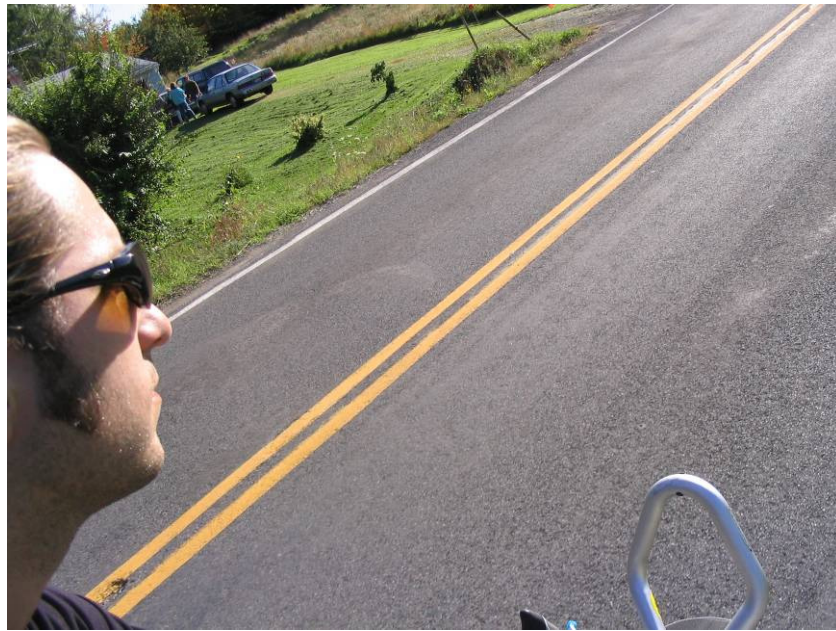


Kenneth's Big Adventure 2006

By Ken Sarzynski
12/10/2006



Introduction

This is the story of my 636 mile circular bicycle trip around NY. It started innocently enough in November 2005 when I picked up a used road bike from a guy in town. A co-worker owned a newer version of the same bike and informed me that it was a very well known model for touring and he gave me a book about bicycling around the world ("Miles From Nowhere" by Barbara Savage) and instantly I was hooked.

I grew up taking long bike rides all over my home town of Binghamton, NY, but not until I was in my mid twenty's did I partake in my first overnighter - my friend, Adam, and I spent a weekend traversing 190 miles of the Chesapeake & Ohio (C&O) canal in Maryland. We had a great time doing it but back then I only had a mountain bike and while it was sufficient for the towpath it was not intended for the road.

Five years after the C&O I found myself with time off between jobs, a touring bicycle, and the desire to thumb my nose at the status quo. I had been getting in shape for the past year by commuting 40 miles round-trip to work a few times each week, so I wasn't concerned about being physically capable. I stocked up on spare parts, fixed up my bike bags (thanks to "Hardware Amazon" at Lowes!), and formulated a plan to get me from Queensbury to Queensbury by way of Rochester.

The first half of my journey would take me on a southerly route much like the lower half of a clock - sweeping from 3:00 to 9:00. I was hoping for this to be a personal trial, something to push my nerves and will, and certainly something I could write about. It turned out to be far easier than I ever would have expected, but just as rewarding...

Outfitting

Here's what I packed onto my Trek 520...



3 water bottle cages
Generic (Blackburn?) Rear pannier racks
Two rear panniers, fairly high volume, gore tex
Front aero bars
An under-the-seat bike bag strapped to aero bars
CatEye wireless computer

Strapped to rear rack:

Blue tarp (for quick access)
NYS Gazetteer
Sandals
Three season sleeping bag (inside a "dry bag")
Spare tire

To Wear:

Bike shirt
Bike shorts
Socks
Biking/Walking combo shoes
Underwear
Smith sunglass with interchangeable lenses

In panniers:

Long-sleeve fleece
Long johns
1 pair wool socks
2 pair cotton socks
Thermal long-sleeve shirt
2 short-sleeve bike shirts
1 long-sleeve bike shirt
2 wicking cycling brimless hat things
2 pair underwear
1 pair of workout shorts
1 microfibre towel
Waterproof/Windproof "soft shell" jacket
Lightweight rain jacket
Neoprene booties
Leg warmers
Fleece gloves
Outdoor work gloves

Hennessey Hammock (tent)
Green tarp (for overnights and wrapped around hammock)
Spare parts

