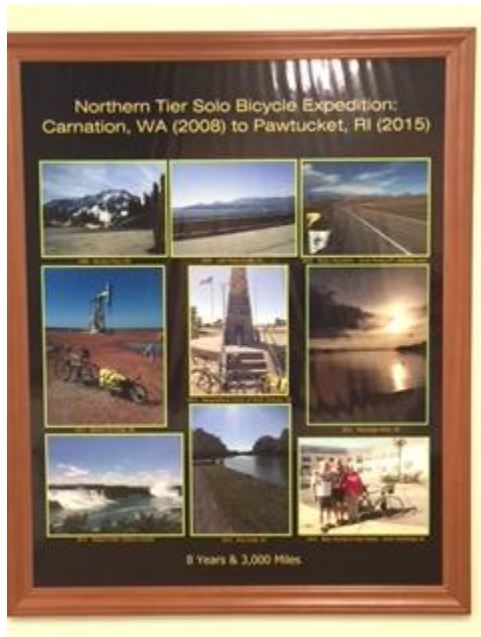


June 12, 2017: Michael Fiset's Annual Bicycle Ride Starts Tomorrow

Welcome to year 10 of my odyssey to travel across and around America on my bicycle with my trailer. Starting in 2008, when I turned 50, I headed east from Carnation, WA, riding the northern tier across the United States. Each year, I'd ride for a week or so, and pick up the following year where I left off. This trek took me through Washington, Idaho, Montana, North Dakota, Minnesota, Wisconsin, Illinois, Michigan, Ontario Province Canada, New York, Massachusetts, and Rhode Island.



Having finished this cross-country trip in 2015, in 2016 I rode south from Rhode Island to Cape May, NJ, where I attended a graduation ceremony at the Coast Guard's basic training center, from which I graduated 40 years ago in 1976. From Cape May, I rode north to Philadelphia, and flew home.

When my quest to see, smell, hear, touch and taste the country began in May 2008, little did I know in just a few short months we were about to face near total collapse of the world financial system. There were clues along the way, like when I was eating breakfast in a small cafe on Rt. 2 in eastern Washington. Oil was well over \$100 a barrel, and all the conversations I overheard were about how people were trying to make ends meet. It cost almost a whole day's wages for these people in rural America to fill the gas tanks in their pickups.

As I entered eastern Montana and eastern North Dakota, it became evident that small town America is dying. Towns are spread around 30 miles apart; I stopped at each one for something to eat, refill my water bottles, and hopefully get some ice. Over and over, I observed not a single boy or girl playing outside. The streets were empty. Lack of opportunity meant young people had to move out. The only towns which had any vibrancy were those with a college. This attracted young people, and I realized young people are the lifeblood of society. It was also eye-

opening to see how much of America is farmed, and how few people it takes to plant and harvest this vast acreage.

In 2011, I was privileged to have ridden through the Williston North Dakota oil fields at their peak, and got to see first-hand what a boom looks like. I observed the nonstop activity resulting from America's energy renaissance. I shared the road with trucks whizzing past me at 80+ MPH, carrying sand and water to the drilling rigs taking over the landscape. I talked with people relocating to Nowhere, USA from other parts of the country, including Alaska, where the oil was drying up. It felt to me like our country was turning the corner for the better.

What better way to understand how still vast and wide-open is America the beautiful. To stop and look back at the Rocky Mountains as I began my trek eastward across the Great Plains. To ride 100-mile days alone, just me, my bike and my trailer, finishing some days too tired to walk up three stairs into the house where I was to spend the night. To fight off the fear that maybe tomorrow will be the day that I just can't make it and would have to admit defeat. Of having to ignore that little man in my head who all day long kept encouraging me to "quit now, quit now." To ride past abandoned Cold War missile silos in North Dakota. To see, and hear, buffalo run alongside me while I rode alongside them. To see the Mississippi River for the first time, and ride past Charles Lindberg's house. To see and hear Niagara Falls for the first time, and the warm feeling I got when the border guard at the Canadian border said "Welcome Home." But mostly, to stop and talk with everyday people. From the Canadian early-teen girl with her younger brother, who ran out to retrieve their 3-legged dog who was chasing me down; that was the moment in my life that I got to photograph pure innocence.



