

MDA Trans NH Cycle Ride 2005

Thursday – Getting there

Thursday is the day before “the ride”. This year 13 riders and 3 drivers all meet at Steve Patterson’s house in Merrimack where we load up the bikes, luggage and people for the journey north. The vast majority of the 68 riders we have this year aggregate in Portsmouth and take the bus north. Our little splinter group has always opted to indulge ourselves the day before with a great meal and group bonding at Tall Timbers Lodge in Pittsburg NH; if you haven’t dined at this out of the way gem, you’ll be really surprised and pleased with the experience.



- Dining at Tall Timbers Lodge -

This year’s day-before-the-ride weather is lovely, and the forecast is promising for the whole weekend; that has us nervous... at least one day of marginal weather is always the norm for this event.

We always stop in Colebrook on the way up to register with the folks who handle the administrivia for the ride, get any last minute instructions or changes, and to deliver any late arriving pledge money. Our goal is to get to Pittsburg by 515 so that we can make our 530 dinner reservation. Most of the folks in our little group are MDA ride veterans; we have two new additions this year, Suzanne Guidod, a friend of Pam Wright’s, and Pam Patterson, Steve’s wife. Both are excellent cyclists and fit right in with the crazy group of people we bring together every year.



- Looking out at Back Lake from Tall Timbers -

Because the evening is so perfect, a bunch of us gather in front of one of the cabins right on the lake (Back Lake, I think) and commiserate for a while as we watch the fishermen troll around the lake. Tall Timbers has a lot of guests engaged in fishing this time of year. It's a lovely setting... campfires, the lake... even the bugs don't seem as bad as what I'd expected.

About 9pm I go back to our cabin to watch a little of the NBA finals with some of the guys... I make it thru the first half but wake up is at 430am tomorrow so we can get to the border station and be ready to roll at 7am sharp, so most of us are turning in by 10pm.

Friday – The Ride – Day 1 – 98 + miles – Pittsburg border station to Littleton

Friday dawns sunny, calm and about 60... you can't ask for more. No need to pack the rain gear today. Breakfast, pack up, and drive the last 20 miles to the border. We have to get all the bikes off the racks and put together; there are always little things to tweak before getting on the road. Bill Schwab starts the process with a flat tire so is doing a quick tube change to start the day... hope that is not a sign of things to come.



- At the border -

The Start of the ride from the border station is always kinda cool... lots of bikes and people, a good cause, nothing hurts yet... this year the weather's sweet (right now anyway)... it's all good. We launch at 7am sharp without incident.

So... I'm rolling along about mile 4 when I hear a sound like a rifle shot and notice that my front wheel has started to wobble considerably... I've spent enough time on the bike to know that I've broken a spoke on my front wheel... I open up the front brake to accommodate the wobbling wheel and keep going figuring I'll see a support vehicle somewhere down the road. The wheel will roll alright for a while... not what I'd want to ride 100 on but as long as I don't let it run too fast on the downhills it should be OK.

Sure enough I spot the support truck and find that they have a few spare wheels in the back... so we do a simple swap... my wheel ends up at a bike shop in Littleton to get fixed; I end up riding on Craig Simpson's spare wheel for a couple of days... his wheel seems to go faster on his bike than it does on mine... I don't know why that is.. :>).

All this fix-me-up stuff has me at the end of the group; I start to focus on trying to catch up with somebody just not to be at the end of the line. By the time we get to Colebrook (about 40 miles into the ride) I've found some other people to ride with. By then (about 930am) two things have happened: (1) it's gotten really warm (2)

there is a really brisk wind blowing right at us out of the south. The wind has a sort of cooling effect but it easily knocks a couple of miles per hour off the riding speed... I'll take a tailwind any day.

There is a nice rest stop in Groveton, and by the time I get there I'm ready for a real stop. I tend to not stay off the bike long enough at the rest stops and it usually causes me pain further down the road. Here I decide to stay off the bike for 20 minutes and drink as much as I can... it is so hot that excessive fluid loss and cramping are a real possibility; there is also still a lot of pollen in the air up here and I can really feel my lungs being mad about breathing all that in hard.



- Groveton Rest Stop -

Groveton to Lancaster is a flat, easy ride along the river... today the wind and heat make it seem a little less easy but it is still not really bad. On to the last rest stop at the intersection of Rts 3 and 135.

The last twenty miles from Lancaster to Littleton on Rt. 135 are really two rides. The first 9 miles are just as pretty a ride as you will ever take... light traffic, scenic road, just sweet, even WITH the wind and heat. The last 10 miles consist of 3 nasty, steep hills made doubly hard because I've already ridden 90 miles and there is nothing left in the tank to attack them with. So, I find the lowest gear I can and fix my eye on my front wheel and keep turning.... Sooner or later the top of each hill gets found.