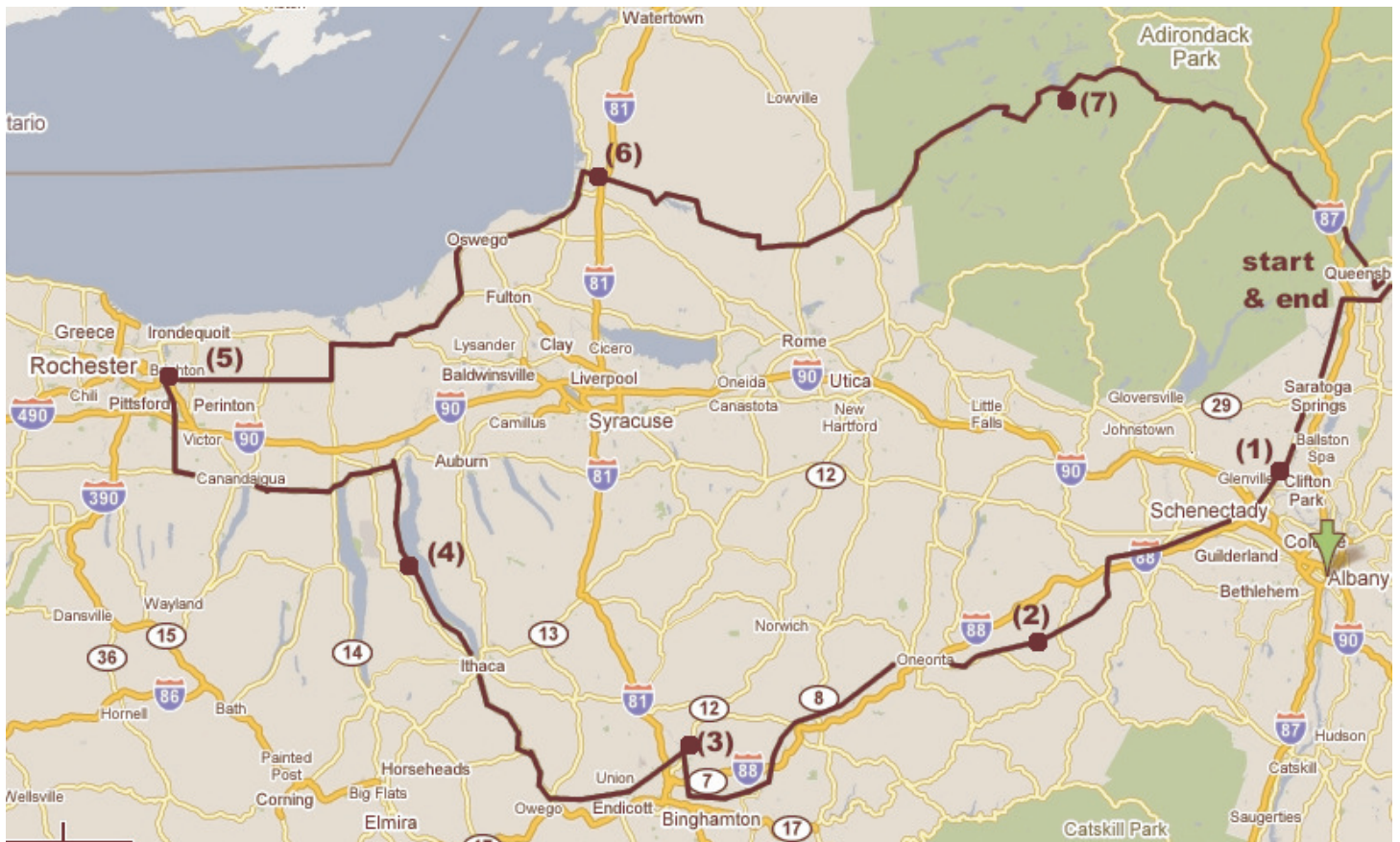
Toothbrush, toothpaste, first aid kit
Disposable Soft Wipes!!! (for tushy)

Prunes
Peanut butter
Tortilla shells
Honey
Granola mix
Protein bars

In front bag:

Wallet
Phone
Gum
Notepad/pen
Camera
Occasionally an apple or two

Route



Sunday, Sept 24 - Queensbury to Glenville

[Rt 9 to Rt 50]

Time: 2h 48m**Distance:** 35.92 miles**Avg:** 12.8 mph**Max:** 30.2 mph**Trip:** 35.9 miles**43 mph wind, 64 F, partly cloudy**

This was my final day of packing and planning for the trip. The morning and early afternoon were consumed by running errands - primarily visiting every store in town to find straps for holding my sleeping bag to my bike rack. While milling around the grocery store an hour before my intended departure I heard a noise that suggested there was a golf driving range on the roof - this was the sudden and thrilling start to an orgy of rain storms playing throughout the area today. With winds gusting up to 40mph grape sized rain pelting sideways was the last thing I wanted to see (vineyard owners probably have similar nightmares).

At this time my thoughts strayed to my friends, Adam and Sara, who were presently at an outdoor "Taste of the North Country" festival. I found out later they were fortunate to find themselves under a tent, tasting the North Country, when the rain fell.

The rain clouds loomed all around Queensbury, but by the time I was packed and having my farewell picture taken there wasn't a drop falling in my vicinity, and I didn't feel a drop of it until Rochester, several days later. The rain was absent but the 40mph wind stayed, making for an exciting ride [sarcasm]. Around 2pm I departed and stopped next door at Sara's parents house to say hello and thank her mom for fixing my favorite bike shirt - this was my first official stop.

From Queensbury to my friend Matt's house in Glenville was something I knew I could easily do in a day - it was less than my daily commute to/from work - but since it was the first time pedaling my Trek 520 with all that weight I didn't want to over commit myself. His house also had the added benefit of being a perfect distance from my second destination, one that I also felt comfortable doing in a day. The route I had planned was nothing unfamiliar, I had driven it before and knew what to expect, and I arrived just in time to help with dinner. I enjoyed a very nice meal with Matt and his wife, her brother and another co-worker and his wife.

Lessons Learned:

Today my right knee experienced a continuous pain on the outside of the underside, and both knees felt a burning/strain - problems I knew could be remedied by simple adjustments.

For my right knee I moved the cleat on my shoe (the piece of metal that locks in to the pedal, holding the foot secure to the bike) all the way back so that it was more under the ball of my foot. For the burning/strain I raised my seat to allow my legs to reach almost a full extension. Only the next days ride would tell me if the fixes worked.

Already having a sore butt, I checked online and made a mental note of the phone number to call for a new bike seat so that in the morning I could call to have it delivered to Rochester.

Additionally I adjusted my panniers (bike bags) so that I wouldn't constantly be brushing them with my shoes, boy is that annoying!



Hi everyone, meet Chad. Chad is somewhat of a local legend... err, joke. He's a real estate agent that markets himself as a celebrity.

Monday, Sept 25 - Glenville to Charlottesville

[Rt 50 to Rt 5 to Broadway to Rt 7 to Rt 23 to Rt 10 to Rt 6]

Time: 5h 43m

Distance: 54.94 miles

Avg: 9.6 mph

Max: 35.8 mph

Trip: 90.8 miles

0-10mph wind, 65F, sunny

Leaving Matt's house bright and early I was pleased to find my panniers no longer brushed my shoes, but I also realized they were now too far back on the racks and in danger of hitting the tire/spokes. After a quick adjustment I was on my way, stopping a minute later to dodge rush hour traffic in an attempt to photograph a very out of place cascading waterfall in the suburbs of Albany.

The route I was taking would begin with lots of traffic and urban life but eventually morph into rural NY and rolling hills. It was the latter that would see me through to my final destination - Adam's house in Charlottesville, next to Summit, NY.

