



# FREEWHEELER NEWS

*Newsletter of the Morris Area Freewheelers Bicycle Club Special Edition October 31, 2012*

## *Biking with Lili*

### *"From Sea to Shining Sea"*



*Back in the fall of '96 the big six-O was sneaking up on me and Lili asked me if I would like a big party to celebrate this big birthday. Without even thinking I said, "No, let's ride our bikes across the country instead." The words had barely gotten out of my mouth and she said, "OK let's go."*

## THE PREPARATION

There are many ways to go across this country by bicycle. You can go with an organized tour group, who will carry all your stuff, while you ride your regular light bike. You get the camaraderie of a group and can choose to ride with others, or ride by yourself, but you must get to the designated stops when day is done. Accommodations and meals vary greatly, as do the cost of these organized tours. The alternative to going with a group is to go it alone. That could mean self-contained; carrying tent, sleeping bag, cooking gear and of course all your clothes, etc. etc. Or you could just travel by plastic, sleep in motels and run up a huge credit card bill. There are other ways too, but for Lili and me it was an easy choice. We both like to camp, like the freedom and serendipity of being self-contained and certainly did not want to race through this once in a lifetime trip. We wanted the freedom to go where we wanted, when we wanted and to stay as long as we wanted. BUT of course, that meant carrying a lot of stuff. We still had to decide on a route and the direction of travel. I started looking at maps and began talking to biking friends that had done the trip. Most of them had used the routes laid out by the Adventure Cycle Club, located in Missoula, MT. This company started out in 1976 calling themselves Bikecentennial. They try to plan routes on the least busy and most scenic roads they can find, and sell maps that show all the services that a biker might be interested in. They also show elevations and have a brief overview of the area the map covers, giving things like history, type of flora, general riding conditions, etc. They have many routes including (but not limited to) a southern route, a northern and a diagonal. The diagonal is called the Trans America Trail and starts in Yorktown, VA and winds up in Oregon. We decided we liked that one the best, but instead of starting in Yorktown, we would start at our home in Blairstown NJ and meet up with the trail somewhere in central Virginia. That meant of course, that we would be traveling more or less east to west. Hey wait a minute, don't they call them "Prevailing Westerly Winds"? So why travel against nature? Well first off, I'm not too practical, or I would have voted for a supported trip. In my romantic mind's eye, I could see us following the wagon wheel ruts made by pioneers hundreds of years ago. I also thought the snowcapped Rockies were a lofty goal and a sight that I would be sorry to see fading in my rear view mirror, if we were headed east into Kansas. Besides, sometimes the wind does *not* blow from the west..... at least that is what I hoped.....

We then turned our attention to the type of bike we would use. I have a special fondness for tandems, so I started to dream about the advantages of a two-seater. I also knew only too well, their disadvantages, especially for touring with full camping gear. On level or rolling terrain, the power of two with the wind resistance of one, enables a good tandem team to cover a lot more ground than they would on their single bikes. ***But***, because of a tandem's extra weight, on long or steep climbs, after they lose their momentum, a tandem team must spin very low gears and crawl painfully slow to the top. However once pointed downhill again they *really* scream and stopping a fully loaded two-seater with all that weight, is no easy matter. Tandems are highly stressed in some areas and it's often hard to find replacements for broken special parts. And of course, if it's only the two of you on one bike and you pretzel a wheel in the middle of nowhere, you don't have a second bike to ride into the next town for help. A good biker friend sent me a note expressing

his concern about this “lack of transportational redundancy” as he put it. I answered him by saying that of course he was right and I had even considered taking a cell phone along, but had decided against it. This was supposed to be an adventure and it’s the risks and the uncertainties that often lead to adventure. I ended on a euphoric note by saying, tandems are a lot of trouble and hassle, but when everything is right and you are cooking down the road and the miles are flying by, you know it’s all worth it. Maybe in my unrealistic mind I had visions of getting to the west coast so quickly, we would have enough summer to ride back east too. Foolish dreamer that I am.....

We announced our trip plans to more of our biking friends at the holiday parties at the end of ‘96. They were all happy that we had the time to ride off into the sunset for four months, but they all said we were crazy to take a tandem. Too much togetherness, they said. You will hate each other before you get through the first month..... *What do they know, most of them don’t even ride tandems*, I insisted to myself, but in truth I had some questions of my own. For the next couple of months I dreamed and planned, but didn’t really start doing anything constructive until late March. The temperature in my unheated garage was now reasonable and I had gotten over the flu, so I set to work on one of our tandems. Oh yes, in our house there are many bikes, but a lot of them need some degree of work. Fortunately I am something of a bicycle renaissance man and in fact the tandem I was thinking about taking had been built by me, frame and all, back in ‘84. Trouble was that I built it to fit my first wife, a six footer. So I began the process of rebuilding the frame to fit Lili. After a week or so of cutting, fitting, filing, etc. I discovered the rear seat tube had over the years, started to rust out on the inside down at the bottom bracket shell. The whole tube would have to be cut out and replaced with a new one. It would have been easier to scrap that bike and use our much newer aluminum Cannondale tandem. I had always felt that although the ‘dale was a good, strong and fast machine, it was so stiff it beat me to death on long rides. So cut and fit, braze and file, the work on the old steel machine went on. I also replaced the old cantilever brakes with the newer, extremely powerful “V” type brakes. That took more time, because the mounting posts were located differently. Time, time, the work was taking all my time. It was already April and I had done no riding at all, since the previous October. Oh well I’ll just have to get in shape on the trip, I reasoned with my typically faulty logic.

We were planning to leave the first of May. Lili had arranged a leave of absence from her job, I was retired from full time work and my part time job didn’t need me in the summer. Even my dog had a place to stay at my daughter and son-in-law’s. We were all set, just had to try out the completely rebuilt, repainted red white and blue tandem. I dubbed it, **EZ Rider** after Peter Fonda’s starred and striped Harley Davidson chopper. We planned a short shake down, weekend ride. So the panniers were loaded up with everything we would be bringing across the country and the load got bigger and bigger and it slowly began to dawn on me, that two people’s gear on two bikes is a big load, but two people’s gear on one bike is just plain ridiculous!! The final straw that broke the camel’s, or in this case, the tandem’s back, was when we piled the camping gear on top of the rear rack. There was almost an audible groan from the beast, as the tent and two sleeping bags were lashed down. I grabbed the front and the rear handlebars as I stood alongside and shook the beast hard to see what would fall off first. As I shook its handle bars, the long bike began to undulate from end to end. **EZ Rider** was wiggling in such a violent spasm that it was plain to see, it would not live up to its name. I frantically started to rearrange stuff, putting the heavy gear as low as possible, throwing out anything I could bear to part with and lashing everything down as tightly as I could. It didn’t help much, there was just no way were we going to ride this shimmying, unstable bowl of Jell-O anywhere. To say that I felt stupid would be a

big understatement. I had used up all my time trying to make this tandem perfect for the trip and had done absolutely no riding at all!!

It was well into April and we had to once again make a decision. Do we scrap the tandem idea and take our tried and true singles, or should we load up the Cannondale double and see how *it* behaves with the load? *Oh well the Wright brothers' first plane didn't fly either*, I tried to justify my own stubbornness. Once again I burned the midnight oil, checking out, cleaning, greasing, changing gears, brakes, and finally loading our red Double-Dale with all the bags and baggage that was going on this odyssey of ours. With Lili and me onboard, it was at least rideable, or I should say, almost rideable. On the level at a good rate of speed, with some careful steering, I could manage it, but going slowly up hills it veered wildly and would not hold a steady course. The huge load of gear was causing it to sway like a drunken, three legged mule and when we had to pedal hard going up hills, it just got completely out of control and threatened to dive out into traffic. Throughout all my foolish tandem building, Lili was as usual, very supportive and helpful, but now she said, "enough already, let's take the single bikes."

*If truth be told, I must say that knowing what we learned later, we could have easily done it with the tandem. Several years after the cross – country trip we got a "Bob" trailer. As soon as we started using the trailer + front panniers, we had a very stable setup that could easily carry all our gear and everything else we needed. "You live and learn" and although our later trips with the tandem + trailer rig were lots of fun, I am very glad everything wound up the way it did in '97.*

It was then Sunday April 27th. That gave me four days to overhaul our two single bikes and get them all outfitted properly with racks, bags, lights, etc. and then carefully pack everything we wanted to bring. In that time I also had to bring the dog's kennel down to my daughter Wendy's house, cut the grass and do all the endless chores around the house we would be leaving for four months. I began pulling our bikes apart, greasing and adjusting, replacing this and that and the light in the garage burned late, but slowly it began to look like we might still get away on May first. Of course I was a total wreck from all the stupid work I had done, and all the riding I hadn't, but the important thing was, that we were going!!

Tuesday night our good biker buddy Muriel gave us a going away party at her house in Roseland, NJ. Friends came from as far away as Downingtown PA to wish us luck. Five of the people there had already done the transcontinental ride, all from west to east. We talked about the winds and stuff like that. Everyone wished us a safe trip, good weather and told us how much they envied us. There were even some presents to take along. There was a book of dog poems for me from fellow dog parents Ed and Elaine, there were postcard stamps to encourage writing, a folding spoke (no kidding), and some passes for steak dinners at Sizzlers. Most of all, they gave us their love and best wishes. Somehow we had to live up to their expectations. We couldn't let anything defeat us now.

It was technically the first of May when I finally put the light out in the garage and went to bed. Tired though I surely was, sleep would not rescue me from all the thoughts racing around in my head. As I tossed and turned, I worried about endless details! Did I forget something important???? .....?????  
.....??????

Lili and I got up early and listened to the forecast. It was predicting afternoon showers and thunderstorms. Let's try and get away before they start, we both said to each other. But we seemed to be stuck in endless

last minute things that had to be done. Looking for the brand new map case that we knew we had, (but actually never found until a couple of years later). Things like that.

I took good-ol Tober down the hill to Wendy's house and put him in his kennel. He looked up at me with puzzled, worried eyes. He was sadly saying, what did I do wrong boss, please don't leave me here. I'll be a good dog now boss. I'll be a good boy. I filled up his water bowl and told him not to bark too much, don't run away, and don't let those pesky squirrels tease you. He stuck his nose into the chain links and licked my fingers in a last desperate attempt to make me change my mind. I turned around quickly and walked away, while I still could.

