

Day Six – Defiance to Sylvania

Today topped off what has been a near perfect week of cycling for the tour. The weather forecasters were almost correct; we did have the predicted 10-15 mph tailwinds – thank you, thank you, thank you. And the temperatures did climb toward the 90s and felt much warmer. But the thunderstorms luckily blew off to the north and never dampened our path.

We began with breakfast where we had dined the night before, at Charlie's Down Under. Pete the owner proudly served us fine fare and we gobbled it all up. You'd never think it had only been about ten hours prior that we were there eating our body weight in Italian dishes. A short staging area was set up at nearby Pontiac Park, where past president Darline Clemens presented the group with a check from the club for MESA. And while we had everyone's attention, Ken Pollitz, one of the riders, presented the group with a check from his club, the Rotary Club of Ottawa-Glandorf.

Finally we were off for the last day of the tour. Our route followed the north shore of majestic Maumee River up to the small town of Florida, where we crossed over and rode the south shore for another eight miles to Napoleon. Members for the Napoleon Rotary Club met us at the community center they built together with the local Lions Club a few years ago. This was only a water and rest stop but it was very nice seeing friends in Napoleon again – this was our third time to stop in Napoleon and they always treat us like family.

After Napoleon we headed on to Liberty Center. As some of you may know, the rotary Club of Liberty Center recently dropped their Rotary charter, another victim of our struggling economy and cultural evolution, but they wanted to give the remainder of their treasury to MESA. We stopped at the municipal building and were greeted by the mayor and were given a check and a proclamation. What a nice gesture for the club, what a sad decision it must have been for them. One of their past officers insisted that we sing a Rotary favorite, "Smile," a tradition in their club. This may have been the last time they sang it together with other Rotarians.

It was now about 11 a.m. and the sun was beating down hard as we refilled our water bottles, hopped on our bikes and pedaled off. Our northerly route was blessed by the SSW winds that were a good 15 mph. This gave us a boost so our speed could help us overlook the heat. Still, there were plenty of stops along the way for shade and dumping water all over our heads to help cool off. We were about an hour early already so any resting we did was did not really interfere with our schedule.

Lunch was scheduled for Swanton High School and we arrived there during the club's meeting. Assistant Tour Coordinator Bill Pepple gave a brief presentation to the Swanton Rotarians to update them on what the bike tour does and how it helps MESA. The bikers lingered a while in the air conditioning and enjoyed meeting with the local members.

Our final leg of the day and of the tour was from Swanton to Sylvania and Centennial Terrace Quarry. The winds had helped us so much we were about 1 ½ hours earlier than they were expecting us. We took the free time to enjoy our own company for once and share stories, comical and ridiculous, with each other. We also took advantage of the quarry, where they have set up very nice swimming facilities. We did get a few strange looks as we walked down the steps in our bike gear – black Spandex shorts and heavily decorated stretch jerseys just are not the style on today's beaches or swimming holes. They cleared a path for us as we walked toward the quarry. We probably did stand out somewhat, a group of "older" adults in bike togs amid all the lithe teenaged girls and boys wearing a lot less than we did at that age.

Dinner was served there at the park. The Sylvania Rotary was very happy to have us as guests and we felt the same. President Norm Konigseter and member Gary Johnson expressed interest in having the tour return and we assured them that would happen. We lingered at the park for a longer time than we expected, continuing to discuss all the positive things we had seen and done all week, and looking ahead with interest how we will design next year's tour. Around 5 p.m. we were on the road, tired, sunburned, bellies full, sated and satisfied for a six-day job on the road well done.

And so ends the sixth annual Rotary Bike tour for MESA. It was one of the nicest ones we've had, even though each has had its own special features, adventures and memories. Next we will sort out our laundry, the used and dirty from the unworn but pretty wrinkled. We'll unload our bikes and other gear, setting them aside in our garages for a day or two – it's very unlikely anyone will even look at a saddle tomorrow. The bikers' jobs are pretty much done for this tour. The rest is up to the clubs and members to step up for MESA. This project is the gem of District 6600 and deserves our strong support.

Thank you to the many, many people who worked hard this year to make this tour successful. MESA leadership –DG Dave Dayne, PDG Jim Heinrich, DGE Helyn Bolanis, MESA Director PDG Jim Shrader, MESA Secretary Ron Stoner, District International Chair Bob Ruehl, Assistant Tour Coordinator Bill Pepple. There were many others and I hope they do not feel insulted by the omission. Two individuals do deserve some special recognition: Rotarian Rebecca Waggamon of Lima and her husband Jeff. Becky normally would have ridden with us all week but had dual knee replacement in the spring – she was not quite ready yet to ride. However, she and Jeff did all the road marking for the tour this year, staying about a half day or so ahead of us, painting arrows on the road to help us find (or at least not lose) our way. Many times they had to reroute us around detours or route changes or freshly tarred roads. This service was truly Service Above Self.

Planning will begin soon for next year's tour. If you want your club to be included on the route, please contact Ed Stewart at emsbiker514@gmail.com.