

Year 7 of Carnation, WA - Pawtucket, RI Bicycle Ride: Muskegon, MI to Buffalo, NY

Well here I am in year 7 of my 8-year bicycle expedition from Carnation, WA to Pawtucket, RI, which is where I grew up. For those of you joining mid-tour, this is all about my desire to pedal across the United States. Rather than do it in one trip, I decided in 2008 (when I turned 50) to break it up in segments.

To recap previous years:

2008: Carnation, WA - Spokane, WA. I fell quite a bit short of my goal of reaching North Dakota. This was one of those experiences where you learn how unprepared you really are. The Cascade Mountains kicked my butt, and I got beaten down by the heat and ran out of water at Stevens Pass. I lost feeling in my right hand, was badly sunburned, and didn't eat for 3 days. I was doing 110 - 120 miles a day, and crying the whole way.

2009: Spokane, WA - Whitefish, MT. Once again, too many miles in a day. The first day was 110 miles, and I could hardly sit up straight to eat dinner that night. Guess it didn't help that I got up at 2 AM to drive from Carnation - Spokane, so I could start riding from Spokane at 8:00 AM. This leg too was cut short due to concern about pain in my left shin.

2010: Whitefish, MT - Havre, MT. The train from Seattle - Whitefish left 5 hours late, and arrived 5 hours late. Instead of departing Whitefish at 8:00 AM, I found myself getting on the road at 1:30 PM, and terrified I was going to get caught going over the Rocky Mountains in the dark, without a headlight. Fortunately, I made it to East Glacier by dusk. The Cascade Mountains were much worse than the Rockies. Because of mechanical difficulties, I had to return home from Havre, MT, and not North Dakota. Oh, way too many miles each day again. Call me a slow learner.

2011: Havre, MT - Minot, ND. Success! I completed the entire planned course. Welcome to the middle of nowhere, home of the North Dakota oil boom. Minot had just gone through a very bad flood, which wiped out much of the town. Miles and miles and miles between towns. People who say they want to live in the middle of nowhere should get their heads examined.

2012: Minot, ND - St. Paul, MN. Talk about Nowhere, USA! The state tree in ND is the telephone pole. 100+ degrees every single day. Thought this leg would never end, but then I got to see the Mississippi River and reached St. Cloud, MN. First city since Spokane, and first good food in a very long time.

2013: St. Paul, MN - Chicago. Perfect weather (70's) every day. Small towns were much closer together than in Montana and North Dakota. Wisconsin was a beautiful (but hilly) state, and riding in to Chicago felt like a victory lap.

So now here I am on the Amtrak Empire Builder, heading to Milwaukee, WI. It will be a 48-hour trip, but I have a sleeper car. That means I get a complimentary dried-out NY Strip Steak for dinner! I thought it would be good to take the train one last time, so I could look out the window in comfort, and see the 2,000 miles I pedaled.

Here's a picture of my 6.5' X 3' sleeper car. Not much, but it beats sleeping outside or in a seat.



I'll arrive in Milwaukee on Friday afternoon, and stay the night there. This year, I'm using the AirBNB app, in which people rent out rooms in their house. I figure this will be a lot more interesting than some musty, nasty motel.

Saturday morning, I take the 6:30 AM ferry from Milwaukee to Muskegon, MI. I'll hit the road around 9:00 AM, with 80 miles in front of me the first day. I plan to detour to Grand Haven, MI, which was designated by Congress in 1998 as Coast Guard City USA. The first Coast Guard presence in the city was in 1924. The Coast Guard cutter ESCANABA was based in the city until the Second World War. After it was sunk by a German U-boat, the citizens of Grand Haven raised more than \$1,000,000 in bonds to build a replacement cutter bearing the same name.

Here is a brief summary of where I'll be staying each night. My old Coast Guard buddy who I haven't seen in 25 years, Art Butler, is going to drive up from Plymouth, MI area to meet me for dinner. He's both an officer and a Coast Guard Academy graduate, so I expect I'll be paying.

I'll be sending daily updates and pictures for your reading pleasure. I hope you enjoy the trip with me.

- June 27: Milwaukee, WI
- June 28: Ionia, MI
- June 29: Durand, MI
- Jun 30: Romeo, MI
- July 1: (my 56th birthday): Petrolia, Ontario
- July 2: London, Ontario
- July 3: Hamilton, Ontario
- July 4: Buffalo, NY

Day 1: Recap of Train Ride, Arrival in Milwaukee, and Day 1 Ride Muskegon, MI to Ionia, MI

While on the train, I got to see of lot of the flooding in Minnesota.



