

A Short History of Desert Camp Talks By Fred Matheny

Desert Camp has a long history of evening talks from top cycling coaches, nutritionists and bike fit experts. In the 21 years of camp, many of the most well known cycling experts have shown up in Tucson and Sierra Vista to share their expertise with attendees.

This tradition began with the inaugural camp in 1996. The 45 riders included the Bicycling Magazine Race Across America 50+ team of Ed Pavelka, Pete Penseyres, Skip Hamilton and me. We rode each other into the ground during the day, gave talks in the evening and then planned for the race late into the night. It worked--we set the 50+ record of 5 days, 11 hours from Irvine, CA to Savannah.

Through the years, Desert Camp has hosted luminaries like bike fit legend Andy Pruitt and Chicago-area shop owner and bike fitter Bob Olsen both of whom conducted fits for riders. Cycling coaches like Joe Friel, John Hughes and Michele Grainger shared their knowledge and often advised individual riders about their training plans. The aforementioned Pete Penseyres, holder of the individual RAAM average speed record from 1986 until two years ago also attended many camps and shared his knowledge.

Nutritionists included Lulu Weschler and Susan Barr who served 5 years as the nutrition columnist for Bicycling Magazine. Exercise physiologist, the late Ed Burke, and cycling physician Arnie Baker, discussed, sometimes passionately, the merits of protein in hydration drinks.

On the technical side, former Bicycling Magazine tech writer Jim Langley dispensed tech tips and his famous technique for no-tools flat tire repair. Hint--it requires strong thumbs.

Desert Camp has had special guests too. Bob Stapleton, the founder and director of Team Highroad, the top-ranked professional cycling team at the time, rode hard during the day and shared stories of life in the pro peloton. Sierra Vista bike shop owner Martin Coll, director for Graham Obree's legendary hour records, told how Obree rode a home made bike with a bottom bracket fashioned from washing machine bearings. Last year, the holder of the most miles in one year (76,076) Kurt Searovgel, shared with campers exactly what it felt like to average over a double century every day of the year.

And of course camp directors Lon and Susan have shared their long distance cycling secrets and their stories of setting Race Across America records during the heroic period of American ultra-distance riding.

I apologize if I've left anyone out--the number of cycling experts who have made Desert Camp an important part of their itinerary shows how well respected it is.

This spring I'm honored to return to camp for the 22nd year to ride, present talks in the evening and chat with riders about their cycling lives. I hope to see you there!

