

A Beginner's Guide to BRAG

By Fitz Miller

Fitz has written a five-part series that is a must-read for those going on their first BRAG. You can find the articles as follows:

Installment 1: introduction to BRAG

Installment 2: the BRAG application, which bus to register for and the initial decision to tent or gym.

Installment 3: luggage, what to pack, what to put on bike.

Installment 4: meal plans, rest stops, hygiene.

Installment 5: safety and riding etiquette.

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 and your bike 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 (**Exception: This option is unavailable for BRAG 2008 due to the proximity of Oxford College 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.

INSTALLMENT 2

BRAG APPLICATION

Applications can be found in some of the bike shops or can be downloaded in Adobe Acrobat Reader* format by navigating through the "Download Application" link on the BRAG home page.

The application for BRAG is fairly straight forward but there are some decisions that need to be made and indicated on the application.

Complete a separate application for each person. You may copy the application if you need additional copies. **Be sure and sign the waiver on the back of the application.**

Do not even consider riding BRAG without registering. BRAG is non-profit and freeloaders are not welcome.

After registering, you will get a confirmation letter in May that explains a lot of the details about the ride. Also in that letter will be options for the meal plans.

CENTURY RIDE ON WEDNESDAY

After legibly filling out all your personal information, the first decision is the Century Ride. This is on Wednesday, the layover day, where you will spend both Tuesday night and Wednesday night in the same city. If this is your first ride and consecutive 60- mile days seem daunting, perhaps the wisest thing to do is to take Wednesday off and not ride at all. But it will be tough watching everybody start out in the morning while you just hang around the campground.

Your options for Wednesday are varied from short mileage to the 100-mile century ride. All distances are supported with rest stops, SAG wagons, etc. If you have never done a "Century" this is your chance! But remember, start early and take on lots of electrolytes at the rest stops. Hyponatremia (excessive salt loss) has stopped many a rider only a few miles from the end. Century bandannas are promised to the first 200 finishers, but you need to indicate on the registration form that you will do the 100.

MEAL PLANS

You will not have to commit to meals until you receive the Confirmation Letter in May.

BRAG, BRAG LITE, and CHILDREN

BRAG is at least 6 days of riding out of 7. BRAG LITE gives you some options besides the "whole enchilada." You can join the tour on Wednesday and do just the last 3 or 4 days. There is a bus option back to the halfway point from the end of the ride.

PRIVATE VEHICLES

If you choose to bring a vehicle with you for the week, you will need to purchase a vehicle permit for \$30. You will receive a set of route maps which will keep you off the bicycle route. You will also be given a decal that needs to be displayed in the rear window of the vehicle. If the driver is staying at the overnight site, he or she will also need to register.

SPECIAL OLYMPICS GEORGIA

Special Olympics Georgia will be hosting the rest stops throughout the week. Check out their web site to see the good that they do and consider a donation. <http://www.specialolympicsga.org/> for more information.

SHIRTS AND JERSEYS

BRAG merchandise will be for sale at every overnight stop. Besides the T-shirts and jerseys, they will have rain jackets, hats, sports bags, etc. Merchandise will be in a yellow Penske truck near the BRAG headquarters. The jerseys will go fast and should be ordered now. Check out the jersey design on the BRAG home page.

BUS SERVICE

On the application are the optional bus rides. Even though the application gives you until the first week in June, or until the buses are full, to make this decision, do not procrastinate. Buses fill up in a hurry.

The buses are nice chartered rigs complete with A/C, toilets, and video systems so you can watch a movie. Your luggage will travel with you.

Your bike will travel in an enclosed truck. The pedals must be removed (do not attempt this without the right tool) and the handle bars rotated so as to render the bike as narrow as possible. If you are worried about your frame getting some cosmetic damage, pack your bike in a box. If your bike does get some functional damage (this would be extraordinary) there will be bike shop vendors near the BRAG headquarters upon arrival at the start. BRAG provides cardboard to put between the bikes.