Downtown Schenectady is somewhere between "happening" and "dead" but for the life of me I can't tell which way it's heading. It feels very industrial, you can see in the brick architecture that it was once a bustling city, and it pleased my sense of community to see the high number of commuters on the sidewalks before 8am. Schenectady aptly fades from clean city to dirty city to suburb to sub-suburb to countryside - where I would spend the next few days.

Leaving town on Rt 7, heading south, you pass over the Thruway and instantly arrive in the country. The Thruway plays the part of a fence, keeping out the sprawl of the city - or keeping out the sprawl of the country I suppose - and instantly puts your mind into a difference mode. I went from dodging cars and trucks, to dodging road kill and washed out shoulders - don't let the negative opposing images distract you, I just as easily could have said "dodging smiling pedestrians, to dodging bunny rabbits"... except that would probably be a lie since 90% of the people I encountered the entire time were grumpy, and I saw no rabbits... I'll work on the imagery later.

Rt 7 in NY is basically Highway 88 for pedestrians - they run side-by-side all the way from Schenectady to Binghamton, whereupon 7 becomes 88 for a few miles and pedestrians/cyclists are forced to either wade across a river, bike up a large mountain (err, hill), or take a long detour. Most of Rt 7 consists of rolling hills in the farm lands of southern NY, but occasionally passes through a blip of a town.

It was in one of those blips that I came upon the first of only a few people to ask me about my trip. While I stood in line at a post office to buy postcard stamps the white haired lady behind me ask where I was headed. I divulged my plan and struck up a small conversation. Having read a lot about long distance biking I was fully expecting to be asked that question frequently, especially since I believe myself to be very approachable, but perhaps that's not something New Yorkers do - this was one of the rare times someone seemed to actually take interest in what I was doing. I blame the internet. And video games.

The day was as I expected - up hill, down hill, up hill, down hill, blip, up hill, down hill, blip, etc. The landscape wasn't exactly

breathhtaking, but it was beautiful and made for a most pleasant day. I took a moment to visit SUNY Cobleskill's campus, which was actually quite nice, but unfortunately I soon discovered why it would be good to avoid Pizza Hut lunch buffets from there on (oddly, Taco Bell, Burger King and Wendy's all seemed to agree with long distance bicycling) and was grateful for the nearby presence of a Hess Mart bathroom.

After what I'm calling my Hess Mart Revitalization, I returned to the hills and Main Streets of Route 7, complete with historical signs for every conceivable point-of-interest. Tunnels, houses, historic events, toll highways, etc. As I reached West Richmondville I felt compelled to stop and pedal back 50 feet to one of those signs. It read "Old Covered Bridge Built 1850... Destroyed 1886". I get the impression "they" were having a good laugh when they came up with this sign, since I had just pedaled over the "destroyed bridge" which is now a nice steel and concrete structure that blends in with the "Old Dirt Road... Destroyed 1902" which is now a white and yellow lined asphalt road along side the "Old Forest of Trees... Destroyed 1919" which is now grass land.

Under the non-existent shade of the absent covered bridge I sat to look the map over, having realized that I was ahead of schedule and felt the need to take a longer, more scenic route. It was at this time that three vehicles stopped to make sure I was okay. Perhaps in West Richmondville people aren't grumpy! One fellow was in bike clothes and had a bike strapped to his car, he actually came over to talk. He lived down the next road, and had biked much of the area so I was eager to follow his advice and take a "gorgeous but hilly route" - which I later learned is code for "it's a gorgeous ride, but you'll die of exposure on some of the hills! Mwuhuhahaha!!". Rt 23 to Rt 10 to Rt 6 takes you from West Richmondville to Beards Hollow to Summit, and there's a reason it's called SUMMIT, NY... it's the highest elevated town in the state! As for Rt 23, it was narrow with no shoulder, full of screaming dump trucks (fortunately all moving FAR away from me), corn fields, old barns, and two possessed dogs that insisted on running all the way from their house to chase me! Up a hill!! Where walking would have been faster!!! I'm just glad they spoke English, stopping in their tracks when I yelled "NO!".

Let's just say that in spite of the hills, Muffin and Biscuit the Hell Hounds, and the Return of the Hess Mart Blues (I won't go in to detail, but I'm glad Rt 23 is VERY remote), I definitely enjoyed the views and quaintness of life in this part of the country.

Summit to Charlotteville wasn't as downhill as I hoped, but the distance was all a blur after my weary journey to Summit. I arrived at Adam's house early, partook of the snack foods/drinks at the General Store, and read my book while waiting for my high school friend.

The evening wound down pleasantly with Adam and his family - everyone was in good spirits and it made for a great ending to day two.

Lessons Learned:

Even when you intend to yell "NO! Return to the abyss of Hell, you fiends of Satan!" more oft than not you only succeed in getting out "NO!".

The outfitting adjustments I made for my knees the previous night worked! The shoulders and neck are still problematic but nothing more can be done for them since my handle bars were already adjusted to max height.

Employees of Stewarts stores are so focused on their scripts that even in full bike gear (gloves, helmet, etc) the girl asked me, "Did you purchase any gas?".

PRUNES ARE THE PERFECT BIKE TRIP FOOD! Mmmmmm, I love my prunes!



◀ Part of the cascading waterfall near Matt's house.

Where country meets city, the Thruway on the southern border of Schenectady suburbs. ▶



◀ Old tunnel under some railroad tracks on Rt 7.



Car parts dinosaur art on Rt 7. ▶





▲ Seriously?



◀ See! I TRIED to go to church, honest I did!



Near Summit, NY, quite a pretty place ▶

Tuesday, Sept 26 - Stamford to Binghamton

[Rt 23 to Rt 7 to Rt 7b to Nowlan Hill to Chenango St to home]

Time: 7h 33m
 Distance: 87.70 miles
 Avg: 11.6 mph
 Max: 38.1 mph
 Trip: 178.5 miles
 0-30mph wind, 68F, partly cloudy

In the morning I threw my bike in Adam's mini-van and took off for his place of business where I finally got a tour! He works for Catskill Craftsmen and they make an array of gorgeous wood products for the kitchen, I've been dying to tour their facility for almost a year now but never found the right time!

