

June 28, 2013 - Day 1: St. Paul to Hastings, MN

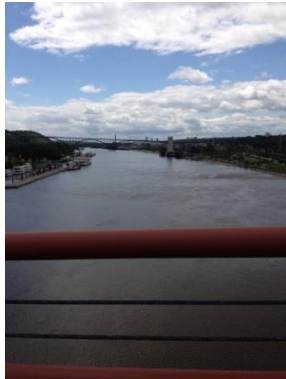
Year 6 of my bicycle ride from Carnation, WA to Pawtucket, RI commenced today. Last year, I rode over 600 miles from Minot, ND - St. Paul, MN.

Day 1 of this year's 8-day 478-mile bicycle ride from St. Paul, MN to Chicago is behind me. Out of bed at 4:15 this morning to catch a 7:00 AM flight to Minneapolis. Had my socket wrench confiscated from TSA, but my multitool made it through. Guess they were afraid I'd use the 8" socket wrench as a weapon of mass destruction on the plane. Looks like I won't be removing my pedals when it comes time to ship the bicycle back via Amtrak to Seattle from Chicago.

Arrived in Minneapolis at 12:30, and took a train and bus to the St. Paul Amtrak station to pick up my bicycle, trailer, and gear bag, which I shipped earlier this week.



In St. Paul, I crossed the Mississippi River.



Lance insisted on joining me this year, as he's a little short of friends. OK, in my dreams.



On the bicycle at 1:00 PM for a short 30-mile ride along the Mississippi River "Great River Road Trail" to Hastings, MN.



Staying at a beautiful Victorian B&B in Hastings called the Rosewood Inn.



This is nothing like last year's ride in North Dakota. So far, the towns are very nice and frequent. Temps are forecast to be in the 70's right through next week, as compared to triple-digits every day last year. Favorable winds are also forecast. Ran into a little rain today, but nothing bad.

Still smiling, so you know it's early in the journey.



South of St. Paul I smelled a New Jersey-like stench in the air. Sure enough, a refinery.



This year's ride will take me south down the Mississippi River to Pepin, WI on Saturday; La Crosse, WI on Sunday; Boscobel, WI on Monday; Madison, WI on Tuesday; Troy, WI on Wednesday; Zion, IL on Thursday, and Chicago on Friday. This will be my first time to see the Great Lakes. I catch a flight home on Saturday, and ship the bicycle and gear back home via Amtrak.

June 20, 2013 - Day 2: Hastings, MN to Pepin, WI

Great dinner last night in Hastings... quite a difference from North Dakota. Restaurant owner tells me business is great.

Hit the road this morning around 9:00 AM. Crossed the Mississippi to Wisconsin, and followed the Great River Road all day to Pepin, WI.

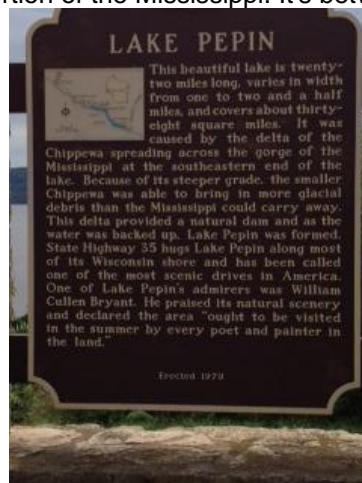


Today was just 50 miles, but it was a tough 50. Although there was no elevation gain, I climbed around 3,000 feet. Weather was perfect. Low 70's and mostly overcast.

All day I rode alongside the Mississippi.



Lake Pepin is actually a 22-mile portion of the Mississippi. It's between 1 - 2.5 miles wide.



I stopped in the town of Bay City to get something to eat at Pioneer Days, and ended up with free entertainment thrown in.



I also made a friend at a visitors' center.



I'm staying the night in Pepin, which was home to Laura Ingalls Wilder, who authored Little House in the Big Woods, which was later made into the TV show "Little House on the Prairie." The motel innkeeper told me people travel from as far as Sweden to see her home and museum. I'll take a pass on that one.