Flooding in downtown Minneapolis/St. Paul

It sure feels good to be off the train. As the route from Seattle - Milwaukee runs alongside many of the roads I rode from 2008 - 2013, it brought back a lot of memories looking out the window from the "luxury" of my sleeper car.



As expected, we encountered a lot of delays in ND due to the oil-related rail traffic.



This is one long train looping around to be refilled.

Because of the delays, I arrived in Milwaukee yesterday 5 hours late at 7:00 PM. This is definitely beer town.



I stayed in an upstairs "flat" with a lady named Bethany. She advertised the empty bedroom on an app called AirBNB. Milwaukee was a very tough city to pedal through. The drivers are quite aggressive. However, the city had a good feeling of being revitalized, probably because there seem to be a lot of young people living there.

After arriving at Bethany's with my flashing lights on because it was sundown, I strolled back up the street to an Italian Restaurant called Crabby's. After meeting the owner, I immediately determined the restaurant was named after him. He wasn't very receptive to my request to park the bike inside, but he relented. The food was very good and very inexpensive. Back to Bethany's and a good night sleep in a very comfy bed.

Saturday morning, I awoke at 4:30 AM caught the 6:00 AM high-speed ferry from Milwaukee

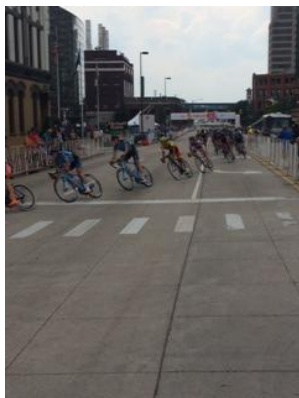
across Lake Michigan to Muskegon, and hit the road with my bicycle at 9:30 AM (time zone change). The waterfront of Milwaukee and Muskegon, and especially Muskegon, are really pretty. Riding off the ferry, I was pumped up and ready for some serious riding.

What was supposed to be an 80-mile day somehow turned into almost 100 miles. I did take a serious wrong turn once, which results in the most depressing thing: bonus miles. The first part of the ride to Ionia, MI was really pretty and flat. That changed as I approached Grand Rapids, for the remainder of the day. Who would have thought Michigan was hilly? Come to find out, the whole United States is hilly. The hills aren't the bad part... it's pulling a 40+ pound trailer up the hills that makes it hard. Coming into Grand Rapids, my map app put me on the interstate highway, which I rode for a few miles before I could figure out how to get off. Lots of honks from passing cars, and just a little bit of fear on my part.

When I finally found my way in to Grand Rapids, I passed the Gerald Ford Presidential Museum. The picture is blurry, but here it is anyway (just to prove I was there).



Then, further in the city, I encountered a closed-circuit bicycle race. Those guys were flying. I was tempted to jump in with my trailer to show them how to ride a bicycle at 11 MPH.



I was at a loss for how to get to Ionia from Grand Rapids, without going on the interstate. Fortunately, one of the guys watching the race told me to stay on the street in front of me, and that would take me all the way there. I even found a bicycle trail along the way, and jumped on

that. When I got off the trail is when I started heading south instead of east, and wasted a lot of miles and energy.

My energy was really depleted, and I was starting to experience that sick feeling of being out of gas. With around 25 miles to go at 4:40 PM, a very nasty thunder storm came up really quickly, and it started to downpour. A big gust of wind came up, and the temperature plummeted. Fortunately, there was a gas station under whose roof I took shelter. The storm passed in less than 30 minutes. Broke out the rain gear and continued my ride in the rain.



This last leg of the trip was very painful. I was not only out of energy, but I was experiencing severe cramps in both quadriceps. Once, when I got off the bicycle to rest, I fell to the ground they hurt so bad. Anyone passing me on the bike with their windows down would have thought there were passing a wounded animal. I finally made it to Ionia at 7:50 PM, which is way too late to arrive. This was an extremely long day, especially since I woke up at 4:30 AM.

I tried eating an Italian sub I picked up around 15 miles back, but found I had no appetite. Sound asleep by 8:30 PM, after washing the nasty off both me and my clothes. Can't wait for Day 2... Not!

Day 2, June 29: Ionia, MI - Durand, MI

It can't be 7:45 AM already, but my alarm tells me otherwise. Time to begin the daily ritual: Check to see if clothes have dried, apply sunscreen, apply chamois cream to my delicate nether regions, brush my teeth (which I didn't have the energy to do last night (sorry Dr. Redd and Renee), fill the water bottles with ice and water, pack up the gear bag and head out.

