

Our First Desert Camp by Dale Johnson

Well Jane and I survived the week of spring training in Tucson. In fact we did well and enjoyed it and would consider returning in future years. One notable item is the efficiency of Pac Tour. They are extremely well organized. Every evening at 7:30 p.m. there is a meeting that all riders attend. One evening two young crew members gave a slide report of their journey on bikes through Southeast Asia. Fred Matheny spoke two evenings on cycling related trivia. He is an entertaining speaker and is the founder of RBR cycling website. Lon and Susan, the founders and operators, spoke one evening on their latest trip to Ghana where Lon rode bikes with African girls and other roadies on dirt roads in remote Ghana, all with the mission of helping the Guyanese people.

Typically we are rose at 6 a.m. and had breakfast in the lobby, then prepared our bikes and drinks outside where the trailers were parked. On the days we were relocating our hotel, we had our gear bags out to the trailers by 7:45 in the morning and were on our bikes at the same time. Each day we had previously prepared route sheets and maps to show where we were going. The instructions were excellent. After riding usually two hours we came to the first rest stop which consisted of a parked trailer which provided cold water for drinks, powder for the bottles, cold soda pop, candies, cookies, bananas, fruit, beef jerky, granola bars and similar foods. On a separate small table was sunblock, salt, Endurolytes, etcetera. After the first day I did not take my Camelbak but we just used bottles. Jane just reminded me of their cool hand washing station. Riders always remove their gloves, squat down and rinse

their hands from a small water dispenser that has soap in it and then dry their hands with paper towels. All very sanitary. The organization at rest stops and lunch stops is excellent. I have never seen such quality on any bike ride or tour.

The trailers used by Pac Tour are expensive, custom jobs which are highly organized inside with just about everything that can be useful on long tours, and pulled by large Ford vans. A smaller Dodge minivan also accompanies the riders and performs more as a sweep. We never sagged, but riders are not discouraged from sagging the steeper climbs, or if just tired, or want to skip the boring parts, of which there are some.

One day we chose to have lunch in Tombstone instead of trailer dining, and one day we also rode to Kartchner Cavern, and

took a 2 hour tour. It is not a scenic area like California, but there are things to do besides ride a bike.

Our riding each day varied from 70 to 100 miles and 2000 to 4000 feet of climbing. Gradients averaged 2 to 3 %. The steepest climbs were perhaps 10% for only a few seconds. Jane just said no, but since I am telling the story I will overrule her. In other words ideal for tandems. We were first in the tandem division. We were the only tandem and there was also one recumbent rider.

Road surfaces in Arizona are much better than California except it was mostly chip seal surface and winds were always present but not a factor. The high temperatures ranged in the upper 70's which is considerably warmer here than normal and was ideal for bike riding. No

rain, no severe cold. All very nice. The drivers we encountered were very courteous. Sometimes too courteous. For example, drivers would sometimes pull so far to the left to go around us they would endanger oncoming motorists. Of course, this only happened a few times.

The average age of the 35 other riders was in the fifties and there were several men just about my age and who looked it, in other words old farts. Most of them had been cycling many years, and used this week of training to jump start their upcoming year of cycling. They were perhaps not in the best shape but within a few weeks they will be extremely fit, the type that race and do double centuries. 20% of the riders were women and were perhaps 5 - 10 years younger than the men. The crew and Lon and Susan also rode part of the time with the riders who paid to

attend. Riders came from all over the US, Canada, and Australia. Some were also here for additional weeks of Desert Camp. Many of the riders have been here in previous years and their enjoyment of these camps is testimony to the quality and relatively low cost of the camps. The cost per person is approximately \$1,200 for one week and that includes lodging, most food, nice jerseys, and all the support.

Most of the riding is to the east of Tucson centered about Sierra Vista, which adjoins Fort Huachuca. The surrounding communities we rode to include Tombstone, Bisbee, Benton, Patagonia, and into Fort Huachuca after we received our special fort access permits.

P.S. Prior to our bout at PAC Tour Desert Camp, we spent a few days in Big Bend National Park in Texas, where I

acquired a speeding ticket. At the time, the cop mentioned a couple times that I should call the judge in the closest community, Terlingua, which was a really small place and the judge is only available a few hours per week. So I called him that day, and explained the situation (guilty), and he explained my options. \$150 by cashiers check, or for \$250 the citation will be dismissed if I incur no more citations in Brewster County the next 30 days.

So, now I understand how Terlingua survives. On California motorists.

Dale