I did manage to find a winery a mile outside of Pepin. Leave it to me.



The rail line runs along my trail. The oil tanker cars from North Dakota continue their march south to the refineries and/or export terminals.



I had a great dinner tonight at the Harbor View Cafe in Pepin... 2 1/2-hour wait. I'm telling you, this economy is doing just fine. Fortunately, I was able to snag a seat at the bar right away.

Tomorrow is going to be a 78-mile day to La Crosse, WI. The motel innkeeper told me it should be less hilly. Let's hope so. Weather forecast is perfect. Plan to hit the road bright and early, so I can arrive no later than 4:00.

June 30, 2013 – Day 3: Pepin, WI to La Crosse, WI

Day 3 is now winding down. Last night, I took a stroll after dinner and caught this shot of the sun setting on the Mississippi River (Lake Pepin).



I hit the road bright and early this morning at 7:15. This was an 80-mile day. It was just 60 degrees out when I started, which felt great. I got almost 20 miles behind me before breakfast in Kellogg, MN. Oops; took a wrong turn and ended up crossing back over the Mississippi into Minnesota. I wasn't about to go back for bonus miles. The MN side is the same distance, but everyone tells me it's less scenic. I stopped for breakfast at the Town & Country Cafe in Kellogg. A nice couple struck up a conversation with me, and told me they were avid bicyclists. They told me of an alternate 5-mile route through what is referred to as the prairie. I took it and it was nice, going through wetlands. When I went to pay for my breakfast, the waitress told me the couple already took care of it for me. Pretty nice way to start the day!



I met Jesse coming in the opposite direction. He just left this morning on a 600-mile ride to Rugby, ND. He camps out says he'll ride until around midnight. He plans to arrive in Rugby on Thursday. Good luck with that one Jesse! And enjoy North Dakota too.



I stopped in the town of Winona in the hope of finding a bicycle shop. I'm having trouble with my rear derailleur. The bike shop was closed (even though Jesse told me it was open today until noon). I have to wait until I arrive in Madison on Tuesday to have the derailleur adjusted. While in town, I ran into this man (whose name I forgot). He's a lawyer in Manhattan, and on his way to Seattle. He'll spend 2 weeks in Seattle and then head south to Santa Barbara. This is his third time riding cross country. He doesn't look too tough, but obviously looks are deceiving. This is one tough guy.



Heading out of Winona, I smelled charcoal smoke and began to drool. I stopped at a softball game and had a brat and chips. Mmmmm!

Today's ride was a lot flatter than yesterday's. There are very large bluffs all along the route by the Mississippi.



About 12 miles outside of La Crosse, I accidentally found myself riding eastbound on I-90... Oops! I didn't see any parallel road, so I decided to just keep going and plead dumb if a state trooper pulled me over. They must have all had Sunday off. I finally got off I-90 and crossed over the Mississippi back into Wisconsin.



I arrived in La Crosse at 3:00 PM, and immediately discovered an old-fashioned ice cream parlor right across the street from my hotel. One banana split please. Nice way to end the ride.



I'm having pizza and chicken wings for dinner tonight at Big Al's. Way more food than I can eat. I don't want to pull a James Gandolfini, so I'll be leaving quite a bit on the table. Tomorrow I ride 69 miles to Boscobel, WI. Boscobel was in the news last week for flooding. I'll be staying at The River Inn. What could go wrong with that? I'll head south along the Mississippi again, and then turn southeast into the hills of western Wisconsin. I'm hoping they're not too bad. At least the weather is great. To bed tonight by 7:30, and will hit the road at 7:00 AM.

July 4, 2013 - Day 4: La Crosse, WI to Boscobel, WI

I was up until 9:00 PM last night adjusting my rear derailleur. Robert, the bicycle mechanic at REI in Issaquah, was good enough to walk me through the repair. I ran across the street to the ice cream parlor to borrow a pair of pliers, so it worked out.

