

Day Three – Elyria to Norwalk

Each day on this tour keeps getting a little bit longer and brings on more variety than the one before. After a good night's rest, with some riders staying at the Elyria Holiday Inn, others staying in Rotary homes, and the rest staying with their own families, we all converged at the Holiday Inn for a breakfast and short meeting. Sadness was placed into the day with the announcement of the passing of PDG Steve Day. Steve was a dynamo in the district and he will be missed in ways we can only now imagine.

Our start was delayed a bit due to the malfunction of one of our bikes and we hung around to wait for it to be repaired. This was difficult as we watched dark clouds come moving in from the west threatening to dampen our day. Finally we were off for Day Three and left the inn, wandering through a mall parking lot like a bunch of feral cats. Modest chaos is a close term. That didn't last long as we found our way and began on the first of the day's adventures, the High Meadows Trail. This is Elyria's newest trail, leading from a park up on a ridge down over the Black River, under I-90 and down to the lower Bur Oak Trail. This one wends its way along the river, crossing it twice. The trail then connects with another recent trail, the Steel Works Trail, in Lorain. This one follows the river on one side and offers views of steel slag dumps resembling a moonscape. The total trail ride is about 6 miles but seemed longer because of the constantly changing scenery.

First stop was at Lorain Lakeview Park, where we were met by many members of the Lorain Rotary Club. Coordinator Sandy Keiser presented a "big check" to the tour, in the form of a foil-wrapped checkmark. Very clever, very generous. A lot of time was spent among riders and local Rotarians as another bike had tricky mechanical problems. This placed us further behind on our schedule but we hate to leave a companion behind. Finally we had to leave, almost an hour behind schedule, our team member riding in the bus with his vehicle.

From Lorain it was a 17-mile trip straight south to Oberlin. Anytime you travel south from Lake Erie, you must go uphill. And our troupe learned just that for this distance. Not a steep incline but steady; steady enough to keep one from gaining any good speed, and with the building temperatures, steep enough to make sure you lost plenty of fluids... but that's a good thing.

The Oberlin Rotary Club was waiting for us as we wandered in, in small groups of two or three, spread out by the effort of the road. President Tad Cowling was joined by Judy Riggle, Mary Aufdenkampe, Rex Engle and others to greet us warmly and feed us heartily. A reporter from the local paper was there for photos and stories.

Our group had spread out so much that by the time some were leaving to go on to the next stop, a few were still arriving for lunch. Eventually each headed out on the Oberlin and Kipton portions of the North Coast Inland Trail toward our final destination, Norwalk.

The terrain changes a bit once you get away from the ridges that formed ancient shores for Lake Erie as the ice age was melting. Now we were into serious farmland and we could see first hand how the spring rains and early warmth had favored the farmers for once. Corn is about two weeks early and that's a good thing.

By the time we all had arrived in Norwalk there was about an hour's difference between earliest and latest arrivals. But the terrain is beautiful with gently rolling country roads, the kind of setting that has made Ohio famous for bicyclists.

As Norwalk had done before, we showered at the Norwalk High School, as refreshing as that ice cold bottle of water handed to us by the local coordinators, Gary Englehart and Wayne Babcanec. Then it was off to

the dinner, a cookout at Norwalk Furniture Pavilion. Many other Rotarians were there, as this was a joint activity for Norwalk and the Milan Rotary Clubs. Grilled burgers and brats, delicious salads and plenty of liquid refreshments, all disappeared as soon as the bikers appeared. After a short program of thanks, lodging assignments were handed out, bikers went with host families and a different kind of fellowship ensured.

We've said it many times how one of the best parts of the tour – for bikers and for local Rotarians – is to get a chance to stay over in another's home. What other way would so many of us have such an opportunity to meet and learn about fellow Rotarians? The Rotary tour for MESA is much more than a fund raiser, much more than a bike ride. It brings people together, new friendships are formed, ideas are shared. We all feel very fortunate to be a part of something so special.

Tune in tomorrow to hear about a bike trail in Clyde, what does Fremont do for fun, and learn where is the most scenic 30 miles in Northern Ohio.