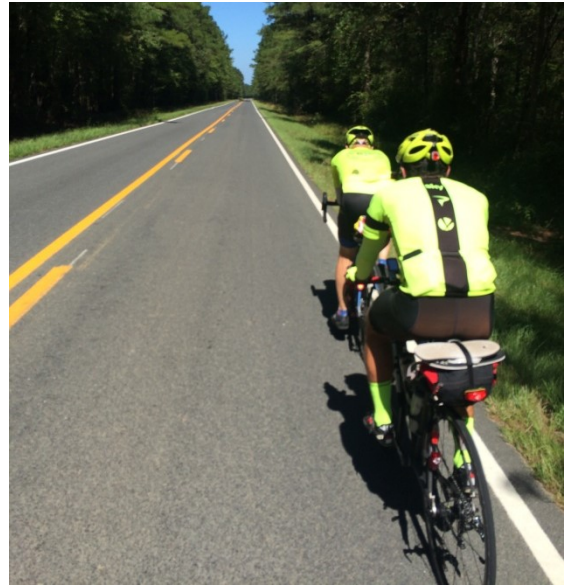
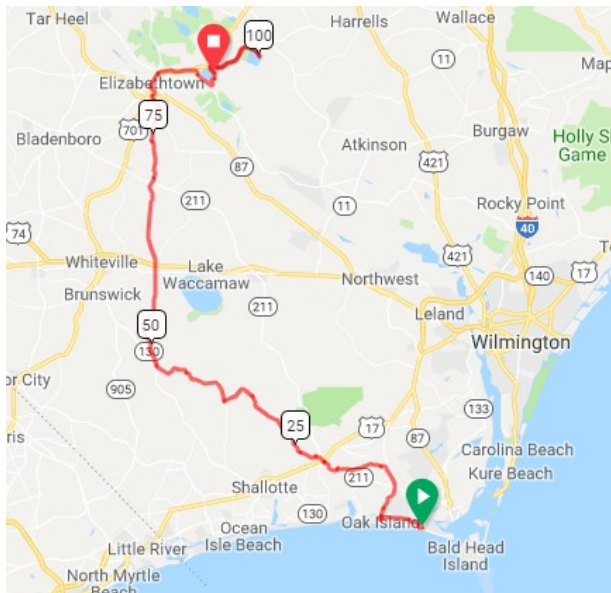


2019 Cycle North Carolina Mountains to the Coast Ride

A bicycle ride from Blowing Rock to Atlantic Beach and the Crystal Coast. By Terry Pierce

Seeking a final tune-up ride to ready for a ride across the state, I joined others for two back-to-back 100 mile days from Oak Island to White Lake and back <https://ridewithgps.com/trips/40164683>. Fellow Brunswick County Pedaler riders Bill Alford and Daniel Hendrickson joined me in a “credit card ride” hauling only sandals, shirt and shorts to a cottage overnight stay. We really enjoyed the quiet Green

Swamp roads and woodland ramble down Hallsboro/Elkton roads. The kind of roads meant to be cycled down, since cars were an infrequent interruption to the tranquility. Part of our mission



was to make a late lunch stop at [Melvin's in Elizabeth town](#). They are voted one of the 100 must eat at dinners in NC and can easily handle a 25 person, middle of the afternoon, service line, in

under 10 minutes, with their simple effective methods. Temperatures were great and riding conditions couldn't get much better. We did have an 8 mile detour to accommodate the overpass construction at Hallsboro and US 74. I convinced Bill to just roll the dirt ramps on the way home to avoid the extra mileage. Our overnight accommodations were one of the only two cottages or hotels answering the



phone. Apparently after Labor Day the White Lake resorts roll up the carpet and bar their doors. We did catch a good dinner and breakfast at the Hot Rod Grill just a few miles north on the lake. After two days of quality riding, we felt ready for the Mountains to the Sea.

After a six hour drive we made it to Blowing Rock campsite and Davant Field where wall-to-wall people and wall-to-wall tents awaited. Melissa Alford had been nice enough to drive us all the way to Blowing Rock, and in my angst to try and find enough tent space for two small mountain tents, I failed to thank



Melissa for her efforts to get us north. The campsite had a good mountain music band playing in the gazebo and several vendors like Defeat socks and a local bike clothing manufacture selling their latest gear. That along with some free local microbrew and plenty of great restaurant options, we felt welcomed. Dinner that night was a British inspired Six Pence Pub which had great selections of local cuisine but my go-to was a Shepherd's Pie which is one of my favorite comfort foods,



along with some Kolsch beer. In route we met up with several other Brunswick County Pedalers (Brian Troxler, Jim Iannucci, Terry Pierce, Margret (Rudd) Bishop, Al Bishop, Bill Alford, Bob Shapiro. Not shown are Eric Royer, Ed McKinnon, Sheila Roberts, Hanna Williams, Sarah Haus, and Malcom Morrison). This is the first year of CNC when more Brunswick County Pedalers road the ride than Cape Fear Cyclists. Sunday AM was an early 6 am rise to ready for a 7:45 depart to Hickory and the Highland Recreation Center & Park.