In all the plans listed below, none of the parking areas for the automobiles are guarded locations.

BUS FROM AND TO ATLANTA (This option is unavailable for BRAG 2008 due to the proximity of Oxford College to Atlanta.)

Drive your automobile to Atlanta and park it there for the week. Partially disassemble your bike and pack it into the truck. Ride the bus from Atlanta to the ride start on Saturday before the ride begins. Retrieve and re-assemble your bike. Ride your bike for 6 or 7 days ending on Saturday. That afternoon, disassemble your bike, pack it in the truck, and ride the bus back to Atlanta. Retrieve your bike and drive your automobile back home.

Pros: If you live near Atlanta, this is great. The bus will be filled with like-minded people and is a good opportunity to begin making new friends.

Cons: Once you board the bus in Atlanta, you had pretty much better have what you will need for the week with you.

DRIVE TO THE END OF THE RIDE

Drive your automobile to the end and leave your car there for the week. Partially disassemble your bike and pack it into the truck. Ride the bus from the end to the start on Saturday. Retrieve and re-assemble your bike. Ride your bike for 6 or 7 days, party, load up your bike and gear, and then drive your automobile back home.

Pros: The bus will be filled with like minded people and is a good opportunity to begin making new friends. Your automobile is at the end of the ride so you can load up your fully assembled bike and get back to the world when you choose.

Cons: The bus ride from the ride end leaves at 10 AM which is kind of early if you don't live near there. Once you board the bus at the end, you had pretty much better have what you will need for the week with you.

DRIVE TO THE BEGINNING OF THE RIDE

Drive your automobile to the start and park it there for the week. Ride your bike for 6 or 7 days to the end. That afternoon, prepare your bike for shipping and load it into the truck. Ride the bus back to the start where you left your automobile. The bus is supposed to leave at 3 PM. Retrieve your bike then drive your automobile back home.

Pros: Your automobile is at the beginning of the tour so you can bring all kinds of extra gear. For a first-timer, this is a good idea because you can see what everybody else is doing. This gives you the day to pare down all you brought to just what you really need. If you need to go to a store, you have your automobile. Your bike won't have been partially disassembled. You can get to the start anytime you wish.

Cons: At the end of the ride you must wait for the buses. You must disassemble your bike which requires some tools, namely a pedal wrench and allen wrenches or hope somebody brought tools. On the last day you will ride your bike several hours, ride a bus several hours, and drive your car several hours making for a long day!

DRIVE TO THE RIDE MID-POINT

Drive your automobile to the mid-point on Tuesday or Wednesday and join BRAG (actually BRAG LITE) at the approximate mid-point of the ride. This is the layover day so the riders will be there two nights. Wednesday is the optional day to ride not at all, choose shorter options, or ride the Century. Ride your bike for 3 or 4 days to the end. That afternoon, prepare your bike for shipping and load it into the truck. Then ride the bus back to the mid-point where you left your automobile. The bus is supposed to leave at 3 PM. Retrieve your bike and drive your automobile home.

Pros: This is good plan for those that do not want to ride a bike 6 or 7 days. Your automobile is at the beginning of BRAG LITE so you can bring all kinds of extra gear. For a first-timer this is a good idea because you can see what everybody else is doing. This gives you the day to pare down all you brought to just what you really need. If you need to go to a store, you have your automobile. Your bike won't have been partially disassembled. You can get to the mid-point anytime you like on Tuesday and ride for 3 or 4 days, or Wednesday and ride for 3 days.

Cons: At the end of the ride you must wait for the buses. You must disassemble your bike which requires some tools, namely a pedal wrench and allen wrenches or hope somebody brought tools. On the last day you will ride your bike several hours, ride a bus several hours, and drive your car perhaps several hours making for a long day!

NO BUSING

Do not ride any buses, but work out your own automobile logistics.

TENT

Packing tents and their paraphernalia adds complexity to your bike ride and weight to your luggage.

