

Bike Camping July 2017

By Vic Faesser

The piano sounds of Jim Brickman's "The Way You Look Tonight" plays through my office computer speaker, as I take a break from attending client and office matters on this Tuesday mid-morning. The music is a soothing break from KFAB Talk Radio, which switches over from Scott Vorhees local program, to the national politico....for some reason, his name just escapes me...my mind is blank for now. Oh well. Find that occurring with some regularity, and then the information pops back in minutes later, sometimes! I'm still thinking, without success. Haha.

I reflect back on the three days of this past weekend which I spent on my bicycle, riding and camping throughout a portion of southeast Nebraska. I looked forward to this with some relish. I always do, when it is an opportunity to go riding with a biking friend. To get together in a hobby which is a common interest to us. In this case, I had not yet met Ric Hines. Only through emails, and a couple of telephone conversation have we been in touch. We had arranged to meet up at Casey's in Tecumseh at 11 a.m. From there, we found a place to park our vehicles on the north side of the courthouse square, where we unloaded our bikes and gear. A brief stop at the Sheriff's office to let them know about our vehicles, then we pedal west to Highway 136 and Beatrice.

As Ric and I pedaled through the fairly large town of Beatrice (it probably took us about a half hour to get from the east end, riding on highway 136, to the west end, exiting from the Homestead Park trail onto Highway 4) we picked up a fellow cyclist. Gavin was pedaling along on the sidewalk as we came up to him shortly after entering Beatrice. The carefree, and school-free days of summer are here, and Gavin is enjoying a ride on his impressive off-road bike, with shocks, which he enjoyed engaging from time to time, jumping a curb, or just jerking the bike off the ground momentarily. He soon develops a keen interest in Ric's recumbent Easy Tourer, which Ric has loaded with various electronic gadgetry, and Ric is peppered with questions, as I ride along behind them, thoroughly enjoying this serendipitous encounter. Finally, after accompanying us on most of the trail, Gavin issues his good-by, and pedals off back into town. Eleven years old. Carefree. Curious. He just made a couple of old cyclists' day!

The end of Friday's ride finds us rolling into Wilber on highway 103. We arrive somewhere around 5:30 to 6:00 p.m., with plans to take in supper, and then pedal over to our campsite for the night, a spacious grassy park near the baseball complex. Cold beers for each of us hit the spot, with food on order. The place was lively with customers.

Wilber is a kind of base of operations for Ric, who does a lot of bike camping, many times motoring to Wilber, and exploring the environs from there. He is almost a local, as the coffee drinkers at Casey's greet him the next morning, berating him a bit about not having seen him last year. Ric explains that last year he was doing a trans-continental ride to benefit a non-profit organization "Tennis Buddies" which Ric's wife started. Tennis Buddies pairs accomplished tennis players with mentally challenged folks. It is one of the events in Special Olympics.

Our tents are up in short order, however, not near the big Gazebo Ric prefers, which, this night, is occupied by the little league ball players, and their parents, in an end of the year picnic, followed up with a ball game. A couple of the ladies approach us later, and invite us to partake of the desserts that are set out. We thank them, and do!

Ric and I enjoyed the sounds of the ball players, but were hoping that they will be winding up their celebration in good time, i.e. maybe 10 or so. That didn't happen, and the festivities went on to midnight. Shortly after 11, the lights of the ballfield came off. People were leaving, but some were still joking, with occasional raised voices filling the space between them and our tents. Sleep, for me, didn't come until sometime after midnight.

Morning light enters my tent as I awaken sometime between 6:00 and 6:30. Notwithstanding the short night, I feel refreshed, and ready to "hit the road" after finding some breakfast. The nearby restroom/shower facility helped us with our evening and morning needs in that regard. We were clean, and set to go, after breaking down the tents, and loading up. Ric pulls a small two wheel trailer (his "Burley"), attached with a tongue to his bike frame on the left side. Everything he has along goes into it. I am using Arkel panniers for my clothing, snacks and odds and ends, with my tent, sleeping mat, and sleeping bag attached with bungee cords to the top of the rack. Wow, is it a load, and I take extra care in getting on and off the bike. If I lost control, the bike, and I, would surely go down. However, as I put my right foot on the pedal, and push off against the road with my left, to get the bike to rolling, the magic of motion takes over, a smoothness settles in, an ease of movement and comfort, as I sink into the seat, and my legs turn the crank, increasing the cadence as I pick up speed. The joy of riding. Every time!

