

Day 10 – Go Big or Go Home

Wednesday starts with 95% of the field still in the eastern half of the US. Riders have roughly 48 hours to clock in at the Finish in Albuquerque. Plans are either coming together or unraveling in epic failure. For riders with a plan this is the sweet spot of the rally, the Zone, the Happy Place, the stuff remembered with great satisfaction for the rest of a life. For the ones without a plan, where things are unraveling, where a wet sock launches a roadside meltdown worthy of TMZ, the next 48 hours are pure unadulterated torture, the moments relived every day until death or drawn again for a chance at redemption. Both are defining moments. It's that simple.

At 8 AM (central) there was a front of heavy weather anywhere from 60-120 miles wide, extending from Chicago to San Antonio. Only four riders were on the west side of it. Everyone else will have to punch through. After all, it is the Iron Butt Rally.

“Adventure is adversity told later in comfort.”

- Norm Babcock, 3 time IBR finisher

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Mark Crane notified Lisa late Tuesday morning that his eye problems had not improved and he was stopping to rest. Based on his progress before being waylaid, Mark should have collected enough parks and states to be a finisher, if he can ride the 2,000 miles back to Albuquerque. By this morning, he was moving again. Mark will finish this rally if he has to squint for 2,000 miles. Or get a service dog. But he will be there.

Phil Weston would not be confined to just a few states this leg. Still recovering from his state deficit after Leg 1, he started Leg 3 with just 11 states in the bank. By late Tuesday, he had ventured all the way into Maine by late Tuesday noon, picking up as many as 11 states and perhaps 20 more parks. Of course, he starts Wednesday 2,600 miles from the Finish with less than 48 hours to go. Erik Lipps got dangerously close to New York City at the end of Tuesday's daylight, bravely dealing with the worst traffic and congestion the US has to offer. By this morning, he had continued his push into New England. Like Weston, Lipps will have a long, *long* final 48 hours. But, he's also *half* Weston's age. These two will be exciting to watch to see if age and treachery really can overcome youth and skill.

How does the old dog catch the rabbit? He waits until the rabbit gets tired.

- Old Italian proverb

By now, the riders have moved away from the DC area and are all headed back to the barn. Over the last three days, all but a handful rode into the busy DC area to collect bonuses. Tom Austin advised riders at the rider's meeting that "Reading comprehension is very important if you are going to the District of Columbia." The twelve DC bonuses were worth a combined 4,380 points. Of those 4,289 were available in just 5 locations. In fact, 3293 points were available from a single location, the Lyndon B. Johnson Memorial Grove on the Potomac River.

From this sliver of land within the District of Columbia, but on the Virginia side of the Potomac, an observant rider could see the Jefferson and Lincoln Memorials, the Washington Monument and the LBJ Memorial. With the parking lot for the Theodore Roosevelt Island National Memorial a mile up the road, but still on the west bank of the Potomac, a rider could leave the remaining 91 DC points on the table and save the 1-2 hours it would take to cross the river and play in DC traffic. Of the seven Top Ten riders at the end of Leg 2, only Josh Mountain clued into this unique geography, doing a “hit & run” on DC before moving on. The other six spent between 1-2 hours in the DC area. If the final positions come down to within 91 points, it could make all the difference.

Chris Purney, in 58th place at the Leg 2, also realized this unique geography, calling Lisa to confirm that if he was *within* the District of Columbia, and he could see the memorials over the river, he could take the picture from the west bank. He was hyperventilating like a kid on Christmas unwrapping a Red Ryder BB gun when Lisa confirmed his understanding. Let’s just hope for his sake the photos came out. (right – Chris celebrates his ingenuity with a seegar)



The Rally van stopped at the Bass Pro Pyramid store in Memphis, which just opened this past April. We had to. As we passed on the way to Kingsport, good ‘ole boy Harrison and retired cop Hobart both started panting like Dalmatians passing a firetruck. Harrison said something in Alabaman that Hobart loosely translated as “I can smell the ammo.” The Pyramid, frequently a photo bonus on prior rallies, was built in 1991 as a sports arena for college and NBA basketball but it was inadequate from the start, flooding on its first night due to poorly designed drainage systems. The teams relocated to the newly constructed FedEx Forum in 2004, leaving the Pyramid a venue without a purpose. The arena closed in 2007 and was the frequent topic of heated political debate for the next few years until a deal was struck with Bass Pro in 2010 to open a destination retail store with hotel, shooting and archery ranges, laser arcade, bowling alley and restaurant. The building was also fitted with the tallest freestanding elevator (320 feet) to an observation deck level with views of the city and the Mississippi River, in addition to another restaurant and an aquarium. The City of Memphis, itself damn near bankruptcy at the time, invested \$30 million to retrofit the building.



