

Day 16 Update

September 24, 2007

Day 16: Parkersburg, WV to Lake Tygart, WV

After a groggy and routine early morning departure, the Penn and Bucknell teams rode east towards the Appalachians. Mike, Bruce, Ted, and Nir rode at a steady but conservative pace through the empty streets of Parkersburg, while the Bucknell riders, spearheaded by senior riders Frank and Walt, sped out of town and towards the slowly rising sun and the first of the day's many steep rolling hills. Butterflies fluttered amongst the roadside wildflowers and the riders could feel the rejuvenating warmth of the sun.

Exhausted from riding 120 miles the day before, Frank was laboring up the course's demanding inclines until the sun rose over the hills on the eastern horizon. On his sixtieth birthday, he felt strength return to his tired legs and he sped onward along with Walt. Frank rode 60 miles through trees that blazed orange, red, amber, and gold and stopped after reaching his age in miles. Walt, meanwhile saw an opportunity to ride the entire 80 mile course through the hills, but decided to stop fittingly at 76, so that he could ride his age in miles as well. After reaching their goals, the Bucknell van was joined by several members of Frank's family, all of whom flew into Pittsburg from California then drove into West Virginia to show their love and support. Mike's wife Deb also rejoined the trip along with Frank's wife Sara. Upon seeing his family, particularly his gorgeous, two and a half year-old granddaughter Lucia, the stresses and fatigue of a 16 day trek across America melted away from his face and was replaced with a loving smile. The junior riders with the Bucknell van smiled too, and they appreciated just how lucky they were to be along for the remarkable ride.

The Penn riders rode on through the same difficult course, taking turns up the difficult inclines. All three senior riders recorded over 60 hard-earned miles then rode to the mountain town of Grafton, WV and on into Tygart Lake State Park. Both the Bucknell and Penn groups arrived to the park relatively early in the afternoon and filed into four large cabins near the lakeshore. With some time before dinner at the Park Lodge, the riders enjoyed a couple rare hours of quiet relaxation.

The large dinner party of the riders, crew members, and loved ones sat Frank at the head of the table and one-by-one they raised their glasses to him. Each person had wonderful things to say, whether they had known him for 46 years as Walt had, or 46 minutes as Ted acknowledged. Sara and Frank's son Drew expressed their love and admiration, while the junior Bucknell riders offered their sincere gratitude. Bruce and the Penn riders, along with Jake and Jess, all remarked about how genuine, generous, determined, and loving a person they saw in Frank. After the toast, Frank stood and spoke of the personal importance of returning home to the East Coast and Bucknell University and he expressed love and appreciation for his family and for the friendships made along the trip. With two days of brutal climbs and treacherous turns lurking in days 17 and 18, the Alumni Bike Race across America took a back seat to the truly important things in life; the laughter between new friends and old, the peaceful rest after a hard day's work, and the embrace of a child and her grandfather to name a few.