

What's Happening

I N T H E U S A ?

BY LAWRENCE GABLE

VOL 19, NO 10 JUNE 2012

Every summer thousands of Iowans get on their bicycles and take to the roads. They participate in a camping ride across their state that lasts seven days. This will be the 40th year, and again this year 19,000 people will make the ride.

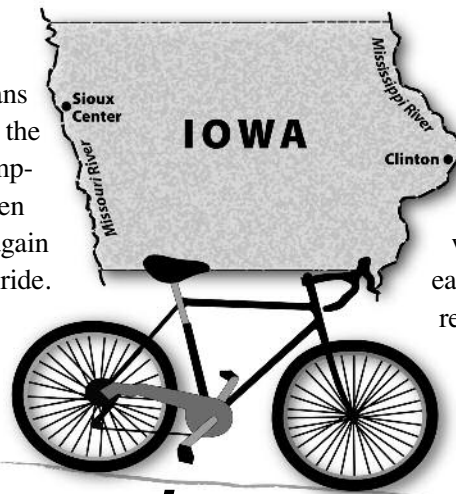
The ride had a simple beginning. Two writers from the *Des Moines Register* decided to make a ride all the way across the state. They were both avid bicyclists, and they intended to write articles for the newspaper to tell about their journey. When the *Register* approved their idea, the writers invited the public to ride with them.

That first ride began in Sioux City. It lies on the Missouri River, which forms most of the state's western border. About 300 people started, but only 114 of them made it all the way to Davenport, a city on Iowa's eastern border on the Mississippi River. Many others rode only part of the route. When the writers wrote their articles, many more people expressed interest in the ride. That caused the newspaper to plan another ride the following year.

The ride has had several names. In 1973 it was unofficially called "The Great Six-Day Bicycle Ride." In 1974 it became SAGBRAI, the "Second Annual Great Bicycle Ride Across Iowa." The next year the newspaper expanded the ride to seven days and added its name to the ride's official name. Now everyone knows the ride as RAGBRAI, the "Register's Annual Great Bicycle Ride Across Iowa."

Perhaps the most important element of RAGBRAI is what it is not. It is not a race, so there are no timekeepers or prizes. Instead the ride is intended to last the full seven days. Even though the ride is physically demanding, participants are supposed to have fun. It is a rare opportunity to see Iowa's rolling hills, spend days riding and camping together with old friends, and make new friends along the way.

RAGBRAI attracts many riders, even from other states and foreign countries. All riders have to register and pay a fee. For the entire ride it costs \$150. Those who only want to ride for a day pay \$25. For



Iowa Rides Again!

safety reasons the Iowa State Patrol asked RAGBRAI to restrict the number of riders. As a result, RAGBRAI accepts only 8,500 weeklong riders and 1,500 day riders each day. Many more people than that register, so officials hold a lottery to select riders. About 30 percent of the riders each year are new to the ride.

RAGBRAI begins with a festival on Saturday before the ride starts on Sunday. A big part of it is the RAGBRAI Expo. There more than 60 manufacturers of bicycles and bike accessories display their newest products. Riders, friends, family and local residents can test ride new bikes. The expo also invites RAGBRAI's ten official bike shops from across Iowa to attend. Those shops provide repair vans along the route that fix any bicycle problems that riders have.

The ride follows a different route every year. The distance changes a bit every year too, of course, but it usually goes through 470 miles of Iowa's countryside. RAGBRAI selects eight different host communities every year. Aside from the two that host the beginning and ending, the six others provide campgrounds for the riders each night. They use school grounds, city parks or county fairgrounds. RAGBRAI transports riders' duffel bags, sleeping bags and tents to the next town every day.

Safety is a big concern during the ride. RAGBRAI encourages riders to get in shape before the ride. Riders should wear helmets and gloves, and make frequent stops for fluids and light meals. Because riders are often crowded together, accidents do occur. In order to remain alert, RAGBRAI recommends that riders do not talk on cell phones, or wear headphones or earbuds.

Every year many riders dip their rear tires in the Missouri River before they begin. This year they will do it near Sioux Center on July 22. When they finish in Clinton on July 28 and dip their front tires in the Mississippi River, they will finish a ride that has become not only America's oldest, largest and longest touring bicycle ride. It also has become a beautiful Iowa tradition.

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Every summer thousands of Iowans go for a bicycle ride together. It is a camping ride across their state that takes seven days. This will be the 40th year, and again this year 19,000 people will make the ride.

The ride began simply. Two writers from the *Des Moines Register* decided to ride across the state. Then they wanted to write articles for the newspaper to tell about it. When the *Register* approved their idea, they invited the public to ride with them.

That first ride began in Sioux City. It lies on the Missouri River on the state's western border. About 300 people started, but only 114 of them completed it. They finished in Davenport, a city on Iowa's eastern border on the Mississippi River. Others rode only part of the route. Many people read the articles and expressed interest in the ride. That caused the newspaper to plan another ride the next year.

