

May 23, 2019 - Michael Fiset's Annual Bicycle Ride Starts Tomorrow.

Welcome to year 12 of my odyssey traveling alone across and around America on my bicycle with my trailer. This year, I will ride around 480 miles over 9 days from Washington, DC to Morehead City, NC, riding through historical cities of colonial America. While the first couple of days will be a little hilly, thereafter it should be mostly flat. (Looking at the map, I'll be headed south, so I assume that means it's downhill.) The weather forecast is sunny with temps in the 90's. The landscape may look a little more colorful this year, as I'll be wearing my new EnChroma color blind sunglasses, which Erica and Scott gave me for Christmas.

I'll fly to Washington National Airport on Friday, arriving around 4:30 PM. Then, I'll take the Metro to Amtrak, to pick up my bicycle, gear bag and trailer. Amtrak called me two days ago, to inform me everything arrived... great service! I'll ride south 25 miles along the Potomac River to Fort Belvoir, VA, where I'll spend the night at the Officer's Club. Lots of memories there, as Gina and Erica spent most of Erica's preteen summer days at the pool, which was on a scenic bluff overlooking the Potomac River. Also, when I was on a Coast Guard buoy tender from 1976 – 1979, we used to sail by the bluff. I remember how cold it was when we were breaking ice in the winter of 1977. While I was wet and freezing at night, on the cold dark buoy deck, I'd look up at the beautiful lighted dining room windows of the Fort Belvoir Officers' Club; it looked so warm and inviting. They have a delicious Friday seafood buffet until 9:30 PM, so I'll try to ride quickly.



USCGC Madrona {wlb-302}

In Virginia, I'll be staying in Fredericksburg, Richmond, Colonial Williamsburg, and Chesapeake. In North Carolina, Elizabeth City, Williamston and New Bern. On Saturday, June 1, I'll rent a car and drive from Morehead City, NC back to Washington, DC, where I'll ship my bicycle back home on Amtrak, and catch a flight home Sunday morning.

A little history, for those of you who joined us recently. 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, I rode south from Rhode Island to Cape May, NJ in 2016, where I attended a graduation ceremony at the Coast Guard's basic training center, from which I had graduated 40 years earlier in 1976. In 2017, I rode along the rocky New England coast from Rhode Island to Maine; it was cool and rainy in June. In 2018, I rode with a group for the first time. We went over the Great Allegheny Passage and along the C&O Canal from Pittsburg, PA to Washington, DC. (Recaps from 2012 – 2018 are located on our website at https://www.raymondjames.com/fisettefinancial/bicycle_ride.htm.) Here is a map of each year's route:



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 in 100° heat 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 oil wells and abandoned Cold War missile silos in North Dakota, and 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 experience Niagara Falls and the warm feeling when the U.S. 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. For some reason, this is my favorite photo.



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 with her dog; and the flies that almost carried me away as we sat and spoke about her family's history farming the Great Plains. Witnessing the despair of people on Montana Indian reservations, whose lives are merely an existence, with no promise of a better life. Seeing the sun set over Lake Pepin on the Mississippi River, and riding through broken-down industrial towns in New York State, hearing over and over how the factories closed, property values plummeted, and the towns were dying. These were the signs in 2015 of a festering political upheaval. And, in my first year 2008, right before the crash, overhearing farmers in Eastern Washington cafes talking about nothing but the soaring price of gasoline, and how they were hurting economically.

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.

I hope you enjoy the upcoming daily updates to come.

May 24, 2019 Year 12, Day 1:
Union Station, Washington DC – Fort Belvoir, VA (30 miles)

I saw that yesterday's flight to Washington, DC arrived 1.5 hours late. Had I been on that flight, I might not have been able to get to Amtrak on time to retrieve my bicycle, before they closed. That would have thrown a big wrench into the trip, as I'd be starting a day late. Looks like there was a tornado around DC, so that must have been why the flight was delayed. Today's 5-hour flight was on time. Why is it that time seems to go by so quickly, except when you're on an airplane? I imagine this is how time must pass in prison. I could never make it as an air marshal.

