

INSTALLMENT 3

"Less is more!" Mies van der Rohe. The common error is to bring too much.

Mark your baggage distinctively with your name. Some riders tie something distinctive on their baggage so it will be easier to locate. You will not believe how many black and navy blue bags you have to sort through to locate yours.

There is a 40-pound and 2-bag limit on baggage. You have to haul your baggage and place it in the trailer each morning. The walk up the ramp and into the trailer is slippery so trying it in cleated shoes will provide much entertainment! At mile 40, that little bump you received on the ramp will become a big problem! In the afternoon, you will have to haul your bags to your campsite or gym. After riding 60+ miles, a 40-pound bag is REALLY heavy.

The earlier finishers start to unload the trailer as soon as they get to the overnight stop. Basically they just spread it out on the ground next to the trailer it came from. Your baggage may get rained on so pack your clothes, etc. in plastic zip-loc bags.

There may be more than one baggage trailer so remember which trailer you put your bag in. They will not park the trailers left and right the same every day, so look at their license plates or some other unique marking. That way you will have to search through only 1000 bags instead of 2000 bags.

WHAT TO PACK ONCE THE TENT/GYM DECISION IS MADE

CLOTHING

Besides the usual (US Cycling Federation approved helmet, eye protection, shoes, gloves), bring at least three sets of riding clothes and plan on doing laundry in the sink or shower. If one set doesn't get dry after washing, you have an extra. Additional riding shorts are better (see hygiene in the next installment). You will not need many non-riding clothes. Three pairs of shorts, 4 "T" shirts and underwear for every day, walking shoes or sandals, is about all you'll need off the bike. Perhaps some flip-flops for the shower are a good idea. Bring a hat.

FLASHLIGHT

Fishing through your bag after lights out or navigating to the bathroom without stepping on somebody requires a small flashlight.

TOILET PAPER

Use a half roll flattened and packed in a zip-loc bag. Even if you believe the toilet paper fairy always keeps the bathrooms stocked, bring it anyway. You never know when you may need it.

EARPLUGS

When the lights go out, most people quiet down. But invariably people rise in the middle of the night or earlier in the morning than you do, or generally make noise. Earplugs do a great job and are fairly comfortable. All brands do not work for all people: experiment with them before you need them. If you want a nap before lights out, try earplugs because it will be too noisy otherwise. If you think camping outdoors is quieter, remember that dogs bark, trains blow, and cars honk. You will need the earplugs indoors or out.

EYE COVER

The indoor facility usually turns out the lights at 10:00 PM and on at 6:00 AM. But most schools have emergency lights that are permanently on and require a "creative solution." Anyway, for a nap or if you are the early-to-bed type, you will need some way to cover your eyes while you sleep. There is the "traveler's mask" or a simple bandana will do the trick until lights-out. When the lights do go out, BE RESPECTFUL OF OTHERS, BE QUIET, AND GO TO SLEEP!

CHAIR

A small chair or camp stool comes in handy. GCIoutdoor.com has a small 3.5 pound three-legged affair with a back rest that REI sells. There may be an REI vendor at the campground each night. You will see people with large folding chairs; these are transported by a couple of the BRAG vendors for those that engage their services and not on the baggage trucks.

FRAME PUMP WITH GAUGE

Even if you carry only CO2 cartridges on the bike (not the best idea), keep a small frame pump with a gauge for the morning pump-up in your baggage (better to keep it on the bike). Topeak and Sigma both make hybrid-frame pumps which have many features of the larger floor pumps but will still strap to the bike. They have a short hose so you place one end of the pump body on the ground and pump the fold-out handle which can deliver over 120 PSI. Optionally they have a built-in gauge that makes it much easier to get the correct pressure than a separate pressure gauge. Some frame pumps are so hard to use, they will not put the correct air pressure in your tire and are strictly "get-you-home" devices. A real floor pump would be better but they are too big for your baggage and weigh too much. BRAG has a floor pump available but it is often busy or hard to find early in the morning. Also there are pumps available at each rest stop along the route. Performance Bike has thorn-proof tubes that leak down very little in a week, but a pair of them will add a pound to your bike in the worst possible place.

Do not ride on under-inflated tires; it is harder on you, dangerous, and wears out the tire prematurely.

INSECT REPELLANT

Bring insect repellent for ticks, gnats, and chiggers. A sure-fire repellent for the "no-see-um" type gnats, plus a SPF 30 sunscreen, is Coppertone Bug & Sun. It comes in a yellow plastic bottle.

FIRST AID

Band aids, headache and muscle ache remedies, antibacterial spray, etc.

SWIMWEAR

Some of the schools open their swimming pools so bring some swimwear.

