

## Day 9 Update

September 17, 2007

Day 9: Dodge City, KS to Eureka, KS

After a harsh and windy introduction to the prairie of the Jayhawk state on day 8, the Alumni Bike Race team leaders Frank and Bruce decided that to get through Kansas and the long miles of days nine and ten, changes in both riding strategy and group dynamics were needed. The result of their discussion was a re-emphasis on the over-arching feature of the race: the amazing endeavors of four senior riders, all well over 55 years of age, who took on the challenge of riding over 50 miles a day for nineteen days across the country. In an effort to bond with each other and to share their experiences as senior alumni riders, Mike and Bruce from Penn's group and Frank and Walt from the Bucknell team joined forces. This arrangement left the junior support riders Kyle, Pat, Jay and Nir to form the second group. Together they split the staggering 200 miles of the course scheduled for the day into two 100 miles sections.

Both vans drove east from Dodge City to the start point of the course along route 54. In Mulinsville, KS, the vans were forced to pull over upon coming across a long row of metal windmill sculptures, each named and themed with politically and religiously charged messages. A hand-painted sign at the center of the row spoke of the purportedly egregious actions of the Kansas State Board of Education, which voted to allow Evolution to be taught in public schools. The riders became increasingly aware of how values and beliefs in America's heartland tend to vary from those of more familiar cities like Los Angeles and Washington.

A few miles down the road, the riders experienced a sight that left a much more solemn and indelible impression on their minds. Entering Greensburg, KS the race team noticed that while a John Deere tractor sign stood on the road, nothing more than an outline of a building stood behind it. Upon further inspection, they realized that the street was lined with such foundations and littered with broken glass and twisted metal. Trees leaned sideways with their top branches missing, and nothing could be heard in the wind but the faint tapping of hammers. Six months previous to the race, a tornado ripped through the main street of Greensburg, destroying everything in its path from homes to businesses, even the hospital. A man helping a small group in the rebuilding of a home said that the tornado was so fierce that pieces of a car bumper were found lodged forty feet up the side of a grain silo. After walking down what was once a quiet residential street and viewing only small cement steps leading to a gaping hole in the ground, the riders realized just how quickly one's life can change, and how very fortunate they were to be in a position to take time from loving families and successful careers to bike across the country.

Reflective and with altered perspectives on their trip, the group members left Greensburg and prepared to begin their day's riding. The senior group began a short distance down the road while the junior riders began further east near the town of Pretty Prairie. Both teams battled powerful side-winds for the second day of their travel through Kansas and both approached the conditions by riding in groups and drafting off one another. The junior group stopped 30 miles into their course at the town limits of Maize, KS where they celebrated the halfway point of the Alumni Bike Race. The team had reached 1,525 miles, an accomplishment that made the entire team simultaneously excited about what they had achieved, and aware that they had a long way to the finish-line.

While the pace was slowed significantly by winds that made the bikes drift like boats with full sails, the senior riders completed their 100 mile course through rolling, seemingly endless wheat fields; each of whom recorded better than 60 miles. The junior riders also worked efficiently, blazing their way through their course from Pretty Prairie to Eureka. With their groups divided by age, the race team was able to work closely with riders they otherwise would not have ridden with, and as a result, the riders seemed to grow closer and more united in their desire to complete a race across America as a team. At dinner in Eureka, the team leaders, Frank and Bruce, re-outlined the duties and roles of each member of the team and commended them on their hard work through the first nine days. With the halfway point of the trip came a much-welcomed clarity of purpose and a re-invigorated notion of determination. With only ten days of the trip left, the team was poised for a strong push out of Kansas and towards the East Coast.

Written by Jay Kosa, Bucknell '07

Photography by Jake Alba and Frank Arentowicz

Picture of the Day by Walt McConnell, M.D.