When we landed in DC, I scurried off the plane, and hustled to Metro. After looking like a dope at the Metro station, trying to figure out how to purchase a fare card and a long line forming behind me, an attendant came up and told me which buttons to push. The less than 30-minute train ride to Union Station was smooth. I found the loading dock for "express shipping," and the same man who called me on Tuesday, telling me everything arrived, was on duty; he remembered me. While he went in the back to get my bike and trailer, I quickly changed clothes on the open loading dock as people walked by, hoping nobody would look in. I realized I forgot to pack my riding jersey, so I'd have to find a bike shop to purchase one. A cotton tee shirt, with no pockets, won't cut it in 90° heat. The weather today is gorgeous; high 70's with low humidity.

I unpacked my bicycle, trailer and gear bag. Everything was in good order. I quickly reassembled the bike and trailer, loaded the gear bag, filled the water bottles, and started out on my annual adventure. (Side note: I appreciate Gina for putting up with this foolishness every year. As another wife once said to her, "Why can't our husbands just be normal?")

My ride began in "The Swamp," as I rode past the U.S. Capitol. Then, onto the National Mall to the Washington Monument, past the Jefferson Memorial, and across the Potomac River via the 14th Street Bridge. Then, onto the Mount Vernon Trail, which runs along the Potomac River towards historic Old Town Alexandria, VA. This is the area where Gina, Erica and I lived in the 1980's, and from where we relocated. Google maps gave me wrong directions a couple of times, so I got a few bonus miles.

It was difficult riding in DC, because I shared the path with crowds of tourists who didn't know where they were going, and a swarm of electric scooters. The worst was the fact that almost everybody was looking down at their phones, so they kept walking right in front of me. Almost nobody looks up anymore.



I found a bicycle shop in Old Town Alexandria. I went in and purchased a new riding jersey. I didn't even look to see if it had any wording on it; it just needed to fit. For all I know, it probably says "run me down" on the back.

My throat was a little scratchy. It could be that I am just getting over a cold, or that the air is not as clean here, or pollen. After a 25-mile ride, just as the sun was setting, I arrived at the Fort Belvoir's Officers Club at 8:00 PM, in time to check in and get to the Seafood Buffet. I was told to see Eric, the seafood manager. He would have the key to my room. The room is a suite, and will be very comfortable.



The Officers Club dining room has a prominent sign spelling out a strict dress code. I realized I forgot to pack a pair of pants, so the question became whether I could get in. Apparently, I looked a little too much like a hobo, so Eric banished me to the lounge, where I had the place to myself. Apparently, the military is the last bastion of civilized society. I sat alone, drank a beer, and dined on free potato chips and not-very-tasty chicken wings. There were no other choices.

Tomorrow, I'll head out around 8:00 AM, and ride 59 miles to Fredericksburg, VA. That should be a comfortable distance. I've learned from previous years not to overexert in the beginning. One hundred mile plus days are behind me; now, it's more about trying to enjoy the trip, rather than conquer it. The weather tomorrow looks very nice; sunny with a high of 85°. While there will be virtually no elevation change, I'll ride up around 2,500' and down about the same.

May 25, 2019 Year 12, Day 2: – Fort Belvoir, VA – Fredericksburg, VA (62 miles)

The accommodations last night were very good. The bed was comfortably firm, but I slept pretty lightly. The sun woke me at 6:30, so I decided to get a jump on the day. I went to the bicycle, which I left locked to a rail, only to find the front tire was flat. This was a bad omen. After I fixed the flat, I realized I forgot to apply sunscreen and chamois cream... back up to the room. My new Coros Bluetooth helmet, which connects with my iPhone and plays through discs which sit on my cheekbones, is not working. I just purchased it a few weeks ago. Customer service is closed until Tuesday, so I'll use my earbuds which I brought just in case.

I rode 62 miles to Fredericksburg, VA. Google Maps gave me quite a few bonus miles, routing me way off the beaten path. A few miles in to the trip, I rode by our old townhouse in Lorton, VA. This is where we lived when Erica went off to kindergarten.



The town of Lorton was famous for the Lorton Penitentiary, which housed DC's miscreants. I heard it was closed down, but was very surprised to see what an amazing job they've done with developing the land. It's now called "The Liberty Life." It's an arts center, and has a lot of nice homes built there.



Just past Lorton was the town of Occoquan. I always remembered it as very picturesque, and a place I wouldn't mind living.



I got a flat tire in Montclair (different wheel than earlier this morning). I was now starting to get concerned that maybe I didn't bring enough tubes. As I was fixing the flat on the side of the road, a guy in a pickup pulled over to ask if he could help. He told me there was a bicycle shop in Stafford, where I could purchase more tubes.

