

Day 5 Update

September 13, 2007

Day 5: Kayenta, AZ to Durango, CO

As the sun rose over the small town of Kayenta, the Alumni Bike Race team gathered in the hotel breakfast lobby for a team meeting. The team captains, Bruce and Frank, led discussions regarding issues of route planning and rider safety. After agreeing that the teams would break the route up into alternating sections throughout the 180 mile course for the day, both teams headed north towards the well-renowned and spectacular Monument Valley. On their way, the teams crossed the state border into Utah, the third state covered by the cross-country race course.

Both teams enjoyed an extended morning respite at the Monument Valley Overlook, snapping photographs and embracing the enormity of the vast panorama. Jutting upwards from the bottom of a red sand valley, giant pillars stood like sentinels of the desert. After a relaxed and inspiring start to the day, the groups split up and headed towards their respective starting points.

The Bucknell team began its first stretch of mileage by sending Walt and Frank barreling up a long slow grade past a massive basin known as The Valley of the Gods until slowly he pedaled out of the red rock canyons familiar to the team in Arizona and into roaming hills of white rock and increased vegetation. The transformations of scenery that accompanied the day's increase in elevation were rapid, with the contours of the landscape changing like slides through a projector, each beautiful in its uniqueness. In addition to the variety of plants, a wide array of animals acted as spectators during the day's journey. Wild dogs, bats, hawks, Mustang horses, cattle and turkeys were all observed along the way. In addition, one startled mule on the shoulder of the road started towards and almost collided with bewildered Bucknell rider, Kyle. Once finished with their first section the Bucknell team packed into their van and moved on towards their next stretch.

Meanwhile, the Penn team rode through Whitehorse, UT, a small rural village amidst the scarce desert highlands. The riders traveled three at a time, rotating the fourth as a driver. As a trio the group attacked a daunting series of uphill grades along a winding road which cut through fields of black-faced boulders and eventually into Colorado by way of a desolate back road. In fact, the causeway was so infrequently used that no sign marked the border for either state. By crossing through three states in one day, the Combined Alumni Bike Race group accomplished a feat which will be accomplished only one other time (on the last day of the race, when they pass through Pennsylvania, Delaware, and New Jersey).

Both teams continued to the second legs of their team's designated miles during the afternoon, with each taking

on significant increases in elevation. Senior Riders Bruce, Murray, Mike, Frank, and Walt all contributed mileage consistent with their previous days' averages. After Frank and Walt finished the last 20 miles of day five's course with a strong climb up Colorado's invigoratingly green and somewhat cool (75-80 degrees) mountainside, the two riders coasted down into their destination in Durango. The two groups were considerably tired upon meeting up at the hotel, having covered 8,680 climbing feet over the course of the day.

In the chill evening air, the Race team reflected upon how far they have already come after having completed Day 5, 26% of their riding days. The team has already completed 844 miles, 28 % the entire trip's mileage. In addition, 29% of the group's climbing elevation (29,430 climbing feet of the 103,000) has been ridden.

On a side note, the riders enjoyed the company of Deb, Mike's wife, and Sara, Frank's wife for the previous two days. Despite having a challenging day of climbing on Day 5, the team faces what could possibly be the two hardest riding days of the entire race as they take on the Rocky Mountains and the trek upward toward the Continental Divide while heading east across Colorado.

Jay Kosa, Bucknell, 07