 3100 of climb. The ride took us along some (15 miles) of the HBA Toledo ride three weeks before. That was the ride where John crashed ---- well I didn't want to mention it!! For 08 RAGBRAI this was our first day of not so good weather. It was cloudy, some drizzle, cloudy again and, if you got in after 2:30, more drizzle. I felt bad for Belle Plaine because, not only was it wet, but also cool. That doesn't help vendors I'm sure. It was the first day I can remember wearing a jacket almost all day. It never got out of the 60s all day. While Belle Plaine was trying to have entertainment, Vining – 17 miles out – seemed to be overwhelmed. The two Amana stops were different because they seemed to have forgotten about restrooms. The next best stop was at Homestead which was organized and did well. But the best stop and the most fun was just past Homestead where there was a sign – “Free Beer”. They were selling corn, but it was the free beer that made us stop. Because they weren't licensed to sell beer they were giving it away. It seemed to be a neighborhood thing, and the corn was good too. I think that the freewill donation raised more then if they had charged. The Iowa City Chinese church of (North Liberty) was adequate in size, and it also had hot water for our sun showers (no sun).

Friday – on to Tipton – at 64 miles with 3000 climb. We had to go way north to Martelle to come back south to Tipton. They had to get creative to get the 117 miles in from North Liberty to LeClaire. Jerry Falta made the suggestion that this RAGBRAI should be called the “Railroad RAGBRAI” because we have crossed the mainline of the Union Pacific double track about 50 times this week. The track seemed to have paralleled the route from the start. The 64 miles to Tipton was mostly flat, with little wind, and cloudy.

It made for a wonderful day to ride. The first stop was in Solon, where all the vendors seemed to be selling breakfast burritos. Lisbon and Mt Vernon were great and they succeeded in doing what should be a model for all towns. They made everyone stop and walk because of the congestion. Especially Mt Vernon, where vendors were lined up for 300 yards. In Mechanicville a bank sponsored a shrimp feed by a beer garden (what an idea). My small group of Jerry, Gerry and I had been hungry for a good pizza all week when we hit Tipton. We found Happy Joes after a recommendation from a bar. We had stopped for toddy, and I asked the server where we could get a good pizza (looking at their sign that offered it). Oh you mean those cardboard ones like we sell? But if you want a good one go across the street!! Only in Iowa!! The First United Church of Christ was our last home for this year. Almost everyone was inside even though they were serving meals on the 1st floor.

The last leg was to LeClaire. It was 52 miles, and what a day it was. Nice temp, a little tail wind, sun, flat, and fast. A great way to finish it off, and send everyone to their real homes in a good mood. As usual there were trailers, trucks, vans, buses and cars everywhere along the river front. Our bus left at 1:45 and we were back in C.R. a little after 3:00. Mission accomplished!!!

Things to consider

Although you can say all RAGBRAIs are alike (which is partially true), the annual replay is great because the people of Iowa make great hosts. I'm sure that is why it has lasted for 36 years. You can traverse with your bike any where, but Iowa is unmatched for friendly people. Thanks Dick for heading this caravan up and Jim for moving and setting us up. Thanks to Kay and Billy for moving the vehicles along and to Rick and Vern for redoing the showers. And also to all who helped to call for churches and made all the plans.

1. The most touching moment I had along the ride this year was with a 5 year old Riding with her dad. We came upon them, and she was looking out from under her helmet with her curly hair blowing in the wind. She was smiling at everyone and when I got even with her I asked her if she was racing, and she shook her head up and down. And every time I went to pass her she would pedal like crazy. I noticed she had a tooth missing and asked her how much the tooth fairy had left her? She said 5\$ and when I told her she had a rich fairy god mother she pulled one hand off the handle bars and proceeded to push up her lip to show me more loose teeth. That was when I realized that this wasn't a great way to have a conversation with a 5 year old at 20 mph. But boy was she cute!!!
2. The storm that flattened trees and more along the way was very close to an overnight stop. A lot of people dodged a bullet I think.
3. I always think I take my time and look around along the route but that may not be true. Two times people (Donna and Denise) told me about the antique barber shop and grocery I had noticed but didn't stop for. Also I didn't take the time to see the

Danish Museum that was only 4 blocks off the route. Maybe I should think about changing my habits.

4. The weather this year I would say was much better than average. Not too hot, not a lot of wind or rain.
5. Thanks to Jerry and friends for coming from California to brighten our ride.
6. No granny gear this year because I don't have one anymore (new bike). But I got as low as I could go.

Dave Evans