I forgot to attach this photo from yesterday morning, while waiting to board the ferry. Also, here's a photo of the sun rising over Lake Michigan (as seen from Milwaukee).



Usually, I feel energized in the morning, but not today. My energy level was low all day. Leaving Ionia, there was a very big hill (they're always uphill). The map app put me on back farm roads. Very pretty and very little traffic.



The enormous lawns are meticulously maintained. The map app thought appropriate to put me on gravel roads, so I had to adjust the filter to exclude unpaved roads.

I felt like Forrest Gump when I went by this water tower.



The day was supposed to have been around 62 miles, but that turned into 68 miles. Normally, 68 miles is not a big deal, but like I say, I still had not recovered from yesterday. There were fewer towns on the roads I traveled today than in the most remote areas of North Dakota and Montana. There was not a single place to stop to eat all day. I had not eaten since noon yesterday, when I had a salad with chicken and a diet coke (\$3.75 for everything). I felt like I was taking advantage of the guy.

I did go by a supermarket, and purchased an orange juice and apple, but the apple was mostly inedible. I really had no appetite anyway. I had to stop at several houses to refill my water bottles. Everyone was really nice and wanted to help. I also laid down on several people's front lawns. One man stopped his car to see if I was alive. My energy level was so low I just wanted to keep taking lawn naps. At one house, two big dogs came running out of the house to me barking. They were inquisitive, and one of the big ones ended up sitting on me. Even the dogs are nice out in the country.

I arrived in Durand around 4:30, and stopped at a Chinese restaurant on the edge of town. As I expected, it wasn't very good, but I wasn't hungry so what difference did it make? I ordered the chicken chow mein, which sat in a puddle of water. The egg roll was frozen. I ate around 10% of it and thanked them for their wonderful food. The chef came out to take a photo of my bicycle and trailer.

After checking in to the hotel at 5:00 PM, I showered, washed my clothes in the shower, and plopped down on the bed. I didn't sleep soundly, but it sure felt good. I woke up at 7:30 PM and headed to Subway for my old reliable tuna sub and chips. I was only able to eat half. Normally, my appetite returns on day 3. We'll see if that holds tomorrow.

Well, it's 9:00 PM and I'm finishing catching up on my journal. Time to walk back to the hotel and hit the sack. Sleeping in to 8:00 AM tomorrow. Durand to Romeo is supposed to be 60 miles. We'll see about that. Looks like there are a couple of towns to stop at along the way.

Day 3: Ionia, MI - Romeo, MI

Well that tuna sub last night was apparently spring-loaded. I orally deposited it to the porcelain receptacle in my hotel room. Sorry, no pictures available. That's what I needed, as I soon had visions of chicken wings dancing in my head while laying in bed. Just like in previous years, it seems my body takes 2 full days to adapt to the ride. After that, I'm my old gluttonous self.

Today's ride was supposed to be around 60 miles; it came in close at 62 miles. Not many significant hills, just lots of rolling hills. The map app started me out on a really nice country road, but then it put me on a gravel road. The gravel was packed well, so it wasn't too bad. I'm always afraid I'll break a spoke, like I did in northern Minnesota 2 years ago. I can't fix that myself, and repair shops are few and far between.

Then I came across a flooded roadway. At home, I would have plowed through, but too much risk of something going wrong out here.



I knocked on the door of a house by the road closed sign, and asked the owner if there was an alternate route. He told me a paved road ran parallel a mile down the road. That was good advice, as it was a good road. The man who answered the door told me he was a Huey pilot in Vietnam, and suffered from the effects of Agent Orange. I noticed he had Parkinson's-like symptoms. He too is a retired chief warrant officer (but I outranked him by one grade).

My appetite returned this morning, and I felt like my old self. I stopped at a McDonald's after riding around 20 miles (you're welcome Alan). When I ride, I crave salads. I ordered the McDonald's southwestern salad with crispy chicken and Newman's Own vinaigrette dressing. What a great salad... I may migrate away from the burgers. I did have a small fry with it. This was the first enjoyable meal I had since Friday night.

A short time later, I rode by a supermarket. I went in to refill my water bottles, and noticed they had 1/2 BBQ chickens at the deli. I purchased one, even though it was bigger than I wanted. They charged me 25 cents per water bottle to fill them with ice. I took my chicken to a park around the corner. I needed a chain saw to cut into that cold hunk of chicken. Forget the plastic knife and fork. I'm talking a barbarian meat-eating episode. I only ate around half of it, but it

was nice to be eating again.