Did you ever try sleeping in 85% humidity with temperatures in the

high seventies? Clearly sleep was difficult to come by even with my hand held fan hanging from the ceiling of my tent. Every night all week my fan would overheat and shut down just an hour or two into the night. Morning came early enough and temperatures helped dry the campground from the rains of the previous night. Morning began with arm warmers, a hot cup of coffee made with my cook stove, and a bowl of Honey Bunches of Oats filled with a heaping supply of both raisons and unsalted peanuts.

With Blowing Rock campground being so close to the Blue Ridge Parkway, and my previous Cycle North



Carolina weeks had always included riding down the Parkway (regardless of the route), I convinced Bill Alford and Jim Iannucci (photos above) to join me in a ride down the Blue Ridge Parkway. Bill had also wanted to ride Shoals Cove road since that was the major climb to get from his old property up to the Parkway. Jim and I decided that a few miles were enough climbing miles considering how much climbing was involved, so we limited Shoals Cove and then proceeded on the Cycle North Carolina route (below) heading down U.S. 321 at a high rate of speed. Cones blocked the right lane from normal traffic so we were able to accelerate to 50 plus miles an hour going down this wide open 5 mile stretch of downhill. Although it was scenic the whole way

down, there are just a few turnoffs that were suitable for stopping to get a photo. Once down, then when began the rollers associated with Western North Carolina State, which pushed this flatlanders climbing ability. Both Jim and Bill



were good climbers, but I on the other hand was best with downhills, flats, or tailwinds (Photo atop Blowing Rock).

The rest stops were all exceptionally well provisioned with cold soda, cold ice water, fig bars, apples, bananas, gorp, cliff bars, pickles, nut bars, or Gatorade. One of the big changes cycle North Carolina had made was including entertainment in nearly every rest stop. This was both good and bad, since enjoying the entertainment too long caused our already tired bodies to stiffen up. Another welcomed addition in recent years was several Highway Patrol Officers in motorcycle escort. After the big U.S. 321 dissent we rolled into camp in Hickory North Carolina. Hickory had a fair amount of traffic and an immense commercial district that wasn't too obvious at camp. (Above: Top of the US 321 Decent in Blowing Rock)



From our Hickory camp we hopped on the bikes for nearly 70 miles of hilly roads and frequent rest stops in route to the Transportation Museum in Spencer North Carolina. The town of Spencer had no real commercial district but the museum was incredible with the largest warehouse in NC. (photos below)





After cleaning up in the mostly reliable Forest Service Shower Trucks we headed off for some cool down in a beer tent within camp. There I met two gentlemen from my alma mater at the University of Kentucky, who also went to my Engineering School, and had some of the same business connections as my Wilmington City Engineer friend, Jim Iannucci. Small world. Later we strolled through the North Carolina transportation museum. That night I joined a tour leader from the museum that was giving a ghost walk. I had no idea how huge this museum really was. The front building that was easily accessible was just 1/4 of the total museum and yet this building was the largest warehouse in North Carolina. The next building behind it was where they serviced most of the Southern Railroad company locomotives. It was built to do most of the steam engine to diesel locomotion conversions. There must've been two dozen Railroad Locomotives on display and several incredibly long passenger cars. One super opulent car was the former steel magnet, Charles Schwab's personal business car. It had a



conference room for 12, full bath tub in a large bathroom, bedroom, kitchen and other appointments that clearly put it over the top for anybody traveling back in the early 1900s. The last building the tour guide took us through after showing us the incredible turntable maze for track diversions to all of the maintenance spaces, was a large steel barn that held all the collector cars. They had a Corvair van, old Studebakers and a 1914 electric vehicle. The museum was quite amazing considering it was in Spencer North Carolina which most North Carolinians have never heard of.

Having thoroughly been worn out from the hill climbing, sleep came easier in spite of the heat.

The next day's ride was another hilly 70 mile day to Bray Park in Siler city North Carolina. It was on this ride that we learned our dear friend Dan Knighton (right with wife Karen)

had passed away. Dan was one of the founders of Brunswick County Pedalers. He was an inspiration to many, having lived of diverse life, from union boss thug, to farmer, having studied for the priesthood, to

a professor of economics. His mega rich financier protégés that sometimes visited North Carolina, gave high accolades to his mentoring.

