

Part 26

The next morning I rode 40 miles to Laurelville, Ohio.

This was the start of the Hocking Hills Region. This was a new road for me because it was different from the route going west we had taken further to the north a few weeks earlier. Riding on Rt. 56 through the hills and past the caves was a beautiful section of the route. There were plenty of very steep 10% grades and fast 50 mph downhills.

I rode through the big university town of Athens and found my way out the other side. My support car was going to catch me down the road after they stopped for gas. I was now on Rt. 50 heading east. The highway was a narrow slab of concrete with a grass shoulder. Traffic was busier on this side of town. I heard the rumbling motor of a pick-up truck coming from behind. The truck passed me with a few feet to spare. As the truck went by the passenger through their cup of coffee at me. The damp spray of coffee misted me at 60 mph. I lost my temper and yelled at the truck "That's not very nice" I said. For emphasis they tossed the empty white styrofoam cup out the window. Out of all the miles I had ridden back and forth across America that was one of the few times a motorist had acted aggressively toward me.

It was now mid morning when I crossed into Parkersburg, West Virginia. This was new territory for us as we rode on Rt. 50. On our way west we had travel on Route 40 which was about 100 miles

further north. When we were heading west we had met Len Vreeland and his crew in Oklahoma. Len was trying to set a record for the first recumbent bike to cross the country in under 15 days. They suggested trying Rt. 50 because the grades were less steep than the way I had gone through Morgantown, West Virginia and Frostburg, Maryland. Route 50 had been converted to a divided four lane type road that bypassed many of the towns along the way. The shoulder was newly paved and clean. Old Rt. 50 was the business route that would branch off and follow the valley into towns along the way. Although new Route 50 was wide and clean it followed the straighter route up and over the rolling mountains instead of going around the hills. As I rode the next 70 miles to Clarksburg there were at least eight major climbs followed by 50 mph descents.

It was late afternoon when I pedaled through Clarksburg. The buildings looked old and the architecture was changing to the style of the eastern United States. Huge brick homes with ornate front porches were more common. Rt. 50 had was a narrow old main street through the city. The traffic was busy and I looked forward to getting out of town. As I pedaled into the rolling farmland on the east side of Clarksburg I was heading into the rural hills of West Virginia. The traffic was gone. The road was narrow but safe. The temperature was comfortable as the sun was setting in the late afternoon. I was finally able to start counting down the remaining miles. I only had 500 miles to go to New York City.

As I rode into the night it had been nine and a half days since leaving Santa Monica. I had a real good chance of beating the cross country record of 12 days, 3 hours. If I kept up my same pace I had a chance to finish in New York in 11 days and a half days. I would try to ride long into the night and get through the mountains. The longer I rode tonight I had a wide range of emotions when I relived the previous 22 days of riding across the country but also the previous ten years of preparing for this ride. I could hear the support car engine shifting gears behind me as I stood on the pedals in a 42 x 26 gear climbing one of the many 9% mountain grades that night. I was riding in the pool of light of the headlamps. The night was pitch black. I stopped briefly to put on a warmer jacket. I could see my breath in the headlights of the car and night air was becoming chilled the higher up the mountain I rode. Even though the crew was leap frogging with the other vehicles every ten miles I felt alone tonight. We were all looking forward to the finish.

About half way up the mountain I had a complete emotional breakdown while I was riding and started crying. It was the first time during the whole record attempt I felt this way. I realized we were going to make it to New York City. We had been through so much the past 5,500 miles. I let my emotions out for the next five minutes. No one in the support car knew what I was feeling. It was a private moment in the middle of the night, in the middle of nowhere.

I rode for two more hours that night. The air was brisk and the fog was starting to become thicker. The car head lights reflected off the fog and reduced my visibility to 50 feet. At the top of the longest climb I put on another warm jacket. I wanted to get off the top of the mountains and I started coasting down the twisting decent. The fog was dense and the support car was keeping me in the headlights as we both pumped our brakes going down the grade. I rolled into New Creek, West Virginia after 1:00 AM. We would take a sleep break in a local parking lot. If everything went as planned this would be my last time I would stop to sleep. I had ridden a little over 280 miles today. It was a tough day in the mountains. I went to bed knowing I only had one more day to the finish.