

## ED'S ODDESSY RIDE 2017

\*EOR, pronounced Eeyore, with apologies to A. A. Milne

In late January Mike told me about a group planning to ride the Southern Tier Route. After some hemming and hawing I decided I would give it a try. I chose a Fuji 58 cm model-touring bicycle. I immediately ordered and installed a Brooks saddle. To alleviate a persistent neck pain I replaced the 110 mm stem with a 90 mm one, and switched the 32 C tires for Continental 38Cs. I also carried two spare tubes although I never got a flat over the entire 3100 miles. Mike and I did a two-day test ride with fully loaded bikes from Ocotillo Wells to Agua Caliente in the Borrego State Park as test run; it all went well so in my mind I was ready.



Ocotillo Wells to Auga Caliente shakedown and campout with Mike, February 8th and 9<sup>th</sup>.



Our group of five met for the first time on March third CCW, Gary from Indiana (in Blue), Mike from San Diego, Susan from Port Townsend, Charlie from Tucson and me from Cardiff by the Sea.

Charlie made it to Saint Augustine Beach on May first. Susan joined riders from Sacramento and arrived a couple of weeks after me. Gary got sick in Florida and had to go home. So close to the goal, he says he'll complete the STR next year. With less than a week to go Mike went directly to Jacksonville then home.



Practice ride in late February

We left from Ocean Beach at 7:30 AM on March fourth. We camped at Boulder Oaks the first night. I rinsed my jersey and set it on a bush to dry, it was frozen solid the next morning. We rode in strong gusty winds to the Acorn Casino for breakfast. When we came out of the restaurant it was socked in with fog. Fortunately as we descended to Jacumba we got below the cloud base. The ride from InkoPah along I 8 was challenging with 45 to 50 mph gusts and crosswinds, a hairy ride indeed. Ocotillo Wells to El Centro was fun with 25 mph tailwinds, although over 80% of the 51 day ride was into headwinds.

Charlie the trip initiator dropped out as we reached Arizona. He made it to Phoenix where he got lower gearing for his bike and kept riding with other people. We camped at a very nice RV park in Hope on our second day in Arizona. After that we were 'beyond hope'. I have been waiting six weeks to say that. We made Phoenix on March ninth. The next day we rode AZ 87 on what we were told was the hottest day of the year, over 90 degrees. The road had narrow shoulders and was strewn with shredded truck tires. Truck tires contain a lot of wire and it is not friendly to bicycle tires. For added entertainment there were many areas of charred pavement from car fires. Jimmy, an Arizona Highway Patrol officer told us this was due to poor car maintenance by people set out into the desert woefully unprepared for the harsh environment. We got very low on water and were saved by two Hispanic fellows who stopped and lined up six-pint water bottles on the shoulder. Mike rode holding his water bottle upside down, they knew what it meant and responded with kindness. We learned the Arizona law requires that you give water to anyone that requests it, as it is a matter of life and death.

We camped in a roadside ditch that night although Susan made it to Jakes Corner. When we reached Las Cruces she joined up with other riders heading east. So now we were three.

Crossing the Continental Divide between Lordsburg and Silver City was a milestone, which I celebrated with bottle of Sierra Pale Ale. Mike and Gary declined to have any beer, not my problem. We took a rest day in Silver City prior to riding over Emory Pass, elevation 8228 feet. The first part of the ride down to the Rio Grand River was exhilarating, lots of braking needed, but not too much lest the rims over heat and the tires blow out.



My rig, 70 pounds overall, rock on!

We crossed into Texas at El Paso on March 19<sup>th</sup>. I have coined a new definition for WTF, which now means West Texas (is) Forever. We would not get out of Texas until April 8<sup>th</sup>. At Fort Hancock Texas we met Bubba who was running a Coast 2 Coast Pampered Camper group of 25 riders. He provides full support including meals (except lunch), accommodation, laundry, and bike repairs, midmorning snacks, the whole nine yards. It turned out they had left Ocean Beach four hours after us on March fourth. The best part of his service from my perspective as a self-supported biker was they were all on road bikes with no baggage. Anyway we took Bubba up on his offer of a meal, a shower, and 'camping' in an air-conditioned high school gym. We would cross paths with Bubba's 25 riders from time to time for the rest of the journey. While we deliberated over the path to take, Bubba's riders followed little red arrows pasted on the road surface at key intersections. Taking a SAG tour would have been about 60% more expensive, but it certainly will be the way to go if I ever do this again. I can't say too much about Bubba's generosity, it was offered again on my birthday a month later.

Probably the hardest day was March 22<sup>nd</sup> from Van Horn to Marfa Texas. This was a 72-mile day. It was over 90 degrees F, 20 mph head winds, rough roads, and a one to two percent grade all the way except for the last five miles. We caged water from Bubba's SAG a few times. The first cold beer at the end of the

ten-hour day was among the best I ever drank. I need to write a letter to Amtrak because the next day, a few hours out of Marfa, I was standing alone on the shoulder of the road drinking water when the streamliner went by heading west. The engineer gave me a couple of toots on his horn. Maybe it's a small thing, but it really gave me a lift as the relentless head winds were back.