From Stamford it's mostly a downhill shot in to Oneonta, passing through remote stretches and tiny towns. But it was a cold morning and by the time I got to Oneonta I was happy to stop at the Burger King on the outskirts of town to grab breakfast, take a single-serving Aleve and thaw out my limbs. I was also hoping to hit the bike shop in town to by a spare tire since I left mine at Matt's house on day 1, but here's how the conversation went when I called for directions:

ring ring ring ring ring ring ring ring

Guy: Hmrrrrllllllo?

Me: Good morning, I was wondering where on Main St you guys were located.

Guy: Whhhhhfffff?

Me: Is this So-and-So Bike Shop?

Guy: [something that sounded to me like "yes" with some extra syllables thrown in]

Me: Umm, are you open today?

Guy: The sum of the sides is equal to the degree between the axis and the terminus of two opposing sides [i.e. I wish his response was even REMOTELY intelligent]

Ken: Okay, let's just forget I called, thanks.

Even taking in to account the fact that this part of NY was recently ravaged by massive flooding (hence the heavenly choir of dump trucks) the condition of most shoulders between Oneonta and Bainbridge were horrible, and it looked like they'd been that way for years so I spent most of the time on the road proper, dealing with 30mph head winds for about 40 miles.

Mixed in with the usual sites was an innumerable number of wash-outs where the road was non-existent due to swollen streams, creeks, and rivers. In addition to repairing roads and bridges it was evident that crews were also carefully lining the stream/river banks with rocks to prevent too much land erosion, especially in farm areas.

One of my best lunches on the road took place somewhere between Oneonta and Beldin Hill (I really wish I knew specifically where it was) and I swear I'd been there in my formative years (it looked terribly familiar). There was a large farm stand with a large variety of apples, pumpkins, berries, grapes, gourds, baked goods, etc. I bought a Red Paula [apple], a Courtland [apple], two bananas and two homemade baby dills for \$1.00!!! And it was all delicious! This was the best stocked and cheapest farm stand I found the entire trip!

I also learned that in Sidney the convenience store clerks are related to the owner of that bike shop in Oneonta.

Me: Are there any bike stores in town?

Outside Lady: [drawn out and with zero emotion] Nohhhhh.

Me: Are there any bike stores in town?

Inside Lady: [sigh] Noooooohh.

As I've mentioned before, the problem with Rt 7 is that once it nears Binghamton it melts into the highway. There's simply not enough room to fit both roads side-by-side and in Port Crane the two become one (it's illegal to ride a bike on most highways). As the asphalt leaves Port Crane it hugs the mountain on one side and on the other you'll find a 30 foot drop to the river. Back around 1996, in fact, the highway department was working on the road... they had removed the guard rails and re-blacktopped but for some reason took their time re-painting and re-installing the guard rails. A high school friend of mine was driving that stretch in the dark morning hours when she drifted off the road, down the embankment and landed upside-down in the river. An hour later I was driving that same stretch and passed the emergency vehicles, saw the car, and knew instantly what happened. With no natural light, with no painted lines, with no guard rail, with no traffic cones, it would be impossible to tell where the black road ended and black emptiness began. RIP Jennifer Medovich.

I had pedaled these roads many times growing up and I knew what my options were so I took a detour before the road hit Port Crane. I could either make a long detour around the local State Park and back down Route 12 (lengthy with mild hills) or I could go up and over Nowlan Hill (short but steep). Nowlan just happens to be where my wife grew up (kinda, sorta... just go with it) and even though I really wasn't up for another hill I figured it would be worth the trip down memory lane. After stopping once to munch down my last apple I soon crested the hill and reflected on how yesterday also ended with a long and difficult hill... I deeply hoped I wasn't setting a trend! Negative thoughts about ascents always disappear when you're hit with the thrill of descent - this one topping out at a noisy 38.1 mph.

When I arrived at my family home I surprised my mother by showing up on bike (intending to keep my real trip a surprise, I called a few hours earlier to tell her I was leaving Glens Falls). It turns out the only bike shop in town that I knew of was still closed due to the flooding months prior but luck was shining in the form of another bike shop my mom knew about. They'd been in business for ten years and it shamed me to admit I never heard of them - then again, the last time I bought a bike or bike part in Binghamton was 15+ years ago. At last I was able to purchase a spare tire and put that worry behind me.

Soon after returning from the bike store my father returned home and was also surprised to see my bike. As with the past two nights, I was ending the day amongst friends/family, and was definitely feeling "soft" while wondering when the difficulties and hardship would begin. Surely it couldn't all be this easy. Surely I wouldn't end each day with great food and great people... would I?

Lessons Learned:

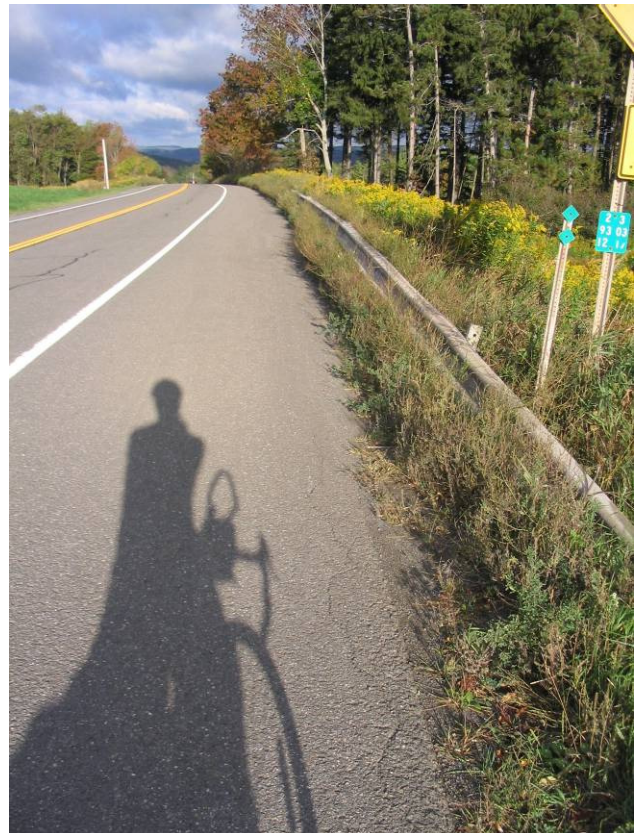
Don't rely on the yellow pages for bike shop listings - or at least check the date of the publication first.



