

Buffalo Bill Century Ride pleases bicyclists...

By Connie Parish, Times Guest Writer, Weekend, October 4, 2008

Those who still harbor the stereotype that Kansas is “flat as a pancake” have never talked to those who have participated in the Buffalo Bill Century Ride.

If they were to ask each of the roughly 160 cyclists who were part of the seven-city bicycle ride that started on Sunday in Leavenworth, the answer would be far different.

In fact, one of the cyclists who came the furthest – Bruce VanderKamp of Centennial, Colorado – commented on the steep grade of the hills. VanderKamp, who traveled on the “green loop,” 104 miles altogether; stopped at SAG 2 in Basehor for a little pick-me-up.

According to Baron Powell, organizer of the ride for the Leavenworth Bicycle Club, SAG stands for “snack and gear” or “stop and go,” depending on who is asked.

As he munched on some of the goodies available at Basehor City Hall and filled up his water bottle, VanderKamp said the mountain trails he was used to are only a 5 percent grade – to accommodate truckers. That does not compare to what Powell described as the “unremitting rolling hills” of eastern Kansas that are steeper; though definitely picturesque during what he considers the prettiest month of the year.



Riders in the Buffalo Bill Century Ride Sunday passed the C.W. Carousel Museum, shrouded in heavy fog, as they took off from the Leavenworth Landing Park.

Cyclists had a chance to see for themselves as they wound down tree-lined secondary roads and up the numerous hills passing silos and sometimes deserted farms along the way.

“It’s a challenging route,” said Todd Frederick, a member of the Santa Fe Bicycle Club who traveled the 59-mile loop, which was the most popular route for riders. Joe Mirani of greater Kansas City could not disagree about the challenge, but enjoyed the ride. “It’s fun,” he said. “These are great hills.”

Riders could potentially ride loops through three counties – mostly in Leavenworth County with short forays into nearby Johnson and Douglas counties. How far they rode depended on which loop they chose – the green loop, 104 miles; pink, 85 miles; orange, 59 miles; yellow, 36 miles; and blue, eight miles.

For those who might think there is some arcane significance in the color of the loops, there is not. Powell chuckled as he recalled that club president Joel Buck drafted the first map when the route was considered last year. Buck used florescent pens, and the colors – and the names – stuck.

Some repeat riders remembered the days when the route had even more twists and turns.

Caroline Helmkamp of Kansas City, MO, remembered riding in the 1990s when “the route was hillier.”

Helmkamp and Martha Blackman of Lenexa, KS, stopped at SAG 5 at the VFW Park in Tonganoxie. Leavenworth Bicycle Club members manned SAG 5, as they did all but two of the seven SAG locations – the one in Basehor and one in Eudora. But in Tonganoxie the members are also proud to say they are member of GOMAC. Members Mike Patterson and Al Mueller claim that GOMAC stands for the “Grouchy Old Men’s Athletic Club.”

This route, the third format since Powell joined the club in 1994, is significant for



Rick Morrow, a member of the Leavenworth Bicycle Club, relaxes after his 59-mile jaunt Sunday. He is at the starting and ending point in Leavenworth’s Landing Park. The CCA flag flies behind him because Corrections Corporation of America was the chief sponsor of the ride.



Members of the Santa Fe Trail racing team led the pack Sunday morning. They are pictured 155th Street and Fairmont Road on their way to Basehor.

several reasons. He said he was inspired by the Cider Mill Century ride several years ago, which went through downtown Paola and Osawatomi, KS. On most rides, downtowns are avoided. However, Powell said he liked the idea of encouraging riders to notice the often picturesque and history scenery that small towns can offer.

He said he envisions each town "having a little party or festival" in connection with the ride, which would be just one event among many. Historically, that is how it started in Leavenworth. Some 26 years ago, Larry Wise of Biringer's organized a ride in conjunction with Buffalo Bill Days.

Thom Cochran, who described himself and Greg Scircle as founders of the Leavenworth Bicycle Club, said the group decided to keep it going over the years. Cochran did not ride this year, but as a veteran of 24 centuries (100-mile rides), he said he had to visit SAG 7 in Easton, where only those who tried the longest route stopped.

The city of Eudora exemplifies the kind of participation Powell loves. Riders who approached the Douglas County city knew they were on the route, because seven signs along the way welcomed them to the city and directed them to SAG 4. Eudora City Administrator Cheryl Beatty was one of those inside the bright blue and white tent festooned with flags. She made sure everyone got 150-year Eudora pins, as well as food and drink. Beatty also made sure they met their local Chamber president, Dr. Doug Mateo.

Mateo, a chiropractor, offered free massages to the riders.

"I'm an athlete," he explained, "and I love working on athletes."

Since this was the second year he has offered his services, he says he knows it take the first brave rider before others try it, too. This year; it was Marie Tennant of Fort Leavenworth, who was experiencing her second Buffalo Bill ride.

Because she and her family had just moved to the area before last year's ride, she said she expected to enjoy it more this time, because she is now familiar with the Kansas hills.

SAG 6 was different in several ways from the other stops on the ride. Most of the SAG locations were stationed in cities – Leavenworth, Basehor, DeSoto, Eudora,

Tonganoxie, and Easton. They typically catered to smaller crowds. Few riders were ready to stop after 11 miles in Leavenworth and many went past the volunteers in the other cities as well, depending on which loop they rode. Those who made it to Easton – at least 16 this year – were making the entire century ride.

In contrast, SAG 6 is in a pasture on the Packwoods' farm. It is on County Road 29, a mile south of 92 Highway. Its remote location is good, several riders said, because they are definitely ready for a stop. There also is little wonder why the "Aloha" SA is one repeat cyclists remember: Susan Powell, a club member and a native of Hawaii, planned a feast for the riders, since riders on all loops pass that SAG.

Cyclists were adorned with leis to go along with the theme, but there was also a plethora of food, ranging from shrimp to pineapple and nuts to grilled hamburgers and brats. There was even two varieties of chili – regular and vegetarian.

Matt Nowak, a bicycle club member who volunteered at SAG 1, said there is a theory behind the foods offered along the way. Riders initially need carbohydrates to build up the blood sugar so they can maintain the ride. By the time they get to SAG 6, according to volunteer Dave McKune, they are close to the end and heavier food sounds appealing.

Greg hiss of Basehor relaxed at SAG 7 in Easton. For him, the century ride was a "baptism by fire," because he just started riding in February.

However; he was not the only new rider Sunday. Kent and Lisa Harms got their bicycle only a month and a half ago, but the Lansing couple called it a great experience.

For his part, Powell said he was pleased with the participation of the riders and club volunteers. He said he is also excited that two city governments got involved in SAG work this year and that Leavenworth, the host city, was so cooperative.

SAG 0, the beginning and the end, was in the Landing Park parking lot. There were initial police escorts and Saint John Hospital set up a tent where about 25 people took advantage of the opportunity for a chair massage. A sculpture of Buffalo Bill was a focus at the park, courtesy of the First City Museum, and Shelton Richardson, warden at Corrections Corporation of America's Leavenworth Detention Center; the chief sponsor; staring the ride using a bullhorn.

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Photos by Connie Parish