At around mile 40 in the town of Triangle, I rode past a BBQ joint. There are two things that cannot be passed by: BBQ and ice cream. I ordered three ribs and baked beans. As I was leaving the BBQ joint, I saw that I was at the gate for Marine Corps Base Quantico; the FBI Academy is located there also.



In Stafford, VA, the second thing that is never to be passed appeared. I stopped in for a root beer float.



The day was very hilly and hot. I drank a couple of Gatorades, and ate a banana, but as I'll discuss later, it didn't work. My quadriceps cramped up several times, but the worst was when I was just 2 miles to my destination in Fredericksburg. I never had cramps that bad before. I had to stop the bicycle, and just let it fall over. The pain was so severe I couldn't lift my leg over the bicycle. When I finally did get clear, I laid down on the sidewalk, but no matter which position I put my legs, the pain was intense. Nobody could hear me, so I let out primal wounded animal sounds. I was getting concerned that the cramps wouldn't stop, so I wondered if I should call 911. They did let up a bit, just as a family was walking by. I asked the father if he could give me hand to get up.

I then rode another mile, and saw a brewhouse (actually, there are three things that should never be passed). I stopped in for a beer, but it was a porter that was way too sweet. I had a few sips, and headed out to complete the final mile. The couple sitting out front of the brewery asked me if that was my bike, because the front tire just blew. Oh no, number three! When I removed the tire, I saw that the rim liner had a hole in it, so that caused the flat. I cut out a piece of inner tube to cover the hole, and changed the flat. I was now starting to get more concerned that I could run out of tubes over the next seven days. I headed out for my last mile, and rode by a bicycle shop. (Ever since I started this in 2008, I've been very fortunate to have bike shops nearby when I needed one.) The repairman put a new liner on, and reinstalled the tube and tire. I purchased four more tubes.

I'm staying the night in Fredericksburg, and have one-half a townhouse to myself. It's a very nice Airbnb rental. Fredericksburg is on the Rappahannock River. It is an historic town, and has a very good vibe. There are lots of restaurants and young people, and all the sidewalks are well-maintained brick.



Tomorrow is supposed to be even hotter, so I'll try to get on the road before 7:00 AM. It will be the last of the hills, and the elevation gain tomorrow is supposed to be half of today's. Fifty-eight miles to Richmond.

May 26, 2019 Year 12, Day 3: – Fredericksburg, VA – Richmond, VA (35 miles)

Today was a day of mechanical problems. I woke early, and was on the road at 6:42 AM. I could tell it was going to be a hot day. The long road on which I was riding was tree-lined, so it would remain shady until the sun got high enough in the sky to peer over the trees.



Around 10 miles in, I could feel that my rear tire was flat. This is flat number 4, which is abnormally high; something is very wrong. I found some shade by a closed golf course, where I unhooked the trailer, flipped the bike over, dumped all the gear out of my bag, and removed the rear wheel. I could see a pinhole on the tube on the opposite side of the valve stem. I could not find anything in the tube that would have caused a flat, so I replaced the tube, put the tire back on, hitched the trailer, stored all my gear, and hoped for the best.

Five miles down the road, the same tire went flat again. I pulled over to the side of a busy 2-lane road. I knew something was wrong, but I just couldn't figure out what was causing the flats. I decided to put my spare tire on, and inspect the current tire later, when I could take my time. Lisa, an off-duty firefighter, blocked traffic for me with her jeep.



I rode another 10 miles or so, and the tire went flat again. That's it; no sense going through all my tubes. I felt the problem was with the rim strip, just as with the front wheel yesterday. Problem is, I didn't have any rim strips.

I was in the middle of nowhere, so how was I going to make it to Richmond to get the problem diagnosed and fixed, and who would be open on Sunday? If it weren't for my iPhone, I don't think trips like this would be possible. I found in Google that a couple of bike shops opened at 11, and another opened at 12. Now, I just had to figure out how to get to Richmond.

Who would have thought Uber was available around Bowling Green, VA, and on a Sunday morning at that? I entered an Uber request, and my new best-friend Mohammed arrived 25 minutes later. I unhitched my trailer, and put my bike against a row of mailboxes, waiting for my main man Mohammed to arrive. I figured we would solve how to get my bicycle, trailer, and bag into his Toyota Corolla when he arrived.