We took two rest days in Austin, a beautiful city. Only one day was planned but I needed to replace my rear tire as the TX chip seal roads 'eat' tires. The other reason for the extra day was a very strong lightning and thunderstorm with rain and the added fun of tornado watches. We really were lucky weather wise. There were many severe storms across the south during March and April. We missed them all except for Austin. I will go back to Austin, they hold an annual Eeyore Birthday party only announced one or two days ahead of the event, it is my kind of town.

It is fitting that our Big Mileage Day was in Texas; we rode 117 miles from Marathon to Langtry on one of the few days we got a tailwind. The elevation dropped 2000 feet in this section and helped make lots of mileage, still it was long day. I wanted at least one 100-mile day and I got it along with a baptism.



Greg, who joined us for a few weeks, administers the rites. Greg is doing a perimeter ride of the whole country. He will be home in Sacramento in the fall.

After 20 days Texas finally yielded to Louisiana. Gary stopped at an R/V park in Merryville; it had a TV so he could watch the Masters. Mike and I rode on to DeRidder LA as it was only mid afternoon. Gary never rejoined us, now there were two.



I found the Three Little Pigs brick house in Western Louisiana

To borrow from the trumpies, the South is an “Alternate Country”. As Mike and I pulled into Mamou I saw a ‘Drive-In Daiquiri’ joint. You drive up, roll down the window, hand over cash and get a plastic cup with a flexible straw taped to the side. In Louisianan logic this is not an open container. The CHP would take a different view. And a few days later just as we left the state we stopped in a convenience store/gas station had six packs of two-quart bottles of Jim Beam next to the door leading to the gas pumps. It was not lost on Mike and I that the patrons were on the same roads we were riding, so were lucky to get out of Louisiana alive.

Mississippi only took a day and half to ride through. We stayed in Red Creek R/V Park on the river. The proprietor Hilton Murray gave is a cold beer as all the stores were closed. He had been a rodeo rider, a rancher, and now was content to manage his park. The full moon and the fireflies made for a serene evening.



We stayed in a hotel in Daphne Alabama and the next day had to ride in heavy traffic with nearly no shoulder. There was a 'bike' lane of sorts, but some genius put in a rumble strip that forced us to ride in the car traffic lane. I am writing several letters on this to the Alabama State DOT, the main Mobile newspaper, the governor, the tourism board, and the federal highway agency that provides the state with highway money. In particular I will ask the governor to take his family on their bicycles to ride one of these official state bikeways. If I sound annoyed, I am.



Florida was a welcome change, better roads and relatively flat terrain. We were nearing the goal of Saint Augustine Beach so everything started to look better (for me at least). We crossed paths with the Bubbas and were again invited to camp with them. It was the evening before my 73<sup>rd</sup> birthday so I readily accepted, Mike declined. I got some welcome camaraderie and a happy birthday song. It was very nice indeed.



Mike's attitude shifted; the drivers, the roads, and perhaps the long journey got to him. With less than a week to go he rode directly to Jacksonville, got on a plane, and went home. Now there was one.

I rode alone, averaging 80 miles a day, for the next three days on nice roads with very little traffic arriving at Saint Augustine Beach at 1500 on April 23<sup>rd</sup>. I swam in the Atlantic Ocean's 72 F water and spent a day wandering around Saint Augustine. It is a lovely city, founded in 1565, making it the oldest city in the United States. I flew home a happy man, satisfied with my accomplishment.



I cycled, self-supported, 3150 miles from the Pacific to the Atlantic in 51 days, averaging 65 miles a day excluding rest days.

During our ride we passed many cyclists doing the STR from east to west. About 85% were British, several solo Americans, and one solo Swiss rider. We hopscotched with a number of American groups going east. The largest group was Bubba's 25 riders along with 6 to 8 support staff, I have concluded that is the way to go in the future. They passed us on their road bikes many times, no baggage, is bike-envy a word? I felt some small satisfaction in arriving a day ahead of them. However, they were less physically beaten up than me.

I met many great people I met in Middle America. It is another whole story that I feel compelled to write.

See below, it looks like I now have some spare time on my hands.

Edward Slater,  
Cardiff by the Sea, California  
May 4, 2017

Post Script:

I went for a short 30-mile ride on my road bike up HWY 101 a few days after I got home. My touring bike does not have clip-in pedals; which would have been a real nuisance on the long trip.

You guessed it. I took a spill and sprained my wrist. After a few days of increasing pain I went into Kaiser Permanente for an exam. Within a week the orthopedic doctor got me in for wrist surgery. That happened at 6:00 AM this morning. No pain yet, but I have been cautioned not to ride for up to four months, now that is real pain. At least I can type so no excuses for some long planned stories and sorting out years of videos and photos.

Ed, May 19,20017



Duh!