In between each of the 3 hills there is some flat, even slightly downhill terrain that provides a little recharge time... good thing, I need all I can get... near the top of the

last hill I finally cramp and have to walk it off for a minute or two. Fortunately, after the last hill there is a sweet 3 mile downhill run into Littleton and the Continental 93, home for tonight.

This year they've set up a nice food table and massage tent right in the parking lot; both the food and the rubdown are desperately needed... I'm as beat coming out of this day as I've ever been.

Our biking group acronym is SOGIS – Sweaty Old Guys In Spandex - gets together to shoot the breeze, eat and consume recreational beverages before we get rides over to the fire station for an excellent spaghetti supper. One thing about these rides is that you can pretty much eat as much as you want You burn everything.

At dinner we get warned about tomorrow's weather – promises to be very hot ... 95 at least... other than drinking water and Gatorade in vast quantities there is little you can do to prepare. The only change announced is that tomorrow we'll get on the road at 7am rather than the usual 8am start... trying to "beat the heat" by an hour.

Chris Murch (my roommate on these rides for the last 7 years) and I are sacked out by 9pm... I am really tired from the ride today.

Saturday – Day 2 - Littleton to Laconia – 84 miles

Up at 530... off to the Fire Station for 6am for breakfast... back and suited up and ready to go for 7am... The Littleton Fire Department staff just does an awesome job for us for both Friday night dinner and Saturday AM breakfast... these guys go way out of their way to make everything as nice for us as they can. The "frosting on the cake" is the Fire Truck escorted "bike parade" from the Continental 93 up Main Street thru the center of town and out to the hospital where we head towards Franconia.

Three miles of up hill followed by 17 miles of rolling flats till we head up towards Kinsman Notch ...then 3 miles of reasonable slope followed by 2 miles of hard hill. The rest area at the top of Kinsman is like being at the top of Mt Washington when you get off the bike. The "reward" if you want to call it that is a 7 mile downhill roll into Woodstock that is really a rush... some guys reported hitting speeds in the high 50s headed down the steep parts of this stretch.



- **the view from the rest area at Kinsman Notch** -

Well... it IS as hot as I've seen it on this ride today... the south wind is still blowing and, while it perversely slows you down, it also cools you down (or seems to anyway). For me it is a day to just grind it out... no speed records today... just finishing will be a win.

Rt 3 from Woodstock to Ashland is mostly flat to rolling country... not a lot of traffic either... downtown Plymouth is always a little crazy... there is an extra water stop set up right in the middle of the square there and we need it... Then down 3 to River Road towards New Hampton... nice ride... hot as hell today and I am toast by the time I turn off in front of the New Hampton School and lay in the grass and shade for a few minutes trying to recharge.

The next leg takes Rt 132 to Sanbornton.. kind of a back road, pavement is pretty beat up in some spots, but it is pretty, mostly shaded, and the traffic is mercifully light. It is just getting hotter and hotter by this part of the afternoon and all I want is for this to be done. The last 4 miles up to the Sanbornton Fire Station are a long persistent upgrade... last year I remember it was cloudy and cool and I had "juice" going up this stretch; this year just the opposite... the heat has won and it is just a matter of finding a gear that lets me rotate the sprocket and keep going.

Finally the fire station is in view... they have put a shower sprinkler out in the parking lot and we all ride underneath it grateful for the rush of very cold water running over us. One of the support people gives me a wet towel which I gratefully wrap around

my neck trying to dissipate as much heat as possible. The thermometer at the fire station reads 105 degrees.

I should take a minute and thank Steve Jobs (Ipod) and Steven King (Dark Tower Series) for collectively getting me thru these two days. The Ipod performed admirably for very long periods of time and let me get lost in the book instead of thinking about how hard the ride was going.

It is 10 miles from the Sanbornton Fire Station to the Landmark Hotel in Laconia where we are housed tonite. The road scenery is spectacular until the last couple of miles when you are just on Rt 3 with a ton of traffic and lots of warmth. There are a couple of short tough uphill and some spectacular views and screaming downhill runs.

I think today was harder than yesterday... the combination of 84 miles, the heat, and the cumulative effects of yesterday's ride have almost used me up today. Stow the bike, find a COLD shower, some food and drink and hug an air conditioner. Cooling down helps the healing process a whole lot.

