

REGISTERS ANNUAL GREAT BIKE RIDE ACROSS IOWA (RAGBRAI) 2012  
7 Days and 488.8 miles

Each year the RAGBRAI committee selects a different route to ride across Iowa. This year I and 10,000 to 15,000 of my closest friends started in Sioux Center, Iowa and finished at Clinton, Iowa. By tradition, riders dip their rear tire in the Missouri River at the start, and their front tire in the Mississippi at the finish. This year, the start was quite a few miles from the Missouri so we didn't "dip", and our meeting place at the finish was only about two miles from the Mississippi but I was so fried by then that I didn't bother to add the extra few miles to the river and back for the "dip".



I ride with a group of about 55 other riders called the Grind Kings. We meet in Des Moines where we leave our cars for the week, and get on a bus that takes us to the start of the ride. We also have a couple of week-long volunteers that drive a baggage/gear truck, and another truck and trailer. Our small caravan drove to Sioux Center where the bus dropped us off and left while the baggage truck and the second truck and trailer stayed with us for the week. After we arrived at our designated campsite in Sioux Center, we unloaded our bikes from the truck, set up our tents, maybe visited the bike expo, renewed old friendships and prepared for the following days ride.



Our typical day consisted of getting up at about 4:45 AM, taking down the tent, and putting all your gear in the baggage truck. Then, the ride begins! (We start this early to avoid some of the heat, allow our driver to get to the next campsite early so he still has a good selection, and beat the hoards of other riders to the food vendors.) All the support crews take a separate route to the destination of the day. Our first stop would be about 15 miles down the road for breakfast. One of my favorite vendors is "Farm Boys" and their breakfast burritos. Some riders hammer to the day's destination, others (like me) make frequent stops for attractions, food, church lady pie, and beverages. An almost mandatory stop is at Beekman's Ice Cream. It's made on site by using antique gasoline engines. Beekman's sets up their wagon each day somewhere along the route.. When we reach the daily destination it's set up the tent, shower, and recover. Dinner might be a buffet in the basement of one of the town's churches. Since we start early in the morning we usually turn in early in the evening. Then repeat the whole process for the next 6 days.

I think this year was particularly brutal because of the heat. The first day was a 70+ mile day, but then the next 3 days were each more than 80 miles with the temperature reaching 104 degrees. I heard that someone put a thermometer on the pavement and it registered 127 degrees. To make things even more interesting, one of the days we rode into a 15 to 20 mph headwind most of the way. I ended up taking a rest break in a local cemetery which was very peaceful. Another day, I was only a few miles from the finish when my

rear tire blew. I was hot and exhausted, and it was all I could do to focus on what needed to be done to change a tire.



I knew the hot weather was just downright dangerous for a lot of the riders. Even on just the first day, there were more than 400 that required some kind of medical attention. I don't know how many required attention on the following days but I'm sure it was many more. My daughter went to the hospital with fluid/electrolyte problems, and a good friend ended up getting an ambulance ride to the hospital. While he drank enough water throughout the day, he believes that he didn't get enough electrolytes resulting in probable water intoxication (water poisoning). The hospital told him he took a "big hit" to his kidneys and advised him not to ride any more so his RAGBRAI was over.

Thankfully after the 3 long days we had a short day and then the heat broke. I'm not sure I could have handled riding another day in the heat.

We were fortunate enough not to have to ride in the rain during the week. However, we did have a good lightening and thunder storm one night. The wind was reported to have gusted up to 70 miles per hour. While I was lying in my cot, the wind collapsed my tent on top of me a couple of times but it would pop right back up. I don't know why, but one of my very favorite things is going to sleep in the tent listening to it storming outside with the rain hitting the tent. That's great as long as it stops by morning.

So, I finished my sixth RAGBRAI. It's really a unique experience, and I highly recommend it. I have to admit that this year was tough and a lot of the "fun factor" was gone. As I sit here writing this article I kind of question whether or not I'll ride it again. But, pain diminishes over time, who knows how I'll feel about it when registration opens next year.

Dave Greymont