While the Pyramid is not a national park (yet), its origins and history of political controversy is reminiscent of how several national parks came to be, such as Steamtown National Historic Site in Scranton, Pennsylvania. Steamtown had been built around a working turntable and roundhouse replicated from a local railroad defunct in 1960. Opened as a private museum since 1984, Steamtown failed miserably to revitalize the downtown Scranton economy decimated by the decline of the steel and coal industries in the late 1970's and was near bankruptcy by 1986. A Scranton US Congressman, Joseph McDade, pushed for and got \$8 million to begin turning the failing museum into a national historic site. The move was viewed as purely political, dubbed the "mother of all pork-barrel" by pundits. By 1995, the National Park Service had spent \$66 million to improve the facility. Steamtown is worth 1,045 points on Leg 3.

STEA
Steamtown National Historic Site
350 Cliff Street
Scranton, PA
Coordinates: 41.4096 -75.673
9a-5p



Visitors to Steamtown can learn the history of steam railroad transportation, and the people who built, repaired and rode. The site preserves a special era in America's industrial history.

Take a picture of the Trolley museum.

The Charles Pinckney National Historic Site in Mount Pleasant, South Carolina, honors one of the original signers of the US Constitution. The site was purchased in 1988 at the urging of US Senator Earnest F. Hollings. It wasn't until 1991 that the NPS realized the house was built *after* Pinckney died. The bonus is worth 1,200 points on Leg 3.

CHPI
Charles Pinckney National Historic Site
1254 Long Point Road
Mount Pleasant, SC
Coordinates: 32.8471 -79.8234
9a-5p



Charles Pinckney was a principal author and a signer of the United States Constitution. This remnant of his coastal plantation is preserved to tell the story of a "forgotten founder," his life of public service, the lives of enslaved African Americans on South Carolina Lowcountry plantations.

Take a picture of the old plantation house.

Former National Park Service Director (1989-1993), James M. Ridenour, wrote about such parks in *The National Parks Compromised: Pork Barrel Politics and America's Treasures*, published in

1994. Oklahoma US Senator Tom Coburn also routinely rails on waste and politics in the NPS, publishing an open scathing report to Congress titled *Parked!*, issued October 29, 2013. When I first interviewed Mike Kneebone for an article in 1997, he said that he picked bonus locations that he enjoyed, that made him think and that he wanted others to discover as well, especially if the ride there was on exceptional roads. Kirsten Talken-Spaulling embodied this wonder when she complimented Tom Austin on his selection of bonuses after Leg 1. “It was devilishly awesome,” she told Tom. “I got to ride on roads I never knew existed!” Kirsten later complimented Tom again on his crafty bonus selection, noting that the road to Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore in Portage, Indiana, crosses a busy railway, resulting in delays both in and out of the park. Mark Crane’s comments reported in earlier posts reiterate this sentiment. Some of the bonuses can be profoundly affecting. Visiting the Oklahoma City Memorial in the 1999 rally left Paul Graves and me in a funk that lasted into California. I suspect the Flight 93 National Memorial in Stoystown, Pennsylvania, will have the same effect on riders this year. With this year’s theme, and his awesome souvenir rally booklet, it’s clear that Tom Austin is continuing Kneebone’s tradition of giving riders something to think *about* at the bonus, not just how to get *to* the bonus.



Jim Orr is reportedly dealing with a slow leak on the rear tire of his Gold Wing. Wallace French emailed a note about Jim’s issues along with this photo of Jim working on his tire by the Boston National Historical Park Tuesday evening. Or he could be sleeping, after all he’d been through 11 states by this picture. Wallace reported Jim being in good spirits and chatting with passersby before heading off to Lowell National Historic Park. He also said it wasn’t long thereafter when Craig Brooks arrived, snapped his photo and left. Brooks has nothing to do but bag bonuses and make it to the Finish on time.

Hammy Tan called Lisa Tuesday night after taking a kidney jarring rutted road to Niobrara National Scenic River to ask if there were any more dirt roads he could look forward to. The middleweight Honda riding rookie is getting schooled quickly in what it takes to compete in the World’s Toughest Motorcycle Competition. Let’s hope it’s not a crash course. While we will alert riders to specific areas where a road may be problematic, road construction is an ever changing fact of life while in the Big Show and riders need to adapt.