◄ This massive band saw at Catskill Craftsmen is used to cut up cardboard for the boxes.



Top Right: "City of Hills", groan
Bottom Left: Me, at the top of Nowlan Hill, 10 feet from starting a 40mph downhill run.
Bottom Right: Outside Stamford



Wednesday, Sept 27 - Binghamton to Deans Cove (where!?!?)

[17c to Rt 96 to 96a to 89]
Time: 6h 57m
Distance: 92.53 miles
Avg: 13.2mph
Max: 36.2mph
Trip: 271 miles
0mph wind, 58-70F, mostly clear

Without any specific destination this time, I was riding simply to ride and planned on finding a place to camp as far from Binghamton and as close to Rochester as possible. While I could have taken a leisurely pace I still felt like I should make with all haste through the Finger Lakes and not dilly-dally - probably because I heard there was a few days worth of rain on the way.

I wanted to follow Rt 17c to Owego then head North and being a Binghamton native I had a direct route mapped out in my mind to get to 17c. Out of curiosity, however, I detoured from that plan and decided to follow the 17c bike route signs through town. I came to realize that bike route planners don't have efficiency on their mind - I can only imagine they were thinking "Gosh, wouldn't this be prettier?". The signs took me on a long detour across town (unnecessarily), along Riverside Dr (pretty, but parallel to my original route), around the traffic circle by way of a few side roads, and then disappeared, miles from 17c. I quickly decided to make a bee-line to my original route down Main Street.

The goal was to reach Ithaca for lunch but I still had a long way to go before hitting the next big town of Owego and I was desperately hoping for a drug store to buy a small bottle of Aleve as a gift for my faithful keester. In the early morning fog I passed by the Endwell airport where many years ago my father and I took off in a hot air balloon at one of our local Balloon Fests - but this morning it was quiet and still.

In Owego I found a drug store, some snacks, and began to internally drool over Viva Taqueria in Ithaca, a little taco/burrito place favored by the college kids and where my wife had taken me when she was attending Cornell (turns out she forgot all about that place, but even after 8 years it was still fresh on my mind. Who says men aren't sentimental!?).

For whatever reason, the three or so farm stands I stopped at in the Finger Lakes region were no comparison to the rest of NY. In a bad way. They were expensive, lacking variety, and generally lacked quality. So I was thrilled to reach the outskirts of Ithaca and know I was approaching my lunch stop - at the same time I was also a tad frightened that the hill going down, WAY DOWN, into town would burn out my brakes or that brake cables would snap and send me bulleting in to traffic. I was pleased as peas with knees to reach the bottom of the hill safely, and even more pleased to see Viva Taqueria directly in front of me!

I ordered a heavenly mole chicken burrito with chips and ate outside next to my bike, watching the bustle of college kids and the professor-looking types ambling about. The gentleman at the next table was an avid bicyclist focusing primarily on the Finger Lakes region and 2-3 day trips so we talked "shop" and discussed various ways to get to

Rochester. He was quite informative and convinced me that Rt 89 up Cayuga Lake was the way to go.

Route 89 parallels the coast of Cayuga Lake, giving room occasionally for wineries, marinas, farms, and communities. One of the reasons people remember Cayuga is because of Taughannock Falls – a gorgeous array of water falls flowing into the lake. Camping was \$13 a night and too steep for my blood but I saw another State Park just up the road within striking distance so I walked up to the lower falls for some snapshots (I've been to the upper falls before and didn't want to waste daylight) and hopped back on my bike.

Dean's Cove State Park, indicated on the map at Taughannock Falls, was not a State Park per se but a State MARINE Park which simply means there's a small boat ramp with parking lot. No camping, no parking without paying, and best of all, nobody around! Payment was on the honor system ("leave \$6 in this slot please") but there were neither boats, cars nor staff anywhere to be seen and since I wasn't a vehicle I didn't feel the need to pay. Exhausted and with the sun starting to set, I quickly unloaded my bike and carried everything about 100 feet into the woods where only boats could see me if they looked REALLY hard. Amidst the mosquitoes I set up camp, covered my bike with a green tarp, washed up in the frigid lake, and ate a light dinner. Occasionally, until about 9pm, I would hear cars loading or unloading boats, and sometimes I'd see the boats out on the lake coming or going, but I was otherwise alone. Staying awake to read I covered up the flashlight so that only a little light hit the book – a glowing tent would surely catch someone's attention, and fortunately the lapping waves 20 feet away would cover up any sound I might make.

Lessons Learned:

The mole chicken burrito at Viva Taqueria is marvelous!



◀ Binghamton in morning fog.

▼ Lower Taughannock Falls





▲ Side view of a shelf at Lower Taughannock Falls

Thursday, Sept 28 - Deans Cove to Rochester

[Rt 89 to Lake Rd to Rt 89s to 20/5 to 444 to 96 to Andrea]

Time: 6h 03m

Distance: 77.15 miles

Avg: 12.7mph

Max: 29.7mph

Trip: 348.2 miles

5-20mph wind, 55F, rain rain rain

I actually slept quite well last night, and somehow managed to sleep in till 7:30. Over the lake it looked like another gorgeous day... but then I turned around. As the sun was rising beautifully over the lake, to the West were storm clouds - I estimated about 2 or 3 hours of pedaling away. I packed up, hauled my stuff out of the woods, loaded up the bike and decided to re-arrange a little. In the middle of re-arranging, a police car drove down to the boat ramp on a routine check but didn't seem to notice me. Glad he didn't see me walking out of the woods.

Further along Rt 89 I took a detour on to Lake Rd since it was a stones throw (how does a stone throw anything?!?) to the lake and felt like it would connect back up to 89. There was a church, a diner, and a moron on the roof of his two story house using a leaf blower to clean off a few leaves! Back on 89 for a short distance before it met up with Rt 20 / Rt 5, a major East-West route in NY which would take me through several charming downtowns - Seneca Falls first, then Geneva.