To stopping at a farmhouse on the longest, straightest, hottest road in the middle of North Dakota, to seek shade in a barn with an elderly widow sitting there with her dog; and the flies that almost carried me away as I sat and spoke with her about her family's history farming the Great Plains. And witnessing the despair of people on Indian reservations, whose lives are

merely an existence, with no promise of a better life. To seeing the sun set over Lake Pepin on the Mississippi River. To riding through broken-down industrial towns in New York State in 2015, hearing over and over how the factories closed, property values plummeted, and the towns were dying. These were the signs of a festering political upheaval. And of course, staying in people's houses, sometimes eating dinner and breakfast with them, being asked to feed their cats, and always interesting conversation. People frequently ask me, "Aren't you afraid out there alone in the middle of nowhere?" "Do you carry a gun?" I quickly answer "no" to both.

People's nature tends to be good, kind and generous, especially outside the big cities. The only time I ever worried for my safety was walking through the outskirts of downtown Chicago in 2013, after I had completed my week-long ride, and spending time seeing the city before my flight home.

As tough as that journey was, it was on a paved road and I had a roof over my head and three hot meals every day. I gained a new appreciation for how tough the early settlers must have been.

And the courage it took to build a cabin in the middle of the Great Plains, where they had to search for water and protect themselves and their families from threats we can only imagine.

There was no 911. Oh, and they had to figure out a way to feed their families all year long too; there were no supermarkets.

I look forward to seeing this year if I can ascertain any hints about what the future holds for us economically and politically. Listening to economists, market strategists and other prognosticators may be entertaining, but rarely do they get it right. Discerning the future is much easier to do by listening to the man on the street, or the woman with the pebble in her shoe. Just observing is very valuable too, like I did in St. Johnsville, NY, watching so many working-age people standing around mid-afternoon smoking, drinking and eating, rather than working. I know I live in a bubble, as do most of our clients (although they may not realize it). Proudly, my roots are blue collar; these are the people with whom I most identify and empathize.

This year, I will ride north along the coast of New England. Tomorrow morning, I will head out from my sister's house in Cumberland, RI, and ride east to Sandwich, MA, which is the gateway to Cape Cod. On Tuesday, I'll head north along the coast to Hull, MA, which is just south of Boston. On Wednesday, I'll continue north through hard-scrapple, but gentrifying, South Boston, to check in with my old friend Whitey Bulger. Rumor has it Whitey may be away on a Government-funded vacation. Then, I'll ride into downtown Boston, through my favorite area, Little Italy, and head to the North Shore, staying the night in Rockport, MA. Rockport is a very scenic, artsy town, which juts out into the Atlantic Ocean.

On Wednesday, I'll continue north along the coast, and spend the night in Portsmouth, NH. On Friday, I'll cross into Maine, and ride along the coast in picturesque towns including Kennebunkport, where George and Barbara Bush live on an amazingly beautiful large rocky outcropping. (I sent a letter to the Bush's several months ago, telling them of my travels, and asked if I could stop in to say hello; no reply.) I'll spend Friday night in South Portland, ME. On Saturday, I'll ride north to Brunswick, ME, where I'll catch Amtrak south to Boston, from where I'll fly home Saturday night.

Total mileage should be around 375, which is about 100 less than I normally do. While I'd like to ride farther north into Maine, the reality is it becomes very difficult to find transportation out.

With the exception of 2008, this is the earliest in the summer I've ridden. The reason I'm going early this year is because my father, Bob, turned 90 on May 30. My family in Rhode Island held a birthday party for him today, so I scheduled this year's bicycle trip with this celebration.



I already met my first personality of this trip at the party. His name is Don McCarthy. He's 93-years old and still drives (hopefully not while I'm on the road). He was one of the infantrymen who stormed Omaha Beach on D-Day. Ten years after the landing, he thought he should write a book about his experience. I'll borrow it from him when I return in August. He said God told him to do two things if he survived: attend Mass regularly, and place flowers on the graves of those buried at Normandy who didn't survive. He's been back 13 times.



The problem with riding in June is the weather is quite unpredictable. It's looking like I'm going to be riding in the rain tomorrow and Tuesday, with a headwind. The daytime temps are

projected to be between 55 and 70; not exactly summertime riding. However, I'll take those temps any day over the 100 degree days I endured for over a week in North Dakota and Minnesota. The heat just sucks the energy out of me. Being a north-westerner, riding in the rain is commonplace, except I had more than my share over the last 8 months.

I plan to stay off the main roads as much as possible, sticking to the 2-lane coastal roads. New England roads tend to be very narrow, especially in historic towns like Boston, Marblehead and Salem, through which I'll be riding.

