

## **RAGBRAI 2010**

RAGBRAI is sponsored by the Des Moines Register newspaper and stands for the “Register’s Annual Great Bike Ride Across Iowa. It is a 7 day bike tour (not a race) and attracts 10,000 riders.

Many riders complete the full 7 days, but riders also have the option of getting day passes and doing just part of the ride. Many of the riders are just “Joe citizen” riders of all ages from young to old and ride ordinary bikes. But, there are also serious riders on very nice bikes that hammer across Iowa in pace lines. You see about every kind of bike from the Banana Man bike to a tandem bike of 6. At the bike expo you can test ride a bike for a day. One of our group tried out a \$7,000 Trek but ended up standing up in the peddles most of the day because the saddle didn’t fit him properly.

Each year the ride takes a different route, but starts on the western border of Iowa by dipping your rear tire in the Missouri River and ends on the eastern border by dipping your front tire in the Mississippi River. Over the years the route has averaged about 70 miles a day. They also rank the routes and this year was relatively short and flat, so it was one of the easiest, but I’ve also ridden when the route was ranked one of the hardest. In my opinion, the best way to ride RAGBRAI is to join a group. The group I belong to meets in Des Moines, and takes a coach bus to the western border plus a rental truck to transport the bikes. The bus drops us off at the start of the ride and at the end of the week meets us again at the finish to take us back to Des Moines. The truck carries our personal gear and camping gear and each morning moves ahead of the riders to the next over-night town and stakes-out an area for us to camp. We set up a canopy for shade and have snacks and drinks that are part of the package deal.

If you are not part of a group, you’re on your own to find a place to camp. Your camping gear is transported by a semi-truck and spilled out in a long pile for you to dig through and locate your stuff at the end of the day. A typical day (for our group) is to wake up around 4:30 AM, pack up your tent and belongings and put them in the truck, and be on the road by about 5:30 AM. Our truck leaves promptly at 6 AM to get to the next overnight town to find a camping spot suitable for about 60 of us. Once the riders are on the road it’s like a swarm of locusts eating everything in their path, except they’re on bicycles. There are food stands along the route, and you might begin with a breakfast burrito at the Farm Boys stand, or pancakes at the Chris Cakes stand. Then the fuel for the remainder of the day’s ride might include a pork chop, smoothies, church lady pie, and ice cream. At the end of the ride, it’s necessary to rehydrate with perhaps a Mike’s Lemonade or a soda. The miles, sun, and heat may require a little afternoon siesta to fully recover. For supper, it might be a shuttle ride from the campground into town to one of the local churches for a meal. Between the church dinners, church lady pie and ice cream I think I spend more time in church during RAGBRAI week than during the rest of the year. At the campgrounds, they bring in portable showers on trailers or semi-trucks at a cost of \$5.00/shower. If we’re camped on school grounds, they may open the school for showers, but again they charge for them. For food and extras, you can expect to spend about \$30.00/day +/-.

One day during the week, the daily route will include an extra loop for those riders that want to do a 100 mile day. Riders completing the 100 miles receive a patch for their accomplishment. If there is a road kill, they don't remove it but instead put up a sign warning the riders about the possible hazard in the road. This may be a little morbid humor, but there was a dead raccoon in the road that the riders decorated with bling and stickers. This might be a "guy thing" because I think about 70% of the riders are men. There's lots of fun and many interesting things to see along the route, and you should really stop and smell the roses. Unfortunately, that's not the most prevalent fragrance in Iowa. However, the local farmers refer to that as the smell of money. At times you'll see riders getting off their bikes and walking into the corn fields. I never saw anyone walk into the bean fields, don't know why? In West Bend, Iowa there is a huge grotto built by Father Dobberstein out of precious stones and petrified wood. Some consider it the "eighth wonder of the world." At one farm, they made a slippery slide by laying plastic sheeting from the driveway approach down into the ditch and turning on a water sprinkler. You really had to launch yourself in a head-first dive to get a good slide, but it was lots of fun. At another place, there was a pond where they had a rope rigged so you could swing out and drop into the water. Reports were that the police had to shut it down after participants began having too much fun and "doffing their duds".

If you've ever wondered what happened to old school buses when they're retired from school service, the answer is that RAGBRAI teams purchase them for team busses. They get painted up with clever team names and typically have a rack on top of the buss as a deck to sit on, or for transporting bikes. One evening when we were on one of the shuttles, we followed a team bus that had a rack that was just a little too tall and was snagging and ripping down cable as it drove through the town.

With all the riders you have to expect some accidents and there is emergency help posted on the route. Unfortunately, one crash did result in a fatality this year. Our ride ended in Dubuque. Just before approaching Dubuque there was a nasty hill called Potters Hill. It's about a mile long and there have been various opinions of how steep the grade was. All I know is that it was beyond my abilities, and the majority of riders had to get off their bikes and walk up. That was disappointing for me, but it is what it is. I'll be back next year for RAGBRAI XXXIX.

If anyone has any questions about RAGBRAI, please let me know. Dave Greymont  
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