Geneva's a nice lake town complete with a college (or two?), but the city planners decided that shoulders were passé and did away with them, opting for a two-lane busy road that lasted for quite a while. It was shortly after leaving Geneva that rain found me.

At first I opted to just get wet, figuring I was only a few hours away from my destination and that no amount of rain gear would keep me dry anyway. There was one item, however, that I wanted to don... my shoe covers. A wet body I could deal with, but I didn't want wet feet + friction + cold to cause blisters or turn my insoles to mush. Turns out the shoe covers (a spandex, Gore-Tex, neoprene type material) were only good for keeping my feet warm, not dry. After an hour the rest of me grew cold and I decided to stop for a warm snack at Taco Bell where I also put on my rain jacket. A block later I ALSO put on a fleece and my leg warmers. Finally the chattering abated and warmth took hold. Ahhhhhhhh...

Even though I warmed up more than I needed, I kept on the layers even as the rain and wind let up a bit, figuring that hot and limber was better than frigid and stiff. This was around the time that I stopped at my friend Rob's house in Bloomfield to leave a note, pick up Rt 444 North, and grab an apple from my pack.

In the Rochester suburbs Rt 444 meets up with the same Rt 96 I was on in Ithaca, where it continues almost directly to my wife's door step in Rochester. Rt 96 here is populated, well traveled, and most of it two lanes WITH shoulder! I passed strip malls, super stores, Nazareth College, St John Fisher College, and construction zones that mingled with the rain to turn the road and my bike brown with mud.

My second wind arrived when the road became single lane, tree lined, and most of the cars disappeared. I was chasing the canal off to my

right while the rain hitting my face felt refreshing. It was one of those moments where the senses are just alive – which was good because I soon realized that the shoulder disappeared and swollen storm drains began to appear directly in my path causing me to abruptly and periodically swerve to avoid a painful situation.

I was glad to reach my final destination, shower, and change into some dry normal clothes. Shortly after, my wife came home from work and it was decided that we would head to Dinosaur BBQ for dinner! Seeing my wife AND eating at Dinosaur after riding 77 miles was almost sensory overload... suffice it to say that was a phenomenal meal. :)

Lessons Learned:

Plastic bags and electrical tape are probably a better way to keep the feet dry than those booty things – the water just rolls down your calf, into the booty, and collects in your sock.

Might want to try putting Rain-X on my sun glasses, I had to stop wearing them once the rain came, beads of water prevented clear vision (sunglasses are more for wind/debris protection than sun).



◀ Hennessy Hammock set up for the night in Dean's Cove – bike bags strapped to tree to avoid ground critters.

▼ Sunrise over Cayuga Lake



Friday, Sept 29 - Saturday Sept 30 (Rochester)

Not that I was tired or in need of some down time, but a few days spent walking and relaxing was in the cards. It felt good to be using different muscles for a while.

You might recall how I ordered a new Brooks saddle - well it was now waiting for me! A thing of beauty, a bike seat made to cushion my tushin! I was happy to install it and anxious to try it.

I took the time to wash off mud and road gunk from my bike as well as do some tuning. My brakes hadn't been the same since the Ithaca hills and I tried "toeing" them in to prevent squeaking/slipping. The rear shifter cable had also stretched and was no longer shifting in/out of gears reliably so that needed tightening too.

Lessons Learned:

Just because you go out of your way to help a neighbor with a dead battery, that doesn't mean she'll ever be friendly to you. I was disheartened, but that's what karma is for. No real desire to go into the details. :)

Whatever brand of kickstand that was that I bought, don't recommend it to friends! The metal holding the kickstand to the frame snapped in twain whilst I was tightening it. Guess I was meant to use trees/guard rails/sign posts to keep my bike upright.

Sunday, Sept 31 - Rochester to Pulaski

[Atlantic Ave, 286 to 350 to Rt 104 to Rt 104B to Rt 3 to Rt 13]

Time: 7h 01m

Distance: 101.57 miles

Avg: 14.4mph

Max: 35.9mph

Trip: 449.8 miles

0-10mph wind, 60-65F, gorgeous but cloudy around me

Everyone thought I'd be riding in rain all day but to my joy the rain clouds were always around me but never overhead! I heard that several towns I biked through were hit hard with rain just before or after I was there - not once was the pavement wet. From Rochester to Queensbury I was mostly winging it. I had a route planned out on paper but I wasn't committed to it, nor did I know how far I wanted to get each day. I resolved to simply go with the flow and draft the winds of fate. I would camp where the day took me.

As it happens, I was in the mood to take advantage of the flatness and speed of Rt 104 and simply concentrated on putting the miles behind me. Even though Lake Ontario was just a hop skip and jump to my left, it was too distant to provide any scenery, so I had little distractions. In Oswego I was tempted to go around taking pictures but something told me to keep going - I would find out later my instincts were spot-on accurate. At least I stopped long enough to photograph a bit of the area to show my mom some of her alma mater.

Just as I was thinking how wonderfully nice Rt 104 was the pavement disappeared beneath me and was replaced with 4 miles of rumble strips. You know how sometimes "they" strip off the top layer of the road before laying down new blacktop? I think "they" did that here and then went on a long group vacation since there was no evidence of recent activity. It wasn't so much the incessant vibrating, or the confusion about where the shoulder or turning lanes were, it was the added friction that drove me crazy. It was like those dreams where I'm trying to run but only manage a slow walk. Please don't psycho-analyze that.

On my map was a state campground on Lake Ontario just within reach - and since a campfire and a lakeside slumber sounded dreamy I pushed hard to get there before dark. Several hours later Selkirk State Park found me and I was eager to settle down for the night.

"Do you have any campsites available?"

"Yup" the older lady says with an amazing lack of interest.

"Do you have any remote sites? Maybe where there are the fewest people?"

"Here's a park map, go look for yourself."

I had read about this sort of thing... a good number of bicyclists avoid State Parks because just when you think you can "take a load off" you find yourself with a good distance to pedal between the park entrance and your camp site. Even then, when you find your site, you realize the clerk must have been daydreaming when you asked for a "remote" campsite.

