

An early morning start is important to many riders who want to beat the heat on the bicycle trek across Kansas.

Pride keeps biking goal within striking distance

By Greg Peters

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Somewhere in the hills around Liebenthal, God and I came to an understanding.

Unlike most people who have no idea just how or why life throws its maladies in their direction, I knew the exact reason my knees were throbbing with pain. The only real question was how would I make it the final 400 miles of Biking Across Kansas '88? Another five days of constant aching pain combined with the sporadic shooting anguish that only the dentist's drill could compare to just didn't seem inviting.

But I had to make it. This was a matter of pride. Ever since 1976 when the riders on the bicentennial bike route went by my house I knew that an extended bicycle trip was in my future. I had been looking forward to this.

So there I was, climbing the hills on my two-wheeler fighting both a mighty crosswind and the voice in the back of my head that was telling me it was time to sag in and cut my losses.

It all seemed so easy two days earlier when the 600-plus Biking Across Kansas riders left the Colorado border just west of Tribune. My 14-year-old nephew Jeff and I pushed big gears almost the whole day and made the 63-mile trek across the flat lands to Scott City in less than five hours.

That was probably my first mistake.

While I had done some training in preparation for the ride it soon became obvious that my strength conditioning was not enough.

It was partway through on Day 2 when I began to notice a twitching in the outside of my left knee. We had climbed down into the canyon near Scott County

Lake in the morning and the ride out uphill and into a head wind took its toll. By the time we reached Healy, 24 miles into the 60-mile route, I was ready to stop and buy some Tylenol.

I limped into Ransom that night hurting but thinking that rest and a little bit of Ben Gay would solve the problem.

It was early on in Day 3 that we started climbing hills and it didn't take long for my right knee to follow suit with the left and they both were aching. It was ride a little, stop a lot as I tracked my bike along the back roads from Brownell to Liebenthal. Everyone was eager to make the turn north onto U.S. 183 and get a tail wind, but no one more than myself.

Liebenthal appeared like an oasis in the desert with its giant cathedral spire sticking in the air. Bikers gathered around the general store consuming all the food in sight.

But any relief the weary visitors got was quickly vanquished. Less than a mile out of town the ascent began. I never walked my bike, but somewhere in those hills God and I came to an agreement. Moses had a burning bush, I had to settle for burning knees. By the time I made the turn at Loretta the wind was strong enough to push me to the lunch stop in Victoria.

Day 4 and a guy by the name of Dan Iott from Independence, Mo., really made the difference. To this point in the trip I thought I was the only one in pain. But when the majority of the riders cut the route and went straight to Ellsworth from Russell, bypassing a trip to Wilson Reservoir, I knew it was a get-well-soon day for everyone.

It was Iott, however, who showed me

how to massage my legs. A veteran member of a Race Across America team, he was willing to help all those in need. He also helped me adjust my seat's position, which was also affecting my knees.

With the right combination of stretching, Aavil and pushing small gears I was able to ride without much pain the next two days. But there was still a hilly 87-mile day to go.

The route was Alma to Ottawa. The rumor was that it was hilly but no one really knew how bad. Before the trip, Jeff and I had toyed with the idea of making our century ride on this day but that had become doubtful when my knees started aching up and Jeff got wiped out in the heat going from Ellsworth to Athlete.

The sign on the bank in Alma said 42 degrees when we pulled out of town at 6:30 a.m. Steam was rising off the stilling pools at the sewage plant on the edge of Alma as we started up the first hill.

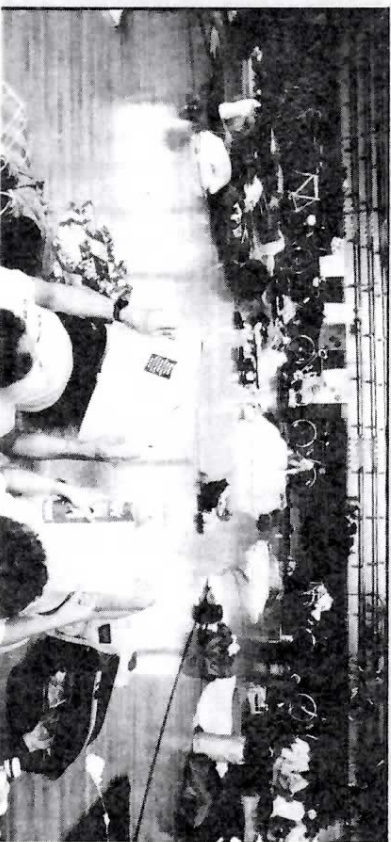
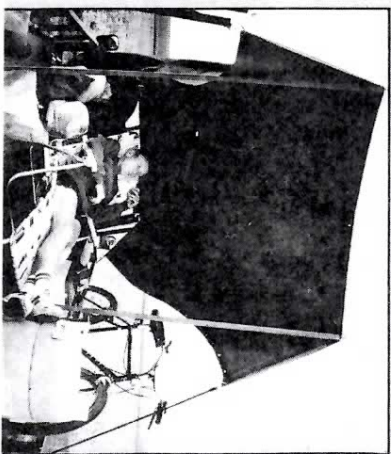
A veteran cyclist had given me a hint the night before. For a long ride, just break it up into a series of shorter rides. So the plan was to make this 100 miles into 10 10-mile rides.

Good fortune was on our side. It was a perfect day for riding, and we made Ottawa by mid-afternoon and were going strong. Thirteen more miles and we'd have it — 100 miles. After going 87 miles, 13 more seemed like nothing.

We rode victoriously into Ottawa with 100 miles plus on the trip odometer. It didn't matter that Biking Across Kansas had another 30 miles remaining on its final day. To go from almost sagging four days earlier to riding 100 miles in a day was a tremendous feeling.



With 600 riders on the trail, participants must sort through the gear.



At right: Riding in a sag wagon can be one of the most enjoyable ways to make the trip. It gives you a place to stretch out when you want to alight from your bike. Far right: Trying to beat the boredom can be as much of the battle as the actual ride. When the day's journey is over, there's little left to do but lie down and wait for dawn.

Story and photos