Provided I have no technical difficulties, I'll send updates at the end of each day, and make sure I take plenty of pictures throughout the day to share with you at night. As you know from previous years' travelogues, I tend to send a lot of pictures of food, and share stories of people I meet. I'm counting on visiting several Italian bakeries, and eating my share of Italian food, lobster rolls, fried clam strips, and chowder; you get the picture, and understand why I have to bike. Hopefully, there will not be any tales of disgusting accommodations to share with you this year. I think I've got some pretty decent places lined up, with all but one of them being AirBNB.

Until tomorrow night...

June 5, 2017: Day 1 Cumberland, RI - Bourne, MA - Plymouth, MA (80 miles)

Last night, it sporadically poured. I awoke at 6:30 AM, and was on the road for 7:00. Just as I left the house, the rain started to taper off. Little did I know that, in spite of an ominous weather forecast for the day, that was the only rain I experienced. It was, however, very chilly. It felt more like March than June. I needed my rain gear just to stay warm throughout the day.



The terrain was mostly flat, and rather boring. I did see a flock of wild turkeys.



And I came across the most magical sign of them all: "Ice Cream." It was a typical New England ice cream shack on the side of the road. One small coffee milkshake please.



Here are a few additional shots I took. The first was in Wareham, MA which calls itself the Gateway to Cape Cod. The other is of a man fishing on the Wareham River. Wherever you look around the coast in New England, you'll most always see a guy fishing.



I stopped for lunch at a restaurant on the Wareham River. Great view and OK food. I had a bowl of chowder (mediocre) and a stuffed quahog. What's a stuffed quahog you ask? Well a quahog is an overgrown clam, indigenous to southeastern New England. They split the quahog in two, dice up the clam/quahog meat, mix in bread, seasoning, onions and peppers, and bake it. They're pretty tasty; this particular one rated around a "5" out of 10.



Took a couple more photos in Wareham:



All went well for the first 55 miles or so, until I entered Bourne, MA. Bourne is one of two places you can cross the Cape Cod Canal, the other is the Sagamore Bridge, which is further to the east. The Cape Cod Canal is about 7 miles long, and traverses the narrow neck of land joining Cape Cod to mainland, Mass.

I planned to cross over the canal and stay on the south side in the town of Sandwich. I used Google Maps, telling it I was on a bicycle. Nevertheless, it routed me onto a highway to cross the Bourne Bridge. I got a ways up the onramp, saw the "bicycles prohibited" sign, and turned around. I called the Bourne Police Department, asking how I could cross the Canal. They told me to ride 7 miles along the Canal until I got to the Sagamore Bridge, which bicycles can cross. Well I got to the Sagamore Bridge and entered the onramp, only to get a ways along and saw another bicycles prohibited sign. This was for good reason, as it's a high, narrow bridge, with no

shoulder or sidewalk. I turned the bicycle (and trailer) around and rode in the narrow shoulder lane against oncoming traffic. I'd rather not have to do that again.

I could see there was a sidewalk on the east side of the bridge, but I could not figure out how to get there. I asked several people, including an ambulance driver, and everyone was dumbfounded on how to reach the sidewalk. I called the motel in Sandwich, and told John I could not figure out how to cross the bridge, and would need to cancel my reservation. He didn't know how to get to the sidewalk either. Surprisingly, there was no place to stay where I was, so I decided to head another 20 miles north to Plymouth, MA.

I was starting to get tired, and my phone and backup power supplies were running low. I need the phone for maps. I suppose I could have backtracked 7 miles to Bourne and stayed there for the night, but I have a pretty firm rule about not doing double mileage. Besides, whatever extra I rode today, I wouldn't have to ride tomorrow, and tomorrow's weather is looking wet and even colder. (It's supposed to clear up Wed - Fri.)

The 20-mile ride to Plymouth was pretty hilly, which surprised me and was not what I needed at the end of a long day. My legs started cramping up. The 45-MPH road had almost no shoulder, and what shoulder there was in disrepair. It was a pretty miserable 20-mile trek. With 6 miles to go, I stopped for dinner. Glass of wine and chicken wings. I wasn't too hungry, and was starting to shiver. In the restaurant, I booked the hotel online. I arrived at the Pilgrim Sands on Long Beach hotel at 7:05 PM, pretty bushed after being on the road for 12 hours.

Tomorrow, I'll reap the reward of today's extra miles. I only have to ride around 35 miles to Hull, MA, where I'll be spending the night in an apartment on the water. I'll get to sleep in plenty late tomorrow.

