

Installment 1

By Fitz Miller

BICYCLE RIDE ACROSS GEORGIA: OVERVIEW

BRAG is a week-long, fully-supported bicycle tour. The ride each day will begin in one town and end in another town with many refreshment stops along the way for food, liquids, and porta-potties. Support personnel in cars (sag wagons) will patrol the route in case you need assistance. Before beginning the ride each morning, put your luggage (approximately 40 pounds total and two bags maximum) into a large truck. At the end of the day's ride, the truck with your luggage will have already arrived at the new destination. Retrieve your gear, make camp, spend the night there, and the next day repeat the process.

At the mid-point of the tour, two nights will be spent at the same location making that day's ride optional. The optional day has rides from 0 to 100 miles with several intermediate distance routes. These are supported rides like every other day. The tour begins and ends after about 400 miles by bicycle. This creates a bit of a logistical problem. For an additional charge, you, your bike and luggage can be transported from the end point to the start either the day before the event or the afternoon of the last day of the ride. You will travel in a nice charter bus while your bike will travel in a separate truck. The bike will require some minor disassembly. Some people skip all the busing by taking two cars, or engaging some of the ancillary transportation services. There is also bus transportation from Atlanta to the end and the end to Atlanta.

The overnight stops will consist of an area in which to pitch a tent outdoors, or you can use a large indoor facility, usually a gym, where you will need at least an air mattress or pad and sleeping gear. These indoor facilities are sometimes (but not always) air-conditioned. Usually these indoor facilities have showers and real toilets. There is also a large truck equipped with hot showers that follows the route and sets up at the overnight stops. There are several vendors in attendance at each overnight stop including three bicycle shops with competent mechanics.

Meal plans can be purchased in combinations for morning coffee and muffins, breakfast, lunch, and dinner. These should be purchased in advance. At mealtime, just present a coupon for your food. This makes it possible to carry very little cash. The food is good to excellent and the prices are very reasonable. The plans can be tailored from all the meals to just a few. Sometimes the lunch and dinner lines can get a little long but this is your opportunity to get to know some interesting people.

Each day's ride has a route map and written route description, complete with mileages, elevation changes, tourist attractions, rest stop locations, and other data. Also there is a brief description and history of the area traveled through each day. Most people just follow the painted markers on the road or other bikes.

There is no official start time but you should get going as soon as you can, both to beat the heat and reach the rest stops before they close for the day. The hours for the rest stops are listed on the route descriptions. Some people leave at daylight, 6 a.m. You must have your baggage loaded on the trucks by 8 a.m.

At each overnight stop, usually some sort of shuttle bus will run between the camping area, motels, and restaurants, etc. in the local town. Some people forgo the meal plans and depend on the shuttle to find dinner.

BRAG is not a race; the point is the fun, camaraderie, and a chance to meet and talk to people with a different take on life while engaging in a healthy activity. Safety is paramount. Always remember this: Every time you mount your bicycle, you are an emissary for the sport of cycling. Everything you do, good and bad, will have a direct impact on all other cyclists. Expanded discussions of these and other topics will follow.

WINTER TRAINING

BRAG will be more enjoyable with a little training in the months preceding June. To make the training enjoyable, begin with a modest effort and then make small increases. May is not a good month to begin: start now. If you get cold on the bike it is because you are not dressed properly. Modern fabrics do such a good job of keeping you warm and dry without bulk, there is no excuse not to ride in temperatures above 45 degrees. Lightly insulated tights, toe booties, long-sleeve jersey, fleece vest, wind-shell vest, ear warmers, and gloves require a modest investment and will add several months to your biking season. Leg warmers, arm warmers, and a balaclava will add flexibility to morning rides that start cold and get warmer. If you ride at dusk, there are many illuminITE garments that are very good for winter riding and extremely reflective. If you must ride indoors, fluid trainers are the quietest. A flywheel makes them run smoother. You can wear out a tire on the trainer if it is not inflated properly and cleaned with rubbing alcohol. Also use a steel skewer on the rear wheel and prop the front wheel slightly higher than the rear wheel. Keep a towel handy so you do not sweat on the frame and steering head bearings. Set up in front of the TV (include a fan and water) with a good movie and you can go an hour. Most local spas and YMCAs have "spinning" classes if you need a cheerleader and company.

SUGGESTED BRAG TRAINING BY BOBBY RONE

Starting in January, I try to ride at least once a week as the weather permits. I usually do this on the weekend afternoons when/if the temperature is above 45 degrees. These rides are usually short loops: 10-15 miles. After the time change in April, I start riding on weekdays and start increasing the distance of weekend rides. I try to ride at least 3 days a week, and often ride every other day. I make the weekday rides intensive training rides and the weekend rides distance training rides, but at a more leisurely pace. I usually ride 12-20 miles on the weekday rides, concentrating on maintaining a steady, intense pace, and often with some hills. On these weekday training rides, I want to work up a good sweat. Each time out I try to go a little harder, without necessarily increasing the distance or severity of the terrain. On the weekend rides, I start with a 20-30 mile ride at a comfortable pace starting in late March or early April. I will increase the mileage each week until I can comfortably ride 60-70 miles. This will be sometime in May. Around Memorial Day I will do at least one multi-day ride of at least 60-70 miles each day. By the time I ride BRAG, I find it relatively easy and very enjoyable.

ANNUAL BIKE MAINTENANCE

Winter is the time to get your bike's annual check-up. Before doing long rides, get your steed checked over by a competent mechanic. Cadence is the speed in which you turn the pedals measured in revolutions per minute. A cadence of 80 or above will make your knees much happier. To maintain a high cadence, you must be willing to shift the gears. If you dread doing this, it may be because your shifting mechanism needs some attention. Any good bike shop ought to be able to make any bike shift gears smoothly. There are two primary culprits for bad shifting: corroded cables and poor adjustments of the derailleurs. Occasionally there may be something "bent." Sticking brakes are also probably a cable problem. In any case, it is a good idea to change all four cables on the bike annually. Get the shop to check the head bearings, crank bearings, and wheel bearings. Ask them to check the wheel trueness and spoke tension. Replace cracked tires. Replace the inner tubes.

If you are using the bus to get you and your bike to the BRAG start, you will be expected to remove your pedals and rotate your handlebars 90 degrees. To insure that this is possible, ask the shop to do this during the annual check-up just to see if anything is rusted in place. If you have a "quill" type handlebar stem, it may have corroded into a permanent position. Never, never, never attempt to remove pedals without an official pedal wrench and a thorough understanding of left-handed threads and where they occur. Better yet, get the shop to remove the pedals, grease them and put them back on. This would also be a good time to get the shop to check your fit to the bike. Saddle position can have a dramatic affect on comfort and knee health. If they do suggest changes, make several small ones over several rides so your body can adjust to the new position. And lastly ask them to check the entire bike for any other potential problems.