This year some Amherst high school students and their coach raised money and rode. The kids did really well; their coach did too, but she became a bit of a human interest story when she came in a good 90 minutes after I did, obviously struggling with the heat a lot. We literally had to help her off the bike when she pulled in; you have to give a lot of the people who do this ride credit for their toughness on days like today.

Tonite the Laconia Fire Department feeds us roast chicken with all the fixins' ... great meal, great guys... This year's MDA ride was dedicated to a Salem music teacher named Patrick Moeschen who's been stricken with muscular dystrophy. This guy must be a great teacher because he sure was brave and funny; I'm sure the disease is devastating to him but his optimistic view of his own condition and life in general was totally uplifting. Trust me when I tell you that if this ride does nothing else, it absolutely teaches me that if you have your health you have everything. Putting up with a little discomfort on the bike is nothing compared to what folks stricken with MD face. You can read Patrick's bio at <http://www.transnhbikeride.org/> under the dedications section.

After dinner we get some information about this years' fund raising numbers. While we had less than 70 riders this year, we raised over \$90,000 for NHMDA. My pal Steve Patterson raised over \$9,000 this year, an awesome amount. It was Steve that got me hooked on this ride 8 years ago.

The lower number of riders seems to reflect the terrible weather we had all spring... a lot of the "regulars" just didn't get enough training miles in to feel comfortable doing the ride. I was lucky enough to get close to 500 in, which I think is just about the minimum I need in order to be sure of being able to finish.

After the Laconia Fire Department feed, it's become a tradition for a group of us to go over to Hectors restaurant for "mud pie and Guinness" to wrap up the night. Every year it seems that a few more people join the "Hectors parade" ... this year I think we had 24 "mudders" at the table... The nice thing is that Hectors lets us roar in and they reorganize the place to accommodate us no matter how many we bring.

Pretty cool..... A nice ending to a tough day.

Sunday – Day 3 – Laconia to Portsmouth – 63 miles

Sunday is always the “easy” day from a rider’s perspective. The goal is to get us on the road by 7am and to the reception picnic in Portsmouth by 1pm sharp.



-Sunday – getting ready to leave Laconia-

The Laconia Fire Department guys feed us breakfast at the local VFW Hall and then provide us with a Fire Truck escort all the way from the Landmark out to Rt 11. This year we also have maybe 7 or 8 one day riders... the MDA ride now lets folks who want to “try the ride out” raise a lesser amount of money and just do the last leg. It’s maybe a way to get some new blood into the ride.

The first leg of the last day’s ride is an easy 37 mile run from Laconia to Rochester, mostly on Rt 11. Laconia to Alton Bay along the lake provides many great views of Lake Winnepesaukee; Alton Bay to Rochester is a long, flat, fast ride on a nice piece of highway.



-Alton Bay water stop-

Once everybody gets into Rochester the Rochester Fire Department provides us a great escort all the way down to Pickering Road in Gonic, which we follow into Dover, and then on to the Newington Fire Station.

A few miles down Pickering, I'm riding along shooting the breeze with "Iron Mike"; Mike is on my back wheel so I can't see him but we are chatting when all of a sudden I hear a clunk and an "oh s—t" ... Mike apparently hit something in the road that spun his front wheel and down he went... banged the back of his head and drove his helmet into it a little ... he was OK but it was all pretty scary.

I've written about Mike in other installments of this journal... he's from Tamworth and has done the ride the same number of years I have. Mike lives hard, smokes, looks like Charlie Manson, and rides good... and, he's a great guy... I'll never forget last year when his first day tee shirt was dressed out with a "Don't worry - Charlie's still in jail" screen print. He won't wear standard cyclist gear... rides in cut off jeans, tee shirt, a black Harley lid and no bike gloves. It wouldn't be the MDA without Iron Mike.



-The "shower" at Newington-

The Newington Fire Station has a big fire hose hooked up providing a great ice cold shower for the riders... I stow the Ipod and stand under the thing for a good 10 minutes cooling down... awesome. Today is as hot as yesterday but the easier terrain and shorter distance take way less of a toll. And... you know it is over.... A little 5 mile escorted ride through the Pease complex into Portsmouth and then the requisite fire truck escort through town to Four Tree Park out by Strawberry Banke and we are done.

A great post ride get together with family and friends wraps up the day, and my 8th MDA ride.



-At the park in Portsmouth with "Team SOGIS"-

And... it's all because of your generosity and support that I embark on this little lark every year. The money goes to the good cause... the ride generates the attention; the experience is unique... sure, the ride is hard, but it is also fun; I've made new friends from all over the place and experienced something unique with them.

Thanks for making it possible for me to do this ride.