June 6, 2017: Day 2 Plymouth, MA - Hull, MA (33 miles)

Today was a very low mileage day, 33 miles, but it was a very tough 33 miles. I slept in until around 9:30 AM, and was on the road for 10:00. I had the heat in my room last night turned up to 70, and I was still cold. Just a sheet on the bed, even though the temperatures are down into the 40's. It feels like March here; the high today was 48. I filled my water bottles with ice, and the ice didn't even melt. The wind was blowing 20 MPH out of the east/northeast most of the day, and the rain was constant. I'm so glad I packed all my rain gear, and even packed some winter gear. This damp cold goes right through you.

I headed out of the hotel, which is located on the Atlantic Ocean. The waves were breaking over the seawall. I'm so glad I did the extra miles yesterday, because this weather is not conducive to a 60-mile day.



I headed north on Rt. 3A, which is a busy 2-lane road with an almost non-existent shoulder, and what shoulder there is is rutted. I had to keep weaving around the potholes. Fortunately, no broken spokes so far this year, and the wheels are amazingly still in alignment. I noticed yesterday and today, in both Rhode Island and Massachusetts, that little plastic liquor bottles dot the roadside. There must be a lot a drinking and driving going on here. Oh, and Massachusetts drivers are not the nicest people in the world. I could sense their frustration as they gunned their engines to pass me.



I stopped in at a combo Dunkin' Donuts/convenience store to buy a couple of bottles of Gatorade. I find I really need the Gatorade to prevent quadricep cramps. I ordered a single chocolate-covered doughnut, and was surprised one doughnut now costs \$1.25. I guess it's been quite a while since I purchased a Dunkin' doughnut. My appetite wasn't into it, so I couldn't finish the whole doughnut.

I continued on to Marshfield, MA, where I found a really nice little restaurant, which was very busy. I ordered a cup of chili and a side garden salad with balsamic vinaigrette dressing. The chili was amazing. I asked the waitress if I could just stay there all day, as I could see the rain was coming down sideways. She told me her son and daughter-in-law had just moved to Seattle. He's a table-waiting musician, and she's getting her grad degree at UW.



I came across a cranberry bog, and took a picture. Cranberry bogs are prevalent in southeastern Massachusetts. The way they work is that the cranberries are grown in the field. When they're ripe, the gate holding back the water from the adjacent pond is raised, which floods the field. The cranberries then float to the top, and the farmer scoops them up.



I stopped at a Starbucks for a nice hot cup of Joe. Google maps finally got me off Rt. 3A, and onto less traveled roads. I came across a Papa Gino's pizza place, which I used to like as a kid. I ordered a piping hot slice of crispy cheese pizza, and was on my way.

Finally, I arrived in Hull, MA. The wind was howling and the sea was churning.



Hull is a picturesque seaside New England town, southeast of Boston. There are mansions on the hillside overlooking the ocean. I'm staying in an AirBNB rental tonight. I have the upstairs apartment to myself. It's plenty roomy, and very comfy. There was even a bottle of Killian's Irish Red in the refrigerator. I can hear the wind roaring outside, and feel it come through the windows. Hopefully, this place doesn't blow down tonight. I can't imagine what the heating bill must be with these windows. The house is right on an inlet, and has two nice decks.

Unfortunately, I won't be going out on them with this weather. I had to climb a narrow, outside spiral staircase to get upstairs. I had to keep slinging my yellow bag from hell up a few stairs at a time, as I made my way up.



Tomorrow, I'll head out early to ride through Boston, then on up the coast to Rockport, MA. The rain is supposed to finally stop at 4 AM, and the sun break through at 9:00 AM. It will be around 53 degrees when I head out. The high tomorrow is supposed to be around 65. I expect to ride around 60 miles, but I'm sure it will somehow turn into 65. Should be lots of nice photo shots and good food on the route I chose.

Tonight, I'm going to walk 0.4 miles through this storm into town, and order the fried seafood platter at Jake's Seafood restaurant. I'll probably be the only one there. Summer is supposed to start in New England on Memorial Day weekend. Not this year; it's like a ghost town all along the coast, because of the weather.

Until tomorrow...

June 7, 2017: Day 3 Hull, MA - Rockport, MA (69 miles)

My accommodations last night were very comfortable. I went to dinner in town, and had a delicious fried fisherman's platter. The fish was amazingly flaky and delicious. I could only eat a few French fries, as my appetite has not come back yet, as happens every year for the first few days. I'm going to call the restaurant to ask them what type of fish it was; probably cod.