Overnight stops are at schools and camping is sometimes restricted to their athletic fields. If not restricted, you may get to camp in a shaded area. Everyday you will have to carry your luggage some distance. There is the additional chore of setting the tent up. In the morning, the tent is usually wet and must be folded up while wet. And this is when the weather is nice. Your bike may have to spend the night outdoors. On the other hand, you can go to sleep and wake up when you like, have a little more privacy, and the campsites are relatively quiet - unless there is a barking dog nearby or a busy train crossing.

If you do not already own a light, easy-to-pitch tent and think you may want to tent, start your research now. By the way, a one-person tent is too small for one person.

Some schools require that inside sleepers stay in one big gym, but other schools let you sleep in the hallways. The hallways are usually air-conditioned and remain at a constant temperature throughout the day and night. Staying indoors definitely requires ear plugs, eye mask, and being able to sleep in a room full of strangers. Of course they won't be strangers if you get to know them first! The temperature stays somewhat constant, storms are less of a problem, and you need much less stuff than tenting. Sleeping pads are really insufficient on concrete floors; get a good air-mattress and a rechargeable electric inflator. Light sleeping bag, pillow, slippers, "jammies" and a small flashlight are all you will need. Leave the alarm clock at home because about 5:45 AM everybody starts stirring which you will not sleep through. The lights should go back on at 6:00 AM.

If you cannot decide whether to tent or gym, plan on tenting. After two nights in the tent, you can change your mind and sleep indoors.

MOTELS

Motels are along the route but getting to them and back to the campground the next morning can be a real problem. Do not depend on shuttle buses running in the mornings. Use the BRAG hotel list for the event. It's a good idea to make reservations early.

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 two 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. Two 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 some schools have night 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**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.

INSTALLMENT 4

REST STOPS

Every 10 or 15 miles there will be a rest stop. Most are obvious but sometimes you may ride by it. Make your stops short because the longer you stay there, the harder it is to get going again. There will be plenty to eat: usually fruit and cookies. Also, there will be PowerAde sports drink available. If the weather is hot you will need water AND electrolytes. The PowerAde has the electrolytes. One of the rest stops is also the lunch stop. See the Meal Plan for more on this. Occasionally, the first rest stop is also a breakfast stop. If you are going to conk-out or breakdown, a rest stop is a good place to do it because they have radios and can get a ride for you. Just be sure that you are in genuine distress and not just out of motivation. By the way, 70 miles non-stop is WAY harder than 70 miles with six 10-minute rest stops.

HYGIENE

Most likely, you will not be carrying rubber gloves or eating utensils on your bike. This means at the rest stops you will be handling food with your hands. Now think about what you have probably touched since you washed your hands last: your sweaty gloves (that have contacted what ?), your bike (that may have been handled by other people), your tires that have rolled through God only knows, and the door to the Port-O-Let. GET THE PICTURE?

- Remove your gloves and wash your hands before handling food or drinks.
- Do not touch any food unless you are going to eat it.
- Do not put your hands into ice (some people got sick in 2000 from sticking their hands in the ice).

Buy quality riding shorts. Thicker pads are not necessarily better. Do not wear anything under the bike shorts. Riding a bike several hours causes some skin irritation no matter how used to it you may already be. Therefore, bathe every day. Many people do their laundry in a sink or while in the shower. While this may be okay for jerseys and socks, it really does not get your riding shorts very clean. For most, this is not a problem, but this author came down with a serious fungal infection two days after the tour. It was very unpleasant to treat and cure. I will bring 7 pairs of riding shorts or find a commercial Laundromat during the week.

The shower truck is dependable and has plenty of hot water and places to sit while you wait your turn. The shower truck has to set up near a fire hydrant and drain which may not be right at your campsite, but it will be nearby. There is no charge. Whether using the shower truck or the indoor facility (usually a school locker room), towels and soap are not provided. There may be a towel service available from one of the BRAG vendors for an extra charge. Liquid soap is easier to deal with than bar soap. Buy a large bottle and transfer it to small containers, which can be found at Wal-Mart and the like. Seven ounces ought to be plenty and about half that much shampoo. These are guy quantities! Quick dry towels do dry quickly and pack down to a small size. Plan on bringing two towels in case one doesn't dry from the previous day. Bring about 20 feet of clothesline and clothespins. Shower shoes or flip-flops may be a good idea.