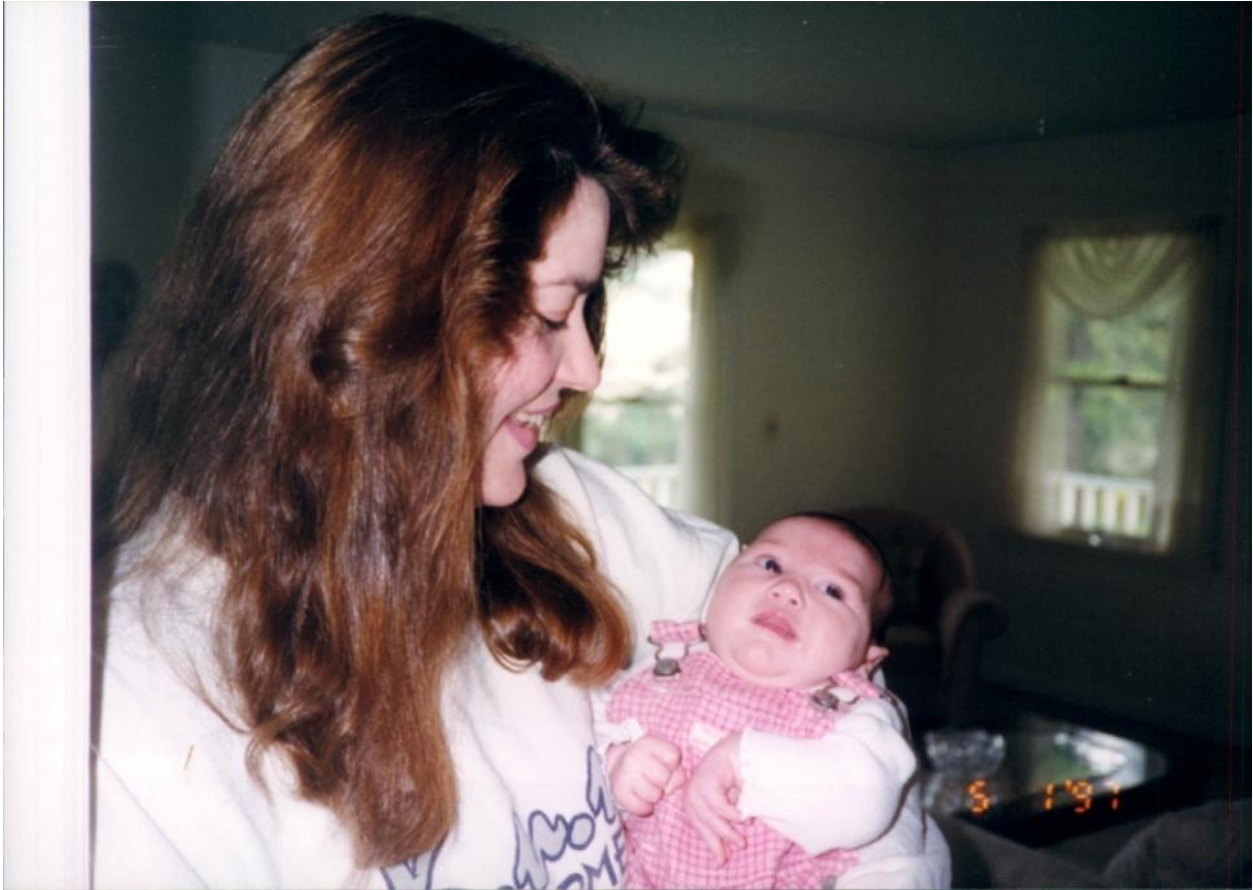
I went back home and added two collapsible fishing poles to the already huge pack. A fly rod and a ultra-light spinning rod, plus an assortment of flies and lures. I also had; two cameras and a small folding tripod, clothes for cold weather, warm weather and wet/windy weather. I had spare parts and all the tools needed to take apart anything on both bikes. I had a tent, a sleeping bag and would you believe a 12lb. air mattress (it filled one entire front pannier) and of course its large pump. (Well I don't like sleeping on the hard ground). Lili's bike didn't have the tent, the air mattress, the tools, the spare parts, the cameras, or fishing stuff, but she had in addition to all of her clothes and personal stuff, the cook stove, the mess kit and the food we would be replenishing daily. She kept all the food and cooking stuff in one bag she called the kitchen and always tried to keep that bag on the shadiest side of her bike. As the official map reader and navigator she had all the maps, books and assorted paper work too. Well, so much for traveling light!

## THE TRIP

### ***May 1<sup>st</sup>. Blairstown, NJ to Pluckemin, NJ 44 miles***

It was going on 2 p.m. when we finally locked up the house. We wheeled the bikes down our steep unpaved driveway just as it started spitting the first few drops of rain. So we put the rain gear on and I looked and felt like the Michelin Man in my billowing yellow rain suit. With quite a little difficulty I swung my leg over the top tube and rolled down our wickedly steep hill to my daughter's driveway. We pedaled back up her equally steep, narrow dirt lane as far as we could and then got off to push the bikes the rest of the way up. I grunted and strained my guts on the 25% hill and said, "I don't know how the hell I'm ever gonna get this thing across the country!" And I definitely was not kidding!!!





Wendy and Steven's place looked like a Victorian dollhouse set in a picture of flowering dogwoods and cherry trees. We went inside and my first and so far only grandchild Haley Rose, smiled and gurgled at us as we gave her mother last minute instructions. Then we went outside and took a farewell picture. Wendy and Haley waved good-bye, Tober barked after us, "don't be gone too long boss." We rolled down the driveway as the light drizzle became a hard rain. At least it washed the tears away..... Our brakes squealed, as we very carefully descended our steep hill with our monster bikes. We rounded the sharp switch back turn always gravelly, now wet and slippery too and I wondered if we weren't just a little crazy to be doing this .....

Riding north on the shoulder of Route 94 splashing through puddles, the tires were hissing along the wet road, thunder was rolling off in the distance and now and then there was a quick flash of lightning over the not too distant hills. We were headed to our friends Ed and Elaine's house in the town of Middlesex a scant 60 miles away. Of course, it was now after 2 o'clock and there were a few good size hills to climb, like Allamuchy and Schooley's Mountains. If the weather didn't stop us, we still had six hours of daylight. We passed the row of gas stations I call gasoline alley and headed up the hill out of our little hometown. I stopped to pick up a nice pair of channel lock pliers I saw laying in the road and then plugged on up the hill.

So now we had done our first climb and found our first road collectable. I was sure there would be a lot of firsts today. We left Blairstown, turned off onto a secondary back road and headed for the proverbial hills.

I noticed it wasn't raining at the moment, but the condensing sweat inside my rain suit was making me wetter than if I were in a tropical downpour. We stopped and took off our sauna suits, but stashed them on top of the load where we could get them quickly. It didn't look like it was done raining by any means. Before we had gone another ten miles, we had the rain suits on and off three times. I checked my watch. It began to look doubtful that we would make it to Ed and Elaine's in daylight. I found it curiously strange to be riding on the back roads we were now on. Normally we rode these same little black top roads on short day rides around the house and buzzed along almost effortlessly up and over hill and dale on our lightweight club racer type machines. Here we were today struggling with our 100/150lb. pack mules, vainly trying to average 10 mph.

It took some careful pacing to climb Allamuchy Mountain without having to stop, but slowly we cleared the top and sailed down into Hackettstown. We breezed quickly through town and started up the south wall out of town called Schooley's Mountain. Silently we climbed, both of us painfully aware of this hill, having been up it many times before. My bike was not handling too well and I knew I was going to have to rearrange some stuff to get the weight lower. No time now, the clock was ticking and it was still a long way to Middlesex. Inch by inch, over the top and down, down, the steep south side. The road on this side has many sharp switchbacks, to make the steep grade possible for cars and trucks to climb in winter. It's fun going down in dry weather with an unloaded bike that handles good, but now the road was wet and the 150lb. moose I was riding, definitely **did not, "handle good"**! By the time we got to the bottom my knuckles were white and my knees were shaking. Then we had to start climbing out of the valley up towards Oldwick. About half way up the next hill, I began to run out of legs and had to stop for a quick break. We had been pushing way too hard for this out of shape, overweight fifty-nine and a half year old. I felt slightly ill. Lili didn't look as bad as I felt. She at least had been doing some riding, while I was spending all my time foolishly working on tandems that we didn't even bring.....

Then the wind started blowing and the leaves on the trees all turned upside down, the way they do when it's getting ready to storm. Lightning split the black sky into countless jagged fragments and a thunderclap crashed immediately after, warning us in no uncertain terms, that it was very, very close. We tried to remember what there was up ahead in the way of delis, cafes or any place we could get in out of this storm that was about to come crashing down on us any second. We couldn't remember anything before the Oldwick country store, still a long way down the road. We sprinted off in that direction, but the ozone laden air smelled like one big electrical fire and I could feel my hair trying to stand up under my helmet. The rain was coming down in a blinding fury. I knew the car drivers were definitely having a hard time seeing us, so we pulled off the road and frantically looked around for some shelter. We spied a little overhang in front of a garage next to a house that appeared to be vacant and quickly pulled the bikes into the overgrown driveway. As we stood under this tiny overhang, we watched the most spectacular display of close-up lightning either of us had ever seen. It wasn't safe to ride of course. If a lightning bolt didn't hit us, a car certainly would have. Thick jagged spikes were crashing continuously all around us, some seeming to strike in the small field right across the street. Stupidly, we stood spell bound, like we were invulnerable or something. We watched in awe for at least an hour. Finally just when it showed signs of letting up, a guy stopped his van and asked, if we needed a lift? We politely declined, but when he offered the use of his cell phone, Lili called down to



Middlesex to our host to explain our late start and the storm that was now finally passing. Ed said he could drive out with his pickup to meet us, but Elaine was out with it and he didn't have any idea when she would be home. We said we would ride on now that the fireworks were over and we would call him later, probably from Pluckemin. We thanked our Good Samaritan for his kindness and he drove off. Little did we realize that we would meet many more kind people like him in the days to come.

*It was about 7 p.m. when we started out again, the rain had stopped, and the sky had become **awesomely dramatic**. We were coasting down a long hill, the water from our wheels fanning out in big rooster tails behind us. The freshly washed air had that romantic, delightfully sweet aroma of spring and our tires hissed over the cool wet blacktop. We were heading into the most dramatic, gorgeous, deep purple, velvet sky, I have ever seen in my life. I glanced back over my shoulder and saw that the flaming sunset had painted the western sky, a hundred shades of red, orange and gold. Droplets of water were a myriad of shimmering lights on every tree branch and every blade of grass in that direction. I yelled to Lili to look and pointed back with my outstretched arm. She responded by pointing up to the huge rainbow I hadn't even yet seen. It arced over the road like a magnificent banner saying..... **WELCOME BIKERS***

At Pluckemin we headed to the McDonald's and called Ed again. Elaine was still not home from the wake she was attending, but since it was now too dark to ride safely Ed said, why not wait there for him to drive us the ten or fifteen miles into trafficky Middlesex. I was surprised at how good that sounded to me. I'm the kind of diehard nut that has to do e.f.i.\* all the time, every time and now here we were starting off across the whole continent and what do we do on the first day? We wimp out and get picked up by a truck! It was disgusting; embarrassing and unheard of for me, a veteran of two ultra-marathons in France where all night riding, [with lights of course] is *de rigueur*.

I realized I hadn't eaten anything in a long time, so I ordered a bunch of Mickey junk to drown my sorrows. Ed picked us up just before the joint closed at 10. While we were stuffing our bikes into his truck we broke my rearview mirror and that gave me something to direct my anger at. But of course, I was really angry at myself, for what I perceived at the time to be wimping out. I didn't realize until later, how exhausted and emotionally drained I really was. Lili on the other hand, was relieved to be free of the e.f.i. burden and without even trying to, she by her good example, made me realize what a stupid immature ego I have. I hoped some of her goodness would rub off on me on this trip. Even as I thought that, my bad self was thinking..... well we really don't officially start until tomorrow, when we dip our rear wheels into the Atlantic. After that, it's e.f.i.\*all the way. We fell into bed and I was asleep immediately if not sooner.

\* e.f.i. every f---'n inch

### **May 2<sup>nd</sup>. Middlesex, NJ to Sea Bright, NJ to Browntown, NJ - 81 miles, Total trip miles 125**

I arose to a bright sunny day and found Elaine had already said good-bye to Lili and gone off to work. I felt almost guilty to have the opportunity to be doing this trip, but quiet fears of what might be ahead, kept me from feeling too guilty. Ed made us some toasted bagels and then we dragged our bags out to the backyard where our mules stood cable-locked to the picnic table. We mounted up the front and rear panniers, and the bag that was on top of the front rack and then piled on the tent and the sleeping bag over the rear rack, and bungeed everything down. Then after a few minor adjustments to the load, we were off through the streets of

Middlesex, with Ed leading the way on his titanium 20lb. stripped down, racing bike. He guided us to a route that would get us down to the Jersey shore on the quietest roads possible. That's not to say they weren't busy roads, they were just the lesser of the evils (most of the time anyway). One thing I noticed right away was that we had a good tail wind and that made the sunny day even nicer. Tail winds, even relatively mild ones, do miraculous things for a bicycle rider. On a level road, the biker's main obstacle is air resistance. The effort to go through the air increases dramatically, as either speed or head wind increases. But with a nice brisk tail wind you enjoy the sensation of flying along. At first it seems that you are just riding stronger, and that this will be the way it always will be. You are finally biking the way you think you should, and it's a grand feeling. But as soon as the tables are turned it's a rude come-down. Today we were enjoying the push of a brisk ten or fifteen mile per hour breeze and it helped to raise our already high spirits, even higher.

Ed kept looking over at our overloaded bikes as he coasted alongside of us with his naked titanium racer. He had a sort of dreamy, faraway look in his eyes. Finally we started kidding him by suggesting a "Hello Elaine, see you in September, call." It was kind of a mean tease I guess, but Ed laughed and kept dragging out that line every half hour or so, all morning. After about the fourth time I heard him say it, I started to wonder if there was some "truth to his jest."