The wind finally died down around 9:00 PM. For some reason, I didn't sleep very soundly, but at least I was lying down. I was on the road at 7:00 AM. It was still pretty chilly, so I had to wear more clothes than usual on a summer bicycle ride. It was sprinkling a little bit for the first hour or two, but finally I could see the sun trying to break through. The wind was out of the east, so it was on my starboard flank (that's my right side for you land lubbers).



The roads to the south of Boston were abysmal. There was hardly any shoulder, and there were potholes all along the side of the road. Boston drivers are notoriously combative and impatient. I tried to ride on sidewalks as much as possible, but there were mailboxes in the middle of the sidewalks. Then, there were the prevalent four bolts sticking up out of the sidewalk, where a lamp fixture used to be. And of course, the unpruned shrubs and trees overhanging the sidewalk.

In North Weymouth, I took a photo of the USS Salem. It's absolutely amazing all the armament these battleships had. Big guns line the ship from stem to stern on multiple decks.



Once again, I was faced with a bridge that I had to figure out how to cross. There was construction, so the sidewalk was torn up and impassable. I noticed a path along some jersey barriers on the oncoming traffic side, so I decided to take that. What a mess! It was mostly rubble.



Surprisingly, the roads in Boston are better than the outlying area, and there are a lot of bicycle lanes. However, cars have no problem swerving into the bicycle lane to go around someone in front of them looking to make a left turn. As always, Boston traffic was extremely congested. As slow as I go, I probably beat some of the cars.



Google maps did a good job of getting me across a couple of bridges. Once I crossed the Charles River into Chelsea, I rode through an industrial area and stopped for a delicious slice of pepperoni pizza around 10:50 AM. No matter how hard I look, I just can't find pizza in the Northwest like in Boston, Providence or New York City.



I got my first flat tire of the trip in Charleston. It took around 20 minutes to replace the tube. About an hour later, I arrived back at the coast and took these shots of Revere Beach and the beach at Lynn, MA.



I passed through Salem, which was home to the Salem Witch Trials. I also passed a house that had a "Satan's Temple" sign out front... real nice!



I stopped for a small roast beef sandwich at Bill and Bob's Roast Beef in Salem. I haven't had a roast beef sandwich in years. It was delicious. I had to force myself to finish it, because my appetite is still weak.

I thought this was a nice shot of all the boats anchored in the Danvers River.



Next, it was on to Gloucester. Local boy made good, Slade Gorton, inherited his fortune from Gorton's Fish Sticks, which is still located in Gloucester. I could smell the fish sticks cooking when I rode by. A lady visiting from Vermont was kind enough to take my picture in front of the famous Gloucester Fisherman statue, as well as another statue honoring the fishermen's wives and daughters. (Who wants to be the first to tell me women are fishermen too?)



I had an ice cream soda in Gloucester, but could only consume a little more than half. Please come back appetite! I arrived in Rockport around 4:45. Rockport is a very scenic town. The houses in these small seaside New England towns are set almost right on the street.



I was pretty spent, and knew I wouldn't feel like walking .7 miles tonight for dinner, so I purchased a lobster roll to go. Delicious, but could have used a little more mayo. I devoured it while typing this report.



While I used to ride 100 miles a day, I find either this trailer is getting heavier or I'm getting older. I struggle on the hills. I had another 2.5 miles to go from downtown Rockport to the house where I'm staying; uphill of course. A semi-retired lady rents half of her house, which is totally private. It's in a beautiful setting, with woods and a pond right outside my door. She left all sorts of treats for me in the refrigerator, but I still can't find the red wine. There are wild turkeys and ducks in the yard.



Tomorrow, I ride to Portsmouth, NH. It's supposed to be a 55-mile day, and I hope that's the case. The forecast is sunny and in the low 70's, so it should be a very nice day, like today. The winds are supposed to be out of the south, which should give me a tailwind. It will be in the low 50's when I head out around 7:00 AM, so I'll need to bundle up for the morning.