If you get wounds, chaffing, rashes, or other physical irritations, no matter how minor, treat them immediately before they become serious problems. If you are unable to treat the wound, see the BRAG medical personnel; they know some secret remedies!

MEAL PLANS

Your confirmation letter, which you will receive in May, will have the various meal plans. You may also find the meal order form on the web site. You can pick and choose each individual meal for each individual day you wish to purchase. You are not forced to get a "package" deal, i.e., five lunches.

You check off which meals you want from which vendor on each of the seven days on the Meal Order Form. Send in your money. In return, you get a coupon book that has the vendor and day printed on small paper slips that you present for your food. You might be able to purchase some of the meals the day of, but you are taking the chance that they may not have enough after feeding everyone that pre-purchased their dinner. The safest thing to do is to buy your meals in advance.

MORNING COFFEE - CAFÉ CAMPESINO

Gourmet coffee and muffins will be available for a one-time charge for the entire week, or cups can be purchased each morning. They open very early. They may also have iced coffee in the afternoon, which is very refreshing. Your coupon is a bracelet you wear for the week. Decaf is also available.

BREAKFAST

At all overnight stops, a breakfast will be available before starting in the morning.

LUNCH

The lunch stops may have more than one vendor. They usually have several sandwich choices including peanut butter in a plastic bag that is a really good snack 20 more miles down the road.

DINNER

Dinner is usually supplied by the host school. In addition, as a fund raiser, they often open their snack bar or have a burger grill for cash sales. Some overnight towns will have shuttle buses to restaurants in town.

MEAL PLAN COMMENTS

The meals are a time to get food and visit with other riders. Though the lines may be a bit long, the people in them make it into an enjoyable stand-up "bull session."or as the BRAG Organizing Team puts it, "a linear socialization opportunity." Searching for dinner after riding all day can be a real bummer; a meal plan dinner is a sure thing. On the other hand, dinner in a local restaurant can be a nice break from cafeteria-type food. Remember that the shuttle bus to town can take quite a while to complete each loop. Some of the overnight stops may not be near restaurants or have shuttle buses. As a beginner, you could purchase breakfast, lunch, and dinner for each day, guaranteeing that you will have something to eat. Because each meal is inexpensive, you can change your mind to eat in town with your new-found friends, forfeiting very little money.

INSTALLMENT 5

RIDING ETIQUETTE, SAFETY, PACE LINES

Most all riding safety and etiquette is common sense. There are some riders whose attention lapses (usually because of fatigue or distraction) and so will do something without thinking. But the usual transgressors are those who think they are too experienced or fast to have to follow the "common folk" rules. If you want to ride BRAG just to show the rest of us how "real cyclists" ride or generally be a "hot dog," stay home and impress your like-minded friends.

The BRAG safety pledge and safety video should be taken seriously. These were developed by people with WAY more experience than you or me.

RIDING ETIQUETTE BY DIANE LOUPE

Pull OFF the road if you stop. If you whip past somebody on the left, SAY "on your left." If you see a pothole or other road obstruction, point to it. If you see somebody ahead of you pointing at something in the road, that means there's something to be concerned about. If somebody crashes, stop your bike (off the road) and walk around them. Assist somebody who needs help changing a tire (as long as you KNOW how to change a tire, of course). The biggest violators of road etiquette are, surprisingly, the riders who ought to know them better than anybody, the speed demons. Somehow they believe that if they are riding 20 M.P.H. or faster, they are absolved from having to be polite to anybody. Au contraire! They should be the examples. Of course, if they're going that fast, nobody's going to catch up to them to chew them out. C'mon speed demons, just say "on your left" when you whip by us to keep us from soiling our shorts!