Ed steered us to a little cafe in Jamesburg and said he wanted to buy us a real breakfast. I got the two eggs, two sausage, two pancakes, two bacons, two everything special. We kidded around some more until we were done eating and it was time to go. Ed faced his bike back toward Middlesex and we faced down toward the Jersey shore. *Then **we** said*, see you in September Ed. He wished us good luck and headed back home. As we pedaled away I felt strangely lonely. We were leaving all our friends to head out into this great big, sometimes dangerous country. I couldn't help it, but I felt just a little apprehensive. I also badly missed not having a rear view mirror to keep a watchful eye on the herds of iron monsters that were passing us, sometimes only inches away.

We hadn't gone far when we fortuitously passed a bike store. I yelled to Lili to pull in and we went in and I got a new mirror. The young guy who waited on us, wanted to know where we were headed and when we told him, he had a look that plainly said; those two old farts can't really be doing this. He followed us outside and when he saw our bikes with the mountains of gear, he seemed satisfied that we did at least, intend **to try** to do what we had said.

It felt good to be able to watch my back again. The nasty iron beasts were their usual unfriendly, aggressive, mean-spirited selves, but the route Lili had us on was as good as it gets around there. When I was a kid, this area still had sand dunes and salt grass. Now it's mostly gas stations, pizza joints and used car lots, but as we got further east, I started seeing a little sand between the road and the sidewalks. I started having subconscious delusions, that we were a couple of baby sea turtles, that had just been hatched on the beach and were scrambling madly down to the sea, to escape the predatory iron monsters. There was just too much squeezing and shoving and pushing and speeding, by too many people in too many stinkin' cars and trucks.

I followed close behind Lili, as if to defend her as we ran the gauntlet. Her gear was piled up so high on her rear rack, it listed badly to one side and threatened to fall over any second. I yelled to her that she was falling apart and she pulled over to bungee things on more securely. We started off again, but her bags still leaned over like some kind of a drunken sailor. There was just too much stuff, piled on top of too much other stuff, that was piled on top of too much original stuff.

*Then we breezed into Rumson and the scene changed dramatically from used car lots and the stink of civilization's fast food joints, gas stations, etc., to the bucolic, sedate and beautiful estates of the wealthy. The magnificent stately homes stood majestically looking out over the Shrewsbury and all had lovely flowering shrubs and mature shade trees gracing their wide flawless lawns. With the wind still at our backs, we sailed down through Rumson and over the bridge to Sea Bright. All at once, the air smelled of salt and we could hear the sound of the surf just behind the breakwater across the road. We first went to the store and picked up some lunch sandwiches and then headed over to the public beach. It was weirdly devoid of people! It was the calm before the summer vacation storm, when migrating herds of humanity would descend on the "Joisey-shore", to completely blanket the beach with bodies of every shape and size. Today we had almost the whole beach to ourselves, as if we were on some remote island. On any other day it would have been a magnificent, perfect day to be here. But today of all days, in my fragile, somewhat apprehensive, pre-ordeal, mental state, my brain automatically seized and devoured this awesomely, magnificent soul food! It was to me, deeply inspiring, way beyond any superlative words I know and far more spiritual than any man-made cathedral, I've ever been in. We sat on some benches that looked out over the sea and ate our lunch and spoke to a professor from Brookdale College. Lili and I talked of places we had biked over the years and found he had visited many of the same places as us, some on the other side of this big pond we were looking at. He was most intrigued by the journey we were now just beginning. He was a nice guy, so we took his address and promised to write when we got to the other ocean. Then Lili in her own special "Lili" way, took the postcards she had purchased across the street and ceremoniously dipped them into the Atlantic, to send out as announcements of the official start of our odyssey. It was then time to do the obligatory wheel dipping ceremony. Not such an easy task considering the immense loads on our mules and the wide, soft deep sand beach that separated us from the sea. Finally after much struggling we reached the water and turned our bikes to anoint our rear wheels. Looking up, we saw we had drawn some curious onlookers. They offered to take our picture when we told them what we were starting off to do. After a few snaps, with both of our two cameras for insurance, we struggled off the beach, shook off the sand, mounted our monster bikes and headed west into the afternoon sun.*

## **WESTWARD HO !**

Our immediate destination was not all that far west. Actually, we were headed to Browntown, only 30 miles inland to our friends Barbara and Gary. We crossed back over the bridge to Rumson and found our way down to another bridge to cross the Navesink River. This put us on a new route on a beautiful winding and surprisingly hilly road. We struggled upward and onward being constantly reminded by the sinking sun, that we had said we would be there for dinner. Now that we were heading more or less west, the wind was not our friend anymore and we had to push much harder to make miles. Five o'clock came and went and when it got to be six we pulled up in a schoolyard to check the map for the umpteenth time and try to figure our e.t.a. Then Lili, the great communicator, called Barb to say we would be there around seven. Barb said no problem, supper would hold, and gave us a clear route to take. Quarter to seven we biked onto their street and saw Gary and Barb standing outside waiting for us. We had done by my odometer 81 miles, on our second day out and I was more than a little tired, but seeing Barb and Gary and being greeted so warmly made me feel like a new man. Barb is a real fun person and Lili and I had fond memories of our recent trip to Ireland with her and about ten other club members. After stabling our mounts in the garage where Barb and Gary's bikes live and checking out their Cannondale tandem the same size and color as our Double Dale, we went in the house. Our gracious

hosts provided wonderful hot showers for us and then we sat and drank wine as we joked about my tandem fiascoes and the rest of our shaky start. Barb then served a great Italian dinner and we carbed up on pasta and bread until we were stuffed. Then we got to see some pictures of their recent ski trip to Chamonix France. It was great to be here visiting our biking friends as we started out on this epic [for us] journey, but I thought I sometimes sensed a little concern about the realities of our undertaking. Gary is a truck driver and as such, knows full well the hazards of the open road. We did in fact crash, but only on the pull out bed in the living room. We slept as only very tired, well-fed, happy, contented bicyclists can sleep.

***May 3<sup>rd</sup>. Browntown, NJ to Bulls Island, NJ - 55 miles, Total trip miles 180***

Rain!! If yesterday was truly beautiful and it was, today had to be called ugly. But how can it be an ugly day if you are free and alive and starting out on such a glorious adventure? We put on the billowing yellow rain suits that made me look and feel like an inflated balloon. I was hoping we would not be mistaken for a runaway float from the Macy's Thanksgiving Day parade. Gary had some yellow rubber booties that he had to use in the event he ever had a hazardous spill with his truck. He gave us a couple of pairs to take along, so we put them on to complete the comical outfit. We reluctantly said goodbye and thanks for everything and then a splashed off into the gloom and cold wet rain. Barb insisted on biking along with us, at least till we got to Route 9. She didn't even have a rain suit on and we had only gone a few blocks and she was soaked to the bone. But, Barb being the kind of person that she is, was laughing through her chattering teeth as she kissed us goodbye and we pedaled across busy Route 9. Again I felt the pangs of parting and the weird mixed emotions. Our friends had been so great that I almost didn't want to be going away from them. Maybe I felt guilty, or was I really scared? It was hard for me to understand, but somehow I felt we were giving a lot for this trip. We were leaving the comforts of home and hearth. We were out here riding in heavy traffic through freezing cold rain. We were putting our lives at no small risk and it damn well, better be worth it!!

Lili plotted our course through the maze of urban Middlesex County and somehow got us up through the noise and confusion. After several hours of me not recognizing any of the roads or towns we went through, we turned onto familiar, but busy Route 518. Too busy for me to like it, even in good weather, but in this pouring rain, definitely not a good place to be on a bicycle. We slogged along on broken shoulders and mostly no shoulders at all, as myriads of cars hissed by. The beasts all had their lights on and I'm sure most of them thought we were out of our minds to be on "their" road, especially in this kind of weather!

We decided to take a break at Rocky Hill and pulled into a pizza joint in one of the many shopping centers we passed. It was noisy with kids, but it was dry and warm and smelled like the kind of mega calories I needed to fuel my shivering and stressed out body. While we ate, we sucked in the warmth and the comfort of the place and I recorded the events of the last day and a half on the pocket tape machine I carried. Then back out into the cold, cruel, wet world and busy 518west.

Slowly.....Ever.....Soooooo.....Slowly, we started to pull away from the shopping malls, the asphalt parking lots, the concrete and crush that is overpopulated NJ and started seeing fields that still were without buildings, or man-made ugliness. It is this western frontier that has the little, winding, shady blacktop roads that we love to bike. It is here that I run my dogs through fields for pheasants and it's here where I fish in fast flowing brooks for trout. But this face of the state has shrunk drastically since I was a kid. Then the farms and

fields were right in Manhattan's shadow. That's when NJ got its nickname "the Garden State." I grew up about 20 miles from New York City and on a clear day, could see the Empire State Building from my bedroom window, but after school, I worked on a farm down the end of my street. It was a 40 acre farm that grew horseradish, and was plowed by mules instead of tractors, and there were a lot more little farms like it all around. Now the farms are gone far and wide and condos and high-rise apartments and shopping malls have sprouted up in the old farm fields. People crowd and squeeze in buildings upon buildings, towns upon towns, and progress oozes and spreads like an ugly oil slick on a beautiful lake. So, as we biked further west and started to see the things that I love, I started to feel better. Stress started to slowly leave and a more-peaceful, but still watchful mode, started to take me along. We coasted down off the Hunterdon Plateau and started up the Delaware River Valley on the lovely wide shoulder of Route 29. And now that we were almost done riding for the day, the rain stopped! The sun came out and we were cooking in our rubber suits, so we stopped and shed them for the eight mile ride up north to our island camp.

We reached Bull's Island, wheeled in off Route 29 and crossed a small bridge that goes over an old canal lock. The D&L canal was once a busy shipping route before the railroads and trucks made it obsolete a hundred years ago. It doesn't take too much imagination though, to see the heavily loaded barges being pulled along by mules and hear the bargemen and lock tenders yelling out. We pedaled under a green canopy on the tree-lined path and pulled up to the camp office to register. All around us, everywhere we looked, there was beauty bursting out into the sunshine. I had an immediate urge to take pictures, the first since our wheel dipping ceremony back in Sea Bright. There were many giant sycamore trees shining silver in the sunshine and dogwoods flowering and huge fragrant old long needle pines. Everything had a freshly washed sparkle and raindrops twinkled like trillions of Christmas lights in the treetops. The path we had ridden in on, led up to a magnificent old pedestrian bridge that spanned in a graceful arc to Pennsylvania. It was all ornate ironwork in the high Victorian style of days long gone and the river flowed under its span proud and strong. Upstream was a low wing dam that formed a huge V of rushing water from shore to shore. I watched two shad fisherman who were up to the tops of their chest waders, in the fast current below the wing on our side. The shad that were in the river were returning from the sea to travel up to the headwaters of the Delaware to spawn in the stream of their birth. For many long years the lower Delaware was so choked with pollution the shad couldn't get up through it to reach their spawning grounds. But thanks to the EPA and many dollars spent, the river once again has this annual migration of determined shad. I mused silently, that we would need shad like determination tomorrow, to get our heavily laden bikes over the looming mountain, glaring down at us from Pennsylvania. There would be hundreds of mountains just as big and many more lots bigger in the next few months.... It was better not to think too much about it....