(Left: Yes Bill, it's a bicycle built for three)

After cleaning up in camp we hopped in the shuttle bus and rolled around town. When talking to a local officer we got the best food recommendation for Italian food as Elizabeth's in Asheboro

North Carolina. It was not on the designated restaurant stops for the shuttle bus, but our shuttle bus driver indicated it was a short walk from the Days Inn stop, so we hoped the bus and took off for a good Stromboli dinner. It was such large portions that I was able to have Stromboli for breakfast as well.

Our next day's plan was to ride to Clayton community center after a 73 mile day. My plan when creating a packing list was to have enough kits and clothes to get me midway through the week and then do laundry. So my Clayton stop was the laundry day, but unfortunately the laundry was well into the middle of town that included some steep pitches to bike my laundry bag around. With no air conditioning in



the laundry mat I opted to use a local McDonald's to relax in while getting my laundry done. The morning ride from Clayton to Greenville was a good hundred miles of bicycling and some exceedingly hot weather. Having crossed the I-95 Corridor, we had left most of the hills behind us, so the heat was the only contender to rob us of a good ride. The last rest stop on the century ride had a great old country picker name [Lightnin Wells](#) who had many of his CDs available for sale there. He had an ancient half-size banjo that he was playing when we rolled in, but I noticed an old Nashville Resonator on his guitar rack that I talked him into playing. He was truly inspiring and had a full collection of old time tunes. Bill kept all his music on Spotify queue for later enjoyment, since we had to keep rolling to avoid stiffening up. We ended up finishing the hundred miles and included some long Strava segments where we recorded the fastest times of any of the nearly 1000 other riders for those segments of the ride. (Four amigos ready to start a hilly ride: Jim Iannucci, myself, Brian Troxler and Bill Alford)



David Ledbetter also joined our Century ride as shown below.



Camp in Greenville was near the East Carolina university campus in the town common park right on the Tar River. The hardest part of the ride was not the 110°F we had seen on the bike computer while on



tarmac, but when we were hitting stop signs within Greenville North Carolina, our internal temperatures would then skyrocket. A Cape Fear cyclist friend of mine named Craig Mann, was unable to attend this year Cycle North Carolina even though he had registered, but a race injury took him out of the ride.

He had purchased an East Carolina University versus Temple University football game ticket and so I offered to pick it up and use it in his stead. Turned out to be a great deal since Bill found out that it included an option to use their VIP tent for the tailgate party. The tent was loaded with good food and free beer as



well as plenty of other drinks cookies, cakes, veggies, and many other snacks. Since my son had gone to ECU we previously did manage to attend one of their football games many years ago, but I was not prepared for how much the venue had changed since then. The advertising for

commercial interests had become exceedingly obnoxious and delayed many of the instant replay actions so they could slip in a commercial here and there.

We left the game in the third quarter and fortunately were not caught in the stadium wide black out that later affected play. It still was well after 11 when we rolled into camp and I got the “stink eye” from local security guards as most folks had already been hard asleep.

Day 6 took us nearly 70 miles into Union point Park within New Bern North Carolina. This was a nicely located park central to the restaurant district, avoiding any need for shuttles. We ate lunch at Beer Army (photos below) and then dinner at Captain Ratty’s Seafood that night. When we rolled back to camp many of the tents were moved because of flooding where the winds had swept the inlet over the seawall. My tent was fine but several were moved in the middle of the night and the city brought in super-suckers to try and mop up as much as they could.



The last days ride from New Bern to Atlantic Beach was only about 70 miles and flat, but the headwinds made for a totally different riding experience. It was the first day where temperatures were not oppressively hot. We kept the high pace and were able to share the road for many miles with our friend Bill Messenger who moved from our area back to family in Winston Salem. The last rest stop in Swansboro had some great entertainment from a local duet who knew all the right stuff to be picking in front of a worn out group of bicyclists. From there the last 18 miles were all headwinds and a slow slog in heavy traffic. It turns out that the North Carolina Seafood Festival was also on the same weekend. We made it through the finish line in front of most of the other riders and celebrated with the obligatory photo in front of the beach. Although CNC normally has a feed at the end of the ride, this year it was free local brews and a dessert tent since the Seafood Festival was just up the road.



I would have to say that this year's cycle North Carolina route was one of my favorites, since it only had two real traffic towns of Hickory and Greenville as well as plenty of great overlooks or mountain views and woodland rides. The lack of indoor camping is an issue that CNC will have to attend to since the kind of temperatures we had every night were nearly unbearable. The rest stops were especially great this year with both entertainment and a full supply of snacks. The State patrol escort gave us a little bit more comfort on the road and the police directing traffic in town was definitely a blessing. Although CNC has had a history of hurricanes or torrential rains during the week, this one was dry! So I too am looking forward to next year's Cycle North Carolina.