MORE RIDING ETIQUETTE BY FITZ MILLER

You will get a plastic name tag to mount to your bike. Print your first name in big letters. Mount the tag so overtaking riders can read it. When you pass somebody give them a big "Good morning Ed!" At the least just say "On your left." Or get a cool sounding horn or bell and use it.

We all know about automobile operators who just cannot stand being delayed for 30 seconds so they endanger us, but there are some techniques for these people too. Generally, always ride on the right edge of the road; this is especially applicable when in towns. But this is where the debris is just waiting to flatten your tire. Ride in the right 1/3 of the lane but watch to the rear for cars. When they come up on you, move to the right edge. The motorist sees this which indicates to them that you know that you are in their way and have done something to expedite them getting past you. So now that you have done something, they will feel compelled to also make a cooperative effort for you both to achieve the same goal. Just this little gesture on your part may give them the patience they need to wait a moment longer and select a safer opportunity to pass you.

RIDING SAFETY

What is a cyclist called who does not wear a helmet when riding? - Organ donor! Do you really have to be told to wear your helmet? We've all seen the pro riders without their helmets, but it doesn't make sense. Remember, it's mandatory to wear your helmet on BRAG at all times while you are on a bicycle, even in camp.

Wear eye protection both to keep debris out of your eyes and also to protect your eyes from ultraviolet (sunlight) damage. Polarized glasses cut more glare but many bicycle computers have polarized faces that will appear black when viewed through polarized lens.

Gloves may not seem too important until you fall and attempt to catch yourself with your hands on asphalt.

Do not use earphones while riding.

PREVENTING ACCIDENTS ON BRAG--JERRY COLLEY, BRAG RIDE DIRECTOR

Safety is, or should be, everyone's Number One concern on the Bicycle Ride Across Georgia. And yet, every year accidents happen, usually cyclists running into each other, or individual cyclists running off the road. Car-bike accidents are rare on BRAG. With 2000 riders on the road, motorists are forced to pay attention to us.

Why do cycling accidents happen on BRAG? Consider these points: Riding with thousands of people is different from riding with your friends. It's also different from riding with your club with hundreds of people. You must be extremely cautious with bicycles around you all day.

BRAG is a fun event. SAG wagons, rest stops, route markings and lots of people around make riders feel very comfortable. Some riders get caught up in the fun and forget about the serious issue of safety. They are surrounded by friends and fun and they get lulled into a false sense of security. They forget the first rule of cycling which is to always Stay Alert to everything around you.

BRAG also attracts many inexperienced riders, children, and newcomers. These riders may not know the dangers inherent in riding in large groups.

BRAG attracts many seasoned veterans. Experienced riders are not used to riding with inexperienced riders. They assume everyone has a high experience level. This is a very bad assumption.

BRAG attracts some "hot dog" riders who think everyone should get out of their way. This is extremely dangerous.

BRAG continues even in bad weather, rain or fog, which makes visibility poor. Roads can become slippery, and most brakes do not work well.

Everyone gets somewhat dehydrated in the hot Georgia sun. One of the first symptoms of dehydration is a loss of basic common sense.

Not all bikes are well maintained. Brakes don't work, handlebars come off, pedals fall off, and tires go flat. Lack of proper maintenance can cause accidents.

Riders get tired. They ride all day, every day, and they may not be sleeping as well or as much as they should. One of the first symptoms of fatigue is a lack of paying attention to the details.

Crossing railroad tracks is extremely dangerous: rough tracks, bad angles, cars and other bicyclists all around you. Add in rain, and the tracks become as slick as glass. Riders forget that BRAG's country roads are still open to cars and trucks. What can we, as riders, do to prevent accidents? Adhere to the BRAG Safety Pledge.

Experienced riders should adopt a mentor-like attitude on BRAG. You are an example, for good or bad, to all those around you. Be the best, safest example you can be! If you are a "hot dog" type rider, stay home. We don't want you on BRAG endangering those around you.