*Lili came out of the park office and we rode off to find our designated campsite. The dirt path went first along the canal where ducks and geese were swimming in noisy profusion. Then the path turned and we headed across the island to the riverside. We pedaled along the little dirt path through shafts of sunlight, surrounded by verdant green ferns and found our idyllic campsite. We pitched our little green tent right on the soft sandy bank of the river and then sat at our picnic bench trying to drink in all the beauty at our doorstep. The Pennsylvania Mountain that was looking back at us was all sunshine and springtime with pinks and yellows and greens of many shades. The dogwoods and wild cherries, especially, were at their most magnificent joyful selves and the big D sparkled and rolled on by us, before plunging over the wing dam just downstream. I tried as hard as I could to drink it all in and fill up my whole body with the beauty we were in. It was not just for the moment, but I was trying to store it up for the inevitable times when the road gets bad. Indeed much of this day was a real*

*trial and if it weren't for rewards like this, I'm sure I would never be able to deal with the bad stuff. Oh, of course we could have come here in a nice dry car and seen the same things, but for me it would not have been anywhere near the same. I suppose it has something to do with the fact that you work so hard getting to the top of the mountain, that the beauty you get to see is all the more magnificent. Your senses fill up with everything around and you feel like you are part of life, not just an isolated occupant of a car passing through.*

*Across the wide river, we could see some lovely old stone houses nestled in amongst the pastel spring blossoms and a few boats motored lazily by trolling for shad. As Lili prepared supper, a platoon of ducks waddled over and stood in front of us noisily demanding that we feed them, as so many others probably had done. They were obnoxiously spoiled, but almost irresistibly cute. I walked behind the tent to visit a tree and lo and behold there was one sitting on her nest. We hadn't even seen her as we set up the tent only ten feet away. She was so quiet and motionless all hunkered down on her nest, that she became invisible in spite of her whiteness. We ate our first camp meal of spaghetti, cleaned up the dishes and then as the sun disappeared over the mountain, Lili went off to find a phone. It was dark and I was suddenly very tired, so I crawled into the tent, pulled off all my clothes and stretched out butt naked on our lovely four-inch thick air mattress. It felt sinfully good! It occurred to me that in spite of already riding 180 miles and being on the road three, or at least two and a half days, we were only sixty miles from our house. Of course we had been to the ocean and dipped our wheels and visited with friends, but just the same, it was sure the long- hard way to get where we were. I heard the Delaware rushing over the dam and I heard the pitter patter of a few new rain drops on the tent six inches over my head and I fell into a deep catatonic trance.*

*The next sound that I heard was the tent door being unzipped and it woke me up with a start. Lili crawled in quickly to get out of the rain. She had walked all the way down to the road and had spoken not only with her own son Lee, but had called and talked to my son in law Steven too. They both have birthdays on May 3. She also called our friends Dan and Carol who were meeting us tomorrow. I felt like such an inactive, lazy bum for not going with her to the phone. It wasn't right for me to let her go traipsing around in the dark like that either, but if I were to say that to her, I know she would be indignant. Lili is just going to be a hard person for me to live up to, I thought as I kissed her and fell deeply asleep.....*

#### **May 4<sup>th</sup>. Bulls Island, NJ to Downingtown, PA - 60 miles, Total trip miles 240**

We woke to the same mono-sound that had lulled us to sleep. It was the powerful roar of water rushing to find the sea. It was bursting free again, after being restrained, if only briefly by the dam. But halleluja, there were no rain drops, only bright sunbeams coming in to warm our little green tent. Looking out I saw the ducks were already waddling back and forth in their picket line, three or four feet in front of us. They kept looking over at the tent door and were grumbling, "Will you lazy humans come out here and give us something to eat already!!" We crawled out and staggered to our feet, cautiously stretching this way and that to see if there was any serious body damage. There seemed to be just the normal aches and pains one gets after a hard ride, especially if one is an out of shape fifty-nine year old. While I broke camp and packed up, Lili fixed breakfast. We ate our cereal and fruit, looked around to see if we had picked up everything and left the place clean and neat, and then headed down the trail to the footbridge. We stopped at the old rusty hand pump and after priming it, pumped up some good tasting water for our bottles. Then a final stop at the bathrooms, a nice warm water wash up and out to do battle with the mountains of PA. We rode down past the incessantly

roaring wing dam and then lugged, pushed, and cursed our beasts up the entrance stairs to the old fancy iron pedestrian bridge. The sun was now high over our Island. We looked back and thought, what a lovely place we had chosen for our first camp. As densely populated that it is, New Jersey still has some very lovely places.

We walked across the bridge toward our destiny in PA, snapping some pictures along the way. Then we headed north up the river, past the centuries old stone houses that we had admired from our tent. When we got to the road Lili had chosen to go over the mountain on, we headed our pack mules up. It looked like a very, very serious climb. Except for our breathing we pedaled quietly and apprehensively, conserving our strength for the wall that we were, in spite of Sir Isaac's law, somehow slowly ascending. It was hard, but not as hard as I had feared. I know it usually isn't and that's why it doesn't pay to waste energy worrying over hills you haven't gotten to yet. You should save it for the real work, anyway if all else fails, you can always walk. We made it up slow and steady and tried to head for Route 113. Finding no direct way to get on 113, we got on 513 and tried to ride its narrow shoulder. We hadn't gone far when it became obvious that 513 was filled almost bumper to bumper with Sunday morning traffic heading to nearby Lake Noxamixen. To make it even worse, narrow 513 had almost no shoulder to ride and every other car and truck was towing a big wide boat. After a mile or two, we gave it up and turned around and headed in a different direction. It wasn't the direction we wanted to be going, but at least it wasn't filled with boat traffic.

We stopped several times to look for things in our bags. Since we had not yet memorized the contents of each bag, it meant searching through all the bags before the article sought after was finally located, usually in the very last place it could possibly be. We started off again and I decided my chain had become dry from all the rain yesterday, I realized I should have taken care of it last night or this morning, but now we had to stop and spend more time searching the bags for the chain oil and this time spent stopping was really starting to add up. Even though we had left camp at nine fifteen, with the slow climb up the mountain and all the stops, we had ridden only twenty miles and that was not all in the direction we wanted to be going either. It was now about noontime and we were late. The plan was, we were supposed to meet Dan and Carol in Phoenixville on Route 113, but we just couldn't seem to get there from where we were. We started up Route 202 and found we had to go north away from our destination to get to the elusive 113. It seemed Countyline Road, although in the wrong direction, would at least get us there, but then it changed into frightening Route 309. 309 was a horrible high speed, limited access road, with a crummy shoulder, filled with broken glass, potholes and parts of crashed cars. After a mile or so we pulled up and dismounted, then carefully turned the bikes around as murderous cars and trucks speed by at supersonic speed. They all no doubt, had some very important place to be, considering it was Sunday afternoon. We walked back against traffic on the glass-strewn shoulder. We went all the way back to a side road with a traffic light. We didn't exactly know where this road would take us, but it couldn't be as bad as 309. We followed it for about ten miles and wonder of wonders came out on 113. And 113 even had a good shoulder and we had a real good tailwind too!! For the first time today we started to make time. In fact we were flying, but we were also two hours late to meet our friends. In the next hour and a quarter we did another twenty miles and as we cleared a steep hill finally saw Dan and Carol riding towards us. They were a sight for our sore eyes and we were sure glad they hadn't given up on us. They were of course starting to get quite concerned that we were so late and wanted to know what took us so long.

I wanted to stop for something to eat as we hadn't had anything since breakfast and we had ridden hard and it was now getting to be late afternoon. In short, I needed to get some food in me, or I wasn't going to make it back to Dan and Carol's house in Downingtown. So Lili rode off with Carol, and Dan and I went into the

McDonald's in Phoenixville and I had a milkshake. In the food line I started talking to a guy that had done the Trans America Trail, back in '76 and as if that wasn't a coincidence enough, before we left, I met another guy who didn't know the first guy, but had also biked the trail. I thought that might have some meaning or message, but I couldn't figure what it was. Anyway it was kind of spooky.

Dan and I left and started back down 113. It seemed to me to be very hilly and Dan wasn't going any too slow either. On the downs, I would try to get as much momentum going as I could and then kill myself trying to stay with him as he floated up to each new summit on his unloaded, lighter than air, Litespeed titanium racing bike. [The same kind of bike that our friend Ed had on our 2nd day out of Middlesex]. Why does he think I can do this, I wondered to myself, as I frantically tried not to drop too far back. I was just about to cry uncle when we finally got to Downingtown and cruised into Dan's neighborhood. I was whipped to within an inch of total exhaustion. To make matters worse, Lili and Carol had taken the longer back road way, had gotten to the house long before us and were as fresh as daisies. I thought to myself, there are many lessons here, but if I haven't learned them by now, I probably never will.

After a nice supper we started to assess some of our various body and bike startup ailments and found there were indeed quite a few. Lili had developed a severe blister on her butt, my right wrist was very painful (from old injuries) and I was becoming concerned about the drive chain of my bike. All of these things considered, we decided to accept Dan and Carol's gracious invitation to spend a day resting up, patching butts and fixing bikes. My bike actually was working pretty well now; it was the future I was concerned with. I realized, even before we left home, that my chain had a lot of miles on it and needed to be replaced. The problem was that a new chain would not match the badly worn teeth, of the gears on my rear wheel. What happens if you put a new chain on a worn gear cluster is, the chain skips over the worn teeth and you wind up lurching toward the top tube. (Ouch!!) The ordinary thing to do is replace both chain and cogs when they are both worn. The reason I hadn't done it was that the hub I was using was an old obsolete six speed Dura Ace freehub. The parts for this dinosaur (actually, then only about six years old) were not easily available, if at all. Bicycle technology had already gone to 7, 8, and 9 (now 10 or even more) cogs on the rear hubs. I would have to relace my wheel with a newer hub. A 7speed would be the maximum that could be made to work in the space that my old Cannondale 6 speed frame had, and even that would require some juggling. So our good friend Dan decided to take the day off from work and drive me around to bike stores to get the parts I needed. If it weren't that Lili's rear end needed patching and rest, I think I would not have done anything about my bike. I reasoned while it *might* go all the way, if it didn't, it could be a lot harder to find parts later on. As far as my wrist went, I would just try and baby it and thought it should get better if I was careful to keep changing hand positions and tried to keep as much weight off as possible.

### **May 5<sup>th</sup>. Downingtown, PA rest day**

We woke, ate and hopped in Dan's car for a tour of all the bike stores in a twenty five mile radius. There were a lot of them, but not one of them could come up with a hub that had the right configuration. It is not all that surprising if you know the technical whys and wherefores. There is a tremendous lack of interchangeability in the parts of high tech, multispeed bikes. As far as my hub went, it had to be no more than 130 millimeters between the locknuts, and since my 5 speed frame only measured 128mm even 130 would need a spacing washer removed. This is not too good a deal, since removing spacers makes it necessary to build more offset or



dish into the wheel and this compromises the strength of the wheel. But short of buying a new bike frame, that's what I would have to do. The cassette needed a wide range of gears or cogs, from very low to quite high, to deal with the wide range of pedaling conditions. In this case, cogs from 12 teeth for downhills and tailwinds, to 32 teeth for mountain climbing. Of course it also had to have the same number of spoke holes as the rim (in my case 36). A lot of the newer bikes have only 32 holes, but that is not enough spokes for all the weight I was carrying. In fact I probably would have been better off with 40 or even 48 spokes on the rear, but then the parts are even harder to find. So after visiting no less than ten bike shops for the better part of the day, the best we could come up with was a used Shimano 7speed cassette hub and a new 7speed cassette, of a more limited range than my present 6speed. In other words I now had less of a high gear and worse yet, less of a low. But the very worst thing was that, although Shimano makes many good to excellent grades of hubs, this one was the bottom grade, designed for cheap department store type bikes. The day was waning and I thought I had already taken way too much of Dan's generosity, so I said it'll do. Little did I know, how much I would come to regret that decision!!!!(Years later, I regretted it even more, when I accidentally found out {from reading Sheldon Brown} that that my old Dura Ace 6 speed had reversible cogs! Yikes! I could have simply turned the cogs around and they would have been good as new! That may be the only cassette you can do that with! Who knew???? Not me, back in '97.....)

We got back to the house and I tore the bike apart; off with the wheel, off with the tire and tube, and one by one, out with 36 spokes. After dinner it was back to the garage to lace the wheel with the new/old hub. Next problem; after tightening and carefully truing the wheel, the spokes on the freewheel side were now too long. It was because, as I said earlier, I had to dish the wheel a little to make it centered, that I now had spokes ready to puncture my tube the first chance they got. "Oh Dan, do you have a file?" Nope, so off to the store. Not many open now, but Dan and Carol drove me and Lili to every place they could think of to find me a file. No luck, in spite of Dan's mighty efforts, we didn't come home with any files! Back in the garage, I opened Dan's toolbox and the first tool I saw right on top, was a nice big sharp file!

I was still out in the garage working, it was after midnight and everyone else had gone to bed. I finally got it all back together, washed up and slipped into bed next to Lili who was busily or should I say blissfully, sawing wood.