Until tomorrow -- Michael Fiset

June 8, 2017: Day 4 Rockport, MA - Portsmouth, NH (59 miles)

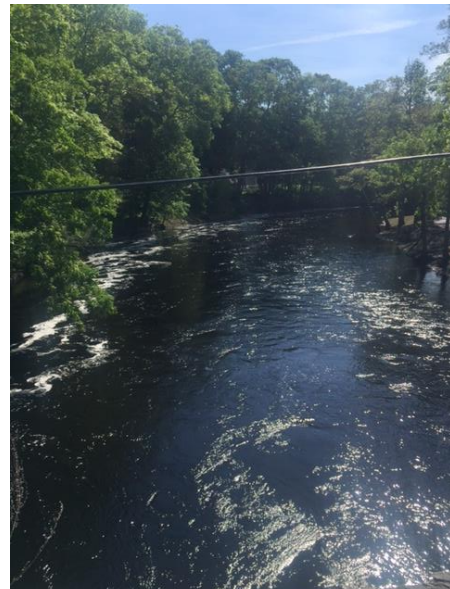
Another restless night, even though the bed was very comfortable and I was certainly bushed.

6:30 AM came way too quickly. The sun was shining brightly, and it was warm enough for just bike shorts and a jersey. I was on the road around 7:15 AM; the turkey was at my back door eating feed the lady threw on the ground. I started out downhill, which is always nice. Just four miles into the trip, I got another flat. I only had one tire iron to pry off the tire, because yesterday when I changed the flat, I neglected to zip up the tool bag under the seat. Guess what fell out? I was concerned because I couldn't find anything sharp in the tire which would have caused the flat. It could still be there.

After a half hour or so, I hooked the trailer back up and was on my way. Google maps routed me onto a dead-end road. I'm glad I asked someone when I figured it didn't look right. It would have been a hill climb to nowhere.

The first part of today's ride consisted mostly of rolling hills, and there were a lot of waterfront views throughout the day. I pulled into a parking lot to have a honey oat bar snack and some water. I noticed a strange sound around my rear wheel. It was a long staple sticking out of the tire and rubbing against the fender. This staple wasn't there when I got the flat. I removed it, and just hoped it wouldn't cause the tire to go flat. It didn't.

I took a picture of the harbor in Essex, and of the Ipswich River.



Then I got another flat. I figured there must be something in the tire, so I decided to use my spare tire. Another half-hour wasted. Back on the bike and shortly thereafter another flat tire.

Now I'm down to just one spare tube. Fortunately, there's a bicycle shop 5 miles ahead in Newburyport, MA.



The first bicycle store I rode to was nonexistent. Fortunately, there was another one around 1/2 mile away. They were very helpful. I bought four new tubes and a new pair of tire irons. I asked to use their pump to make sure my tires were inflated properly. I filled them up to 110 lbs, and was on my way. Then, guess what? Another flat. That's it. .. I brought the bike into the store and they immediately took it in back to be worked on by the mechanics. I decided I'd go to lunch around the corner. It was a very fancy food yuppie type of place, where I didn't know what was on the menu. I asked if they had soup and she told me they have sausage with something I've never heard before soup. I asked her what that was and she said rice. Of course, they're too smart to just call it rice. It was delicious nonetheless. I asked if they had just regular salad, but of course they're too special to serve something like iceberg lettuce, so I settled for just the soup.

I then went back to the bike store and my bike was ready. The mechanic said the rim strip needed to be replaced (protects the tube from the rim) and the tube was pinched (my fault when I put the tire back on). He assured me I was good to go. He also cleaned and lubricated the chain, which had a lot of sand on it.

Newburyport is one of the most scenic towns I've seen. It seems to be really vibrant too.



Once I left Newburyport, the terrain was much flatter and I had the wind at my back. What a difference when the wind is pushing you along. I entered New Hampshire and took a photo of the Seabrook nuclear power plant.



I then arrived at Hampton Beach, which has some amazing mansions. The tourist strip must go on for 2 miles.



It was really nice riding along the beach. Traffic was light, but then again summer is coming late to New England this year. I arrived at the house where I'm staying in Portsmouth, NH around 3:45. I was greeted by a young lady who is a high school junior. Her mother will be home around 6:00. Good thing Jack the Ripper is not staying the night. There are two very friendly and talkative cats, which I think will be spending the night with me.



Time to head to town to find something for dinner. Still not much of an appetite.

June 8, 2017: Day 5 Portsmouth, NH - S. Portland, ME (62 miles)

On Thursday night, I went out for chicken parmigiana and a glass of red wine in Portsmouth, NH. It was cooked just right, but unfortunately I only had enough appetite to eat the one piece of chicken and a little pasta. I even left behind 2/3 glass of wine, which is totally out of character.

Please come back appetite! I walked back to the AirBNB where I was spending the night, and settled in for a good night's sleep at 8:00 PM. I hit the road at 7:00 AM for my final day on Friday, for what Google maps tells me should be a 60-mile day. The roads in New Hampshire and Maine are far superior to Massachusetts.