I spotted a little swing in front of a mobile home, and figured the owner wouldn't mind me sitting for a spell (as we say in Virginia). The owner came out, and said I was welcome to take a load off.

Mohammed showed up right on time. He had a couple of bungy straps, so I took the front wheel off the bike, and wrestled the bike into the trunk. Mohammed strapped down the trunk, and I put the trailer and bag in the back seat. Off we rode down I-95 with my bike hanging out the back.

Mohammed told me he came to the U.S. from around Kandahar, Afghanistan, with his wife and two children 3 years ago. He was able to obtain a visa, because he was embedded with U.S. soldiers. He said he could have gone to Australia, but he found Americans to be much more welcoming. He now works on a loading dock, and drives for Uber on the weekend. He's in his 20's, but can't join the Army because his wife doesn't speak English, and he doesn't want to leave her alone when he gets deployed. Mohammed seems like just the type of person we need in America. I was sure to give him a very big tip, as he totally saved my bacon today.



Mohammed dropped me at the bike shop, where I had to wait around 20 minutes for them to open.



The mechanic quickly confirmed my diagnosis that the problem was a defective rim strip. He replaced it, and put the tire back on. The tire bead wasn't seating properly on the rim, so I told him I'd prefer he just put on a new tire. He did, and asked me if I wanted him to check out the bike. He said the chain was worn, and suggested I replace it. I told him to be my guest. I went next door to Dunkin' Donuts for a small coffee (first of the trip) and a glazed doughnut. As my appetite has not yet returned, I could only eat half a doughnut, which is pathetic. My appetite better come back soon, because I'm running on food fumes. Last night, I had Cajun pasta for dinner. I could only eat half and, when I returned to the room, I threw it up. This is par for the course every year.

Repairs completed, I was back on the road, and checked in at the Omni Richmond. The attendant declined to valet park my rig. While waiting for my room to be ready, I'm sitting in Starbucks in the lobby, enjoying a Frappuccino. Delicious! The hotel has a restaurant in the lobby. I looked at the menu and it said "The Art of Breakfast." I won't be eating anywhere that considers breakfast an art. Give me Waffle House over breakfast art any day.

As I arrived in Richmond early, I'll try to make the best of it and grab as much rest as I can. I'll hit the road around 6:30 tomorrow, riding the "Capital Trail" around 55 miles to Colonial Williamsburg. I'm expecting (and desperately hoping) it will be a good day.

May 27, 2019 Year 12, Day 4: – Richmond, VA – Williamsburg, VA (56 miles)

I got a good amount of rest yesterday, and my appetite came back. It's pretty hard to pedal on an empty stomach, especially one that has been empty for a couple of days. I stayed at the Omni Hotel, which was very nice. Around 2:30 PM, I had a hankering for meatballs. Fortunately, the hotel lounge served "bar meatballs." They were covered in marinara and melted cheese; they reminded me of what Salish Lodge serves at Snoqualmie Falls. I savored every bite, along with a complimentary glass of house red wine.

I went back to my room, and took a 2-hour nap. I was in a state of semi-sleep, and it felt so good. At 5:45 PM, I woke up and noticed something was obstructing my vision in my left eye. I think one of those horseflies bit me below my eye. Fortunately, I packed four Sudafed tablets, so that should clear it up in a day for so. For now, I'll look like I was in a fight.



I headed out to The Taphouse for dinner at 5:45 PM. I figured I'd take it slow, and order small plates. I started with the She Crab soup, which was delicious. There was a bit too much corn starch to thicken it, but it had a good taste and big lumps of Chesapeake Bay crab meat. Then, I had a small dinner salad with vinaigrette, which I crave on these trips. Next, I had the pan-fried pot stickers, which were delicious. I finished with the mini steak quesadillas. I think I can safely say that my appetite is back. This is usually the point in the trip where things turn for the better.

Like Fredericksburg, Richmond has a lot of young people. It is a very vibrant city, with lots of great restaurants. If you recall from previous years, I surmised that cities with college students seem to be the healthiest economically. Richmond has at least eight colleges, with Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU) being

the largest at 31,000 students. Fredericksburg has four colleges. Richmond still looks like a Southern city, but it doesn't sound like one (no Southern accents). My waitress at The Taphouse told me she relocated from California, because Richmond has the feeling of Los Angeles, just on a smaller scale. She agreed that it is a happening place; I'd like to return to both Richmond and Fredericksburg.