I reply, "Before I do that, what are the rates?"

"Electric or not?" she says with no change in interest level.

"Not."

When she told me \$15 I gawked and ask if there were discounts for bikes, surely there must be!

Apparently unaffected by my shock she offers another "No."

Turning to leave I thought about thumbing my nose to the park by camping in the woods that lined the entrance. After all, there were no posted signs. With a deep resignation the Boy Scout in me sighed and decided to take to the road again. By now I was thinking a warm meal would really hit the spot and figured I could easily make Pulaski before night fall and maybe I'd just find a hotel or B&B while I was at it. At least then I'd feel I was getting my moneys worth.

The park was about 5 miles from Pulaski and not only was there a lot of RV campgrounds between the two, but there were a lot No Vacancy signs. At first I thought this part of NY was so remote the owners were too lazy to change their signs and I had a good chuckle - as the frequency increased and I pulled in to Pulaski it all made sense.

The Salmon River courses directly through town and the salmon recently began to spawn, which means the trucks, wading boots and fishing poles were swarming. As far as I could tell the only lodging was a single B&B right on the river, and they didn't need a sign to tell me they were booked (there actually wasn't a sign anyway). After a ride to the edge of town I thought it best to head back to the B&B where at least they could tell me what to expect from neighboring villages.

The 1880 Bed and Breakfast is an antique of a brick building built next to the river in the town center. The owner, Linda, was very eager to help me find lodging. She informed me that her place books up a year in advance in anticipation of the salmon run, and that most of the 15 visitors had stayed with her for years. This is when I realized every event of the day was leading up to one particular moment. Had I stopped in Oswego, had I maintained my speed on those rumble strips, had I not decided to check out the rest of town first, I might have missed Steve. Steve was an older gentleman staying at the 1880 and while Linda and I were talking he happened to be in ear shot while unloading his car.

"Linda, my son won't be here until tomorrow, he can have my extra bed."

Thank me lucky stars! And clovers... diamonds... horseshoes!

The 1880 keeps four homemade soups on the stove all day, and the price includes all-you-can-eat with free run of the fridge and a great breakfast spread. I graciously filled up on soups, moving from one to the next: minestrone, cream of mushroom (yes, I ate mushrooms!), chili and Italian sausage; then went outside to take pictures, explore town, and buy an ice cream cookie at the convenience store.

A fisherman told me he "caught a 32 pounder this morning", and acted as if it was nothing. I later learned that 32 pounds is considered fairly average, and that people will come all the way from Iceland for a chance at landing one - the Icelanders (restauranters in fact) had left the 1880 for home that morning.

I returned to find the kitchen a flurry of activity as two professional chefs were giving orders and pulling together a grand feast. Just the day before, one of them was ocean fishing and as a result he brought with him 30 pounds of fresh tuna steaks! The tuna was prepared rare all the way up to well-done and was perfectly seasoned.

There was homemade bread, a green bean/ginger/bacon casserole, rice and three sauces.

Each year the guys at the 1880 put on a feast like this to celebrate the fishing and friendships. I just happened to land right in their midst. A bicyclist, wearing strange clothing, in amongst professional and amateur anglers, but I didn't feel too out of place having grown up fishing. It shocked me that everyone I talked to was interested in my trip. Linda even gave me directions to her nephew's bike shop in the Adirondacks (it was right on my route) and thought it would be a hoot if I said hello.

Lessons Learned:

It's pronounced "puh lass kai" not "puh lass key". Recently I learned that Chili, NY (a Rochester suburb) is pronounced "chai lai". Yikes.



◀ A few days rest puts a smile on my face... or maybe it's the sun shining... or gas... Note the new bike seat.

▼ I also added some entertainment to my aero bar



▶ Lake Ontario as seen from Oswego





▲ Fishermen in the Salmon River, Pulaski, NY ▲



▲A basement full of fishing waders,
just wish it were in better focus

Monday, Oct 1 - Pulaski to Seventh Lake

[Rt 13 to Cemetery St to Falls Rd to Dam Rd to Redfield Rd to Osceola Rd to Booneville to Moose River Rd to Rt 28]

Time: 8h 37m
Distance: 99.07 miles
Avg: 11.4 mph
Max: 35.7 mph
Trip: 548.8 miles
0-5mph wind, 60-65F,

Up at 5am with the rest of the household I ate a small breakfast, loaded up my bike, said my farewells and took off with head and tail lights slicing the darkness. Several locals were able to expand on my itinerary, ensuring that I would have a more scenic tour of the area.

First up was the fish hatchery on the Salmon River a fairly short distance from Pulaski. As some form of cosmic joke, the signs I had been following to the hatchery disappeared around a small village where I knew the hatchery to be, leaving me somewhat lost. I blanketed the area for 15 minutes until I found the river and a hundred fishermen already casting their lines. Following River Road upstream I passed a gracefully sculpted graveyard (the grounds keeper actually passed me in town on his way to work - commuting by lawn mower!). Eventually I found my bearings and understood what the map was trying to say - the hatchery was just a short ride north. Even though it was too early for a tour I found the main gate wide open and inviting.

At this point the river is fenced off to force the salmon into the "ladder" (smaller fish can pass through the fence just fine). If they continued upstream they'd soon run smack dab into a waterfall sixty perfectly vertical feet high. If they could somehow scale the cliff face they'd eventually run into an impassible cement dam.

Salmon here are treated to a 4 star spawning ground. This is where they were born, this is where many will die, and at 7am the fish ladder was teeming with tails, the spawning tanks were brimming with fins. With nothing but woods in every direction and the sun peaking above the hills, it was a good time to leave the salmon behind me.

My next stop was Salmon Falls, where there was most likely no fish of said species nearby. The road from Pulaski to the hatchery had been well maintained and most of the road from the hatchery to the falls was freshly paved - I was getting spoiled and as soon as I left the falls and crested the little hill, I laughed when I saw the road laid out in front of me. Part dirt, part rock, part pavement, it was in sad shape. The road was like this for some time and was bearable, but then it turned into dirt and mud road when I hit Dam Road and was chok full of natural rumble strips and puddles.

