

2008 Pittsburgh to Washington DC Bike Trip

Day 1 Pittsburgh to Connellsville (60 miles)

The trip started with a group of 5 people: myself, my brother Brad, Steve, Sarah and Karen. We left Heinz Field around 10:00am. About 7 seconds into the trip, Steve busted a chain. After a quick repair, we rode to REI so he could get a spare chain. We then headed out of the Southside along the river trail until we needed to get onto Carson Street. We took Carson Street to Sandcastle and cut through their parking lot and the Water Front Shops before getting back on the road to McKeesport. The road ride to McKeesport went quick but was scary at times with tractor trailers riding so close. We stopped at the Subway in McKeesport for a quick lunch and then headed for the trailhead in Boston. Once on the trail, our pace slowed down. By the time we arrived in West Newton, I was asking myself why did I decide to do this. We finally made it just outside of Connellsville around 6:00pm. We camped at the River's Edge Campground. I wasn't planning on camping and was completely unprepared for the night. I spent the night freezing my ass off on the floor of my brother's tent.

Day 2 Connellsville to Rockwood (47 miles)

The day started out OK. I didn't get much sleep and I was very tired. We had some cereal bars and juice before leaving the campground around 9:00am. The ride to Ohiopyle was beautiful, but all up hill. There were several copperhead snakes on the trail to Ohiopyle. Once we got to Ohiopyle, we had lunch at the Firefly Grill. Everybody loved their sandwiches; even my brother liked his hummus sandwich. I didn't expect my brother to like his sandwich because he is not a hummus type of guy. I suspect that the only reason he ordered it was because it was called a Summer Hummer. Brad & I made it to Rockwood around 6:00pm. We waited for Steve, Sarah and Karen for about an hour before getting a room at the Gingerbread House B&B. The rest of the group arrived around 8:00pm. It took them so long to get to Rockwood because Sarah needed two innertube changes (Make sure you have plenty of innertubes). We then had dinner at the Rock City Café. The waitress and B&B staff told us they have great wings. I got the second hottest wing sauce they had and it was hotter than most other sauces I tried. Definitely hotter than Quaker Steak's Atomic Sauce. It burned going down and burned a couple hours later when I burped in middle of the night.

Day 3 Rockwood to Paw Paw (72 miles)

I got up early after a very restful sleep at the B&B, but I had to wait for the others. I decided to head out on my own and told them that I would meet them in Meyersdale. The rest of the group was able to pedal faster than I was, but I liked shorted breaks to make up for my lack of speed. The ride to Meyersdale is 12 miles up hill. I was so happy to see the Welcome to Meyersdale sign. I waited at the trailhead for about an hour before the rest of the group got there. Once we were together, we had

breakfast at the only place open on Sundays in Meyersdale. The service was slow by any standard. We were the only table in the restaurant and after 30 minutes of sitting there, the waitress returned to say that she lost our check and needed to take our order again. The kitchen is an open kitchen and we could see the cook just sitting there doing nothing while our check was lost. After a 2.5 hour breakfast break, I again left the group and headed out for Cumberland Maryland on my own. The hill from Meyersdale to the summit seemed like it would never end. At one point, I started to think that the Big Savage Tunnel was a myth. But, once I did reach the summit, it was a quick ride down the hill to Cumberland. I met my brother for a quick lunch in Cumberland. I had a club sandwich and a bowl of crab soup at The Manhattan. The crab soup was the best crab soup that I ever had. Even though it was hot outside, the soup was so good. The C&O Towpath is drastically different than the Great Allegheny Passage. The C&O is an unpaved two track trail. When I was about half way between Cumberland and Paw Paw, it started to pour down rain and hail. Luckily, I had my air force poncho with me. It helped to shield my body from the hail. The rain made the towpath a muddy mess. It was so hard getting to Paw Paw, at one point I was in such a huge puddle that a turtle passed me up. It's pretty bad when turtles are swimming in the puddles on the trail. I finally made it to Paw Paw around 8:00pm and was lucky enough to catch the staff at Grandma's Country Kitchen & Inn before they left for the night. The room was big and they had a laundry room. It was nice to be able to wash all of my clothes and have a fresh start the next day. There is no cell phone coverage in Paw Paw and the pay phones didn't work either. I had a steak hoagie from Anthony Jr's and it was awesome. It was loaded with green and hot peppers.

