

Something to BRAG About: Roadtrip 2004

Summer is the official season of road trips, and I recently surrendered to the call of the highway. My housemate Eugene* and I just got back from driving down to Georgia to do the Bike Ride Across Georgia (BRAG). Like the name says, it's about a 400 mile bike ride across Georgia, starting in the edge of the mountains in Toccoa and ending on Tybee Island (off the coast of Savannah). I was drawn by the promise of Georgia peaches at every stop.

Life is often full of challenges and this trip was challenging from the get go. Both of us forgot to pack directions to the ride's start. We discovered this omission several hours into the drive, and after a half hour of fretting, we thought of a solution. We whipped out the cell phone and called everyone whose number we knew from memory and asked them to look up the information on the internet for us. Unfortunately everyone we called was either screening their calls or not at home. Eugene's brother finally called us back about 4 hours later and looked up the directions for us.

We captured most of the other challenges of the ride in the following song that we wrote and performed for the talent show. Note that the verse is sort of a spin off of Jerry Lee Lewis's "Great Balls of Fire" and SAG refers to the cars that pick up riders who are injured or have bicycle failures and take them to the next stop.

They never told me Georgia'd be so hot
I swear my shoes are about to rot

I should have listened about the hills
I swear my butt is aching still

I'm a first time rider of the BRAG
I'm scared I'm gonna have to take the SAG

Chorus:
BRAG 2004
The ride from the mountains to the shore
BRAG 2004
Who could ask for more
By the time I get to Savannah
I'm gonna burn my sweaty bandana

They promised peaches at every stop
Sliced bananas is all we got

We purchased meals ahead of time
Still they made us stand in line

I didn't know about the fire ants
When they bit me every body watched me dance

I have to admit that I almost bailed out before the ride began because somewhere on Highway 17 we found a nightmare hill, marked by three signs (sort of like the Burma Shave ads from yesteryear) stating on the way up, "Faith," "Trust," and "Love." I was terrified that this was the type of hill that we were facing and knew that neither my muscles nor my faith in a higher power were enough to get me up hills like that. Fortunately, none of the hills were that extreme, but the ride was quite hilly for the first two days. Once the land got flat, the temperature rose and it was hot -- really hot -- and humid.

On the bright side, the scenery was really nice and the other riders were friendly. The other plus was that when you bike, you create your own breeze. And there seems to be a tradition at BRAG where some guy hangs beads on all the road kill he encounters, so every so often I would ride by a dead animal wearing purple beads. Ya gotta smile when you see road kill wearing beads.

Far more challenging than riding, we camped out at every stop. I quickly discovered the harsh realities of summer camping in Georgia. First, the nights are hot and muggy. This fact is especially notable because tents do not come equipped with air-conditioning. Second, the ants have taken over Georgia. Worse yet, there are fire ants, a particularly mean variety of ant with an incredibly painful bite, everywhere.

I also learned an important lesson about camping: if someone gives you a tent, assume that there's something wrong with it. I had naively taken a "free" tent on the trip. This was a disaster. The tent was tiny. It sagged. It had no ventilation. And it leaked. Even the ants rejected it. The second night out, in a contest between rain and my tent, the rain won. It seems that my tent held water in much better than it kept it out. I was fighting back tears when a guy with a big tent traded tents with Eugene so that Eugene and I could sleep in his tent. Unfortunately, the ants seemed to like the tent as well, and

attempted a coup. We headed them off by spraying "Off" on their entry point and all along the trail, but there were still a few wandering around the tent. We both suffered from psychosomatic ants crawling on us all night long. I bought a new REI tent the next morning.

The next night we bailed the camping life and stayed in a motel in Savannah, where we spent the off day of the ride (there was no official ride planned) swimming in the swimming pool, sightseeing in Historic Savannah, watching street performers, eating snow cones and sleeping in a dry, air conditioned, ant-free motel.

The ride ended at the beach on Tybee Island. The temperature reached 100 degrees, but swimming in the ocean made the heat bearable. And I found a fabulous snow cone stand!

It was a long drive back and I was cranky the first half of the day. Peace on the planet, or at least in the car, was saved when I found a snow cone stand. Better than Midol, the snow cone took the edge off and I was happy for the rest of the ride home. The moral of the story is: on a long distance biking adventures, never trust a used tent, take plenty of Off, and snow cones cure all.

*Eugene has a keyboard and sound system attached to his bike. You can check him out and see some pictures and or videos of the ride at www.PianoPeddler.com