I was up this morning at 6:15 and on the road by 6:45 for the 71-mile ride to Boscobel. I was concerned today was going to be a tough day, as I was going to have to climb the bluffs I've been seeing all along the Mississippi. I was making good speed, so I rode for 45 miles without stopping to eat. I passed a fish hatchery in Genoa, which raises fish a little different than ours.



I pulled over to say hi to a guy and girl, and two dogs (one a husky) who looked like they were on a low-rent journey. She told me they are on their way to Colorado. I asked her if they were hitching rides. She said yes, and they ride the rails. Modern day hobos (with face piercings and ear lobe stretchers).

I stopped to ask a state trooper the best, and least painful, way to reach Boscobel. He was very helpful. After explaining to him that I was certain those warrants had been taken care of, he sent me on my way.

In the town of Lynxville, I turned left and began the climb. It was VERY painful. Either the trailer I pull is getting heavier, or the hills are getting steeper, or possibly I'm getting older, but these climbs are getting tougher. I snapped this picture looking down at my last view of the Mississippi. Goodbye old man.



Some locals stared at me while I was climbing, looking at me like I was some sort of an idiot. Apparently, very good judges of character.



When I got to the first of many tops, I took this photo. Wisconsin is a very beautiful state.



I stopped in a very small town about 9 miles from Boscobel. The town, like most of the area I am in now, was badly flooded last week. I stopped in a bar to get a cold one, but the place was torn up. They had 4 feet of water in the basement. Keep in mind, this is high country. The owner said he had the cold ones locked up in a small trailer parked out front. He opened it and sold me one for \$2.00. When I saw the name on the bottle, I knew this was for me. It's my 55th birthday today.



I've seen a lot of flooded, unplanted fields. I stopped at a house and laid in the front yard under the shade tree. The lady who owned the house was outside. She said to lay there as long as I wanted. At this point, I was around 3 miles to Boscobel and my legs had nothing left to give. She told me they will be unable to plant corn this year because of the wetness. She said, "A dry spell with scare you, but a wet spell will starve you."

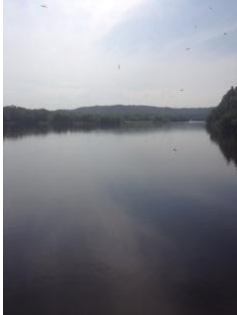
I then coasted downhill 3 miles into Boscobel, where work crews were repairing the washed-out roads. I crossed the Wisconsin River into Boscobel, Wisconsin's Wild Turkey Hunting Capital. I think I'll sleep instead. The turkeys are safe tonight.



Tomorrow I ride 76 miles to Madison, WI. I'll be riding along the Wisconsin River most of the day. This will be my last long day.

July 2, 2013 - Day 5: Boscobel, WI to Madison, WI

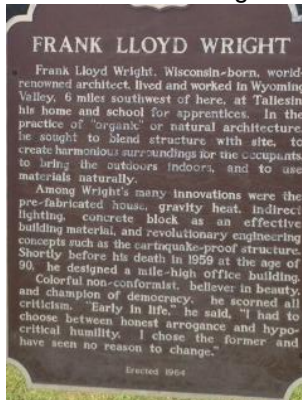
I arrived in Madison, WI around 3:15 today, after riding 71 miles from Boscobel. Actually, I am in a hotel to the west of Madison. I rode along the Wisconsin River for a good portion of the day. There were not many hills, so that was certainly welcome. I did have a bit of a headwind though.



I started out this morning at 6:45. The wind starts picking up around noon, so it's best to head out as early as possible. The day was not as scenic as previous days, and the roads were very straight like in Montana and North Dakota. Lots of corn fields.



There was a Frank Lloyd Wright house off the main road, but no indication how far away it was. I didn't realize he was born in Wisconsin. Interesting roadside marker on him. I like the last two lines: "Early in life, I had to choose between honest arrogance and hypocritical humility. I chose the former and have seen no reason to change."



