

The HHH RAGBRAI 2011

No, that doesn't stand for Hubert Horatio Humphrey (Senator from Minnesota and Vice-president); it stands for HOT, HILLY, AND HUMID. It was supposedly the second hottest RAGBRAI on record. You cooked all day while riding, and then basted in your own sweat all night long.

This year's ride began in Glenwood, Iowa and ended in Davenport, Iowa. The total distance for the 7 days was 467 miles, however, I added an extra 8 miles of fun. We had stopped in one town for a break, and then after getting back on our bikes and riding 4 miles, I discovered that I had left my fanny pack behind. On my way back to retrieve it, I noticed the temperature on the local bank sign was 91 degrees. On another day, one of our group mentioned that his thermometer was registering 104 degrees. Don't believe what you've heard about Iowa being flat. There were lots of hills coming out of the Missouri River valley. We had about 9,000 feet of climbing on the first two days.

By tradition, at the start of RAGBRAI, riders dip their rear tire in the Missouri River. This year, due to flooding and not being able to access the river, they had a kiddie pool filled with river water, and we dipped our tires in the pool by our campsite. At the finish of the ride, the front tire is dipped into the Mississippi River. I don't know why, but everyone has a big smile on their face when dipping in the Mississippi. Another tradition is to mark a leg of first-year riders with the word "virgin". My son and daughter (both virgins) rode with me this year, and they were my two domestiques for the week.

I think it's important to treat the ride as a bike vacation and not put your nose to the wheel and hammer across Iowa. We tried to stop to do and see things along the route. We swam in a farmer's pond for \$1.00. (It was free to anyone skinny-dipping and there were several!) (After the swim it was kinda like riding in a wet diaper. I wouldn't know that from any personal experience though.) At another farm, we rode inner tubes down a plastic slip-n-slide, stopped to see Iowa's largest walnut rocking chair, largest bicycle, largest beer mug, and Mamie Eisenhower's birthplace. Some other RAGBRAI traditions are: ya just gotta have a pork chop from Mr. Pork Chop and have Beekman's home-made ice-cream. They make the ice-cream using antique gasoline engines that make an unmistakably unique sound. I don't know if its tradition, but some times the port-a-potties also get decorated.

You see every kind of bicycle on RAGBRAI from high-tech, very expensive bikes to 50 year old bikes with balloon tires. I saw one rider with a single gear bike (don't know how he made it up the hills), another was attempting to complete RAGBRAI on a skateboard, and we saw several riders on high wheeler penny farthing bicycles.

We rode through the city of Templeton where they distill rye whiskey. Supposedly, it was Al Capone's favorite rye whiskey. And in another town we all got temporary tattoos.

I'm not ready to get back on my bicycle yet, but I'm sure that by the time sign-up comes around for the 2012 RAGBRAI I'll have forgotten about the HHH and only remember the beautiful sunrises, sunsets, and the annual renewal of friendships.