The weather today was less hot than originally forecast. The high will be 87°, and did not break 81° until noon. That, along with a newfound appetite, repaired bike, and a paved trail from Richmond to Colonial Williamsburg (The Capital Trail) made for a much better day.

I started the day at 6:55 AM. Apparently, my mechanical problems are now fixed. No breakdowns today. Google maps put me on a trail prematurely. I had to climb over obstacles to get onto the real trail: the Virginia Capitals Trail, which links Richmond and Williamsburg. It's a great trail; paved and tree-lined. As it's Memorial Day, there were a lot of bikers on the trail.



I rode for about 25 miles, at which point I stopped at “The Fork on 5,” which to be kind I’ll call a café. I had a ham and egg sandwich on toast, and a cup of coffee. They served it with a big slice of watermelon, which was the best part. I could only eat half the sandwich. The man and lady running the café were very nice. I passed some beautiful wheat fields. Virginia is a very pretty state.



I stopped in a 7-11 for some ice, and purchased more Sudafed for my eye. The lady ringing the register doubled as my pharmacist. She observed that I was struggling to see, so she went over the different options. She kept counseling me not to purchase Sudafed, because that would make me sleepy. I purchased the Sudafed in the hope it would put me to sleep, and make the journey less taxing. I look like I was in a bar fight, even with the not-too-bright looking grin.



About 10 miles from Williamsburg, I crossed over the James River.



I was getting low on water, but fortunately there was a place up ahead that would have some. When I got there, they were closed. There's only one thing on these trips that makes me very nervous, and this is running out of water. I need a constant supply of ice-cold water. Google maps told me the next place was 4 miles up the road, so I pressed on. Lo and behold, I hit the motherload... a whole shopping center of fast food restaurants and a grocery store. I was back in civilization.

I saw a Burger King on the corner, so I went there. Now most of you know I'm a McDonald's kind of guy, but how can you walk away from that charcoal smoke they pump out the chimney? I ordered two regular hamburgers; they were delicious.

Four miles later, I arrived at the Homewood Suites by Hilton in Williamsburg. It was only 1:30, so they did not have a room ready for me yet. The manager told me to hold tight, as he walked down the hall and found a room that had just been cleaned. He green-lighted me to walk the bicycle and trailer through the hotel. Homewood Suites are very roomy and comfortable; I've become a big fan. They also have a complimentary happy hour from 5 – 7.

I'm going to settle down for a nap, then get up and go to happy hour and dinner. There's a Denny's a short walk away, but I think Rocco's Smokehouse Grille is going to win.

May 28, 2019 Year 12, Day 5: – Williamsburg, VA – Chesapeake, VA (64 miles)

This morning, I was on the road at 5:52 AM, in an attempt to beat the heat. I rode 9 miles through Colonial Williamsburg and the College of William and Mary, which has a beautiful campus. The sun wasn't quite up yet, so I had my tail light on. It was nice riding before cars got on the road, and the heat began.

I arrived at the Jamestown ferry just in time to catch the 6:40 AM sailing. The ferry crossed the James River from Jamestown to Surry. Jamestown contains the ruins of the first English settlement in America in 1607. Over 80% of the colonists died in 1609-10 of disease and starvation.



The first part of the day was a bit hilly; nothing severe, but I have had my share of uphill. The streets in Surry were tree-lined and very rural; the houses were very nice and well-maintained. The trees soon gave way to farmland.



Once again, Google maps steered me wrong. It took me off the main road and onto a country road. After riding two miles down the road, it said to turn left at a trail. This was nothing more than an abandoned railroad line, and I wasn't about to trudge two miles down that "trail," damaging my bike along the way. I ate crow, turned around, and rode two miles back; four miles wasted! Fortunately, I found a shorter route a little later, so I was able to get two of those miles back.

At 9:30, I again suffered the wrath of Virginia bugs. Something big flew into my slack-jawed mouth. Even though I immediately spit it out, it managed to sting my tongue, which started swelling. Now I have a swollen left eye and a swollen tongue. I stopped at a McDonald's in Smithfield, VA, and ordered hash browns and a mocha frappe. The frappe was quite tasty; I'll be ordering that again. As always, the McDonald's staff gave me the OK to fill my four bottles with ice and water.

Around 10:45, I crossed over Chuckatuck Creek (that's a big creek!). Across the water you can see Newport News Shipbuilding, which is where America's aircraft carriers are built.