If you stop for any reason, get completely off the road. This means you and your bicycle.

Never pass up a rest stop. Drink before you get thirsty. Eat before you get hungry. Rest before you get tired. If you do decide to pass up a rest stop, at least slow down. There are people stopping and starting their bikes, and standing in the road ready to start. They do not expect to see someone flying by.

Get yourself and your bike tuned up before the ride.

If the weather is bad, or there is bike or car traffic around you, ride more cautiously and slower than usual.

Remember, your bicycle is a vehicle under Georgia law. You must obey all stop signs, yield signs, and traffic signals.

When you ride in a pack, you are at the mercy of everyone in the pack. If one goes down, you all go down. Spread out.

Slow down crossing railroad tracks. Cross at a 90 degree angle. Walk across if it is raining. Stop, Look, Listen. (Note: all railroad tracks on the route are noted in the Route Description). Never attempt to turn or brake on wet railroad tracks.

Get a map holder or clip for your handlebars. Keep the Route Description in front of you. Busy intersections are noted there.

Slow Down. BRAG is not a race. If everyone will follow these simple procedures, BRAG will be the safest ride in the nation, in addition to being the best ride.

PACE LINES

Never ride in a pace line with anyone you have not ridden with many times before. BRAG is not the place to find new pace line riders.

Pace lines are where two or more riders form a single file and follow each other very closely; usually the clearance between the tires is less than one foot. The lead rider pushes the air while the rest ride at the same speed using much less effort: "drafting" in other words. When the lead rider tires, he or she relinquishes the lead letting the next rider become the new lead rider who now does most of the work. By constantly rotating the lead, a pace line's average speed can be several miles-per-hour faster than those same riders working alone. On up-hills where the speeds are below 14 MPH, pace lines are not advantageous.

The way the lead is changed is the front rider moves to the left and allows the entire line to pass on the right (this is the ONE EXCEPTION to the "never pass on the right" rule). While the former lead rider is to the left, be sure to complement them on their "pull" as you move ahead. When the last rider passes the former lead rider, the former lead rider jumps in at the end and is now the last rider. If you are the number two rider and the lead rider moves to the left, be sure that the lead is actually being passed to you. The lead rider should give some signal that you are to take the lead. A typical crash scenario is when a lead rider moves to the left (daydreaming or avoiding a road hazard) and then moves back to the right into the front wheel of the number two rider that is attempting to take the lead. If you drift back from the rider ahead of you, your speed will dramatically reduce and the riders behind you will pass on your left. This is the ultimate pace line insult.

Except for the lead rider, everybody is essentially riding blind so communication is important. The lead rider should point at obstructions left or right. The lead rider should verbally communicate what is up ahead, for example, if the pace-line is about to overtake slower traffic, the lead rider should call out "biker up ahead" or just "bike up." When slowing, show the flat of your hand to the riders behind you and call out "slowing" or "stopping." If you are the last rider in the line and a car is coming up from behind call out "car back." When you hear a verbal communication, repeat it to the rider ahead or behind you.

When the line gets more than four riders, it takes on what might be called the "slinky effect." This is when somebody in the line is not riding at a constant pace and so those behind him or her are constantly speeding up and slowing down. Because of the inherent time lag between when each rider adjusts speed, the cumulative effect on the end of the line is so severe that the gain from drafting is lost due the extra energy expended from the repetitive accelerations.

If one rider goes down, everybody behind them is going to crash. And sometimes they manage to take out the rider in front of them, too. If your goal is to get from point "A" to point "B" as fast as possible and body injury and bike damage are of no concern, then jump on the end of the pace line and try to keep up. Remember that your only reward for finishing ahead of most of the other riders is that you get to unload the baggage truck. If, however, you think you might want to look at the scenery, say "hi" to other riders, or just enjoy yourself, then a pace line is not a good idea. You must stare at the wheel in front of you and concentrate; relax and you will quickly become a menace to everyone around you. Looking at the same butt for 30 minutes gets very boring!