### **May 6<sup>th</sup>. Downingtown, PA to Holtville, PA – 43 miles, Total trip miles 283**

Dan and Carol had gone off to work and Lili and I luxuriated in the comfort of the guest bed. The sun was streaming in the window most encouragingly, so we finally, rolled out of bed and started packing our panniers. After a bite to eat, we saddled up the pack mules and I immediately found that the rear tire now rubbed the fender. I tried to realign the fender, but there just wasn't enough room any more, to give clearance. I was not really in any mood to fool with it, so I ripped off the bags again, pulled off the wheel and then removed the fender. After putting the wheel and bags and tent and sleeping bag and the rest of the baggage back on, I test rode it in the driveway and up and down the street out front. It seemed fine, so we left the fender together with the rest of my discarded parts in the garage. We wrote Dan and Carol a heartfelt thank you note, locked their door and started off once again. We rode down to the center of town and passed the first bike store that Dan had taken me to. Was that only yesterday? I was already starting to lose any sense of time. It seemed like so many things had gone by since we had been to that store.

We hadn't even gotten out of town when Lili brushed a curb with her pannier and fell. She was only going about 2 mph, so there was no harm done, but if she had fallen in front of a car (and there **was** a lot of car traffic), it would not have been so inconsequential.

About 8 miles west out of Downingtown the nice day turned fiercely windy, the sky became black and it looked like a tornado could come roaring right down the road at us any minute. We pulled over to talk over our plan and a guy walked up with a concerned look on his face. He told us there was gonna be a big storm and we better take cover. Up the road about a half a mile on the other side, we could see the ubiquitous golden arches beckoning. In a sudden cloud splitting downpour we dashed up to the side of the best looking Mickey D's I had ever seen in my life!

We sat and nursed food and drinks for two hours. Outside thunder and lightning crashed and ripped and rain came down in a blinding fury, but we sat warm and dry and talked to mothers and their kids about our trip. We were sitting right next to the noisy kids' jungle gym / social club / hang-out for moms. Whatever, we were sure glad Mickey was there when we needed him.

Just as suddenly as it started, it stopped raining and the sun came gloriously back out. We said goodbye to the kids and moms we had been talking to and went back out to face the world with a full belly and renewed hope. What we found immediately, was the rain had stopped, but the wind continued to howl. Right in our faces!! We struggled for every inch we covered and riding stopped being a series of hard ups and easy downs, to something that was constantly hard. It blew right at us with such unrelenting force, we made only pitiful headway against it. We were now getting into the Amish farm country and I wanted very much to look at the immaculate vast farms of this area. All I could do was keep my head down, stay on the drops and struggle. Sometimes we had all we could do to maintain enough forward speed to keep our balance. With all our bags and gear piled high, we were in effect, very badly designed sailboats and most of the time, to use a nautical term, we were in "IRONS"! When we were climbing real steep hills we were slightly sheltered, but as soon as we got near the crest, a blast would come whistling through and damn near knock us off the bike. We battled and battled and battled, till at last our route made a turn onto 372.

*All at once we were in a peaceful sheltered valley with tall sycamore trees. It was an amazing difference, a total relief and we staggered to a stop, to rest and have some food. Fighting that hellish wind for three hours, we had burned up all the Mickey D calories and then some. With trembling legs we walked over to a little stone bridge and sat down. As we ate our peanut butter/apple sandwiches, the Amish people rode by in their buggies, and we greatly enjoyed the beauty of the farm we were near. The big fields were being plowed with giant teams of magnificent horses. They were all very large, awesomely powerful, with sweat glistened, rippling muscles. The drivers stood on the plow, leaning back against the reins, white collared shirt tucked into black Amish pants, as beautiful a picture as I've ever seen. I wanted very much to photograph them, but I had the feeling these people were very tired of being the objects of picture takers like me, so I elected to just paste a mental picture, in the album of my mind.*

We continued on and stopped next in Quarryville to pick up groceries for supper and breakfast. While Lili shopped, I sat outside and watched bikes, although that seemed totally unnecessary in this peaceful little community. I watched the strange combination of people and vehicles. Brand spankin' new SUV's parked next to the horse drawn buggies of the Amish and I wondered about the compatibility of it all. Lili came out and we packed up the food and headed to our campground. The wind had subsided to a more tolerable level and we

enjoyed the nine miles to Holtwood, although I was definitely dragging, especially on the hills. We found Muddy Run Park and paid our fee at the gate and located the site we had been assigned. This park run by PECO Power Company had spacious sites, the rest rooms were heated, the dogwoods were in full bloom and we had the place pretty much to ourselves to enjoy. But the wind had beaten us to a pulp and after supper and wash up; we crashed into our little green tent. I was too whipped to look around much.

***May 7<sup>th</sup>. Holtville, PA to Codorus State Park - 54 miles, Total trip miles 337***

We left the misleading stillness and peacefulness of the campground hollow and started off toward Gettysburg. As we crossed the mighty Susquehanna on a high bridge, the wind started up at us again with even more fury than yesterday! It came at us with such blasting force, that we could barely maintain any forward momentum at all. As we were struggling up one of a hundred short, steep hills at three mph, a gust pushed Lili off the road and she sort of jumped, or rolled off her over loaded bike, so she wouldn't be in the path of a car at least. There were not a whole lot of cars, but enough to make it scary on this narrow road we were being blown around on. Again no damage done, but I feared our luck might not be so good the next time. In a desperate effort to defeat the wind, we changed routes and direction a few times, but when we got on the smaller roads the hills became unbelievably steep. They were so steep we were afraid of breaking bike or body!! We had to walk quite a few.....

Around three P.M. we found ourselves in Stewartstown. We were very tired and hungry, so I pulled into a Substation. Lili said she was going to get something in the grocery across the street and to order her a ----- ---. When it was finally my turn to order, they couldn't make what she wanted, or I wasn't quite sure what she had said, so I didn't order her anything. The place had gotten surprisingly crowded and Lili was understandably ticked off, when she returned and I hadn't ordered her anything at all. But the fact was, we were both bone tired and suffering from low blood sugar [the bonk] and I couldn't deal with a simple decision, like what kind of a sandwich I should order her for instance.

We got out the map and agonized over where to go, but finally after much hemming and hawing, we decided to head for Codorus State Park, which is where we had intended to go in the beginning. It was only seventeen miles away, but at that point it might just as well been seventeen hundred, tired as I was! When we started riding again, Lili was very quiet. I think she was probably as tired as me, but she was adamantly denying that the wind was bothering her. It sure as hell, was bothering me! Actually it was a combination of the wind and the many very steep hills we had done. We both had to walk at least six of the steepest. Since Lili was riding in toe clips and cleats, that meant changing her shoes every time, so she could push her monster bike up the almost vertical grades without slipping.

After riding around what looked like a hilltop suburban neighborhood, we finally came to the park. It was quite late in the day and we had only done fifty four miles, but I felt like I had been beaten up and left to die by the side of the road. We were too tired to cook, so we ate instant mashed potatoes, made with hot water from the bathroom sink in the ladies room and liberally covered with butter. Yumm!

***May 8<sup>th</sup>. Codorus Park, PA to Gambrill State Park, Frederick, MD - 58 miles, Total trip miles 395***

We woke up late to a bright sunny day, still feeling mostly like we had been brutally mugged. The good news was that my wrist wasn't hurting too bad and Lili's butt blister had almost healed up. What I really felt was complete weakness! No strength at all and the last thing in the world that I wanted to do, was go back out there and fight that howling wind again!! It was still out of the west, blowing hard and strong right from where we wanted to go! Half-jokingly and half serious, I suggested we take a plane to the west coast and let the wind push us all the way back east across the continent !!!!

We decided to change course and head south. Even though we were only a few miles from Gettysburg we decided to skip it..... It would be easy for us to visit there some other time. I was ready to do anything to get out of this hellish wind-torture. The huge oversized panniers on my boat were giant sails, pushing me backwards, like some evil mean spirited giant was playing with me, before he stomped me to death or something. The thought of crossing the entire continent, against the prevailing westerly winds that I had so casually underestimated, had become a bad dream.....a nightmare in fact!!!!!! This isn't supposed to be a contest, or any kind of a test. This is supposed to be fun.....

*Out on our new "southern course" the wind was only from the side. It was still fierce, but infinitely better (at the moment) than what we had been fighting the past two days. We also decided to go to Hanover for breakfast, but somehow got twisted up and got on the wrong road. It was a pretty busy road, but at least it had a nice wide shoulder. The best thing about it was, there was no head wind and so we were biking along at a steady twelve mph. Not bad for us! It wasn't a tail wind of course, but it sure beat the hell out of what we had since Downingtown. Before we knew it, we were almost out of Pennsylvania. Since we never got our Hanover breakfast we stopped in Littlestown for lunch at the Road Kill Cafe. We kidded with the waitress and a nice young family in the next booth. It turned out that he was a young dentist in town, enjoying his day off by taking his wife and two beautiful young kids out for lunch. They wished us a safe trip and left, but he came back in and handed Lili and me toothbrushes. He said he didn't want us to neglect our teeth while we were doing this cross country trip of ours. I can't describe how happy that little gesture made us feel. We rode down the road with a full belly and renewed spirit. I thought to myself, they ought to call Littlestown, Friendly Little Town, U.S.A. I also began to realize that biking doesn't just make me appreciate the beauty of trees and flowers, it makes me appreciate the beauty of human kindness even more .....*

*I was beginning to feel slightly bipolar though. From the head wind torture, "depth of despair", to the high brought on by a simple act of human kindness! My emotions were strong and as quick to change as the direction of the wind.*

We left PA and dropped down into Maryland, our third state! Twenty miles later we were hungry and tired again and this time decided for the sake of economy, to just make some peanut butter sandwiches. We pulled into a grammar school yard and sat on a log next to the school driveway. As we ate and rested up a bit, we heard the school bell ring and watched the kids as they came out in orderly lines and got on their respective buses. I don't believe I have ever seen a group of such well-behaved young kids. It looked more like military academy discipline, than any thing I ever saw in a regular public school. I wondered about the pros and cons of so much control. There are obviously both(for the kids at least).

Back in the saddle after lunch #2, we continued to buzz on down 194. Through Taneytown, Ladiesburg, Woodsboro, Wakersville and a throng of others, then a right turn onto Route 26 through Frederick. Then we almost doubled back on ourselves and headed up Route 40 to the northwest. Not only was it going the wrong

way, Route 40 was heading up the side of the Appalachian Mountains as well. But our chosen camp site awaited, so upward we struggled and by the time we pulled into the State Park I was whipped again. Shortly after we arrived it started raining lightly, but there was a *nice little shelter* under which Lili cooked us a *nice little stew*. A group of young car campers came in and set up their two tents right next to us, (even though the large park was almost empty) They consisted of two giggling young women, one sort of on his own young man, and two nondescript dogs. They all spent a lot of time running back and forth to their cars, which were parked out on the road, 30 or 40 yards away. Eventually they came under the little shelter our sites shared, to eat. Although they sat only 5 or 6 feet from us, our conversation was strained by the miles of our age difference and even though we tried to be friendly, they pretty much shied away. They did ask us a little about where we were going, but our answer didn't seem to be comprehensible to them. The girls finally crawled into their tent and the guy into his, all with vast quantities of junk food for entertainment. I don't know where the dogs went. It was a cold, damp, windy night, but our little tent was fairly snug. We went to sleep dreaming of nice sunshine for the morning.

### **May 9<sup>th</sup>. Gambrill State Park, MD to C&O Canal Park, MD - 28 miles, Total trip miles 423**

Instead of sun we got fog and drizzle. We finally rolled out and ate breakfast. I had my usual cold uncooked oatmeal, which left me shivering in the dampness, but Lili came to the rescue with some nice grilled cheeses for us both. We could not seem to even think about breaking camp. As long as the tent was standing we had a place to be fairly dry in, but once we took it down, we would be out in the cold wet cruel world. We procrastinated, read maps and then procrastinated some more. We kept looking out to see if the rain was stopping and napped while we waited. Finally we crawled out and decided to face the world, rain or no rain. The other tents were gone. We knew they had a wet night and had moved into their cars before morning. The strange thing was, they had left a sleeping bag and two jackets behind out in the rain. Was it because they departed in a hurry to get to some warm food joint? Or did they just throw in the towel and give up camping for good? Lili hung their stuff under the shelter, but we don't know if they ever returned. We packed up our own wet tent and after a little lunch, left Gambrill State Park to face the rest of the climb up Route 40. It was a very late start, but at least we were moving again.