The map app again routed me onto a gravel road. The roads in Michigan are atrocious; even the paved roads are terrible. I went around 2 miles down this gravel road, and then the app said I had another 6 miles to go. I stopped a car to ask how long it went unpaved, and she said the entire 6 miles. I wouldn't have driven a truck down that road. I think either my body or my bike would break, so I did the unthinkable and turned around. Remember, I never want bonus miles.

I got back on the main road, and passed a bar on a lake with a \$2 cold beer sign. Who wouldn't stop? The four guys who apparently spend a good portion of their lives there drinking, smoking and cussing kept commenting on what an idiot I am, all in good fun though.



The temps are in the low 80's, but it's a bit humid. Everybody keeps commenting how hot it is, but compared to 2 years ago, this is a cake walk. The winds have been mostly favorable too, which is the biggest factor.

About 2 miles past the \$2 beers, I passed a dairy offering ice cream. How could I not stop? I ordered a coffee milk shake, but only drank around half of it. Got to be careful not to drink too much dairy when I'm hot.

There are a lot of beautiful lakes in Michigan. I snapped a couple of pictures.



Uh-oh, another bad road. This one was serious. The road was totally torn up. Two pre-teen boys on their bicycles told me I could get through, so of course I accepted their recommendation. This was a major tear-up job, but the road crew let me pass through.



I arrived in Romeo, MI at 4:30. I should have arrived a couple of hours earlier, but I didn't feel any need to hurry today. Too many good food/drink stops to make, and take time to smell the roses.

The house in which I'm staying is really nice. I have my own bedroom and a shared bath. The owner had towels, soap, shampoo, and bottled water all laid out for me. Very nice accommodations. I hope she doesn't come to the room to see all my wet clothes hanging to dry.

I'm heading out now to a restaurant in town to meet my old Coast Guard shipmate, Art Butler, who is driving up over an hour away to have dinner with me. I haven't seen Art for 25 years. He'll be surprised to see I haven't aged a day.

Day 4: Romeo, Michigan to Petrolia, Ontario

Last night my old Coast Guard shipmate Art Butler, along with his wife Caroline and daughter Meaghan, drove 60 miles from Plymouth, MI to meet me for dinner. Romeo had plenty of good restaurants from which to choose. I ordered the combo smoked chicken and ribs. The portion was enormous. I probably ate one-third of it, and gave the rest to Art to take home. We reminisced about our Coast Guard days, and how everything we have today we owe to being in the Service, and taking advantage of the educational opportunities presented to us.

Around 3:00 AM, a very strong thunderstorm roared through, and the skies opened. I don't recall us getting storms like that in the Northwest. An alarm went off, which I suspect was a tornado alarm. Nobody else in the house got up, so I figured I'd be safe under the covers.

This was one of those days I could ride all day. It was a planned 61-mile day, and that's what it turned out to be. It was mostly cloudy in the 70's, not too humid, flat, and most importantly the wind was at my back. It was due and was a good birthday (56) present for me. I hit the poorly-maintained Michigan roads around 7:30 AM. The shoulders are gravel, and the right-edge of the pavement is badly cracked and pitted. The drivers, while not aggressive, are not exactly passive either. Pick-up trucks like to gun it after they pass, just to express their displeasure.



I filled up my water bottles with tap water, at the house where I stayed. Now I understand why the owner gave me bottled water when I arrived. After a few miles on the road, I took a drink and could hardly keep it in my mouth. The water in much of Michigan does not taste very good.

After riding around 15 miles, I came across the Golden Arches. They are indeed heavenly. I had the sausage burritos and hash browns... delicious. Instead of coffee, I had a diet coke. Things are different when you're exercising a lot. After filling up my water bottles, I hit the road for the next 41 miles. It came to me that ice is the most valuable commodity on a long bicycle ride.

After riding another 15 miles, and approaching Marine City, MI, I slammed on the brakes when I saw a sign for home-made soups. I had the beef barley. As it was 10:55 AM, it was only luke warm, but delicious nevertheless.



I then road another 3 miles to Marine City, where I caught a small ferry across the St. Clair River to Canada. It was a \$1.00 fare... wow!



When I arrived on the Canadian side, I went through customs. All the cars got waived thorough, and then came me. I gave the officer my passport. He asked me the normal questions: where am I from, where am I going, when was the last time I was in Canada. They he asked me if I had any weapons or knives, and he took to inspecting my menacing pocket knife. After asking me twice if I've ever been arrested (to which I answered "No" if you were wondering), he took my passport inside and I waited around 10 minutes until I was cleared. On the way past the guard shack, I stuck my head in the window and told him he forgot to wish me a happy birthday. He said he meant to, but forgot.