In Suffolk, I stopped at a 7-Eleven to fill up my water bottles again. I decided to try their hot dog, after being assured by the cashier that it was 100% beef, so it had to be healthy. It was a very tasty dog indeed; I enjoyed it outside by the combination trash can/ashtray. As I watched a steady stream of people coming and going into the 7-Eleven, I thought these must be very valuable franchises. People are willing to pay for the convenience.



At 11:45, I arrived in Chesapeake, VA, and detoured a mile or so to take a photo of the first apartment in which Gina and I lived, after getting married in 1976. The owners have done a very good job keeping it looking nice.) Our apartment was on the bottom floor to the left. I also rode by the McDonald's where Gina worked when we first got married, while I was away most of the time on a cutter, as a seaman apprentice. (If you didn't know, we started out very modestly, but always had everything we needed. Then again, that's the story of pretty much all of our clients. A famous hedge fund manager, Ray Dalio, recently said "the American dream is dead." I beg to disagree with him.)



At 1:00 PM, I crossed over the Elizabeth River from Portsmouth to Chesapeake. The mile-long bridge appeared to be new. To my left was the Norfolk Naval Shipyard, which is where aircraft carriers are overhauled, and where big jobs like

repairing the USS Cole take place. You can see how industrialized the Elizabeth River is. Downtown Norfolk is the high rises in the distance. Out of sight, further upriver, is Naval Operations Base (NOB) Norfolk, which I believe is our largest Naval base. It is currently home to four aircraft carrier strike groups and their assigned ships. That is enormous!



The last 10 miles were difficult, as the temperature was around 90°. I spotted a big shady oak tree in front of a house by which I was riding. The owner was going in the house, so I asked him if I could sit in the shade for a little while; no problem. It felt so good. After 10 minutes or so, I managed to get back on my feet and complete the five remaining miles. There was a Starbucks a mile away from my lodging, so I went in at 1:50 PM and enjoyed a venti Frappuccino for a half-hour.

Tomorrow, I'll plan to be on the road for 6:00 AM again, to beat the heat. It's supposed to be 97° tomorrow in Elizabeth City, NC, hitting 90° at 11:00 AM. I'm not looking forward to that.

May 29, 2019 Year 12, Day 6: – Chesapeake, VA – Elizabeth City, NC (58 miles)

Last night, I contacted the customer service people at Coros Wearables (who picked up on the first ring) to figure out why my new Bluetooth-enabled helmet was not connecting with my iPhone. They figured it out quickly. Once I told my iPhone to delete the current configuration from “my devices,” it once again discovered the helmet and paired successfully. The helmet has a built-in flashing tail lamp, so I really wanted to get it working again, especially as I’m riding so early in the morning.

Last night, I went to dinner at an Asian restaurant. The waitress said they only serve the large bowls of soup at dinner, so I ordered a bowl of hot and sour soup. It was delicious, and filled at least six cups; I ate most of it. I then had the pan-fried pot stickers, which were very good, but I could only eat three of the six. Last thing I need to do is get sick on this trip.

This morning, I planned to get an early start again, and be on the road for 6:00 AM. The direct route to Elizabeth City, NC is 44 miles, but being a glutton for punishment, I stuck with my plan to make a stop at Knotts Island, NC, so I could take the ferry from Knotts Island to Currituck, NC. The ferry leaves at 10:00 AM, so that would have given me plenty of time to ride the 35 miles to the ferry. The problem is that I set my alarm for 6:30, so I had just 3 ½ hours to get ready, get on the road, and ride 35 miles pulling a 45-pound trailer. I had to think quickly whether I wanted to stick with the plan, and I decided to do that. I was on the road at 6:40 AM, and amazingly I made it to the ferry at 9:20 AM. I averaged 13 miles an hour, which is pretty good for a guy turning 61 next month, with big bones (to put it politely), hauling a trailer.

The roads were in really good shape. I’ve noticed a lot a very large, dead snakes on the side of the road. I would not want to wander through these woods or creeks. I rode through some beautiful neighborhoods with mansion-like houses in the Great Bridge area, which is between Chesapeake and Virginia Beach. Even the roads were newly-paved. The clouds did a good job of blocking most of the sun for the first few hours.

Even though I was in a rush, I managed to take a couple of pictures of North Landing River.