A slightly sinister looking sky color in the west makes Ric comment about possible rain. I had been on this same road, pretty close to one year ago, and did survive a health rain storm and lightning, taking shelter in a grain truck parked just north of the 41 and 15 corner.

We get to the corner, and the day is looking good. Some cloud cover, cool, and easy pedaling. A pretty good surface on 105, and traffic is not so bad. No shoulders, but the vehicles mostly swing out wide, except for one. An ancient sedan gives us the buzz, and evokes a curse from Ric. A Runza sign greets us on the north end of Fairbury, and we turn in there for our lunch at about 11:30.

The heat is cranking up now, so I wet down my special towel, which holds a load of water, and wrap it around my neck for the afternoon's ride. On the south end of town we take highway 8 to the southeast, and along the way come across pipeline construction on the south side, only a hundred yards or so from the railroad tracks and the road. Ric decides that this stretch of road needs to be on his route when he does his Eclipse ride. Perhaps he'll be able to see them tunnel under the tracks and the road. The construction is just about three quarters of a mile west of Steele City, and we had already made plans to stop there for a cool one at the Salty Dog bikers bar. Ric enjoyed a Zip Line, and I sipped on a Budweiser Clamato. What an appetite for a cold beer cycling gives one!

The bartender at the Salty Dog informed us that the bar in Odell is open only on Wednesdays. Thus, no supper for us in Odell. It was now around 2 p.m., so I suggested to Ric that we just take an afternoon Siesta right there in Steele City, have supper later at the Salty Dog, and then pedal on to Odell. Ric thought that was a good idea. There's a park with a shelter and picnic tables just south of the bar, and also a shower/bathroom facility. We took the opportunity to utilize the shower, and lazy around in the shade. I crossed the road, and walked over to a couple of ancient structures which I wanted to

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photograph. One of them an old style filling station which reminded me of Elmer's Standard Service in Ogallala during my growing up years.

We wanted to time our supper so that we'd avoid the evening supper rush, so we had our gear loaded back up and bikes ready to roll at 5 p.m., when we went back into the Salty Dog. A couple of hard shell tacos, with a Marguerita filled me up and then some. Rick enjoyed a super enchilada, and another Zip Line. People started trickling in as we finished up our meal.

Hills, hills, and more hills lead us towards Odell. That part of highway 8 from Fairbury to Steele City was relatively flat. The 13 miles took us about an hour and twenty minutes, and as we rolled into Odell a large Hunt Pizza Sign greeted us on the south side of the Community Grocery, which was still open. Darn. We could have had supper there, but anyway, it was all good!

After a noisy evening in Wilber we enjoyed nothing but peace and quiet at the Odell park. Not a creature was stirring..... A number of assorted vehicles, including a long bed, jacked up red pickup were parked nearby, but no human traffic. A couple of times, a vehicle pulled up to utilize the pop machines against the grocery store wall.

Odell is an attractive small town, with pretty murals painted on some of the downtown building walls. The small grocery, which we visited, was tended by a friendly female clerk, and had a nice assortment of grocery items. As we pedaled north out of town the next morning, on the blacktop, we went past St. Mary's Catholic Church. The sign showed mass at 9 a.m. I was surprised as I had assumed there was no Catholic church there. Anyway, we were on the road, and it was 7:20. On we go!

Having grown up Catholic, attending Catholic grade school, and going to mass every weekend really gets my conscience stirred up whenever circumstances might interfere with Sunday mass attendance. So as we pedaled northward towards highway 136, I battled with letting circumstances dictate the day, or making an effort to get to mass. I thought that mass should be available in Beatrice, so I called Irene, and asked her to check the internet for the mass time there. She called back and the mass time there is 10:00 a.m.

We got to Beatrice at 9:00, so that was going to work out good for me, but Ric planned to catch an evening mass in Omaha. So, the plan was to get breakfast in Beatrice, and Ric would continue on towards Tecumseh, while I stayed for the 10 a.m. mass. Another call from Irene came. This time with the information that St. Andrews in Tecumseh has a 12:30 Spanish Mass. With a quick breakfast, we'd be able to continue on, together, to Tecumseh, to arrive in time for mass, which we did.

Bike camping, a new experience for me. It couldn't have gone better! While hot, we had no storms, or rains. The winds were light. Scattered clouds sheltered us from the heat of the sun, and occasional breezes kicked in to cool us off.