

# SAGA OF THE FOURTH ANNUAL WEST KENTUCKY BIKE TOUR

## SEPTEMBER 21-25, 2005

by *Rod Tompkins*

The West Kentucky Bike Tour (300 miles over five days) departed from Rick Holeman's home at approximately 8:30 on Wednesday morning September 21, 2005. There were six of us in the group; myself, Rick Holeman, Steve Agent, Duc Do, Earl Crowe, and Joe Argabrite. The SAG wagon was packed with fruit, liquids, cookies, luggage and tools. Our first night's destination was Marion. We headed west from Rick's home in Forest Acres through Madisonville to Rose Creek Road and continued west through Nebo and on to Providence and finally Marion where we checked in at Myers' Bed and Breakfast. Rick did a superb job in pre-planning the trip and had excellent accommodations at the end of each day's ride. By the way, Rick had also previously marked the entire 300-mile tour for us.

Myers' B & B is an old two-story house located in downtown Marion with three upstairs guest rooms and two bathrooms for guests. Since Marion is located on the Trans-America bike route that runs coast to coast, the B & B often has bicycle travelers for overnight stays. After unpacking our gear, we headed to Subway for a late lunch. Food was always a high priority during our tour. Returning to the B & B, it was nap time and time to just hang out until supper. There was a swing on the back porch, cats being fed, and the yard being mowed just like an afternoon at home. The older couple that operated the B & B was going about their chores as we watched and rested. It didn't seem very long until we were starting to think about supper. Rick had previously noted a Mexican restaurant a couple of blocks from our lodging and we headed there for supper. Yes, it was an authentic Mexican restaurant located in Marion. The food was outstanding and I experienced my first fried banana dessert. I was informed by the other riders that during a bike tour, you consume a lot of food (fuel for riding) and shouldn't worry about gaining weight. This evening meal was only the beginning of the replenishment of fuel. The next morning breakfast got us off to a great start for our second day. Mrs. Myers fixed a breakfast that would exceed even my mother's breakfasts that I remember from many years ago. We had OJ, coffee, milk, eggs, pancakes, sausage, bacon, biscuits, jams, sorghum, gravy, and more. I am sure I am missing something that was on that table. Mr. Myers joined in the conversation with some insights regarding the local Amish population. That is, he joined in our conversation until Mrs. Myers gave him a dirty look that she needed help in the kitchen.

We left Marion and headed to Eddyville by way of a scenic 58-mile very hilly route. West from Marion to the Ohio River is hill country. We rode some of the same route that I had ridden the previous year on the Hopkins Community Clinic tour and I still get teased about my description of the hills as moderate and rolling. I now better understand what moderate and rolling refer to and it is not the hills west of Marion to the Ohio River. Two of us were riding together engaged in conversation near Carrsville located on the Ohio

River when we met the SAG vehicle heading back toward us and asking where Rick was. We thought Rick was in front of us but apparently we had passed him a few miles back when he pulled his bike off the road because of an upset stomach. We didn't see him since he was off the road and in a grove of trees although he said he whistled at us as we passed on our bikes. He said that we had passed by him in his time of need and left him to the elements. Rick was rescued with assistance from the SAG vehicle and recovered to his own ornery self before the end of the day. We stopped in Salem for lunch at a little diner that had just recently reopened. We got the surprise of our life when the special of the day was clam chowder served in a freshly baked sourdough roll. It was delicious and comparable to the clam chowder served in the best restaurants in America. What a treat in Salem! We continued to Eddyville and checked in a local motel. After a brief rest, ice cream at the local Lic's store and camaraderie among the guys, we once again started thinking about supper. Rick made perfect choices for our lodgings. We were within a few hundred yards of the Willow Pond restaurant, so the choice for the evening meal was easy. After eating another big meal of fish, hush puppies, beans, etc., we retired for another restful night. However, a couple of us had to visit Lic's ice cream shop for another round of ice cream before retiring for the night.