The Canadian I met on the ferry, who took my picture for me, told me an alternate way to get to Petrolia. There is a bicycle path which runs 15 miles to the north along the St. Clair River. That was a great suggestion.



Michigan as seen from Canada



Canadian Geese (see, they really do come from Canada)

What's wrong with this place... kilometers? The roads are in really good shape, and the people seem so much calmer than Americans. Today is Canada Day, so most places are closed for the day. Everyone is flying a Canadian flag or wearing a Canadian flag tee-shirt. Then there's me rolling down the road with my U.S. flag. One guy yelled to me, "It's Canada Day." The area in which I'm riding today is all farmland, power plants, and chemical plants.

I had lunch in the town of Corunna, having only 15 more miles to go. This seems to be working well stopping for something light every 15 miles. Most of the restaurants were closed. I purchased a chicken Caesar salad at a supermarket, with balsamic vinaigrette dressing and an orange juice. When I asked if there was somewhere I could fill my water bottles, I was directed to the men's room. I took a pass on that one.

After a fantastic lunch (I really crave salads and vinegar), I hit the road for the final 15-mile leg. I had a strong tail-wind, and sailed down the 15-miles straight-as-an-arrow road. Very boring road, much like North Dakota. I have a feeling much of my next 2 days in Canada are going to be like this.



I arrived in Petrolia around 3:00 PM, which is ideal. I found an open brew pub, "Crabby Joe's." What is it with restaurants being named after crabby guys? I had a cold brewsky and a few Thai-chili chicken wings. Delicious! I'm not really in the mood for beer though. For some reason, diet coke is more appealing. I'll probably go back for dinner tonight, as nobody else in town is open, and this was very good.



The weather for tomorrow looks good. Mid- to upper-70's, favorable strong winds, and a 30% chance of a shower. Planning on 58 miles tomorrow, which should be another easy day.

Day 5: Petrolia, Ontario to London, Ontario

Today was a 61 mile day, and I've now pedaled 367 miles since Saturday. I stayed with a retired couple last night at a B&B in Petrolia. Petrolia is where the oil industry got started. I was reading that when they struck oil, it was an uncontrolled geyser that lasted years. The remnants are still present, as I bicycled by what appeared to be fenced-off hazmat containment site on my way out of town. Also, the smell of oil permeated the air. Makes me think about what I put in my water bottles this morning. I saw one still-producing well, but I think the oil has pretty much dried up.



I hit the road around late after 9:00 AM. The temperature was in the 70's, and it was a little less humid. The wind was on my starboard quarter (around 4:00 o'clock for you non-nautical types), and the terrain was mostly flat. All-in-all, pretty good conditions. The land was mostly all farmland as far as the eye could see, with a few wind turbines in the distance.



And then there was something out of a sci-fi movie approaching me from up ahead. Turned out to be a John Deere combine. Those things are mammoth when you're face-to-face with them. This is how we enjoy such plentiful food.



And then it happened... I was attacked by the notoriously vicious 3-legged Canadian canine. Fortunately, said 3-legged canine's handlers quickly came to my rescue, and called her off. Seems she has a history of chasing moving vehicles, and met her match with a truck down the road. She's now moved on to bicycles as they're less of a threat. This is one of my favorite pictures of all times.



Throughout the day, my maps app routed me onto several gravel roads, and I almost spilled twice on the loose sand/gravel. I tried to get off them as quickly as possible, but one of them went on for several miles.

I had to ride 37 miles before finally arriving in civilization, where I could get something to eat. Back to McDonald's again. They're so generous with their ice.

As I was around 12 miles outside of Hamilton, which is a large city of 366,000 people, threatening clouds suddenly appeared. Fortunately, I avoided the heavy rain.



I just knew the next turn had to be for me (I'm also an elected fire commissioner with Eastside Fire & Rescue, for those of you who may not know). Sure enough, I was supposed to turn here. How thoughtful of the Canadians to name a road after me, just because I was passing through town.



For the last several miles, I found a bicycle path which ran along the Thames River. It was a nice change of pace from farm roads and main roads. As I passed people on the path, I said "Hi," but not a single person acknowledged me. Must be American-haters, or maybe it's just that I've arrived back in the big city.



Tonight, I'm staying in a house I found on AirBNB. The lady who owns it said she'd spend the night with her boyfriend, so I have the cottage to myself. Well, almost myself. Meet Kitty.



I went out for Chinese food tonight. It was OK, but ours is much better.

When I returned to the house, I heard the TV playing in the basement. I said "hello" and some guy stuck his head in the stairway. Apparently, there are two boarders here tonight, not including Kitty.

