

Touring the Golden Ocean by Bicycle: GASP 2011

by Don Cook

Why? That is the most common question. Why would you go travelling on your bike? For a week? In Saskatchewan?

For anyone who likes to ride a bike, touring by bicycle has probably crossed their mind at some point – simply for the physical and mental challenge. For many people it is joyful to travel and experience the world at a cyclists pace. I've driven on a lot of Saskatchewan's highways in my lifetime but they are a whole new world from the seat of a bicycle. The smell of wild flowers. The sound of rustling grass. The sun's warmth on your skin. Driving is about getting there. Cycling is about the journey.



This year's journey through the "Golden Ocean" of blooming canola fields in the east-central region of the province travelled over 600 kilometres of highway. Humboldt proved to be a great choice of host for the start and end of the tour.



The tour began with a hearty, healthy and delicious breakfast organized by Local Bounty and the north-east producers group. Chef Jenni Willems from New Ground Cafe in Birch Hills catered the breakfast right in the campground.

We were also hosted in the town of Wadena where a refreshing swim was available at their new swimming pool. The Provincial Park at Greenwater Lake provided a great setting for our

accommodation after a long and hot second day. The lake was particularly refreshing. Day 3 took the tour through the village of Bjorkdale, Zenon Park, and Arborfield on our way to Pasquia Regional Park. Another hot day and another refreshing swim.





Three days of heat were taking their toll so as we awoke on Day 4 to overcast skies and cooler temperatures, they were welcome. But then came the rain on our way to Nipawin and by the time we arrived in Choiceland it was a storm. That evening the Mayor of Choiceland has offered to host our riders to a BBQ. True to his word and with the most generous of Saskatchewan

spirits, he invited us to his home for a meal with his family.

The storm did not let up all night and even in the morning it looked like it might be a long, wet day of cycling. But as it often the case, the wind settled and the rain lightened up enough to and it turned out to be a marvellous day of cycling through the forest and across the Saskatchewan River to the City of Melfort. The morning of Day 6 brought us winds from the north-east – perfect for our south-westerly ride to Wakaw. The daily travel sheet and map looked like it was going to be a pretty long day of cycling but with a strong wind at our backs we arrived in Wakaw in good time. The riding was almost effortless – like we were pedalling without a chain. That evening we celebrated the tour with another meal organized by Local Bounty and catered by Chef Mo Mathieu of White Birch Catering. This time it was fine dining under camp kitchen pavilion. Good food, good friends and a great adventure – now all we have to do is get ourselves back to Humboldt!

Day 7 was by far the most challenging for many of the riders. Tired from a week of cycling and with a head wind for the most of the day it was a relief to the riders to reach Humboldt for a warm shower and change of clothes. It is a day like that though that you really appreciate the support of the tour leaders, your fellow riders and the support vans. If you were out there alone it would be so easy to despair but with support you can accomplish more. On the drive home it is hard not reflect on one amazing week and to start dreaming of the next tour.

Kudos to Tour Leader Bob Cochran for his leadership, attention to detail, and communication. The unsung hero of the tour, Denise Eberle, Executive Director of the Saskatchewan Cycling Association, puts in a lot of hours on the tour logistics and community arrangements that are so important in making the tour possible. Our heartfelt thanks go out to both of you.