I was pretty excited when around 11:30 I spotted a billboard for Bob's BBQ Emporium. I fantasized about Bob's for 9 miles, only to find it was closed. Thanks a lot Bob! I rode another 8 miles to find my old standby Subway. 1/2 tuna on honey oat, salt & vinegar chips, and lemonade. And they let me recharge all my gear while I ate, and fill my water bottles with ice.

There are plenty of good restaurants around where I'm staying tonight. As I write this, I'm eating spaghetti & meatballs, soup and salad. Delicious! Last night, I had goulash at a small cafe in Boscobel. It sure looked a lot like rigatoni and meat sauce, but the waitress claimed it was goulash. Apparently, Mr. Stomach and Mr. Goulash did not see eye-to-eye, so Mr. Goulash came back up the hard way. I didn't have the heart to tell the hotel desk clerk that the sink may be going down a little slowly for the next few days.

This is the first day I did not take a nap before dinner, but I'll be in bed before 7:00 PM and on the road at 6:15 tomorrow. 71 miles to East Troy. Somehow, I thought it was 60 miles, but mileage always surprises me to the upside.

It's going to be tricky figuring how to get out of Madison without going on the freeway. I had to ride the freeway for around 1/2 mile to get to the hotel. Improvise and adapt.

July 3, 2013 - Day 6: Madison, WI to East Troy, WI

I got up this morning at 5:45 AM and hit the road by 6:15. I would be heading east - southeast today, and the wind was forecast go be out of the northeast - east, so I figured I'd better get an early start in case the wind came up. Today would be a 74-mile day, bringing my total mileage since last Friday to 374. Like yesterday, today was not overly scenic, but I did snap a few photos. It was cloudy all day, which is fine with me.

While the hotel description led me to believe I was staying by the lake in Madison, I was actually 8 miles to the west of downtown (big surprise) last night. I realized I needed to map out a route to get to the east side of Madison, where I could again get back on SR 12. The problem is that SR 12 is a freeway around Madison, and bicycles are prohibited. Thanks to the maps app on my iPhone, it was pretty easy to figure out. Madison is a really pretty city, and I think as many people ride bicycles to work as do drive cars. There are a lot of bike lanes, so the 18-mile ride along city streets actually wasn't too bad. The picture below is of Wisconsin's capital, which was the scene of all the protests and legislative walkouts a couple of years ago, when Governor Scott Walker eliminated collective bargaining for state workers.



Most of today's 74-mile day was along rolling farmland. I wanted to send this picture to show how the fields are still flooded, and will not be planted this year.



Here's a photo of sheep grazing and farmland planted with corn. Good excuse to stop!



I rode around 40 miles before stopping for breakfast. I've lost my appetite for traditional breakfast food, so I went to Subway for my standard 6" tuna on honey oat, bag of salt & vinegar chips, and lemonade. Ahhhh!

At around 63 miles, I saw a place which said "Voted Best Lunch in Town," so how could I not stop? Of course, it was the only place in town from what I could see. And it even had a bicycle shop attached to it. I was going to ask them to tune my derailleur while I ate lunch, but nobody seemed very interested in asking if they could help me. So I just had an Italian Sub and lemonade. It was delicious; I ate half and took the other half with me.



It started to get dark and I got rained on a bit, but not enough to stop and get the rain gear on. I was concerned we could have a thunderstorm, but it did not materialize. At around mile 68, I decided to take a break at a cemetery and finish the other half of my sandwich. Those are my gloves on the fence posts.



This photo was taken at East Troy, where I'm staying tonight. You can see how the water is still gushing.



It occurred to me today that more and more of the population must be leaving these small towns, and migrating to the cities. As I've noted on previous trips, so many of the owners/operators of the business I stop at look like they're on the verge of retiring. I just wonder if these towns will fold. This also speaks to the political implications, as people in big cities tend to vote D. This migration to cities is a worldwide phenomenon, not just the U.S.

While I was eating my half sandwich at the cemetery, I observed all the different trucks going by, representing various businesses. Capitalism and modern society is truly amazing how we all have our roles to play, we play them well, and all the goods and services we need are available when we need them and where we need them. I suspect we take that for granted.

