

Part 13

Double Transcontinental Record

I reached the summit of Mingus Mountain in Arizona shortly after sundown. The next 40 miles were mostly downhill to Prescott. I could see the lights of the town across the grassy plains. I rolled into Prescott at 10:00 PM. The crew made camp in the parking lot of a supermarket. I woke up a sunrise and proceeded through town on mostly vacant streets. I met a local cyclist who was heading out for his morning ride. He knew I wasn't a local rider and wondered what I was doing riding my bike across town. I told him about trying to set the Double Transcontinental Record. He remembered seeing John Marino come through Prescott the year before during his solo record setting ride. The fellow said he rode with John for a few miles also.

He gave me a water bottle from a Prescott Bike shop. I gave him one of the 50 new Specialized bottles the crew kept for promotional use. We rode together about five miles up the grade leaving town. He warned me about the desert ahead. I told him I had been riding in desert since New Mexico. "No, the desert ahead is hotter" he said. We said goodbye to each other and he coasted back into town. I was alone again except for my leap frogging support car. The terrain and scenery was spectacular with over 50 twisting turns in the next 20 miles. The town of Yarnell sits on the edge of the mountain rim overlooking the expansive flat desert 2,000 feet below. I could look out and see almost 100 miles of sand and scrub brush. I looked for the Pacific Ocean in the distance, but it was still 350 miles way.

As I dropped down Yarnell Grade the heat of the desert increased a few degrees every mile. It was a comfortable 85 degrees at the top. At the bottom it was well over 100 degrees and it was still midmorning. I took the highways of Rt. 71 and Rt. 60 southwest toward Interstate 10. Dust Devil mini tornados danced in the distance for minutes at a time before dissipating and then reforming a half a mile later. It was getting really hot now. The crew had been feeding me peanut butter and jelly sandwiches as I rode one handed. Before I could finish a sandwich the bread had become crunchy like toast. I had to chew with my mouth closed because the hot wind would make my dry lips and tongue stick together like licking a frozen metal flagpole in winter. The smell of the desert was a cross between dried herbs and burnt toast. If hot could have a smell, it smelled like this desert.

It was near the town of Aguila that I motioned for the support car to pull beside me. Susan Notorangelo was sitting in the passenger seat and handed me an ice cold water bottle. I told her "You know a woman had never set a transcontinental record under 15 days". She said "There's a good reason for that. It's hot out there". That was the first seed that was planted getting Susan to start thinking about riding long distances. One year later, almost to the day, Susan would be racing from Los Angeles back to New York on the same section of road across the desert on her way to setting an 11 day, 16 hour Women's Transcontinental Record.

I eventually merged onto I-10 near the town of Quartzite. The sun was going down and offered some relief from the 110 degree heat of the afternoon. I rolled through Blythe,

California on the perfectly smooth blacktop shoulder of the interstate. The heat still radiated off the shiny surface like a pancake griddle. I was counting down the miles to the Pacific Ocean. At the top of every grade I would stand up on the pedals to get a better view of the ocean ahead. I knew it had to be just over the next hill. I rode into the night and was starting to feel as bad as riding to Albuquerque two nights before. My thoughts were divided between anticipation of finally reaching the ocean and self doubt that I could make it through the night. I rode for almost 100 miles that night across the desert. At about 1:00 AM I reached the top of Chiriaco Summit. I started coasting down the grade. In front of me were a million lights of Los Angeles. I had made it across the country. It was all downhill from here. I confirmed my observations with the crew. They said "No not quite. The lights are Palm Springs. You still have 150 miles to go to Santa Monica".

End of Part 13