Day 4 Paw Paw to Shepherdstown (83 miles)

I was able to get up early again today and started pedaling around 7:30am. I was able to make it to Hancock MD around 11:00am. The trail was still very muddy. I got on the WMRT for about 3 miles. I was afraid that the two trails would not end up in the same place, so I got back on the C&O Towpath. When I got into Hancock, I found out that they did meet up again in Hancock. There isn't much to see in Hancock. I had lunch from Sheetz and rested a bit on a picnic bench in the shade. The temperature doesn't feel hot, but I was thirsty all day. I left Hancock with three bottles of water. By the time I made it to Fort Frederick, I was very dehydrated. I drank a bottle of water within seconds and then bought three more bottles for the road. Around mile 110 the towpath disappears and you end up pedaling on a paved walkway next to the Potomac River. When I came off of the towpath and onto the paved walkway, I almost ran over a group of sunbathers. The same thing happened around mile 90. The only difference is that I could have avoided the second group if I would have followed the detour signs. The detour off the towpath seems like it takes a long time for only being five miles. I was pretty determined to make Shepherdstown, so I didn't stop in Williamsport. I finally made it to Shepherdstown around 6:00pm. I felt lucky to have arrived when I did because it was starting to rain again. I first stopped at the Clarion Inn to get a room and before I could even open my mouth the girl at the counter said, "I'm sorry but we don't have any rooms." I knew I looked bad from riding on a muddy trail all day, but she didn't even ask if I had a reservation... at least she told me how to get to the Comfort Inn. When I got there, they were a lot more willing to deal with a dirty bike rider. The counter staff told me that they didn't have a bike rack and that I could just take my bike to room. Once I got to my room, I took a nice long shower and

changed clothes. I went to the McDonald's next to the hotel for dinner. Shortly after dinner, I was sleeping.

Day 5 Shepherdstown to Washington DC (73 miles)

I started pedaling early in hopes of making DC in time to take the 4:05pm train back to Pittsburgh. I had a quick breakfast at the hotel and took some apples and water for the road. My legs were sore and tight but I thought they would loosen up. I finally met up with my brother again after leaving Shepherdstown. The towpath seemed kind of boring at first until we hit Whites Ferry. We had lunch at the snack bar in Whites Ferry and we took a rather long rest. After a couple miles on the trail, my right Achilles tendon started to hurt. Soon I found it painful to push down with my right foot, so the rest was really for me and my brother was all too willing to go along with the rest. After Whites Ferry, the trail becomes more interesting. There are a lot more people on the trail. You will see people fishing in the canal and turtles everywhere. I am surprised that Maryland is known for Blue Crabs and not Turtle Soup. This is the first time I saw a 2 foot turtle outside of the zoo. There are also a ton of Blue Heron. I tried to get a picture of a Blue Heron eating what I think was a snake. Right before I was able to snap the picture, the bird took flight. We stopped again at Great Falls. The area was crawling with people and made riding pretty hard. The canal water is very clear in this section and you can very easily see tons of fish and turtles. You will also start to notice the sound of traffic. This gave me a slight rush and I started to pedal a little faster. It was so nice seeing the mile markers with single digits. Once you get to mile marker 1, the trail disappears and you have to ride through the streets of DC to get to Thompson's Boat House. Finding the boat house and mile marker 0 was more difficult than it should have been. When we got to the bottom of the hill from mile marker 1, we headed towards the Potomac in the direction that the canal was heading. We wound up on a boardwalk near a bunch of restaurants, Thompson's Boat house is at the end of this boardwalk and mile marker 0 is directly behind the boat house. When we were on the boardwalk, we had a DC Cop tell us that Thompson's was about a mile away in the other direction. It seemed odd that mile marker 0 was where he told us to go, so I asked another person once we got out of his sight. She led us straight to Thompson's and we were able to find the mile marker post. The problems with finding mile marker 0 were only the start of our problems. We knew that we missed the train, but we were unprepared for what followed. First, nobody would rent us a car for a one-way trip to Pittsburgh. Then when we went to Greyhound, we were told that we had to put our bikes in a box to take them on the bus. This was expected. When I asked the ticket agent where to get box, she replied, "Why would we have a box for your shit!" Direct Quote! But a guy standing right next to her said that he would tell us for \$2. He pointed us to the Greyhound Package window. When we got there, the clerk told us that they don't provide or sell bike boxes no matter what the person at the 1-800-231-2222 Customer Service line told us. So we had to go back to Amtrak to purchase our box. Then our 8:10pm bus got cancelled and we were placed on the 9:45pm bus that left DC at 10:20pm. Luckily we were in line at 7:30pm because the bus was overbooked and people at the end of the line had to wait until the next morning. I am going to try my best to never take Greyhound again for the rest of my life. We finally made it home around 5:30am. The total mileage for the trip including the trail and rides into town for food and lodging was 353 miles.

Trip advice:

Do not pedal to DC and try to get home without confirmed reservations

Drink plenty of water (If your urine is yellow, you need more water!)

Always have plenty of water on hand

Carry at least two water bottles and fill them up every chance you get!

Wear Sunscreen

Make sure your riding partners have a similar time schedule for completing the trip

Brian Kohler, 25 June 2008

briankohler@comcast.net