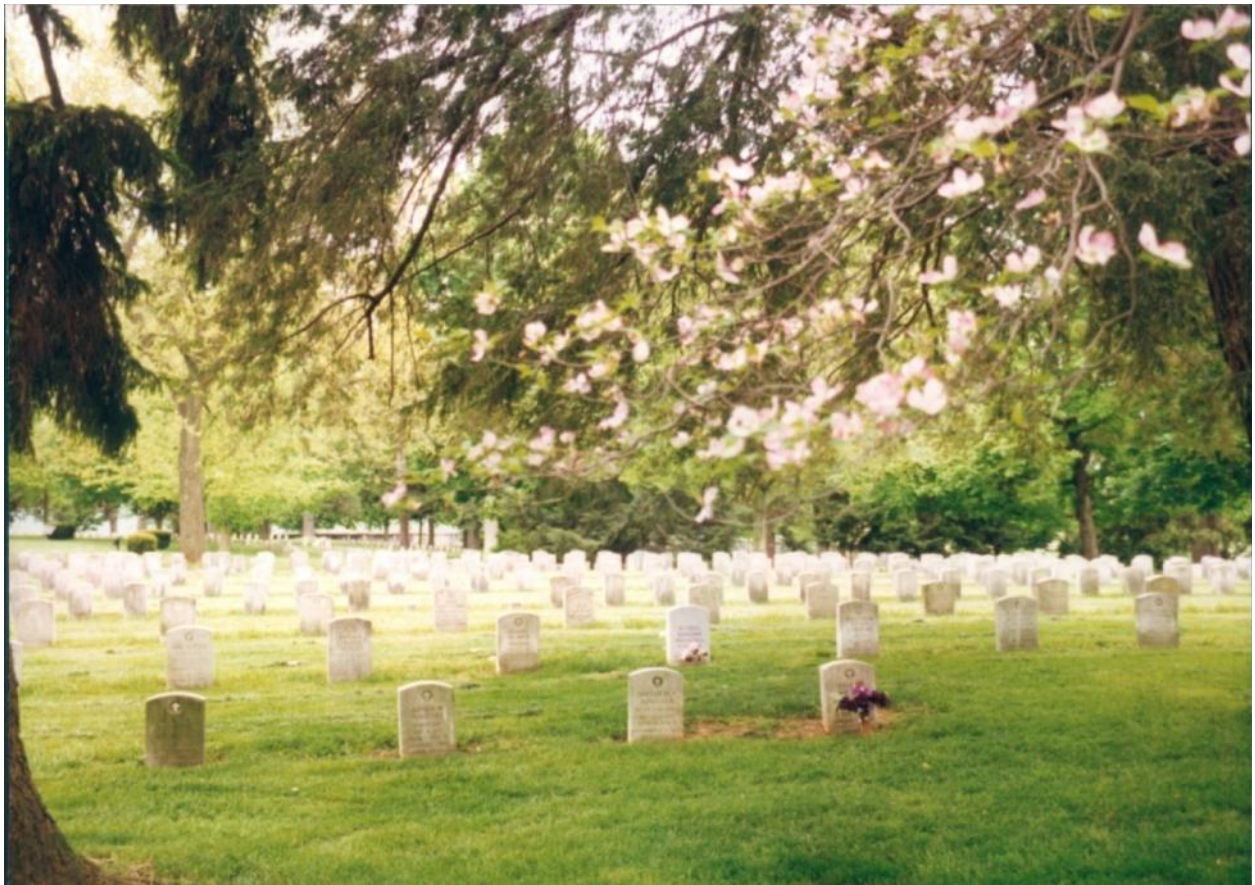
During our map reading session back in the camp, we had decided to skip Skyline Drive and head down the Shenandoah Valley. The reason was, that we knew services at this time of year would not be good on the Drive and that would force us into long days that we just weren't able to do. In my original plans I had us doing 70 or more miles a day by now and climbing mountains like they were mole hills. What a sad awakening. Good thing we were not under any time constraints.

We climbed up the long grade of Route 40 and just as we got to the top of the first rise, my rear tire went suddenly flat. Laying the bike on its side, we were able to pull off the rear wheel (it's always the rear) without removing all the bags. I quickly saw that the valve had pulled out of the tube, and put a new tube in. Probably not enough air, I scolded myself for not checking it, while we wasted all that time back in camp this morning. The rest of the mountain was a series of many hard climbs and false summits. This continued for many miles up and up, until we passed the Appalachian Trail. Then we made a sharp left turn and started down and down

a very steep road called Boonsboro Mountain Road. [Route 66] It angled back toward the side of the mountain that we had, for the last hour and a half today and probably almost an hour yesterday been fighting like mad dogs to climb! It seemed to me a total waste of time and an even worse waste of our very limited strength. Yet we both had studied the map and neither one of us had noticed the folly of our course. We did not stop in Boonsboro. I suppose it has some very interesting stories to tell about Daniel, but I guess I was feeling dumb about wasting all that time, climbing a mountain only to fly back down the same side. We just rolled right on through little Boonsboro and then turned south on Route 34. We hadn't gone far on 34 when we passed the Antietam National Cemetery. We had skipped Gettysburg and rolled through Boonsboro, but now it was time to, **start - stopping**. After all, what's the sense of biking across the country, if you don't stop to see anything?

Even though we were finally rolling along nicely, we pulled in and parked the mules.

*The rain had now gone away and the sky was properly dramatic for this moving, heavy place! Shafts of sunlight filtered through the cherry trees and a veil of pink petals blanketed the ground in silent somber splendor. Husbands, fathers, sons, brothers, old and young lay beneath the silent tragic rows of weathered headstones. I had feelings of extreme sadness and frustration at humanity's ignorance. Thoughts of: What have we learned? How far have we come? Here and there were statues of what they looked like before they were cut down by the thousands in the very fields that surrounded us. I read a bronze of Lincoln's Gettysburg Address; "that these dead shall not have died in vain" .....If you listened closely, you could hear the soft wind say "amen" .....*



Before we left Antietam Cemetery, Lili called the park service to find out if the camp at the C&O Canal was open. A woman ranger told her indeed it was and gave her directions. We rolled on down Route 34 for a few miles, then turned off the main road and followed a small lane down a steep hill toward the river. Then back up along the canal a few more miles to where the campground was supposed to be. We passed a picnic table and a porta-john, but no campground that we could see. After riding all the way out to the next road we asked some riders that were coming down the tow path if they knew where the camp was. Of course, the entire campground was the table and the plastic john we had seen! I guess I was just expecting too much.....

After setting up the tent and unloading my bags, I took a look at my bike. It had been acting real squirrely for the last few miles. I couldn't believe how loose the spokes in the rear wheel had become. We had ridden less than 200 miles since I built the wheel in Downingtown and here it was totally loose and falling apart! I am not a novice wheel builder. For over forty years I've built dozens of wheels for all types of riding, from feather weight racing, to loaded tandem touring and never had a problem..... *Well I did remember that there was trouble when I tightened the spokes in Downingtown, because they were a little long on the drive side. Maybe because of that, I just didn't tighten them enough. I sure as hell thought they were good when we left.....* I argued back and forth with myself. Well anyway, I turned the bike upside down, removed the tire and began tightening and carefully truing the wheel. This time I really tightened those spokes good and put thread locking compound on them to be sure they would stay that way. There were a few that poked their nasty little threads through the nipples and I didn't have any good way to deal with that, having left Dan's big file back in his tool box. I finally just covered the offenders with some of Lili's butt moleskin. That should keep them from puncturing the tube for a little while, until we can get some correct length spokes I thought. The next problem I encountered was that the brake caliper did not have enough reach, that is to say, the brake shoes even when slid all the way to the bottom of the slots, still came too close to the tire. Lili looked over at this latest dilemma on my mule and came up with an idea that I hadn't even considered. Just put the caliper on the other side of the bridge, she said. I sort of had my doubts about why that should help, but I switched it around to the other side of the cross-member and lo and behold it worked. I figured the mounting hole was not drilled perpendicular to the wheel axle, but what-ever, it worked OK. I put the bags back on and gave it a brief road test and decided that most of the bike's problem was that my huge load was swaying around too much, putting tremendous side strain on the wheel. I took some of the extra bungee cords we were carrying and strapped them tightly around the giant rear panniers to keep them from swaying so much. That seemed to be a slight improvement, so I turned my attention to supper and batting mosquitoes, which were starting to descend on us in thick clouds. We actually were camped in the old canal bed, a sort of low lying grassy ditch. There were a lot of puddles all around and the Potomac River flowed slowly by on the other side of the towpath. It was obvious we wouldn't be sitting around too long tonight. We ate our spaghetti as quick as we could, cleaned up and dove into our little green tent. After exterminating the mosquitoes that had managed to sneak in with us, we fell into our usual catatonic sleep.

**May 10<sup>th</sup>. C&O Canal Park, MD to Hayfield Motel, VA - 45 miles, Total trip miles 468**

We ate a skimpy breakfast, because we were almost out of food and then broke camp, packed up the mules and headed back down the road we came in on. There were now three other tents further down the old canal bed and four dogs were having a great time playing dog tag. The first hill we grunted up was a real gut wrencher (Lili walked). The steep little climb took us out of the river valley, back to 34 where we immediately

crossed over the Potomac to Shepherdstown WV, our next new state. We found a *little* crowded cafe and had a *big* sit down breakfast: eggs, sausages, three pancakes, etc. If I was going to be able to motor this truck of mine, I needed plenty of fuel. So I tanked up and I left happier, but certainly no lighter. It's a vicious cycle, I thought; I need to eat a lot to be able to ride, but then as the trip goes on, I'll get fatter and need even more food. At that rate, I won't be able to get over the Rockies on a Harley!

On the suggestion of two women in Betty's café, we found a country road out of town called Leetown Road. It rolled along through the West Virginia countryside just like the song....., but unfortunately it eventually rolled into Route 51 which was **not** the kind of West Virginia road John Denver was singing about. We were also slug'n it out against a head wind again. Life was not easy, but we hit Route 45 and it turned south and that helped, even though it started off a little busy. As we entered Virginia the road became very pretty with lovely views of the Shenandoah.

We came into a little valley where there was a general store and Lili and I had hot chocolate and talked to the lady owner and at her suggestion went down to the Hatfield Motel, approximately 20 miles or so from where we were, to wind up with a total day of 48. Tomorrow we're going to try for 60 miles to end up at New Market Battlefield above Harrisonburg. I forgot to mention that today had, besides the head wind, a serious amount of climbing. There was one hill especially that I can think of. We climbed out of Inwood on 251 up along a hill that was a mile long, anyway and then we turned on Route 45 and went downhill very steep quite a ways. So all day long it was climbing and take the coats off and then reach the top and put the coats back on, because it was too cold and sprinkling rain to leave them off. Even down into the Shenandoah Valley area we we're still hitting hills.

We had a brief look at a real redneck today. As we coasted by Tom's market near Winchester, a young man wearing camouflage army fatigues, while getting out of his camo pickup told us, "Y'll best be real careful out there, cause some good- ol- boys be drivin' like they got places to be..... Hear?" It was not meant as a friendly warning.

### ***May 11<sup>th</sup>. Hayfield Motel to New Market Battlefield - 68 miles, Total trip miles 536***

We packed up our stuff inside the motel and were on the road at 8:50, or so. This was a rather tawdry motel with the gray yellow haze of cigarette smoke stinkin' up the joint and the signs of sin all over, but for us it was a bit of heaven. Compared to the rigors of camping, the warm shower and soft bed were four star. If we were in a car we would have passed up this joint in a heartbeat and would have gone to a better one, but on a long bike trip, it was almost heaven.

We started down Route 600, which except for the wind in our faces was a beautiful back country road. The hills were short, but constant. You sort of went up and you went right down and then you went up and you went right back down again. Some of them were quite sharp, although not real long. At one point we had to turn off Route 600 and go east on 55 and that had quite a severe hill over a hogback mountain. Then we picked up the back road again, I believe it was 623, and followed it right on down the edge of the Shenandoah Valley. I say edge, because that road was up on the side of one the ridges that frames the valley and it hit every little side hill along the entire ridge. The beautiful views of the valley made it well worth the exertion, but we didn't make a lot of miles. We also had to stop three or four times to eat including a picnic lunch at the boarded up



Mt. Olive Church. After we ate the wind roared us to sleep right there on our picnic blanket. I slept soundly for about an hour and woke up to find a tick crawling on my neck, luckily *before* he bit me.