The most direct route from the somewhat uninhabited Salmon River region of NY to the equally uninhabited main roads that run along and through the Adirondack Park consists of a number of side roads - there's nothing considered "direct". It was still early morning, and even though the houses were still fairly numerous in this area I rarely ever saw a car on the road. In perhaps 15 miles (1.5 hours) of travel I saw maybe 8 cars and 2 motorcycles. While eating Cheetos and drinking Root Beer (aren't cravings odd?) the driver of the latter was struck with nostalgia when he saw me. An ex road bike racer from NY State he was

now confined in his "old age" (he hardly looked the part) to riding his motorcycle - but he still has his road bicycle in storage.

Linda had suggested once I hit Booneville that I take the Moose River Rd cutover to Rt 28, rather than Hawkinsville/Woodgate Roads. It fit my criteria for a quiet, scenic road and I was anxious to try it on for size. Moose River Rd, it should be said, likes to confuse people by having three end points - one in Booneville where I was picking it up, one in Port Leyden up the road a few miles, and one on Rt 28 where I was headed. It should also be said that while it is indeed quiet, scenic, remote, serene and beautiful in the fall foliage it also has 7 miles of unmaintained paved road - the bicyclist's nemesis. Not only that, but the majestic Moose River doesn't even flow along side it until the last 2 miles of the 18 or so mile long road, at which point you ALMOST forget the road conditions as you take in the grandeur and wildness of the river. Almost.

I was glad to be on Rt 28, the last time I'd have to look at a map or worry about my route. This was country I knew well [enough] and this one road would take me most of the way home. The other benefit was that I was close to Old Forge where I had hopes for a filling meal and maybe a stop at a bakery my friend, Adam, had drooled over.

While touristy (you almost have to be to survive in the Adirondacks), Old Forge (what forge?) still feels like (is that a mosquito?) it has history (it does) and beauty (it is on a lake after all). It's also the height of "leafer season", the time when every forested area of upstate New York fills up with folks looking for fall foliage. They're called leafers. Overtaken by these seasonal tourists, the diner I stopped at had run out of burgers, mushrooms, mozzarella sticks, and apple pie - thereby downgrading its status from Diner to something less than worthy of the title. It's also on this day that the dish washer and a waiter failed to show up for work, leaving them short on silverware and patience - they had my sympathy while I had their pork sandwich.

Old Forge is planted at the Western portion of the Fulton Chain Lakes, and Rt 28 runs along the shores of this chain, passing signs for Fifth Lake, Sixth Lake and ending at Eighth Lake. It was after saying HI to Linda's surprised nephew at "Petals and Pedals" (flowers, trinkets and bikes) in Inlet, NY that I came upon an obscure trailhead somewhere near Seventh Lake. Clearly it hadn't been used in ages but it was still marked as an Adirondack Park trail. Up the path and in the woods I went, set up camp and settled in for the night.



◄ Morning fog outside Pulaski



Top Left: Fish hatchery overview

Top Right: Close-up of adult holding tank. There are lots more fins beneath the surface!

Bottom Left: The fish ladder up to the holding tanks

Bottom Right: A leap of faith... making progress up the ladder



◀ Early morning fogginess
at the top of the Salmon
River dam



◀ Salmon Falls



◀ Wave "Hi"

Tuesday, Oct 2 - Seventh Lake to Glens Falls

[Rt 28 to 9 to foot path to Glens Falls]

Time: 6h 50m

Distance: 87.91 miles

Avg: 12.8 mph

Max: 40.8 mph

Trip: 636.7 miles

0-10mph winds, 50-60F, mostly clear skies, rain towards end

I had packed up and walked back to the road, when I decided to take pictures of the sunrise over Seventh Lake, perfectly reflecting the landscape and morning clouds. The last day was off to a great start and I was hoping to wave hello to the clients/employees of Whitewater Challengers (I am a rafting guide-in-training there), stop by Sarah's Cafe in North Creek for a yummy lunch, and Stewarts in Warrensburg for a chocolate milk shake.

In the end it turns out that Challengers wasn't running any trips that day (nobody home), Sarah's Cafe is closed on Tuesday's, and I decided to grab lunch and a shake at the Stewarts in North Creek. I passed numerous deer grazing on household landscaping a short distance from the road. Most would turn to watch me slowly pass then turn back to their meals, very few would actually turn to run.

I made good time and around 1:00 I was passing through Warrensburg, enjoying the beautiful day when my cell phone told me I had voice mail - it was my wife wishing me luck and hoping I wasn't too wet... Wet? From what? It was a brilliantly sunny day. Twenty minutes later I was nearing Lake George and the storm clouds were nearing me - I'm betting she didn't knock on wood when she wished me luck! For the final 45 minutes of my ride I was dumped on by the clouds but I didn't care, it would mean fewer people on the bike trail to get in my way.

I did pass a rock climbing school getting some use out of a little cliff along the trail, they didn't seem the mind the rain either.



▲Morning showing its face on Seventh Lake

The footbridge over Quaker Rd in Queensbury, NY▼



In Conclusion

Six days from now I start a new job working from one of three places, or "homes" as I occasionally call them. Since my wife gives me grief every time I refer to "home" as someplace other than with her, I have to constantly quote the sign I saw growing up in my parents house (home), "Home is where the heart is", and as I've heard it sung, "any place I hang my hat is home". This bike trip was about being thrust into that mindset - find home everywhere I go. Be it the house of a good friend, family, between two trees or even the pavement as I endlessly turn the pedals over and over.

Biking slows life down and forces you to look around. While I didn't exactly get off the beaten path as much as I'd like, I did find every little town I pulled into a bit more enjoyable at 10mph than at 30. I've always been one to partake of the journey, and not just focus on the destination, which is why I enjoy long car trips and hikes - now I've discovered a love for long bike trips.

For those of you thinking you might be too old or out of shape to do something similar, let me say this: While researching my trip I found the majority of people on long distance bike trips (at least those writing about it) didn't consider themselves fit or young. Most were not bicyclists then or in their youth. No matter who they were, once they found their pace they loved their journeys. It's never too late to take a bike trip, you just need the patience to find your own groove.