MONEY

If you purchase a meal plan, you'll need less cash. But do bring some money and a credit card. Out-of-town checks are not the coin of realm. In most towns, you may be able to find an ATM machine, but don't count on it.

READING MATERIAL

Bring a good book but you probably won't read it because there are plenty of interesting people to talk to and things going on.

BEDDING

For indoor camping you will need a good air mattress with a rechargeable inflator, pillow, sheet, and light sleeping bag. A sleeping pad is too thin for concrete floors.

Outdoor campers will need a tent and ground cloth.

Toiletries (see hygiene in the next installment)

Don't bring: big chairs, foam mattresses, coolers, cooking apparatus, extra bikes, or anything else that exceeds the two- bag/forty-pound limit.

Oh, yeah, bring your bike!

WHAT TO PUT ON YOUR BIKE

IDENTIFICATION

Carry identification and medical alerts with you. Race car drivers have their blood type lettered on their helmets -- just something to think about. An insurance card would be a good idea also.

TIRE TOOLS

Even if you cannot change a flat tire, carry two tubes, plastic tire levers, and CO2 cartridge or frame pump with you so your "White Knight" doesn't have to use hers. Patch kits can be finicky and require time for the glue to dry. Keep a one-dollar bill with the bike as a temporary repair of a tire cut so big that the tube wants to bulge out; place the folded dollar bill between the tube and the inside of the tire. If you do have a flat, replace all you have used when you arrive at the campground.

MULTI-TOOL

A bicycle multi-tool or at least some allen wrenches can make a breakdown into a minor nuisance instead of a long wait for the SAG wagon.

WATER

Carry at least 24 ounces (two bottles) of water and top it off at all rest stops from the water wand: not the coolers. Until you become proficient, do not attempt to drink from the bottles while riding. Aero-bottles can be mounted on the front handle bars that have a "straw" to drink through. They hold from 28 to 32 ounces. Although this is distracting to do while riding, you will keep yourself better hydrated if the water is easy to get to. If you are riding hard and the weather is hot, you can go through about 1.5 to 2 ounces of water per mile. Drink some PowerAde electrolyte replacement at each rest stop. Water alone is not enough! Putting sweetened fluids in your water bottle requires that it be washed out every day, lest your water bottle turn into a science experiment. You may want to use a Camelbak or other backpack hydration system. These systems can carry from 32 ounces to over 70 ounces of water.

RAINCOAT

Summer rains can get cold so you should carry a lightweight rain jacket.

LIGHTS

To beat the heat, some riders start very early in the morning, some before full light. If you do this, put a blinking red light on the back of the bike.

AERO-BARS

Aero-bars can be a real help by taking the weight off your hands and elbows. They also relieve some of the pressure on your sit bones. If set up wrong, they can bother your neck. However, aero-bars can be dangerous. Learn how to use them when no other bikes or cars are around. Even after practicing, use them only when no other traffic is close. There is a lot of bike traffic on the BRAG so aero-bars may be a bad idea. Never use them while drafting another bike.

MAP POCKET

A small handlebar mounted map pocket makes a handy place to store the route sheet for the day, food coupons, and a small amount of money.

SANDALS

Those that use a clipless pedal/shoe system that discourages any walking (Look) should pack along some alternative footwear. Sandals can be carried in a fanny pack or small seat post mounted rack.

BANDANNAS

Bandannas are good for keeping your neck its natural color while riding and are good as a light block during naps; they also function as a sweat wipe. Sunscreen and lip balm will cut down the UV damage.

MUNCHIES

Carry a few munchies in your jersey pocket. Fig Newtons are great.

MIRRORS

There are differing opinions about mirrors. Some say that no-car-in-the-mirror has fooled some riders into serious injuries. Some people wear them on their helmets (those won't work if using aero-bars), and some mount them on the bike. They are aids, not definitive indications of traffic to your rear!

CELL PHONE

Remember to bring your phone charger with you so when you do have service, your phone is ready to use!

CAMERA

Make sure you have fresh batteries and memory card and/or film in your camera.

BIKE LOCKS

Bikes will not be allowed indoors at any of the overnight stops. BRAG is not responsible for the safety of your bicycle so you may want to lock it to something or someone outside the building. Occasionally, you might want to do some exploring and will have to leave your bike unattended.

FAT TIRE BIKES

Fat tire bikes are heavier, and less efficient than true road bikes if you ride fast. If you mount small, slick, high pressure tires, and keep your speed under 15 MPH, there is not a lot of difference.

DO-DADS

You will see some other esoteric devices on bikes: horns, compasses, Global Position System receivers, inclinometers, etc. Anything you put on your bike or your person is weight which has an effect on your riding.