The ride has had several names. In 1973 it was unofficially called "The Great Six-Day Bicycle Ride." In 1974 it became SAGBRAI, the "Second Annual Great Bicycle Ride Across Iowa." The next year the newspaper added a day to the ride and gave it an official name. Now the ride is RAGBRAI, the "Register's Annual Great Bicycle Ride Across Iowa."

RAGBRAI is a ride, not a race. There are no timekeepers or prizes, and it lasts the full seven days. Even though it is a physical challenge, riders have fun. They get to see Iowa's rolling hills and spend days riding and camping together with nice people.

RAGBRAI attracts many riders, even from other states and countries. All riders have to sign up and pay a fee. It costs \$150 for the week, or



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\$25 just for a day. For safety reasons the Iowa State Patrol asked RAGBRAI to limit the number of riders. RAGBRAI accepts only 8,500 weeklong riders and 1,500 day riders each day. Many more people than that register, so officials hold a lottery to select riders.

RAGBRAI begins with a festival the day before the ride. Companies display their newest bicycles and bike accessories. Riders can test ride new bikes.

RAGBRAI's ten official bike shops from across Iowa also attend. Those shops have repair vans along the route that fix riders' bikes.

The ride follows a different route every year. It goes through 470 miles of Iowa's countryside. RAGBRAI selects eight different host communities every year. Aside from the two at the beginning and end, the six others provide campgrounds for the riders each night. RAGBRAI transports riders' duffel bags, sleeping bags and tents from town to town.

Safety is a big concern during the ride. RAGBRAI encourages riders to get in shape before the ride. They should wear helmets and gloves, and stop often for fluids and light meals. Because riders are often crowded together, accidents do occur. RAGBRAI recommends that riders do not talk on cell phones, or wear headphones or earbuds.

Every year riders dip their rear tires in the Missouri River before they begin. This year they will do it near Sioux Center on July 22. They will dip their front tires in the Mississippi River when they finish in Clinton on July 28. RAGBRAI is not only America's oldest, largest and longest touring bicycle ride. It has also become a beautiful Iowa tradition.

Background Information

RAGBRAI's host communities for 2012 are Sioux Center, Cherokee, Lake View, Webster City, Marshalltown, Cedar Rapids, Anamosa and Clinton.

Roman numerals identify every RAGBRAI. This year's ride is RAGBRAI XL, which goes exactly 471 miles. This year's route is the 11th flattest and ninth easiest in RAGBRAI's history.

As early as the second year the ride had medical services available for riders. Four ambulances and paramedic teams patrol the route each day from 6 a.m. until 6 p.m. RAGBRAI's medical services also treat people in campgrounds.

Aside from bicycle repair along the route and in the campgrounds, repair locations are marked on the RAGBRAI bike maps. There are also repair shops open in the first mile of the route every morning.

Bicyclists who need repairs along the route should pull to the left side of the road and turn their bicycle upside down. They should carry a spare inner tube in case they have a flat tire.

Camping is available on the Saturday night before the ride begins and on the night of the ride's last day. Campgrounds must be quiet after 9 p.m. Late-night noisemakers will be asked to leave the campgrounds.

Cedar Rapids will host the 40th anniversary celebration on July 26th. As part of it, the American rock band Counting Crows will play a concert. It will be open to the public, but registered riders get free admission.

Over the years 26 people have died during the ride. Only five of them died of injuries from riding. Some people have suffered heart attacks, and one died when a tree limb fell on his tent.

Among those who completed the 1973 ride was an 83-year-old man. The professional cyclist Lance Armstrong has ridden parts of RAGBRAI's route several times.

RAGBRAI has a 13-minute video called "Ride Right" on its Web site at

www.ragbrai.com/2009/05/05/ride-right-video

The RAGBRAI entry form allows people to enter as individuals or as a group.

A number of other states have started rides that are modeled after RAGBRAI.

Topics for Discussion and Writing

Pre-reading:

- Use a map to identify the size, cities and main geographic features of Iowa.

Comprehension:

- Briefly outline how RAGBRAI works.

Beyond the Text:

- Why do you think a community would want to host RAGBRAI's 10,000 riders for a night?
- List three bike accessories and explain why bicyclists might want or need them.
- Explain the appeal of a ride compared to a race.

Vocabulary (*advanced article only)

Article-specific: avid*; journey*; countryside; lottery; manufacturer*; accessory; host; duffel bag

High-use: to participate*; to intend*; to approve; route; unofficially; to expand*; element*; to register*; fee; to restrict*; to display; to transport*; fluid; tradition

Sources

Waterloo-Cedar Falls Courier January 29, 2012

Bicycling May 1, 2004

www.ragbrai.com

CA Curricular Standards (4–12)

English-Language Arts

Reading 1.0 Vocabulary Development

2.0 Comprehension (Informational Materials)

Writing 1.0 Writing Strategies

2.0 Writing Applications

ELD—Intermediate and Advanced

Reading Vocabulary Development/Comprehension

Writing Strategies and Applications

Listening and Speaking

History-Social Science

5.8; 5.9