We started off down Route 11 toward New Market Battlefield with too much car traffic. Just south of town we found a private campground with a pretty nice layout, except that garbage was burning some place, stinkin' up the whole joint. Anyway, this trip has been very hard. Today I guess we did about 68 miles and I am really, really tired. Who knows what tomorrow will be like. It will get better eventually, I know!

***May 12<sup>th</sup>. New Market Battlefield to Verona VA - 38 miles, Total trip miles 574***

Today we only rode 38 miles, almost entirely on Route 11, right down through the center of the valley. Mostly the hills were rather gentle to start with. Coming into Harrisonburg there were some *little* bumps, but they weren't really too bad. However the wind was our nemesis again and it blew at us directly in our faces coming from the south! After the first hour that we were on the bike, I stopped and looked at the odometer and it only read 8 miles and that was riding at a steady hard effort on a pretty flat road. To ride any more than 10 miles at a time was very difficult, because you had to stop and rest and so it was not an easy day, even though we only did 38 miles. We had started around 12 o'clock, because we were sitting around writing post cards and what not, so that was a big part of the trouble. However we also stopped in Harrisonburg for a Burger King lunch and then went up to the mall and bought some more tapes for my recorder and then we proceeded on down the road towards Staunton. When we got to Verona, the town right before Staunton, we saw a sign for a campground. It was on the side road, uphill of course. We weren't too sure, quite how far UP the hill it was and we were pretty tired at this point, so we were just about to go up to somebody's house in the development there to ask, but I rode on a bit ahead and saw the sign for the KOA. Before reaching the camp, we went down another hill that we knew we would have to climb again tomorrow morning to get back to Route 11.

We met a guy at the camp office who said he had crewed two RAAM bike races across the country. He and his wife were touring in a Winnebago type camper, towing their car which had two mountain bikes on its roof. They had sold their house down in Texas and were traveling all over the country camping full time. They seemed like nice people and they knew a lot about biking. They wanted us to go to dinner with them, but we had already started cooking our camp meal and hadn't showered yet.

Well, this KOA campground is \$22 a night, which is kind of ridiculous just for tent space. For just a couple of bucks more we could have had a cheap motel room with a bed. But Lili wouldn't like a motel as much as a campground and we wouldn't have met these people either and so that's one of the problems.

***May 13<sup>th</sup>. Verona, VA to Natural Bridge, VA - 69 miles, Total trip miles 643***

A very strange and bad day actually. We left the KOA and climbed the steep hill out of the camp and by the time we got to the top, the light rain that we had woken up to, had turned to real rain, so we suited up and went over the hill to Route 11. We rode down 11 looking for a place to get some breakfast, but found nothing worth stopping for, so we made a right turn up a steep hill on 252. As we went out of town, 252 became a newly surfaced road and quite nice. We stopped at Woodrow Wilson's birthplace for a few minutes and then continued on out of town. We rode along in the rain and started to wind down the valley and saw a store on

the left side about five miles out of town. We stopped there and bought some food and sat in front of the store underneath the overhang. The delivery guy asked if we wanted a ride and the store owner was talking about the weather and asking about our trip across the country.

Then after we had eaten, we continued on down this beautiful winding country road. There were hills, but not real steep hills, no head winds and the rain really wasn't a problem. Then my rear tire blew out with a loud bang! I walked up alongside of a church to change it. At first I didn't see the cause of the blowout, but then I saw where the tire had blown out right along the rim. Probably just too much stress on the tire, too much weight, and it was a folding tire anyway, of dubious quality. It just probably couldn't handle the combined weight of bike, baggage and rider. Something like 350lb! But by far the worst thing I found was that the wheel was falling apart again, the spokes were all loosened up. Spokes were being sawed in half from going back and forth. I replaced some and tightened the rest, but knew it was just a temporary fix. I needed to get the right length spokes and that was that. There was a general store across the road and they had a little lunch room off to the side with tables that were populated by the local farmers having coffee. The tables were close together and I couldn't help hearing the conversation from the table next to us.

1<sup>st</sup> Guy: Me and Jeberiah been out buying trucks!

2<sup>nd</sup> Guy: Wal how many did you buy?

1<sup>st</sup> Guy: Two!

2<sup>nd</sup> Guy: Oh.

Anyway, that's the kind of local humor that was going on while we were eating our hillbilly hoagie. Then we finished and went outside looking for the bathroom. It was an outhouse, behind the store.

We got back on the bikes and headed down 252 and it would have been just glorious riding even in the rain, except that my rear wheel was in such bad shape. I was afraid to put any pressure on going up hills, or afraid to go downhill at anything but a snail's pace for fear it might collapse. We were at that point about 25 miles outside of Lexington, VA which we wanted to get to, to find a bike store. So we kept on plugging and finally crossed the interstate, then went on towards Lexington on Route 11. We found the bike store on Main St, but he didn't have anything in the way of spokes and his tires were K-Mart specials. We bought one anyway for \$16 and were outside packing it up, when a local guy came along and told us that we had passed another bike store back on Washington St. We went back down there and found it was being "manned" by two young college girls, who didn't know the first thing about bike parts. I helped them look through their supply of spokes and happened to come across a box of WheelSmith 14gauge in 292 length and that's what I thought I needed. We asked them where there was a nearby motel and they said on the edge of town, but we must have flown right past it. We didn't find it, so we kept on riding down Route 11 toward Natural Bridge. We finally came to an interchange on 81 and found a Budget motel which reportedly had a restaurant next to it, but it was closed. So Lili walked down to the gas station and got sandwiches and brought them back while I pulled the wheel apart. The outcome of the whole thing was that the 292s were too short. Although I did manage to lace the freewheel side, the spokes barely engaged the nipples. On the non-drive side, the only thing I could do was lace them 2-cross to make them long enough. That side seems like it will work, but the drive side will be a problem. The plan for today is to try to make the next town which is Daleville about 8 miles outside of Roanoke. We hope my wheel will hold up, but if it doesn't, maybe Lili will go ahead or whatever. That's part of

the adventure. So we actually rode 69 miles today and it would have been a very, very nice day with easy terrain, the light rain stopping in the afternoon, such beautiful roads and gorgeous scenery, no head wind and all that would have been really great, except.....we had bike trouble. It always seems to be one thing or another, body trouble, bike trouble, or head winds.

**May 14<sup>th</sup>. Natural Bridge to Roanoke, VA - 49 miles, Total trip miles 692. Hard to believe on Paris-Brest-Paris, I've done this much in three days.**

Since the spokes were too short I knew I had to find a bike store that had the right size, or my wheel was doomed to failure. We called a bike store on our route, but found the phone had been disconnected, so obviously they were out of business, or pretty much out of business. Then Lili called this place in Roanoke, twenty miles off our route and yes they did have 14gauge, DT spokes the exact length I wanted. They were open till 7, so we had very little pressure on us to get down to their place.

We saddled up about 10:30, stayed on 11 down to Natural Bridge and then got off on some side roads that paralleled I-81. We didn't stop in any of Buchanan's numerous burger joints and thought we would ride for another hour and then stop for a peanut butter and jelly. I weakened at 12 o'clock when a little grocery store appeared and it looked like it was going to rain any minute anyway. While we were outside eating our stuff, it did begin to rain lightly, so we suited up, finished eating and then continued on down our lovely little road. *We wound around, over hill and dale and through some quiet little backwater towns like Litha, Spec and Nace. There was a pretty little creek laughing alongside us for a while, and we rolled along through this lovely little piece of Virginia country side, oblivious to the rest of the world, until our quiet peaceful lane dumped us back out onto Route 11, in the center of Troutville.*

We started towards Roanoke, about 11-12 miles down and came to the intersection of Route 220 that the bike store was on. It looked like a busy road without any shoulder, so we decided to go down 11 further to find a better road to our big bike store. Looking at a map later we could see where we went in a great big circle, which cut off about two miles of 220 and we were surprised to find that we had missed a lovely wide shoulder on 220. Once we got on it we made very good time, mostly downhill into Roanoke. BUT two and a half miles before the bike store, the shoulder abruptly ended and turned into gravel! It was really soft, not even rideable and the truck and car traffic was so murderously wicked and so it was impossible to get out on the road at all. So we tried to ride up through the mud and debris on the soft shoulder with this ugly, very, very busy traffic roaring past us on the left. We finally got down to where the bike store was and had quite a long wait for a break in traffic. It was a nightmarish place to be caught trying to lug our over loaded 125-150 pound monster bikes across murderous traffic. We finally got over to this very modern, complete and large Schwinn shop. They had no problem giving me the correct length spokes that I wanted, 294mm, 14gauge, and they also had a 7 speed cassette body for \$19.95, so I bought one of those too, and then we started looking for motels, so I could rebuild my bike again. At that point, the road had no shoulder at all, so we started riding on the sidewalk, which was interrupted quite frequently by crosswalks. At each side street we had to get off the bike, get down to the cross streets and dodge major, major traffic coming from all directions. We finally got down to what looked like the center of Roanoke and there was a Days Inn, a Howard Johnson and all the rest of the motley crew that make up the motel cities of the US. We started knocking on doors asking how much, and some wanted 75 dollars a night, \$65 and there was one place \$39.95, and so we were headed for that when we saw

an Econo Lodge. We went in there and it was the same price, so we got off the nasty road and out of the nasty rain and got a room in the Econo Lodge. We cleaned up first and went next door to a Sizzler type place and had a steak, Came back, tore the bike apart, found the front wheel hub was pretty dirty, thought that's what might be making the noise, took the hub all apart, put clean grease in it, and then pulled the back wheel apart, took the spokes out again for the third time, on this trip! at least now I had the correct length spokes.....

**May 15<sup>th</sup>. Roanoke, VA to Christiansburg, VA - 49 miles, Total trip miles 741**

Got started from the motel in Roanoke at 10:30 this morning and saw that beautiful St. Andrews Cathedral and decided to go over there and take a close look at it and take some pictures. It's a Gothic cathedral, up on top of a big hill. We went over there and took three or four pictures and then got going through back roads and I spotted an old 55 Ford pickup truck. "Best reasonable offer" phone number is 362-9166 and I may call the guy. Now we're going through Salem and we're about ready to start climbing up the mountain toward Catawba on Route 311. It's actually going to go over the steepest part of the Appalachians, so we're going to have a hell of a climb.

So the bear went over the mountain, or I should say, the bears went over the mountain and stopped a couple of times on the way. It **WAS** a hell of a climb and the cars and trucks all passed us with a vengeance, so it wasn't too much fun either. Coming down the other side was much shorter than climbing up the eastern side. *We got into Catawba, which only had a Post Office and one little store, that we didn't bother going in. Then we got back on the trail, 785 to Blacksburg. It's a gorgeous road and the hills are close to both sides of the road. They're very steep, pointy hills on top, and the pastures that go up the sides of the hills, only go about a third of the way or so, and there are cows grazing in the pastures, and there's a neat little brook winding through, that we're having a sandwich by. The place is gorgeous, the wind is blowing and the sound of the wind drowns out the sound of the brook unfortunately. We're about to get back on our bikes and get going down into the wind again, but wind or no wind, 785 going down towards Blacksburg has got to be the most beautiful road I've ever been on in the United States. It is simply gorgeous to ride between Brush Mountain and Paris Mountain and the Roanoke River, which is nothing but a little creek that flows along down through the middle of the valley. 785 is a little black top road, newly surfaced and just drop-dead beautiful. Well, there are a few little ups and downs, but basically it's pretty tame compared to what we've seen so far. The surrounding mountains are very high, very steep, and scenic beyond my writing ability to describe. This has got to be one of the prettiest places I've seen in my travels. Farther south, it says Bicycles Only in great big letters and it's about 4:30 now and we're beginning to see other recreational bikers who are getting out of work. Their day is over at work and they're out on their bicycles. We were passed by a tandem, and of course, all these bikes are unloaded, and they don't pay too much attention to us, since we're on the Transamerica trail and everybody around here has seen loaded bicycles many times before. We stopped again in Blacksburg and had a short bite at a picnic table in front of the general store and then proceeded on down toward Christiansburg.* The people were returning from work and in a hurry to get home and were being very obnoxious the way they passed us, and there were a lot of close calls with cars and bikes and what not. Anyway at Christiansburg, we headed to something called Interstate Campground and we're back on 11 and even though my odometer says 49 miles, the signpost says only 29 miles back to Roanoke, so obviously we didn't take the fastest way. At any rate this campground is very sparse and we're the only tent here. The rest of the people are all trailer people, who live here all the time. I haven't been to the bathrooms yet, but Lili says they're pretty nice. Anyway, it's only 9 dollars, so it'll do for tonight.

