

Part 11

Reaching Albuquerque, New Mexico was a symbolic landmark in the Double Transcontinental. I felt that I had reached the old west from cowboy movies. The landscape and sky had a vast clearness unlike the terrain of the midwest. Albuquerque was 280 years old and it had a feeling of old and new as I rode across town on old Route 66. Central Avenue is 17 miles from end to end and claims to be the Longest Main Street in America. As I reached the west side of town I climbed up the ridge on Nine Mile Hill. The straight highway started at 5% and then tilted to 8% near the top.

By the time I left Albuquerque it was mid morning. I was back on I-40 again with the chip seal shoulder. The interstate rolled into the distance with shallow grades. Near Old Laguna I stopped at a highway rest area for a snack. There was an outdoor pit toilet there. I went in the toilet and noticed the pit was filled with crap all the way to the brim of the toilet. I lost my appetite.

In 1981 I was 23 years old. I had fair speed and okay endurance for USCF type road racing. I wasn't really that good but I had improved from Category 4 to Category 2 the year before. I still liked riding long point to point events best. Some of the local racers asked me why I was wasting my time riding my self planned events of 200, 300 or even 400 miles in a day. These were the days when the club century in September was the longest organized event of the season. Real racers entered 30 mile criteriums on the weekends. The top 10 riders would win some really good prizes like a new chain, tires or clothing. I didn't win anything during my weekend tours across the countryside. I still liked planning and riding those self challenging tours. The

local racers didn't like it when said I considered myself more of a tourist than a racer.

As I continued across New Mexico I was beginning to realize how big the United States is. We passed through the big town Grants that was famous for uranium mining in the 1950's. The mining business had slowed down and most of the businesses were converting to resale shops and auto repair stores. I knew I was getting closer to the Continental Divide as I started the final 30 mile climb. The wind was slowing me down more than the gentle 3% grade. After several hours I reached the summit that was marked by a gas station and gift shop. I looked to the west hoping to see my first glimpse of the Pacific Ocean. I had to be getting close now. I soft pedaled down the other side into the town of Gallup. In the 1930's Gallup was the filming headquarters of many western movies. The lobby of the El Rancho Hotel downtown is lined with dozens of photos of famous movie stars who have stayed there. It would be another 20 miles to the Arizona border. The nagging west wind was blowing again. At the crest of every hill I looked into the distance and hoped to see the elusive Pacific Ocean.

I had never been to Arizona and as soon as I crossed the state line I knew I was someplace unique. The landscape and rocks were as different here as New Mexico was different from Texas. We arrived in Sanders that night at 9:45 PM. We were warned by local gas station owners that we were entering Indian Country. The warning seemed more appropriate 100 years ago. I couldn't imagine people being any different in Arizona than they were anywhere else. We didn't have any problems with Indians or other locals during our ride across Arizona.

I was back on the bike before 7:00 AM. After riding for about 80 miles on the interstate we came to the town of Holbrook. The Wigwam Motel was an area landmark that had been over grown by weeds. The 15 cement tepees were an icon on Route 66 postcards. It would be another 10 years before this motel would be remodeled and return to its glory years of Route 66 fame. The next town west was Winslow. This was another town that had seen better days. The one-way divided main street was lined with closed stores and \$14 a night motels. The "Eagles" song of "Stand'in On a Corner In Winslow Arizona" was play'n in my head. The highlight was leaving town and seeing the snow capped peak of Bill Humphrey's Peak 60 miles away near Flagstaff. At over 12,000 feet this mountain is the highest point in Arizona.

The grade from Winslow to Flagstaff climbed another 2,000 feet. The mountain peak seemed to stay in the distance similar to the grain silos in Kansas. It would take me most of the afternoon to finally reach Flagstaff. A local television station wanted to do an interview there. We met just as I was getting off the interstate and heading south on Rt. 89-A toward Oak Creek Canyon. It was a fast interview and I was glad to be off the interstate for a while. I would ride straight south for the next 150 miles through some of the best scenery of the trip. The red rock cliffs and Ponderosa pine forests were a refreshing change from the interstate.

The corkscrew descent down to Sedona was a thrill as I out coasted my support car through the hairpin turns. The cool temperature was just right to need arm warmers but not tights on my legs. I crossed through Camp Verde at 3,500 feet elevation and started the climb up 7,000 foot Mingus Mountain.

The motor home had driven ahead and called back on the CB radio about the town of Jerome just ahead. "You won't believe the narrow streets" they said, "We can barely fit the motorhome downtown".

In 1981 Jerome was a run down mining town hanging on my it's teeth to the side of the mountain. Most of the stores were closed and remembered better days fifty years earlier. I was feeling good spinning up the grade 7% grade. I was feeling better than I had the entire trip. The routine of the crew was smooth and efficient. Everybody felt good about the progress we made today. Tonight I felt like I was on an after dinner social ride. Even racer crew member Jon Royer commented that I was climbing better now than in West Virginia. In the back of my mind I knew my freshness wouldn't last. It would be dark soon and the fatigue of riding into the night would visit me again.