Tomorrow, I head to Hamilton, Ontario, which will be around a 70-mile day. Hamilton has over 721,000 people living there. The terrain is supposed to be similar to what I've experienced, and I think it will be more populated along the route. The temperature is only going to be in the mid-60's, which should be really nice. The winds should be off my port beam (9 o'clock) at 10 - 15 MPH, which is a relatively neutral wind. Just hoping there are places to stop every 15 miles or so. I think there will be. I plan to hit the road shortly after 7:00 AM, as I'll probably be in bed tonight by 7:00. Two more days to go.

Day 6: London, Ontario - Hamilton, Ontario

This update was delayed a day due to electronic problems I'll discuss herein.

I got an early start Thursday morning at 7:25 AM. It was cloudy and pretty cool, with a 30% chance of rain between 10:00 AM - 1:00 PM. As I headed out, I found myself right back on farm roads. Corn and beans, beans and corn, corn and beans, beans and corn. The monotony is painful. I wasn't feeling particularly energetic, but after a half hour or so I found my stride. I passed a field containing an enormous array of solar collectors. I'm convinced this is our future with all the open land we have, the cleanliness of solar and the fact it's inexhaustible.



Going through a very tiny town, I stopped at this church for a rest. I'm still trying to figure out what it says to the fact they feel they need reserved parking spots. I guess everyone needs to somehow elevate their position in life.



I stopped at a Tim Horton's for breakfast. They're prevalent in Canada. Not impressed.

Riding down the road, I was gagging and coughing because of a brief spat with post-nasal drip. Just as a car was approaching, I projectile vomited onto my right bicep. Nice show for the passing motorist!

Google Maps routed me onto gravel roads more times than I care to remember. I almost fell twice on the loose dirt, but caught myself.

It would be another 40 miles before I found another place to stop. But first, right at 10 AM the skies opened. I ducked under a tree and put my raincoat and booties on. It was pouring way too hard to ride. After the downpour turned to rain, I headed back out. The rain subsided around noon and I could see the blue skies chasing me.

I stopped for lunch in Burford, and had a great crispy chicken Caesar salad. It was at that point I noticed my iPhone would not charge. It kept telling me the charging cable was bad. This was a very serious situation as not only is my itinerary on the iPhone, but I used it as my sole source of navigation (although I do use the sun too). I called the phone provider, who inquired with the infamous "Tier 2" area. Apparently, it would be a brief hold. During the brief hold, my battery went from 18% to 11%, so I hung up before she ever came back on the line.

All attention was now on getting to an electronics store to purchase a new cable. The next town with such a store was around 15 miles up the road. The waitress told me where to go.

After I left the restaurant, I kept my phone turned off as GPS drains the battery quickly. When I got into town, I just kept asking people where the mall was, and kept getting different answers. Finally, I went into a tiny hair salon to ask. They must have been terrified thinking I was looking for a haircut, as they probably smelled me when I walked through the door. A guy with weird curly-looking hair told me there was an electronics store right across the street. Sure enough, they had the cable I needed. I plugged it in and the phone started charging. And then it stopped. The young buck clerk took a look at my charging cable and said the connections were filthy and had a black coating on them. He surmised I shorted out my phone. In hindsight, maybe the rain had something to do with it, even though the phone was covered.

Now I felt I was in a world of doo-doo. My first order of business was finding my way to Breadlbane Street in Hamilton, where I was renting a room for the night. Keep in mind, there are 750,000 people in Hamilton, and here I am looking for one side street. Same strategy: Just keep going in the direction I need to go, and keep asking people for more specific incremental directions.

I rode through McMaster University, which was large and had a lot of new-looking buildings. I was told the house was not far from McMaster. Finally, I arrived at 5:30. This turned into a 90-mile, 10-hour day. I had now ridden 457 miles over the last 6 days.

The lady with whom I was staying, Siobhan, is a stained-glass artist. She offered to drive me to the Apple store to have the phone looked at. I told her I'd take her up on that offer, but in return I'd buy dinner. She accepted. I plugged in the phone before I showered, and saw it was taking a

charge. I was careful not to even breathe near the phone. The battery was shortly up to 50%, after having been down to 1%. If I could get it to 100%, I could use it very sparingly on Friday to find my way to Buffalo.

I told Siobhan I didn't think we needed to go to the Apple store, so she recommended an excellent close-by Italian restaurant. I had chicken parmesan with ziti and the best bruschetta I've ever had. It was just the way I like it... traditional Italian food, not high-brow Italian food.

