

The Southern Transcontinental will cross America from the beaches of San Diego to the beaches of Tybee Island, Georgia transversing nine states and almost 2,900 miles. During our 27 days of cycling, the scenery of rural America will change as each day has its own unique landscape.



Some of the obvious highlights of this tour are the interesting and beautiful places we will visit along the way. The tour begins with a steady climb from San Diego up and over several 4,000 foot mountain passes the first day. The grades are steep and consistent on our way up to the mountain town of Julian which is famous for their apple pies. This is a good warm-up for the rest of the tour as we have almost 8,000 feet of climbing in 77 miles. The following day is mostly downhill as we ride 87 miles into the sandy desert of the Imperial Valley. The temperature will rise to over 100 degrees as we descend back down to sea level.



During the second and third days we need to cross over 225 miles of low desert. The sand dunes near Glamis are famous for its barren landscape suitable for Arabian camels. The contrasts of these days to the Ponderosa pine forests ahead make each day unique. By the fifth day we start climbing out of the desert on several long grades topping out at over 7,000 foot elevation. The air is cooler, the terrain is green and the riding is challenging. We will continue to cross a series of

mountains in Arizona that have granny gear climbs followed by hairpin downhills. Now you know why you had to train for this tour.

The sixth day is another mountainous 110 miles heading to Winslow, Arizona. If the wind is right the final 40 miles will end with a 35 mph downhill for over an hour. The real highlight of the day is staying at the La Posada Hotel. This hotel was built as a Harvey House Hotel in 1929 to accommodate all the travelers crossing the country on the Sante Fe Railroad. This hotel has been renovated to its original splendor with a first-class restaurant and waitresses dressed in period clothing. The La Posada is a landmark for Route 66 travelers and to stay here is a memorable



experience. This hotel is the first of several Route 66 historic places we will visit during our tour.

Bicycling across America is more than just riding thousands of miles on rural roads. The experiences of meeting people along the way are as memorable as any scenic photograph. Past riders often say that meeting new friends during the tour was something they didn't expect to happen when they considered the reasons for riding across the country. This tour is filled with intangible positive experiences that are not obvious before the tour.



Continuing east, the next several days cross between the mesas and red rocks of eastern Arizona and western New Mexico. The long climb up to the 8,000 foot summit at the Continental Divide in Pie Town, New Mexico is an easy grade if the wind is from the west. The scenery continues to change with scrubby juniper trees taking over the hillsides. The trees give way to miles of open ranch country. By the time we reach

Roswell, New Mexico we can see 50 miles of flat prairie to the east. If the visibility is good you might see some aliens. We will visit the UFO Museum downtown just to be sure we see a few.

On the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> day we begin a straight shot to the northeast across 200 miles of open ranch land. The road disappears into the horizon and the grain towers in small towns along the railroad tracks mark our progress every 20 miles. The road is good and the winds are usually favorable too. As will Rogers Rogers said, "When you get the mountains and trees out of the way you can finally see something."

As we roll into Amarillo, Texas we are ready for some action. We are staying at the Big Texan Steakhouse and Hotel tonight. Their billboards line the interstate for 400 miles proclaiming "Free 72 ounce steak if eaten in one hour." Their 500 seat dining room is festive with a roving quartet



of country musicians. The food and entertainment tonight are more memorable than the bike ride today. Maybe someone in our group will take the 72 oz. steak challenge. Staying at the Big Texan is always voted as one of the best nights of the tour.

We are back riding Route 66 for the next 250 miles. Lon has hosted tours on Route 66 for over 20 years and he has a story for every 10 miles of the old highway. The closed gas stations and deserted towns were once booming with cross country travelers. We will tour the Route 66 Museums in Elk City and Clinton, Oklahoma to learn more about the 90 years of highway history.

On the 15<sup>th</sup> day of our tour we leave Route 66 and start bending southeast toward Arkansas. The terrain becomes noticeably hillier as we leave the ranch country and begin cycling through the forests. Near the Arkansas border we begin riding the Talimena Parkway. This is one of the only sections of mountains that run west to east in the United States. The road was built in the 1930s by the Civilian Conservation Corp that follows the ridge line up and down a continuous series of 12-15% grades. This 50 miles of the Parkway has almost 6,000 feet of climbing. The scenery and views from the ridge are amazing. Another highlight of the day is staying at the historic lodge that overlooks the valley. This is another classic day that is always a favorite for everyone.



Our route across Arkansas is through the thick pine forests. The road is in good condition and these are easy miles that pass quickly. As we approach the Mississippi River the forest opens up to flat cotton fields. After crossing the river into Mississippi, catfish in farm ponds is the main crop. We have definitely reached the south and the area has a new feeling with Spanish Moss hanging from the trees and Kudzu vines covering the hillsides. We follow a network of small backroads across Mississippi. There are more dogs than cars in this remote area of the state.

Our final five days average about 115 miles per day across Alabama and Georgia. The roads in Alabama have the best pavement of the trip. The terrain is rolling with well kept farms and quaint small towns. Entering Georgia we will visit the Civil War prison near Andersonville. The brutal history is humbling of what happened to thousands of soldiers during the Civil War. Their lives makes our challenges of riding 110 miles per day look easy.

Our final days of the tour continue across the backroads of Georgia. The anticipation of finishing our goal of riding across the United States is the main motivation now. As we roll on to the beach at Tybee Island the mix of emotions are different for everyone. We have completed an amazing challenge but an adventure has ended. We have all changed from our experiences. We are stronger now than when we started both physically and emotionally. We are a special few who can say we rode our bicycles across America.

