

A LONG-DISTANCE BICYCLE TOUR ACROSS WISCONSIN

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One thing I've learned from well-known writers is to write about something you know a lot about – your life. We all have interesting life experiences – these are our stories. Here is one such experience.

A year in the Netherlands, where bicycles were our family's only mode of transportation, piqued my interest in bicycling – this time in a very serious way. In the late 1970s, I built a Trek touring bike, from the frame up. My friend John Maakestad, an art professor at St. Olaf College where I taught chemistry, became my bicycle buddy. We started with long rides from Northfield east to the Mississippi River and back – about 70 miles. We then became addicted to “century rides” – 100-mile loops in the form of citizen races. This became an obsession. One thing I wanted to try was long-distance bicycle touring.

By the summer of 1981, I was well into long-distance bicycling. My son, Matt, was home from college for the summer, and we thought it would be fun to do an extended bicycle tour. John Maakestad had some pressing art installations to work on, but he also had his priorities, and bicycling took precedence. His wife was not in favor of his going off cycling at that time, but he prevailed. It would be my first multiday, long-distance bicycle tour.

Northwestern Wisconsin was an ideal area for biking; most of the county roads were paved – the dairy industry required good roads for the milk trucks – with beautiful scenery, many lakes and forests, and not many hills. We plotted a route that would take us through some nice countryside, away from traffic and through small towns. Our final destination was Bayfield, Wisconsin, on the shore of Lake Superior. I had been to Bayfield before; it is the home of the Apostle Islands National Lakeshore, which includes 21 beautiful wilderness islands and a scenic peninsula shoreline. We would be self-contained and carry all our gear – tents, sleeping bags, cooking gear, and food – on our rear racks and in our panniers.

Here was our tour, taken mostly from my bicycle log. If you're familiar with the back roads and small towns of Wisconsin, you might be able to follow along. Otherwise, if you're really interested, get a detailed Wisconsin road map. Note: CR = County Road; MH = Minnesota Highway; WH = Wisconsin Highway.

Northfield, Minnesota, to Bayfield, Wisconsin Bicycle Tour, July 27-30, 1981 – Stewart and Matthew Hendrickson, and John Maakestad

Monday, July 27

For the first leg of our tour, Griff Wigley, a friend from Northfield, joined us; he would bike back to Northfield the next day. On a cold and overcast day, we left Northfield, Minnesota on Northfield Blvd (MH-47) northeast through Hampton to Hastings, then crossed the Mississippi River to Prescott, Wisconsin. From Prescott, we biked north on CR-F, then east on CR-M to River Falls. We

continued on CR-M, then north on CR-W, then east on CR-N to WH-29 and continued east to Menomonie and north on WH-25 to the junction with I-94 where we stopped at a KOA campground. Total for that day was a strenuous 95 miles, an ambitious start for our 310-mile tour to Bayfield. After we set up our tents and cooked dinner, took showers (KOA camps do have nice facilities), and bedded down for a well-earned restful night's sleep. It rained that night.

A side remark: At about 80 miles, Matt's legs gave out – an experienced mountain climber, he lacked the big thigh muscles of a bicyclist. He stopped to rest while Griff, John, and I continued at a slower pace until he could catch up. We were ruthless tour guides!

Tuesday, July 28

Tuesday morning the sky was clear - a good omen for the tour. After breakfast, we continued north on WH-25 to Barron where we stopped for lunch. This was a good road with not much traffic. Again we continued north on WH-25 to WH-48 where we turned east. After about a half mile on WH-48, we turned north on CR-V which led us to the town of Haugen at the southeast end of Bear Lake. East on CR-V, north on CR-M and east on CR-D took us to Birchwood on the southwest end of Birch Lake. Then CR-FF and CR-F north along Lake Chetac to Edgewater at the north end of the lake where we camped overnight at the Chit Chat Resort. This was also at the south end of the Benson Creek State Wildlife Management Area. This was only an 80-mile day, through some scenic lake country in beautiful weather. We cooked our dinner and rested for the next day's ride.

Wednesday, July 29

Wednesday morning we continued on CR-F north to WH-70 and WH-27 to Hayward where we had breakfast. Then WH-77 west and north to Clam Lake and CR-GG north and east, coming into Mellen along the Bad River. Most of this route was through the Chequamegon National Forest. Just north of Mellen was Copper Falls State Park where we stopped at a very nice campground to spend the night. This was an 83-mile day.

Thursday, July 30

This was the last day and a shorter ride. The weather was cool and cloudy, with a south wind, which would help us in our final northerly direction. We biked CR-13 north to Ashland on Chequamegon Bay of Lake Superior. We continued north on CR-13, a particularly bad stretch of road, along the shore of Lake Superior to Washburn, and finally up to Bayfield. That was only 52 miles for the final day or a total of 310 miles for the tour. My wife was waiting for us there. We planned to take the ferry across to La Ponte on Madeline Island and camp there overnight, but the campground was full and we had no reservations. So instead we drove back to Northfield that afternoon. John's wife was relieved to see him back early.

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