Tomorrow will be a relatively light 54-mile day. I'll head straight east to Racine, WI, which is on the shores of Lake Michigan. Racine has one of the country's top-rated 4th of July celebrations, so I'm looking forward to that. Racine is 34 miles from East Troy. I'll then head south another 20 miles along Lake Michigan, and spend the night in Zion, IL. My legs are getting pretty tired, so I'm glad the next 2 and final days will be low-mileage days.

I found an amazing restaurant to have dinner at tonight. It's called Ivan's on the Square and is a 1-mile walk from where I'm staying. The tomato-based vegetable soup was delicious, the salad wonderful, and the shrimp/sausage/chicken diablo fantastic. I'm finding Wisconsin to be a very pleasant and pretty state, and the people are very friendly.

July 4, 2013 - Day 7: East Troy, WI to Zion, IL

I started out this morning around 6:45, heading straight east to Racine, WI to watch the 4th of July parade, and then south to Zion, IL. I stayed off the main roads for the first 20 miles or so. I pretty much had the road to myself, because it was early, I was on country roads, and it was a holiday.



I was impressed that this homeowner put flags up all along his fence, even though there was hardly anyone around to see them.



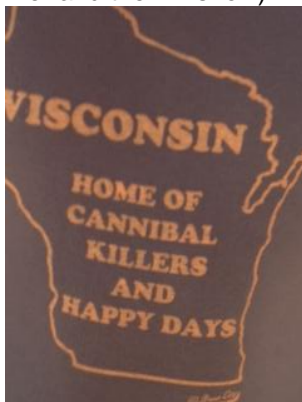
There was a ground fog in the distance, which made for a good photo of this large house.



I arrived in Racine around 9:45, and the parade had already begun. Rep. Paul Ryan was walking by just as I got there, so I didn't have time to take a picture. The parade was very long, and went on for a couple more hours. Racine is a gritty city which is obviously experiencing tough times. Most of the stores in downtown were closed; it reminded me a lot of the town where I grew up in Rhode Island. I snapped a photo of the a Racine police car, just to prove I was there.



I asked a guy if I could take a picture of his tee-shirt. I thought it was pretty funny (reference to Jeffrey Dahmer and the TV show).



For the first time, I got to see the Great Lakes. It was just like being at the ocean (sea gulls, fog, breezy), but without the smell of the ocean. Lake Michigan is truly enormous.



I so wanted a hotdog at the parade (I crave salt when I ride), but couldn't find any food. What's up with that? After the parade, I headed south to Zion, IL, and figured I'd get something to eat along the way. There were very few restaurants, and most were closed for the 4th. I found a Mexican restaurant in Kenosha, and of course overate. It was delicious, but I had too many chips and salsa. Add to that a headwind, and the last 15 miles to Zion were a slog. Nevertheless, I made it to Zion around 3:30. I've now ridden 430 miles since I left Minneapolis 6 days ago. Fortunately, no flat tires so far.

Tomorrow is my last day. I'll head out around 7:00 AM and ride south along Lake Michigan for 42 miles to

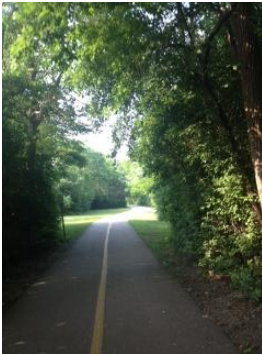
Chicago. I'll go straight to the Amtrak Station and box up my bicycle and trailer, and ship them and my weighty gear bag back to Seattle on the train leaving at 2:15. Then, I'll wander around Chicago as I have never been there before, spend the night, and fly home Saturday afternoon.