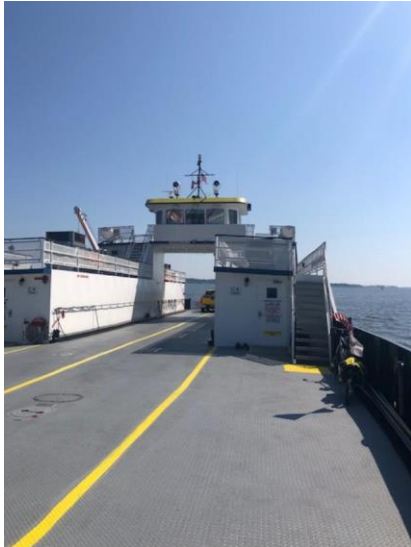
I rode across the North Carolina border at 8:35 AM.



Knotts Island was nice, but there's not much there.



I found a little shade to wait 40 minutes for the ferry. In addition to me, there was one NC government truck and three motorcyclists on the ferry. The ferry had a crew of four. Like the Jamestown ferry, this ferry does not charge. Imagine how much it cost to transport us five passengers across the sound, and how much fuel was used? Oh well, I'm not complaining. The passenger compartment was air conditioned, and I was even cold. I dozed off for a little bit.



On the Currituck side, there was a McDonald's. I got a hamburger and small fry. Everybody in the south is so nice. The lady behind the counter emphasized that she'd fill my water bottles behind the counter, after I filled them with ice from their dispenser. A group of older men sat by me, telling tales of picking 200 pounds of cotton in a day. They couldn't understand why I was out in this heat. I couldn't understand why they live here in this heat.

The next 21 miles were tough. I had a 17 MPH headwind, and the temperature kept climbing, eventually reaching 97°. Mostly, though, it was the headwind. It's bad enough to be pulling at 45-pound trailer, but to have a 17 MPH wind pushing against me, it's very hard to get up much speed. The saving grace was that it was flat, and I did not have any mechanical problems.

I rode for 10 miles, then took a break for ice water in front of an oak tree on someone's front lawn. I stopped again at a church, which had some shade, for more ice water. The road was surrounded by open fields, so there was no wind break.

With five miles to go, I stopped at a Hardees for a vanilla milkshake, and one more refill for a couple of water bottles. Finally, Elizabeth City. The Coast Guard has its aviation training center here.



Tomorrow's forecast is calling for 96°, hitting 91° at 11:00 AM. I'll have a headwind again, but it will be around 9 MPH, getting up to 11 MPH at 1:00 PM. Sunrise is at 5:54 AM, and I have 66 miles to ride. Therefore, I'm setting my alarm for 5:15 AM, and plan to be on the road no later than 5:45 AM. With any luck, I'll arrive in Williamston, NC around 1:00 PM. Friday looks a little better, with highs around 89°.

May 30, 2019 Year 12, Day 6: – Packing It In!

This will be the final update. Last night, I had a great dinner at Montero's restaurant, which was a short walk from my hotel. When I first looked at the menu, it seemed a bit fancy, but the reviews were over the top. I decided to give it a try, and was not disappointed. I had Asian chicken soup, which was the best soup I've ever had, and that's saying something. I also had the half-portion of chicken parmigiana, and a glass of red wine. They also gave me a basket of breads and miniature muffins. All this for \$25. Maybe there's an upside to living in the heat. Montero's was very busy, and this was a good-size restaurant in a small town on a Wednesday night.



As I was putting the final touches on the course and timeline for today's ride, I asked myself "what am I doing riding in the dark so early in the morning, to beat the blistering heat on a route which holds no attractions; just endless farmland?" I decided 6 days and 300 miles was enough, and that I would end my 2019 journey in Elizabeth City, NC.

I've decided to rent a small SUV big enough to fit my bicycle and trailer, and spend the next couple of days exploring and enjoying areas such as Kitty Hawk and Morehead City. This is the first time I'll have gotten to explore and enjoy areas through which I've ridden. Normally, it's just ride, eat, drink, sleep, repeat. I'm looking forward to today and tomorrow, and my drive back to DC for my flight home Sunday morning.

It will be nice to be back to work, and a normal routine, on Monday. As my friend Skip once said, one of the reasons he takes motorcycle rides in far-away places

like Southeast Asia, Russia and Africa, is to refresh his appreciation for the comforts of home. Well said Skip!

Here is my final 2019 route:

