

# BBBC History: Ride Across America

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by Lee Chouinard

On April 24, 2010 four members of the Bonita Bay Bicycle Club, Dave Cramton, Lee Chouinard, Keith Hynes, and Gaby Engelhardt, dipped our tires in the Atlantic Ocean in St Augustine, FL after completing a 32 day bicycle ride across America. We had dipped our rear tires in the Pacific Ocean in San Diego, CA on March 24<sup>th</sup> and departed on our trip with great anticipation of the adventure ahead. We would not be disappointed. Over the next month we rode a total of 2884 miles (an average of 90 miles/day) and climbed a total of 138,312 feet (the equivalent of riding up Mt Everest from sea level once/week) at an average speed of over 16 MPH. I was the only member of the group who had ever done a bicycle ride of more than two days before – I had ridden from Florida to Maine in 1999, the year I retired and moved here. Ever since that ride, this one had been on my bucket list. I tried twice before to motivate club members to join me but was unsuccessful. This time I proposed staying in motels instead of camping at night and successfully enlisted three partners for the ride.

We took turns driving a support vehicle with clothing, bike supplies, food, water, and picnic gear so each rider only rode 75% of the distance each day. It was the "luck of the draw" as to who got to ride the toughest climbs and roughest roads each day. The typical day started with a hearty breakfast between 7 and 8AM, departure within a half hour, a break for a picnic lunch between 12 and 1PM and arrival at our motel between 2 and 4PM. That was followed immediately by 1 or 2 cold beers and snacks and then, at about 6PM, a cocktail hour with wine and cheese. Dinner followed at a local restaurant, not usually of the quality we are accustomed to in Bonita Bay. Our goal was to consume about 4 – 5000 calories/day and we worked hard at it! In between there was planning for the next day's ride; arranging accommodations for the next night; doing the daily blog; programming "George", our bike sized Garmin GPS, for the next day; doing laundry; doing bike repairs; etc. Overall, the days were full and there was not a lot of "down time". We slept well!

There are dozens of stories to tell – here are a few snippets!

While dipping our tires in the Pacific we lost one pair of sunglasses and got our shoes, socks, and bikes drenched by a rogue wave.

Within the first 10 miles we had two flat tires (we would have 17 during the trip), one cut tire which needed to be replaced (we would have to replace six more

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during the trip), and one broken toe clip strap (we found a replacement at a bicycle parts dealer a couple miles off the route). An auspicious start!

We were incredibly fortunate with the weather. There were earthquakes, dust storms, tornadoes, floods, and downpours happening all around us, but we rode across the country under a patch of blue sky, experiencing only one morning of light misty rain. The downside was that we had headwinds for almost the entire ride, but that was a trade-off we all happily accepted in exchange for the excellent weather.

The desert cacti were in bloom, the fields in Texas were swimming in bluebonnets and Indian paint brush flowers, and the deep South was awash in azaleas. The scenery was spectacular!

We went over our highest pass in New Mexico, Emory Pass at 8228 feet. There was snow on the ground, it was probably in the 40's, and there was a gusty wind blowing. It is the only picture we have where we all looked miserable.

In Hillsboro, NM there were no restaurants so the motel owner cooked dinner for the four of us plus two other bikers who were doing the same route East to West. We spent Easter Sunday in Van Horn, TX and had to settle for Subways for our Easter dinner and M&M's for desert.

Outside Fort Davis, TX we were pulled over (with siren) by the local sheriff for riding in the road instead of on the shoulder. The roads in Texas were bad, but the shoulders were almost not rideable (very rough filled with debris, and often narrow) and there were virtually no cars on the road. He told us he knew all that but he could still put us in jail for riding on the road – he was not the friendly sort. We mostly stayed in the shoulder after that at great pain to our bikes and bodies. In Wimberley, TX we were unable to get a motel room and instead rented a log cabin for the night. Although we were concerned (before we arrived) about the sleeping arrangements and the amenities, it turned out to be our most luxurious accommodation of the trip.

In Ville Platte, LA we needed to do laundry but there were no guest laundry facilities in the motel. The night desk clerk offered to do our laundry for us in the hotel laundry facilities for \$2.50/load. This was typical of the many nice and helpful people we met along the way.

In St Francisville, LA the only apparent route to our hotel was over a dangerous and busy road under construction. A local sheriff's deputy provided us an escort to the motel via a back route – another nice and helpful person.

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We met probably 50 – 75 people who were also doing this route going either East or West. Many were carrying all their gear with them and generally taking 60 – 90 days to finish the ride. Many were as old or older than us. One was doing it with only one leg (not even an artificial one) – his stump was strapped to the bike. Some were doing it alone, some as couples, some with commercial organizations, and some were self organized between total strangers via the internet. We came away with great admiration for all of these adventurous people.

The four of us were well matched in temperament, in riding ability, and in our enjoyment of food and drink. We did this trip the Bonita Bay way, enjoying many comforts along the route, but we regretted none of them. We started as casual friends and finished with a close bond between us. We had a wonderful time and are already talking about the "next trip". To learn more about this trip and see more pictures check out our daily blog (<http://daveonatrek.blogspot.com>).