

Day 11 Update

September 19, 2007

Hermitage, MO to Lake St. Louis, MO

The sky was an eerily dark gray when the ten core members of the Alumni Bike Race team congregated outside of the team van in the parking lot of their Hermitage motel. By day eleven the once thrilling daily routine of waking at 6:00am, riding until twelve 6:00pm, and eating and blogging until late into the night had effectively lost its luster. Riders trudged slowly back and forth from their rooms while Nir conducted a diagnostics check on the bikes. Once the logistics for the day's ride were discussed by team leaders Frank and Bruce, the cyclists split into the same two groups as day 10, with Walt, Frank, Kyle and Jay in one van and Pat, Bruce, Mike, and Nir in the other.

The Penn group began its day riding the first hundred of the two-hundred scheduled miles to Lake St. Louis. From behind the van windshield the riders glanced nervously upwards at the dark clouds of the Missouri sky. Amazingly, the race team had yet to encounter more than a few drops of rain during the trip, and it was not in a hurry to break precedent. Mike and Bruce began the day's ride into the Ozark region of western Missouri, riding up and down rolling hills along the less-than-ideal shoulders of busy highways. Storms loomed in the distance as Nir and Pat rotated in for a smaller stretch, then swept overhead and let loose driving rains moments after the Penn van stopped for lunch. Bruce and Mike returned to the road for a second tour and recorded impressive 72 miles apiece.

While the Penn Van dealt with the somewhat densely populated highway by the Lake of the Ozarks, the Bucknell group drove northeast ahead of the rain clouds to the outer limits of Jefferson City, Missouri's capital. In the car, Frank received the incredible news that Bucknell that as of September 18th, the Bucknell-Penn Alumni Bike Race raised over one million dollars for his alma mater. The van full of Bucknell Alumni cheered and congratulated one another before turning their thoughts towards setting a new, higher fund-raising goal.

Frank and Kyle rode to the State Capital Building and admired its beautiful Greek architecture along with its remarkable view of the wide and muddy Missouri River. The twosome then headed out into an area of remote countryside along Route 94. After a few miles of riding along fields of golden yellow soybeans, the riders forgot the stresses of navigating the overpasses and onramps of Jefferson City. Walt and Jay rotated onto the road for thirty miles and rode straight into a punishing series of rollers, 8 of which measured over one hundred feet in elevation. Jay pedaled furiously to muscle his way up the steep inclines while Walt used a steady, even paced approach; both riders successfully managed the hills despite a stunningly hot and humid late-September afternoon. Frank and Kyle returned to their bikes to attack a very similar series of hills, which they dispatched with a formidable effort. Sweat-drenched and sore from climbing, the Bucknell group arrived the endpoint of their course in Wentzville, MO and climbed into the team van. On the way to the hotel, the group members noticed a strange occurrence; not only were there deciduous trees lining the winding streets of rural western Missouri, but the leaves on these trees were beginning to change from bright green to faded yellows, reds, and browns. The afternoon's brutal weather (a mid-day temperature of 100 degrees) and the unusual heat in Kansas and Colorado gave the riders the impression that they were still riding in late August, rather than mid-September. The alumni of both UPenn and Bucknell were excited by the visage of changing foliage, as they served as a reminder of Pennsylvania's temperate natural beauty. It seemed for the first time that the destinations of Philadelphia and Atlantic City were not aimless daydreams but goals just eight days from becoming realities.

Jay Kosa , Buckenll ‘07