By the time we got back, it was almost 9:00 PM. The phone was 100% charged, and I was still afraid to touch it. Siobhan printed out directions to Buffalo for me to take, in case the phone stopped working.

I hit the sack and fell right to sleep, not knowing what tomorrow (my last day) would hold.

Day 7 and Final: Hamilton, Ontario - Buffalo, NY

I awoke around 6:15 AM, so I figured while I was up, I would get an early start to this my final day. I needed to build in extra time in case the iPhone died on me again and I had trouble navigating as a result. I was on the road at 6:53 AM. It was very cool, but sunny. I navigated the city streets using the directions Siobhan printed out for me, as I was terrified to use my phone and drain the battery.

After riding through the city for a couple of miles, the street I was supposed to take to get to the bike path had a 20-foot crater dug into it. I asked a passing bicyclist how to get to the Escarpment Trail as the road was closed. He said there was a set of stairs around the corner, leading up to the trail's overpass. This was one of those former train tracks paths. I literally dragged the bicycle and attached 45-pound trailer up two flights of stairs, one step at a time. It was real grunt work. I was just glad I didn't damage the trailer's connection to the bicycle, as the trailer kept tipping sideways. Once I got the bike and trailer onto the trail, it was a 30-minute continuous climb up the escarpment. In Hamilton, they call the escarpment "the mountain." It's not a mountain, but it is a very high cliff which surrounds Hamilton. The slope of the trail was not extreme, but riding uphill for 30 minutes, while pulling a trailer, is very tiresome.

I spent most of the morning riding through suburban neighborhoods and country roads. The weather was beautiful and the winds mostly favorable. Not a bit of humidity. After 13 miles, I stopped for breakfast in a supermarket, and struck up a conversation with the local retiree coffee clutch. There were quite inquisitive of my quest.

I asked the lady behind the counter if she could fill up my water bottle. She said they have well water, and strongly recommended I purchase bottled water. After my previous experiences, I took her up on that. I did have to use the phone's navigation system a bit to get this point, which ate up 12% of my battery. I plugged the phone in while I ate; lo and behold, it was taking a charge. After it got to 100%, daring as I am, I tried plugging the iPhone into my portable power

supply and that worked too. I was now back in business. I could again listen to my music and use satellite navigation.

I passed two grown wild turkeys with their babies. I came back around to take a picture, but they were moving away from me. I did take a picture, but you can't see them.

I continued on for a few more hours, seeing lots of corn and beans, along with beans and corn.

Very interesting stuff... not! I did see a couple of vineyards, which grow grapes for Welch's. After a few hours, I saw a vision on the horizon. Could it be the observation tower at Niagara Falls, 15 miles ahead? Sure enough, it was.



I had a newfound energy, seeing my penultimate destination in sight. Google maps had me on country roads, but I had to cross a major highway. The maps routed me onto a very primitive mile-long gravel path, and through a pedestrian underpass.



I was now back on pavement, for which I have newfound appreciation. The bicycle has been through a lot on this trip, and is showing wear. The wheels are out of true and the rear derailleur keeps slipping.

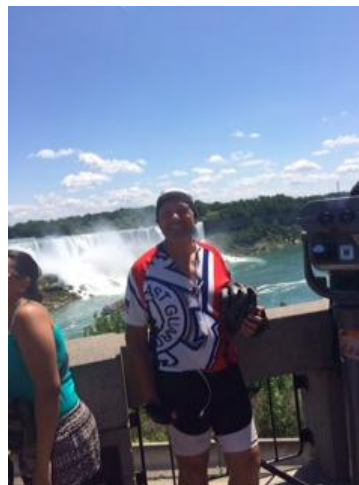
And finally I arrived in the City of Niagara Falls, Ontario. I saw a sign at a small restaurant touting the best burgers, so how could I not stop. The burger and homemade fries were wonderful, and I could now take time to enjoy them, along with my diet coke.



As I got closer to Niagara Falls, traffic was much more congested. It was very seedy. Lots of strip clubs and run down motels dotted the wayside. I failed to see the tourist attraction so far. I rode over a bridge which spanned a canal. I don't know what the name of the canal is.



As I approached the main downtown area of Niagara Falls, I felt like I was in Las Vegas or some enormous carnival. Can't say I was impressed... probably the biggest tourist trap I've ever seen. I made my way to the park overlooking the falls. I can understand why people say the view is best from the Canadian side. They are impressive.





I now had to figure out how to get to the Peace Arch bridge, to return to the United States. I quickly passed through customs, even though I wasn't coming in from El Salvador or Honduras. Coming in to Canada they were asking if I had any weapons. Coming back into the U.S. I was expecting them to ask if I remembered my gun.

