

Route Description

ABR racers start their cross-country cycling challenge in Santa Monica, CA. After cycling over 3,000 miles, climbing a total of almost 103,000 feet and crossing fourteen states as well as all four of the contiguous United States' time zones, racers will arrive at the east coast to finish in Philadelphia for the Penn riders and on Atlantic City's Historic Boardwalk for Bucknell riders.

The racers leave Santa Monica for a long first day ride of 190 miles to Indio, deep in the California desert. Luckily, the ride is relatively flat (only 2900 vertical feet). Unfortunately, not unlike a blast furnace, the temperatures rapidly climb. The next day, the racers face another long hot day — 180 miles — and over 4,000 vertical feet as they follow Interstate Highway 10 to Blythe, the Colorado River and the first state border crossing of the race.

Conditions continue to toughen in Arizona. The route bends upward along I-10 west of Quartzite and along US 60 further east in Arizona. The barren stretch between Wenden and Gladden will be more mentally demanding than almost any other part of the course: for over twenty miles, the road is perfectly straight and not even the string of telephone poles along the left side of the road appears to alter in appearance. The desert is not a forgiving environment. Surviving this, the racers are rewarded with some exceptionally scenic climbing: the legendary Yarnell Grade as well as subsequent climbs into Prescott. Heading north, the racers join I-40 for the fifty easterly miles into Flagstaff.

Once again, the route bends north into the Native American territory east of Grand Canyon. The race remains in lands belonging to Navajo and Ute Indians, some of the most spectacular and unspoiled in North America, until the crest of the Rockies in southern Colorado.

At Kayenta, the racers pass between the silent sentinels that guard the spectacular Monument Valley. The Utah canyons around Mexican Hat and Bluff will be equally memorable.

Western Colorado brings the high Rocky Mountains. Between Cortez and Durango, Mancos Mountain and Hesperus Hill are simply polite introductions to the more significant climbing to follow. Not until the racers pass through Pagosa Springs do things get really serious. Wolf Creek Pass is a true "working man's" climb: once the road tilts upwards, the 8% grade doesn't moderate until it crests at the 10,550 foot continental divide. La Veta Pass follows: somewhat less steep but with much more open vistas. Finally, Cuchara Pass completes the trio: a narrow, windy climb that tops out just less than 10,000 feet.

After coasting down the eastern slopes of the Rockies, the racers emerge into the high plains of eastern Colorado at Trinidad. Tailwinds are likely to push the racers along. Unfortunately, thunder showers and lightning are equally likely to accompany the racers.

In Kansas, the plains continue their tilt eastward, dropping from 3,000 feet in the west to 1,000 feet in the east. The route passes just south of the wild-west town of Dodge City and the Santa Fe Trail. Towns, along with their water towers, regularly interrupt the continuity of sunflower-lined roads. Halfway across the state, the route leaves US 54 to skirt around the busy Wichita traffic. It is here, soon after crossing the Arkansas River, the racers will be halfway through the race.

At Fort Scott, the racers enter Missouri. Immediately, rolling hills and distinctive "lettered" state highways will clue the riders that they aren't in Kansas any more. Midway across the state, the route crosses two widely separated arms of the massive Lake of the Ozarks, in between which the racers will be forced to contend with an overabundance of vacationing motorists. A short while later, riders circle the magnificent dome of the state capital at Jefferson City and cross the Missouri River. For the next 70 miles, the road never strays far from that river and is fairly flat, except for two sections of short, extremely steep, twisty climbs. Finally, a bit north of St. Louis, racers will cycle over

the mighty Mississippi on a magnificent golden yellow suspension bridge, The Clark Bridge, into Alton, Illinois.

ABR slices through the farming country of southern Illinois and central Indiana, following US 40 for most of the way. The historic National Road spurs off at several spots – including once to pass through an old covered bridge within sight of the race route. Along the tree-shaded boulevards of Terre Haute, Indiana, the race enters the Eastern Time Zone, to complete the final third segment of the race and make ABR and local time the same. Continuing east, ABR retraces much of the Ride Across Indiana route, arcing south of Indianapolis and on into Richmond, Virginia.

Considering that Ohio is the seventh most populous state, it is surprising how rural this section is. The course gently rolls north of Dayton (reaching its northernmost point outside Urbana) before bending southeast, to the west of Columbus. Steep inclines once again challenge the riders through the thirty miles of hardwood forests of the Hocking Hills region. In Athens, the grades moderate as the riders skirt Ohio University’s sprawling campus and athletic fields.

ABR crosses the Ohio River and enters West Virginia on US Highway 50 and starts a series of climbs through the Appalachian Mountains. As the road narrows, it climbs over the Eastern Divide at 3,000 feet above sea level, and then climbs again to the ominously named Mt. Storm before dropping into Maryland. Some of the most intense grades of the entire race are found on Scenic US 40 in the forty miles between Cumberland and Hancock. The fourth of these climbs, Sideling Hill, subjects riders to a 1,000 foot ascent in two miles.

Fortunately, once the route enters Pennsylvania, racers will no longer face any extended climbs. Unfortunately, between Gettysburg and the Susquehanna Rivers, an interminable series of extremely steep but mercifully short rollers will discourage all but the toughest of competitors. The course then starts to flatten out as it enters Pennsylvania Dutch “horse and buggy” country and the racers stop in Georgetown, PA. Here, the Penn and Bucknell racers will part.

For Bucknell racers: after skirting the southern suburbs of Wilmington, Delaware, racers will be shuttled over the Delaware Memorial Bridge into New Jersey. The increasing traffic hints of the now near and approaching finish line. Soon after McKee City, Atlantic City’s casino-dominated skyline rises in the distance. Finally, after crossing the familiar “Monopoly” streets – Atlantic, Pacific – the racers arrive at the Historic Boardwalk, just a few feet short of the Atlantic Ocean.

For Penn racers: from Georgetown, the racers head east through Christiana, past Atglen, then South through Unionville to West Chester and then, finally, Route 3 to the Penn campus.