Waffles in the morning at the Waffle House. Our little side trip to Roanoke only added 20 miles to our journey. A most interesting thing is, that to get to this campground, we had to double back east on 11 and so at that point we had a tail wind and even though it was in some places a slight climb and the road was grungy and all, it felt really great to go with the wind for a change.

***May 16<sup>th</sup>. Christiansburg, VA to Wytheville, VA- 58 miles, Total trip miles 799***

Woke up to the usual wind tunnel blast down Route 11, coming right at us. We went over to the Waffle House for breakfast and the discussion last night was whether we should quit this stupid into the wind trip and fly out west and ride back, or what the hell we should do, but I guess the answer was, that we should plod on ahead, maybe the wind will die down a little, or maybe it won't, but Lili is a total optimist, probably a Pollyanna and she says that we'll make it. But the wind is so strong today that when we came out of the Waffle House, it almost knocked me off my feet! No kidd'n! We rode down the shoulder of miserable Route 11 into Christiansburg and it was very, very, busy, with the interchanges from I-81. Down in the center of town we stopped at a food store and picked up a couple of rolls of film and some bread and so forth, then headed on down, until we hit our small route road, which was 666. We followed that down and wound up on 664 and at Radford crossed over the New River Bridge on Route 11. Immediately after the bridge we took a sharp left turn onto 626 and it changed direction radically from what we had been doing. We were sheltered by a side hill, so we were in a relatively wind free environment for a little while. Thank you Mother Nature, whoever you are! We passed Claytor Lake and went up and down over hill and dale through tiny towns like Draper, Ft. Chiswell, etc. It was quite nice in there, but not as nice as the day before. Anyway, all the time we were riding along this small service road, we were paralleling I-81 and you wouldn't know it most of time. You can't see I-81 and the countryside is quite gorgeous, but you would miss it all, if you were on the interstate. Eventually we managed to get down to Wytheville, which is where we're staying tonight, at the Super-8 Motel, for a pretty big fee of \$55, ground floor, no smoking. But we're tired and have done 58 miles and although there were numerous hills, there was only one really big one which I forgot to mention before. At Radford we were really off the route taking a short cut. There was a monster hill, that we both walked, and going down the other side our brakes were sizzling. Other than that, it was just a series of rather small hills, most of which we didn't *have* to walk, but some we did anyway. And it really wasn't a bad, 58 miles. It should have been no problem, but we're tired and we didn't arrive here till 7:30.

We really noticed today that the people along the route hardly raise an eyebrow when they see you riding along, with the mountains of gear on your bike. The heavily laden, cross-country tourists have been going by their houses for 20 years now, since 1976, and to them it's quite a pain in the neck to have to drive on the other side of the narrow roads to pass you. There is always the possibility that coming around the bend will be another car coming towards them, so basically they don't like us very much. The general mentality is that the older people might be a little careful when they pass you, but the young people are crazy and try to scare you off the road, by passing you recklessly.

I remember stopping today in a convenience store along I-81, to replenish my Mt. Dew supply (now 1-2 liters per day). The guy behind the counter was asking somebody he knew, "what-did-y'all-go-to- hillbilly-high?" It seems like a sad joke, but a lot of them seem to have.

**May 17<sup>th</sup>. Wytheville, VA to Roger's National Forest, VA - 28 miles, Total trip miles 827**

We got up late and ate a leisurely breakfast in the hotel room and we didn't really get on the road till about 10:30 and wandered down through Wytheville which is a pretty large town with cross streets, and actually we found 11<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> streets but we couldn't find 12<sup>th</sup> and we went up through this housing development, a steep hill no less, and could not find 12<sup>th</sup> St. We wandered around in this development coming down to a major road which turned out to be 21 and finally asked some guy in a gas station How do you get to 12<sup>th</sup> St? He explained that it was really a continuation of Monroe St, I think and it would take us out to Route 11, so we went down the hill this time and found it and got out of town finally. We started going down Route 11 again. Of course we had the usual headwinds and so eventually we stopped looking for Route 90, because we thought we should have come to it, but we actually miscalculated the distance and it was still in front of us. It's easy to get tired when you are heading into the wind. We finally found 90 and stopped. We had about 20 miles on by then and we headed to a store on the top of the hill. It turned out to be a sub station and a food store and we ordered meatball subs with a bag of potato chips and a soda, but while Lili was in the food store didn't get the sandwich she had ordered, so it was either wait for her sub sandwich, or eat a peanut butter and jelly, which is what she did. Then we took off from there and wandered on down through Rural Retreat and Cedar Springs, all the time bucking that killer head wind, right at us, but the country was nice back country Virginia. By the time we got down to Cedar Springs we were pretty tired and we'd only gone 26 miles. I had to go to the bathroom, there were none, so I ended up going up in a pit where they had dumped silage and then zoomed back to the bike, where Lili was conked out on the grass and from that time on, showed signs of being very tired. Went down into Sugar Grove and the first few drops of rain spattered on my face and I felt them on my lips and I said Uh, oh, better stop and put on the rain gear, I didn't want to get my nice red coat wet. It never actually did rain and later we stopped at a post office just outside Sugar Grove and still couldn't make up our minds whether to put on the rain gear or not, but then we looked at the map and saw a campground up the road only 2-1/2 miles further and since we were pretty tired and the perpetual head wind was still out there, we decided to go into the campground and have a short day of it.

It's a real beauty that the US Forest Service calls Raccoon Branch and I haven't been over to the bathroom yet. I doubt very much that there's a shower, but the rest of it is really spectacularly clean and nice. First class heavy duty picnic benches, right next to a little trout stream. There are very few people here, I think one other tent is all. We cooked up some spaghetti with tuna fish in it and it was really delicious, with tomato sauce and we are going to have a banana and a peach pie and hot chocolate spiked with Jaegermeister!

*Well after supper I could not resist tossing a little spinner under the Hemlocks into this gorgeous little sugar creek we were tenting next to. The light was fading fast, but I put the spinner out to the other end of the 20 foot pool and it had not come back more than a few cranks and wham, a pretty little silver trout grabbed it. It was all but dark under my hemlock tent, so I wiggled out and over the grass to our own little green tent still carrying the wiggling trout. Lili had not done the dishes yet, so my plan was to have this fish as a special treat. Sort of a reward for the bashing we have been taking on this trip and so far at least, surviving. I put my little ultra-light folding fishing rod away and just then spotted a ranger pulling in to pick up our camping fee. Oh, oh I don't have a fishing license! On the bench was my sneakers, so I quickly stuffed my little trout into my size 14 sneaker. The ranger picked up his fee and after a few friendly words with me and Lili over by the still wiggling trout, he*

turned to leave. We cooked the fish and he was well worth the risk. We slept well and woke to a beautiful morning in Roger's National Forest.

**May 18<sup>th</sup>. Raccoon Branch, VA to Elk Garden Methodist Church, VA - 67 miles, Total trip miles 894**

Well it's a lovely day in the neighborhood! It's not Mr. Roger's neighborhood but it is Rogers National Forest. We packed up and headed for the road and immediately we were faced with a four mile climb, a pretty steady up grade. We were sweating quite a bit by the time we got to the top and went down about only a mile and a half on the other side into Trout Dale. Trout Dale didn't prove to have anything in the way of stores, so we kept on going along the route and there were some lovely little sugar creeks. I don't think I've ever seen any prettier ones with beautiful little waterfalls and all. We wound up climbing another 3 mile hill that wasn't as steep as the first one, but when we reached the top of that one we headed down a long, I would say four or five mile downgrade into the little town of Damascus. It consisted of a general store and 3 or 4 houses and another little sugar creek where we had lunch at a picnic table alongside of another of the endless little trout brooks. The woods are all conifers and a few hardwoods and going up and down those hills was nothing but a sea of mountain laurel on either side of us, absolutely beautiful, so that we didn't even notice the slight headwinds. There were cute, cute little puppies trying to play with us at lunch time here, black and tans, they are really adorable, about 3-4 months old. Our total mileage so far today is 16. And the distance To our destination today is something like 68 miles. It will be amazing if we get there. Views down Mt Rogers were beautiful, nice long, long winding blacktop, steep long curves, that seemed like they would never end, and we got down into Damascus and still continued on pedaling pretty easy. We went over the bottom land which was crossed by the three forks of the Holsten River. We then got on Route 80, not the famous interstate, but a small country road and just when I got starting to think that we were out of the wheel spoke woods, I heard a couple of the dreaded pings, as we stopped at a little store to get something to drink. Sure enough I had two broken spokes. Then after sitting there for a while having soda and ice cream, I decided I'd better fix them there, before going on because they probably were going to develop more, and I only had four of that size. So right there beside the car wash that was in use (this was the only shade around), I replaced two spokes and pumped the rear tire again. We took off from Meadowview on Route 80 again and shortly after that began a very, very long climb that wound around every little ridge and nook of the mountain up there. For two and a half hours we rode and we walked and we rested and we climbed, inch by inch up through Hagers Gap on Clinch Mtn. and finally started down the other side towards Rosedale.

We were just starting through the valley down here and I was slowing up waiting for Lili and a little girl came over to the road and asked me if I wanted a drink, and I said, "Yes, as a matter of fact I could really use a drink, after climbing that mountain back there". The little girl, who I assumed was selling lemon aid or something returned with a couple of drinks and a woman following her. The woman reached us just as Lili pulled up and said, "Hi, I'm Sherri the pastor here." She continued, "We had a hike and picnic and have way too many sandwiches, would you like to join us?" So we walked up the hill beside the church and took a seat out by the congregation and were hearing about life in rural Virginia and they got to hear a little about our difficult windy trip. Then the hikers were starting to leave and I was just about to thank Pastor Sherri and **go on** to try to find our sleeping accommodations for the night. Then Pastor Sherri said to us, "you can bring your bikes right into the church!!!!!! Yes and don't forget to sign the LOG BOOK !!!!"

*Dah, then it dawned on me! This was a hostel. Not just any hostel it turned out, but a hostel who's mission was for the hikers on the Appalachian Trail and the bikers on the Trans America Trail. Pastor Sherri led us into her church, showed us where we could wash up and roll our sleeping bags out. And then gave us the log book to read and to sign. Lili and I stayed up to 12:30 reading and were just totally amazed. So far on our trip we had not seen even one tourist biker going anywhere. Now there was written documentation that other riders were out there. The one we found totally unbelievable was a young woman from Highland Park, New Jersey, traveling east to west and about three weeks out ahead of us! Her name was Sarabeth Matilsky, 17 years old, riding out to Oregon to attend a homeschooler camp there. There was lots of good information there in the log book, places to stop and places to miss, good roads and bad, so Lili made notes and we signed the book and tried to get some sleep. We woke up in the morning about 7:30 and got our stuff ready to pack and Lili took our clothes outside to hang up, to dry them in the wind and there was Pastor Sherrie outside and we thanked her again and tried to make a donation. She would not hear of it. With the morning sun on our backs we pedaled down the road westbound once more. This had been the best thing that's happened to us on this trip, maybe a turning point!*



***We were tired and weary. You gave us a safe place to rest.  
We were hungry and weak. You gave us food and renewed our strength.  
We were discouraged and disheartened. You renewed our spirit.  
Thank you nice people***



*Dear Rider, Reader,*

*As I reread this Journal, I was struck by how grim it must sound to people who were not there. In truth there were many rewarding incidents. I have put some of them in italics to point them out, but I had underestimated the force of the west winds on my huge panniers, tried to carry way too much weight and not spent enough time getting the single bike, or its engine ready for this difficult trip. My wheels and my tires in particular were way too weak for the 350lb. load that I was punishing them with. But if my medical health allows, I will continue to write on and in future editions the patient reader will find the joys will eventually far surpass the ordeals.*

*Best Regards, Jack Brohal*