It was a little chilly when I headed out, but it was supposed to be in the mid-60's, so I didn't want to dress too warmly. It was a nice sunny morning. Right after getting on the road, I crossed over a bridge into Maine. My route took me on mostly country roads for the day, and I spent around 15 miles on a rails-to-trails path. It was heavily-compacted gravel, so it was fine.



After around 18 miles, I stopped for breakfast in a small town. It was a small cafe which just opened 2 months ago. I ordered one egg over easy and a piece of ham. It was absolutely wonderful. I'm used to thick-sliced ham with scrambled eggs, but this was very thin ham grilled ever so quickly. The yolk and the ham became very good friends. I'm going to switch from my usual scrambled eggs. I think my appetite may finally be returning.



After riding another 5 miles, I stopped at a Cumberland Farms convenience store. With my appetite back, I yearned for coffee milk; let me explain. Coffee milk is generally only available in Rhode Island, and Cumberland Farms was founded in Rhode Island. I grew up on coffee milk. You simply pour some coffee syrup (which as far as I know you can only get in Rhode Island) into your milk, and stir. To make it taste extra good, you mix it by pouring from glass to glass, which I guess aerates it. You haven't lived until you've had coffee milk. I just don't understand why Starbucks hasn't started making coffee syrup. Unfortunately, the clerk told me a lady cleaned out all their coffee milk on Thursday, so I had to settle for chocolate milk.

Just before noon, at mile 35, I bicycled into West Kennebunk, ME. Google maps was now putting me onto the gravel bicycle path. But wait, be still my heart! What is that I see? A hotdog stand staffed by two elderly ladies. Now you know those have to be good hotdogs. One hotdog, mustard and onions please. That was one of the tastiest hotdogs I remember eating. I sat with a retired couple, who probably spent their day there, and talked with them a bit. The lady told me how her mother used to own a store, and worked 6 - 7 days a week. When she retired, she had a chunk of savings and set off to see all 50 states. She'd be gone 6 weeks at a time, and nobody knew where she was. They told me things are good and stable in Kennebunk, due in no small part to their having a good school system. They were proud of how everybody kept up their properties. Once I finished that fine hot dog, I was back on the road; this time on an off-road trail.



The trail took a break in the town of Biddeford where, lo and behold, I spotted the Golden Arches for the first time in 5 days. How could I resist? One hamburger, a small fry and a cup of ice water please. While waiting in line, a pretty rough down-on-her-luck looking lady was also waiting in line. The lady manager told her she had to leave or the police would arrest for her trespassing. I felt bad for her because she held up a sawbuck (that's Rhode Island for a \$10 bill), and said "I have money." The manager reiterated that she is banned from the restaurant, and if she doesn't leave, the police will arrest her for trespassing. The lady shouted to the manager

"You're being mean." While I felt bad, I'm sure there was some history that warranted the treatment. But for the grace of God go I. I observed how talented this manager was, as I ate my burger and fries. She was like a maestro conducting an orchestra; it was truly a sight to behold. I've always figured managing a McDonald's must take a boatload of skill. It's amazing how many now-famous people started out working at McDonald's as a teenager, including Jeff Bezos ([Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com)) and Jay Leno. Before I left, I made a point of letting her know she did a masterful job. After using the clean bathroom and filling my water bottles with ice, it was back on the road for another 17 miles, a good part of which would again be on trails.

It started to sprinkle, but no big deal. I just didn't want too much rain getting on my iPhone, which is mounted on my handlebars. In 2014, water got in the phone in Canada, and it wouldn't charge. As I do not carry paper maps, I totally rely on the iPhone for navigation. On the trail, I crossed the Scarborough River.



Incoming call... pause the ride. A client needs cash moved over to his checking account. Sounds like a job for Super Erica. OK, back to the ride. The sprinkles were getting harder, and looking at the weather radar, there's going to be a squall passing through momentarily. What is that sign I see up ahead? Soup and sandwiches at Highland Avenue Greenhouse & Farm Market. Perfect timing. I ducked inside as the rain began. I ordered the Spring Pea and Bacon soup and grilled cheese. Once again, the names of the bread were not breads I recognized. I asked the lady what type of bread the one with the fancy name was, and she replied "white bread." Like with the fancy rice that they can't just call rice, why can't they just call the white bread "white bread." Anyway, it was delicious, especially the soup. I made a point to tell the chef how delicious it was; he didn't seem to care.



