

Day 18 Update

September 26, 2007

Day 18: Hancock, MD to Georgetown, PA

From the 6:00 am wakeup call to the 7:00 pm departure from the hotel in Hancock, MD, barely a word was spoken between the riders. With only Day 18 standing in the way of the completion of a nearly three-week journey, it was difficult to focus on the road that lay directly in front of them. Simultaneously tired and excited, the Alumni Rice Race team members seemed anxious to get on the road and head towards their final destinations in Atlantic City and in Philadelphia.

The vans embarked eastward before the fog of the low Appalachian valleys had a chance to lift, and the riders were rewarded with miraculous views of layered mountain ridges fading into the gray horizon. The foregrounds were filled with dew-covered cornfields and meandering horses silhouetted by the warm rays of the sun that slowly peeked over the hills. The crew in the Bucknell van was charged with riding the second half of the 140-mile section filled with an endless rollercoaster of country roads, but they spent much of the early morning stopping to take pictures of the beautiful scenery.

After only two miles the course led the Penn group into Pennsylvania, then proceeded to carry the riders back and forth along The Keystone State's Maryland border. The course took unusually secluded back roads that offered both unrivaled vistas of Southern Pennsylvania's majestic rollers, but a fair share of confusion as well. Fortunately, the Race Across America Marathon (RAAM) course, which the bike race followed almost entirely across the country, was well marked with capital "R"s and arrows spray-painted along the road in white. Bruce, Mike, Ted, and Nir rode in their dependable three-man line formation, rotating through the lead position often. Together they rode up a long, moderate ascent through Cove Gap then rolled down into the quiet town of Mercersburg. The group also summited the Blue Ridge, the last of the major mountain ridges offered by the mighty Appalachians. The end of the course featured a ride through the beautiful and historic fields of Gettysburg, PA. The views from Confederate Avenue, which featured sprawling pastures lined with monuments and lined with ornate wooden fences, offered an eerie serenity. The riders imagined of how much violence and turmoil the nation was enduring only 144 years ago, and thoughts turned towards the civil wars and rebellions currently taking place throughout the world.

In nearby Hanover, the Bucknell group began riding the second section of the day's course with Frank and Walt taking their customary first turn. The duo of senior alumni riders rode a seemingly endless series of hills that offered challenging climbs and exhilarating descents, which eventually blurred into one long ramble across southeastern Pennsylvania. Late in the afternoon, the three junior riders got a chance to charge through some hills of their own and were even granted the distinction of being the first riders to face heavy rain on the trip. An unusually hot and humid day amongst the cornfields and cow pastures led to an afternoon storm that drenched riders Kyle and Pat as they raced across the Susquehanna River and up a long and dangerously slick trail. The riders had been trying to downplay the unbelievably lucky string of weather they experienced, like baseball players avoiding discussion of the possibility of a no-hitter going into the seventh inning, but they after the wet afternoon they acknowledged that one storm during 19

days of travel was incredibly fortunate.

After Kyle and Pat finished the day's mileage, the Bucknell van drove toward their Georgetown hotel and entered the heart of Pennsylvania's Amish Country. The group marveled at the Amish farmers they saw collecting, bailing, and stacking hay using machinery entirely powered by mules. In another field a farmer rode a horse-drawn plough near rows of golden yellow tobacco plants. Having just spent the past 18 days traveling across the country on a simple, human powered machine on two wheels (with some support from the team vans), the riders felt a new respect for those who choose to live without the complications of modern technologies.

After a hearty meal in Georgetown, the riders felt a mixture of sadness and relief with the realization that in the morning the Penn and Bucknell teams would part ways and that both would experience the conclusion of their epic journeys.

Jay Kosa, Bucknell '07