

## Day 17 Update

September 25, 2007

Day 17: Lake Tygart, WV to Hancock, MD

After a restorative night of sleep at the cabins of Lake Tygart, WV, the members of the Alumni Bike Race team woke up refreshed and anxious to attack what they expected to be the hardest day of the race. The team members woke before dawn, loaded the vans and rallied at Jerry's Diner at 242 Barrett St. in nearby Grafton, WV. After ordering large breakfasts, a very friendly and enthusiastic waitress named Tammy Sheme asked what the team was doing in Grafton. Upon hearing that a group of senior alumni from two universities was cycling from Santa Monica to Atlantic City, she became so enthralled that she called a reporter from the local newspaper. After only a few minutes, Walt was telling the details of the cross-country journey to a reporter and the entire group was posing for pictures.

After the impromptu press conference, the Penn and Bucknell vans split up to take on half of the day's 135 mile route through the heart of the Appalachian Mountains; the Penn riders choosing the first section and the Bucknell riders taking the second. Bruce, Mike, Ted, and Nir rode in their usual style, three at a time, up two long and unforgiving climbs. Having started the day at 1,100 feet of elevation, the Penn group churned up a 5 mile, 6% grade to "Friend's Gap" at nearly 2,700ft, and was then rewarded with a 3 mile, 9% descent. The weather was warm but pleasantly breezy as the riders cruised down Route 50's exhilarating hairpin turns. Leaves fell softly onto the road like golden flakes of snow as the team crossed into Western Maryland, the eleventh state of the trip. Before long though, the route passed into West Virginia's eastward stretching arm, then back into Maryland. After an extensive second climb to the top of Backbone Mountain at 3,095 ft. the Penn group triumphantly completed their 75-mile section, then drove on towards the second set of ridges for some more leisurely climbs.

In the Bucknell Van, Walt was getting anxious to put his tires to the road. Late in the morning, he got his chance, beginning with a long ride through rollers at the top of a massive mountain ridge. After the rollers, Frank joined Walt for a steep five mile, 9% grade descent. While following Walt in the van, Pat and Jay caught a glimpse of two adolescent black bears scampering across the road. Surrounded by forest, the riders felt in tune with the vibrant colors and the activity of West Virginia's mountains.

Once at the bottom of a Maryland valley, junior riders Pat, Kyle, and Jay raced across a flat stretch of Route 220, then back into the Mountains to the town of La Vale. Frank met his family for lunch, then rejoined the Bucknell van to take on an afternoon that would feature three climbs of at least 700 hundred feet of elevation each. Pat and Walt climbed steadily over the first ascent at Rocky Gap, then Frank single-handedly rode a steep incline before being joined by Jay for the

second major climb. Grinding slowly but steadily up to the summit of Town Hill at 1,680 ft., after a roaring descent, Frank was joined by Pat and Kyle, and later Walt, for a final 2.5 mile climb. The 8% grade passed through the last major ridge of the Appalachians. It was nicknamed "Dead Man's Walk", for its reputation for forcing weary riders to walk their bikes up it. The Bucknell team road up the incline with impressive speed and dexterity then celebrated with a gleeful 8 mile descent into the course's endpoint in Hancock, MD.

Breathing more easily after having battled the dreaded climbs of the Appalachians, the Alumni Bike Race teams' thoughts turned toward the startling reality that it was only two days from finishing the race. While the day's mountain ascents were fortunately more manageable than expected, the senior riders still felt the effects of their exertion, getting to bed early in order to traverse Maryland's rolling hills and to cross into Pennsylvania, the beloved home of Penn and Bucknell.

Jay Kosa, Bucknell '07

Photography by Jake Alba, Frank Arentwoicz, Drew Arentowicz and Debra Shockro. Picture of the day by Jake Alba.