Perfect timing. I finish my soup and sandwich, sitting alone under the plastic covering the sweet-smelling greenhouse, just as the rain stopped and the sun reappeared. Only 5 more miles to go. I rode into South Portland. Google maps put me on a nice paved trail, which ended around the corner from Coast Guard Base South Portland. After asking the gate guard if the U.S. Coast Guard could spare some ice for an old retired, tired, unshaven and smelly Coastie, he called the Officer of the Day to come escort me to the galley. The young Coast Guard seaman told me he graduated from basic training in Cape May, NJ last October, and was waiting to go to marine science technician school or officer candidate school. The Coast Guardsmen today sure seem a lot more squared away than I remember myself being in the mid-1970's. They also offered me a freshly-baked chocolate chip cookie to take along. The base is now much different than I remember when I was there around 1992. I remember back then having lunch in the galley with the commanding officer. I still remember how delicious the clam chowder was, and how there was a screen door leading outside. It couldn't have felt more New England back then. Now, it's a brand spanking new galley, which is nice, but feels too sterile.



The AirBNB where I was staying the night with Dee Dee and Tom was around 10 houses down from the Coast Guard Base, and right on Saco Bay. Gina and I had stayed there before when we rode a Harley around New England 2 years ago. Dee Dee and Tom remembered me. The yard was filled with grandchildren, as they have 14. Tom is a retired firefighter, and was also Mayor of South Portland for the last 6 years, before being turned out last fall. He also teaches Maine history at the community college, and maintains four rental properties he owns. Tom told me how difficult it is to find people who want to work and/or have skills. He said if it weren't for immigrants, he wouldn't be able to find workers for his rentals. I saw he built new stairs leading down to the water. He told me the permits cost \$8,000 and the writeup for the permit was 75 pages. Yes, we definitely need more Government. Tom and I traded stories about how our fire services work. Their firefighters start out at around \$30,000 per year, with very little overtime. That is about a third of what our firefighters earn. Tom also told me how house prices in South Portland range from \$30,000 - \$2,000,000, but you can't judge a book by its cover. He said he'd respond to an EMT call in some \$30,000 houses, and be surprised how well-maintained they are. Then, he'd go into a \$2,000,000 house, and find the people are hoarders. Tom told me the

economy in southern Maine is fine, but the other more remote parts of the state are still struggling.

I called Uber to pick me up and drive me to a Chinese restaurant in Portland, whose online write-up reminded me of Din Tai Fong in Bellevue, which is one of my favorite Chinese restaurants.

The driver took me over Casco Bay to Portland, which is an amazingly vibrant downtown. The buildings are well-maintained, the people youthful, and wonderful food smells permeate the air.

One man around 20 tried to bum a dollar off me, which was met with an unmistakable "NO." If there's one thing I can't stand is a young able-bodied man bumming money. There is no excuse; get a job. I entered the restaurant and could tell it was one of those places with the attitude you should just be honored they're allowing you to dine there. I was told it was a 1-hour wait, or I could take a seat at the counter or bar if one became available. After watching a family of three at the counter eat their food in slow motion, they finally got up and left. I quickly grabbed the chair, and settled in to my little corner nook by the front window. My appetite was now back in full force. I had hot tea, ice water, hot & sour soup, pork wontons, chicken soup dumplings, and tempura cod. The white rice never came, but everything was absolutely delicious.



After dinner, I walked 3/4 mile to a wine store, to purchase a nice bottle of red wine to take back to the house, which I planned to enjoy with a 5-day overdue cigar (only allowed one a week) on the deck outside my room. The store was very busy; the economy in Portland, ME appears quite heathy. I took a photo of Portland, across the water, just as the sun was about to set and again after dark. What a perfect way to end a tough week. I called down from the deck to Tom, who was watering the plants with his watering can, and told him he has an amazing place, and that is just doesn't get any better than this. He agreed.



Now, I am on the train heading to Boston. Amtrak decided to do track maintenance in Massachusetts, so I, my bicycle, trailer, and bag will need to transfer to a bus for the final segment. Once I get off the bus at North Station in Boston, I'll ride to South Station, from where I'll ship my bicycle, trailer, and bag home via Amtrak. Then, I'll bum around Boston for a few hours, and fly home from Logan at 7:00 PM.

I hope you enjoyed traveling vicariously with me this week. It will be nice to be home tonight, and back to work Monday morning.

Michael Fisette