Daryl Doughty’s Tuesday did not improve after witnessing a motorcycle accident in DC in the morning. Overcome by heat and dehydration, Doughty required medical attention this

afternoon in Harper's Ferry, West Virginia. He informed Lisa Tuesday evening that he was withdrawing. He picked up seven more states since leaving Kingsport, with 10-12 more parks. If he can rally after a good night's sleep and fluids, he may be able to resume on Wednesday and work his way back to Albuquerque and squeak out a finish. As I said yesterday, Day 9 is when you start to see what you are made of. Sometimes it's not pretty.

The 12 hour window for the final Call In bonuses opens at noon Pacific time today. I will be monitoring incoming rider calls for more information to report in tomorrow's update, my last before the wrap up Friday night. I anticipate that some of the calls will not be as complete as prior legs simply because it's Day 10 and, well, people get sloppy on Day 10. I also anticipate 3-5 calls from Kirsten Talken-Spaulding and maybe a telegram. Kirsten failed to collect the Call In bonus on Leg 2 when her call was never received by the rally phone bank, despite evidence of an outgoing call on her phone. After extensive scrutiny at the scoring table, we concluded that she had poor cell signal from where she called that prevented the call from going through. With no way to verify the call or its content, the bonus was denied. Kristin had not placed a backup "insurance call" something I suspect she will remedy this time. If the 1,000 point loss makes a substantial difference in the outcome, it will be heartbreaking for this hard charging rider.

Equally hard charging are Josh Mountain and Eric Jewell. Eric took a southeasterly tour from Kingsport before methodically working his way up the east coast, with surgical precision. He certainly has enough states and parks now to finish although it's about more than finishing for Jewell. This his ninth Iron Butt Rally. He's finished in the Top Ten in seven and failed to finish only once, 2013, when he experienced a low speed get off while leading the field, a spirit crushing incident caused by a loose bolt. He freely admits that he only gets to do this because his lovely wife, Kelley O'Hern lets him. He knows the sacrifice his family makes for his passion. Unfinished business is hard on more than just the rider.

Josh Mountain took an Appalachian route out of Kingsport, also to the east coast before turning west across Pennsylvania. Nine years junior to Jewell, Josh benefitted from the veteran's misfortune in 2013 but still couldn't put it in the hole, taking 2nd to Derek Dickson despite riding 1,164 more miles. He's smarter now. He knows he can ride the miles, but has become more focused, Owen-like in his routing. Josh is not a "wait your turn" kind of guy and may have something to say about Eric's quest. He too, has unfinished business. It will be a battle to the end for these two warriors.



Kirsten, Eric and Josh at the checkpoint after Leg 2 as Kristen told Josh how she became so star struck at meeting up with Eric at the San Antonio Missions National Historical Park that she forgot her flag and had to double back 25 miles to retrieve it, the whole time saying “Leave the flag. Leave the flag” in the hopes some well-meaning rookie wouldn’t pick it up.

Rod Schween, 3rd place at the end of Leg 2 has to be giving the front runners something to think about. Rod has taken a different approach to Leg 3, avoiding the congestion of the east coast altogether and heading for Michigan’s Upper Peninsula. *(right – Schween feeling pretty good at the end of Leg 2)*



Kirsten has taken a similar path over the UP, along with Will Barclay, Bob Lilley, Paul Slaton and, Ian McPhee. I am still not sure what these contenders are seeing in that route. But, Jim Owen is heading north as well, of course only after he cleaned out the east coast. He is a methodical bonus predator. Eric Bray ignored the east coast and Michigan, choosing instead to suck up lots of parks in the Midwest. He will have some of the heaviest rains to punch through. Brant Moteelall went with a “go big or go home” approach, cutting a swath through midtown

Manhattan between 5-6 PM on Tuesday. We were staring at his blip in disbelief as it dotted through Central Park, imagining the chaotic scene in *Die Hard With a Vengeance* as Bruce Willis and Samuel L. Jackson cut through the Park in a commandeered cab. Let's hope it wasn't exactly like that and that no mimes were injured.

Overheard in the Rally van:

Chris: "I need to pee."

John: "Is that coming out of sleep time or Bass Pro time?"

"Dave, if I lay my seat back into your lap will you rub my head."

"Well I went faster. So I fell down harder."

"Don't call me again about dirt."

"Dave, are you out of jokes?"

"I guess I am."

"Dead weight."

Stay tuned!

Chris Cimino

Iron Butt Scribe

Iron Butt Rally©