After Eddyville we headed for Grand Rivers by way of a grand tour of Livingston County for another very pleasant daily ride and arrived at the Grand Rivers Inn in early afternoon. The Grand Rivers Inn is another very pleasant lodging establishment. The proprietor is a Hungarian refugee who escaped from her mother country and came to America just prior to the fall of the Communist regime. Obviously we were very curious about her escape from Hungary and asked many questions which she readily answered. Her escape and life story is very interesting and we can share more about her at another time. A couple of the guys went swimming. Unfortunately I didn't even think about packing a swimsuit for the trip. The motel area was comfortable and much laid back. All in all it was a very relaxing visit to Grand Rivers with no hustle or bustle this time of year. I know you are interest so I will tell you that we all packed into Rick's truck and went to the Oasis steak house for our evening meal. Another great pick by Rick. After returning to our motel, you guessed it; we had ice cream at the local Grand Rivers ice cream shop.

We enjoyed another outstanding breakfast on the fourth morning of our ride. We ate at the local bakery and deli next to the bicycle shop in Grand Rivers. The breakfast was comparable to IHOP restaurants, i.e. French toast, pancake, waffles, etc. I highly recommend the establishment if you are in the Grand Rivers area. I keep reminding myself that I have to provide fuel for my body if I plan to ride with the "big boys" on this trip. We left Grand Rivers and headed south on the Trace, the main road on the Land Between the Lakes, to Cadiz. After riding the Trace we turned east on KY 80/US 68 to the bridge crossing Lake Barkley and were missing two riders. After placing a telephone call, we learned that the riders were in the Elk & Bison Prairie area on LBL among a herd of bison with no way back to the highway. Fortunately for them, a vehicle entered the area and they were able to follow the vehicle through the herd of bison. I won't name the riders but I was not on the prairie. On leaving the prairie, the riders noticed a posted sign

stating that bicyclists and motorcyclists were not permitted to enter the fenced-in prairie for their own safety. We waited for our stranded riders at the bridge so we could transport all bikes and riders over the bridge on the vehicle. The bridge is very, very narrow and unsafe for cyclists to cross. After taking the first of our group to the east side of the bridge, I drove the vehicle back across to pick up our wayward wilderness riders. On my way across there was a long line of traffic heading east behind our two buddies riding side-by-side crossing the bridge. Those guys have no fear!

After a rest break on the east side of the bridge we continued on to Cadiz. Our ride took us along the Tennessee state line near Ft. Campbell. In Cadiz, our stay was at a Super 8 motel close to I-24 near the Cracker Barrel. Didn't I say that Rick made good choices for lodging? For our last night on the road, we searched for a pizza place to eat. While looking for a pizza, we passed a local Ferrell's hamburger place. Everyone voted for an appetizer at Ferrell's and we stopped for a sack of hamburgers. We ate our hamburgers and continued to search for a pizza place. Hooray, we located a buffet pizza restaurant that not only served pizza but also had delicious hot wings. When we left that restaurant a couple of hours later, it looked like a squad of soldiers from Fort Campbell just returning from Iraq had eaten their first meal on arriving back in America. The proprietor kept going back to the kitchen to prepare more hot wings for us. What a meal and a way to spend our last night of the tour!

On our last night we watched TV very closely because rain from the Hurricane Rita was moving into western Kentucky. Obviously our concern was that we would be caught in the rain. The next morning we prepared for our ride by going next door to the motel to the Cracker Barrel. You will notice that we always considered the needed fuel for that day's ride. Another great and filling breakfast. The sky was cloudy as we commenced our journey to return to Madisonville. Our little group left Cadiz and headed toward Madisonville for our last day's ride. We made it to Crofton before the rain came. Fortunately the rain was a light rain and we continued to Mannington, Nortonville, Morton's Gap and Madisonville just after noon on the fifth day. The group experienced two flat tires, a couple of weak knees, numerous dogs, a couple of sick stomachs, but all in all a very enjoyable trip with a group of very nice guys who for a few days returned to their youth and experienced a few care-free days on the road.

The tour included a distance of 300 miles and each one of the riders took turns driving the SAG vehicle. All riders arrived home safely and plans have commenced for the tour next year.