July 5, 2013 - Day 8 and Final: Zion, IL to Chicago

I got an early start this morning at 6:45, waking up again before the alarm went off. Last day to slather on the chamois cream and sunscreen... ahhhhh! Packed up for the last time, filled the bottles with ice and water, and headed south for what turned out to be a 50-mile ride. Heading out of town, the wind was dead calm, and it was nice and cool. The streets on which I rode for the first 20 miles or so were less than desirable. There was no shoulder, and two cars passed within 1 foot of me. The neighborhoods were gritty and run down. I found an industrial side road which paralleled the main road and took that. There was very little traffic, but it was ugly. I arrived at the U.S. Naval Recruit Training Center.



Once I got past the Naval Recruit Training Center, the neighborhoods improved and I found a great bicycle trail.



I thought I was in another country when I came upon this Baha'i House of Worship. Beautiful building!



As I continued riding south through areas such as Highland Park, the houses along the lake on Sheridan Road were absolutely amazing. They reminded me of the mansions in Newport, RI. There were several

new mansions under construction too. Obviously, the rich in Chicago are doing quite well.

I stopped for a cinnamon role and coffee at a yuppie kind of place in Highland Park. It was such a relief to be able to sit outside on a beautiful morning and relax with a cup of coffee, knowing my trek was mostly behind me.

After breakfast, I saddled up for the final leg. I passed through Northwestern University and Loyola, having not known these universities were located around Chicago.



I started to run into a lot of bicycle riders. I waved, but barely got an acknowledgement from most. I've got to say bicyclists are not the friendliest people in the world. They all think they're Lance, streaking to the finish. Give me a break. The pedestrians weren't much friendlier either. The only two people who were friendly and helpful had foreign accents. They told me how to get to the bike path. One lady who helped me told to get on Sheridan Drive, where she said I'll think I've gone to heaven. Another older man with a Slavic accent who rode an old bike with no helmet told me to follow him. He was an animal weaving through traffic and going the wrong way up one-way streets.

Most everyone else I ran across seemed to be caught up in their seeming self-importance. This tells me I must certainly be close to the big city. I made my way to North Lake Shore Drive, which had a bicycle/walking path along the water. It was packed, but I was in no hurry at this point. Time to slow down and smell the Lake. Once the city skyline was in view, I stopped and asked a runner to take a photo for me.



After winding my way through the mean streets of Chicago, I located Union Station, from where I would ship my trusty bicycle, trailer, and gear bag home. I had to descend to the bowels of Union Station to find the person who would ship it. I must say, he was extremely helpful, and even assembled and taped up the boxes. He let me slip into the employees' nasty basement bathroom to change into normal-people clothes, and wipe down with a wet facecloth that I lifted last night.



Leaving Union Station, I immediately recognized the staircase in which the baby stroller rolled down in the movie "The Untouchables."



I was finally free around 1:00 PM to just wander around the city for the day. The architecture is really beautiful. I took the River Cruise Architectural Tour, which I highly recommend.



I'm staying at the Chicago O'Hare Hilton tonight, because I booked an early Saturday morning flight home. However, the good folks at Alaska Air who charge you \$100 to change a reservation decided to cancel my flight, and instead put me on a 3:10 PM flight out. Seems I don't get to charge them \$100. Aren't big companies wonderful?

I'll just plan to sleep in tomorrow morning, get home around 9:00 PM tomorrow, relax on Sunday, and be back in the office on Monday. People often tell me this trek sounds like fun. The last word I'd ever associate with it is fun. But, it is rewarding to see just how hard I can push myself, power through the pain, and ignore that little man in my head saying "Quit now, quit now." I've always wanted to pedal across the United States, to smell the air, meet the people, and see the amber waves of grain and the purple mountains' majesty. I realized 6 years ago that my career would not permit me to do it in one fell swoop, so instead I do it 1 week at a time each year. (Don't get me wrong, I have no desire to do this all at one time... no desire whatsoever.)

As I get older, I ask myself "What's the hurry?" There is no hurry. Life is all about making memories,

being nice to other people, and trying to impact others' lives in a positive way. At the end, I want to say I have no regrets, so next year I'll take off from Chicago to points northeast, and be thankful I have the health and determination to realize the dream this quest has become. I hope you enjoyed the daily updates.