Now that I was back on friendly soil, I had about 25 more miles to pedal to Buffalo. I'm sure glad my GPS was working again, as the route was very circuitous as I had to stay off the highway. I pedaled on a bike trail along the Niagara River, which was really scenic. In fact, most of the next 25 miles turned out to be on bike paths.

I saw some 4th of July activity at a local VFW Post. I pulled in and saw young men with their hats on sideways and backwards guzzling very long-stemmed glasses of beer, with a policeman keeping an eye on the getting-intoxicated group. Sure is nice to be back in the United States! Not very comforting to think this is the group I'm going to count on to provide my Social Security benefit.

There was one particularly confusing area, which turned out to be in the neighborhood of Love Canal. If you remember in the mid-1970's, it was learned the Love Canal neighborhood was build on a site formerly used by Hooker Chemical Company (now Occidental Petroleum) to bury 21,000 tons of toxic waste. The entire neighborhood was demolished and the area is now fenced off. As pretty as the Niagara River is, I believe it is still badly contaminated.

I rode my bicycle over two large bridges. There was a narrow sidewalk for pedestrians with a sign directing bicyclists to walk their bicycles. I assumed that didn't apply to me as I wanted to ride, so I just rode up and over the bridges. Judging by my face in this selfie, I must have just finished the uphill leg.



Buffalo, and the end of this year's journey, was now in sight on the horizon, from the top of one of the bridges.



As is always the case when I enter a big city, I enter through the rough neighborhoods. I was a sign at a small dive advertising hot dogs. Now who wouldn't stop for a hotdog? I went inside, placed my hotdog order, and saw they offered clams casino. Like a dummy, I asked if they were any good. What else would the reply have been except "Of course." I changed my order from a hotdog to clams casino. Keep in mind I'm in a very beaten down part of town, and I'm ordering seafood. If that's not courage, tell me what is. Of course, you're probably thinking courage? More like stupidity. After a 15-minute wait, the seafood delicacy, which I so enjoy in Boston,

was presented to me in a plastic take-out carry case. I found whole, not diced clams. Even though I'm colorblind, self-preservation told me these weren't the color they should be. Into the trash they went, and off I went for the last 2 miles of my trip. The best part is I'm alive to tell of these clams.



15 minutes later, I arrived at Caroline's house, in which I was renting a room for the night via AirBNB. It's a beautiful big old restored house, but is on the edge of a dicey neighborhood. Caroline is a grades 1 - 4 math teacher. The bedroom and bathroom are very large and luxurious. At \$70 per night, there's no comparison to a musty hotel room. And, she's going to cook me breakfast in the morning.

This trip turned out to be around 530 miles in 7 days. While the terrain wasn't too hilly, it was hillier than I expected in parts of Michigan. The worst part was getting routed onto so many gravel roads. I'd say most of my route was as sparsely populated and spread out than in many parts of North Dakota and Montana, which I wasn't expecting.

The memorable part to me is struggling every day with just a piece of steel with two wheels attached, into which my shoes were clipped... just me, my machine, and sweat pouring off my body all day long. There were certainly disgusting episodes, some of which I have spared you the details. You really get down and dirty with nature when you push your body to its limits. I forgot to mention that this year I kept encountering small clouds of tiny white insects. All of a sudden I'd find myself in one of these disgusting clouds, and exit with nasty insects no bigger than a pin head covering my face, arms, and legs.

Along the way, people ask me if I'm retired or independently wealthy. I tell them no. I own a business with my daughter, and I can trust with 100% confidence our clients are being properly served while I'm away. Plus, I'm in touch all along the way, and have full system access.

People always comment how "fun" the trip sounds, and I reply "fun" is the one word I would never use to describe it. It's a quest, much as Lewis and Clark's Corps of Discovery was a quest to discover and observe the country. My friend and client, Skip, takes exotic motorcycle trips to the most off-the-beaten-path parts of the world. When people ask him why he does it, he says it makes him appreciate the comforts of home. I couldn't say it better myself. To fully appreciate and enjoy the cushy lives we have, it's good to have it taken away from us occasionally. Also, as I get older, I find the need to squeeze every bit of gusto out of life that it has to offer.

Well that's it for this year. Next year's trip will take me from Buffalo - Pawtucket, RI. Tomorrow morning, I pedal 7 miles to the Buffalo train station to box up my bike and ship it home. Then, a short walk to the Buffalo airport and home on Saturday night. Until then, I'm signing off. Thanks for taking the time to read, and hope you enjoyed this odyssey.

Michael Fiset

