

Two Blind to Ride

Trans-America 2009

(See photos at http://tauruandchristi.com/2009_07.html)

Dubbed “Two Blind to Ride,” we rode a tandem bike from the Pacific Coast to the Atlantic Coast from July 9th to September 19th, totaling 73 days. We got the idea to ride a bike across the country after meeting and speaking to a hiker from Scotland while traveling through northern India in September 2008. Despite the complete absence of any cycle-touring experience, we got a tandem in January 2009 after returning to Arizona from our round-the-world trip.

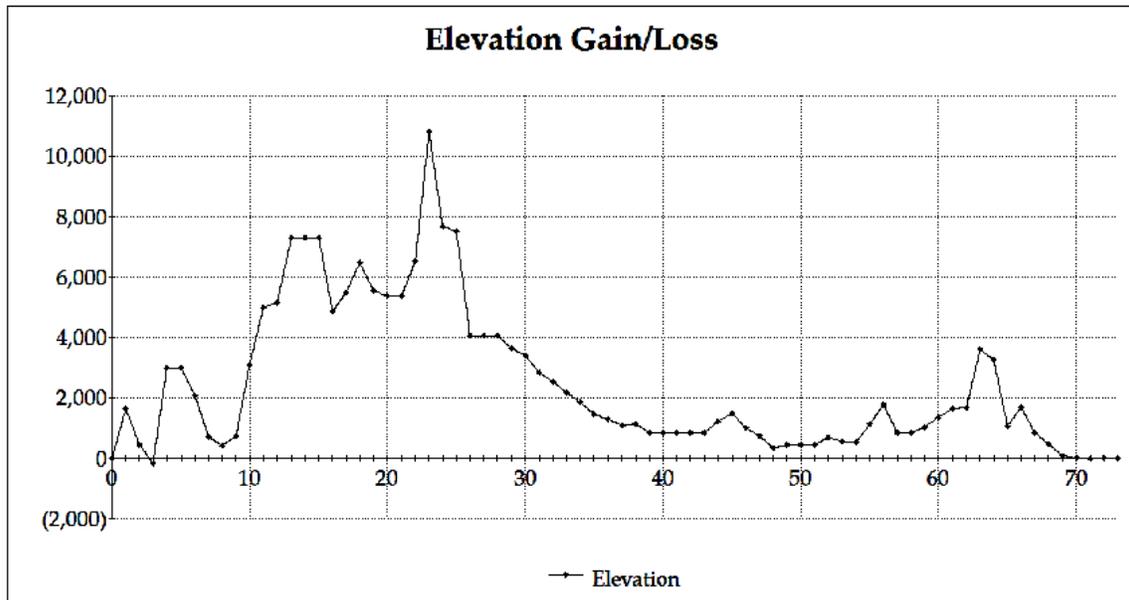


The 3200-mile route started in Huntington Beach, CA and ended in Corolla, NC at the Outer Banks where Christi’s family was planning a family vacation starting September 19th.



The route was neither the most direct nor the easiest. We encountered such challenges as riding through the Mojave Desert in July with temperatures soaring over 120 F during

the day. We had to ride during the day because we couldn't see at night to take advantage of the cooler temperatures. Tauru suffered a heat stroke just east of Palm Springs, CA. We also had some dramatic elevation changes, topping out at Wolf Creek Pass in Colorado at 10,800ft on the Continental Divide. A few times we were caught by monsoons, including a fierce dust storm and a sharp hale storm. While we were a little late for tornado season, we did have to wait out some bad weather in Kansas while tornado warnings were enacted. Humidity became intense after crossing the Mississippi, and fog took hold through the Appalachian Mountains. We rode through the clouds on the Blue Ridge Parkway with visibility down to ten feet at times.



Graph above illustrates the elevation gain/loss for the 3198 miles from Huntington Beach, California to Corolla, North Carolina.

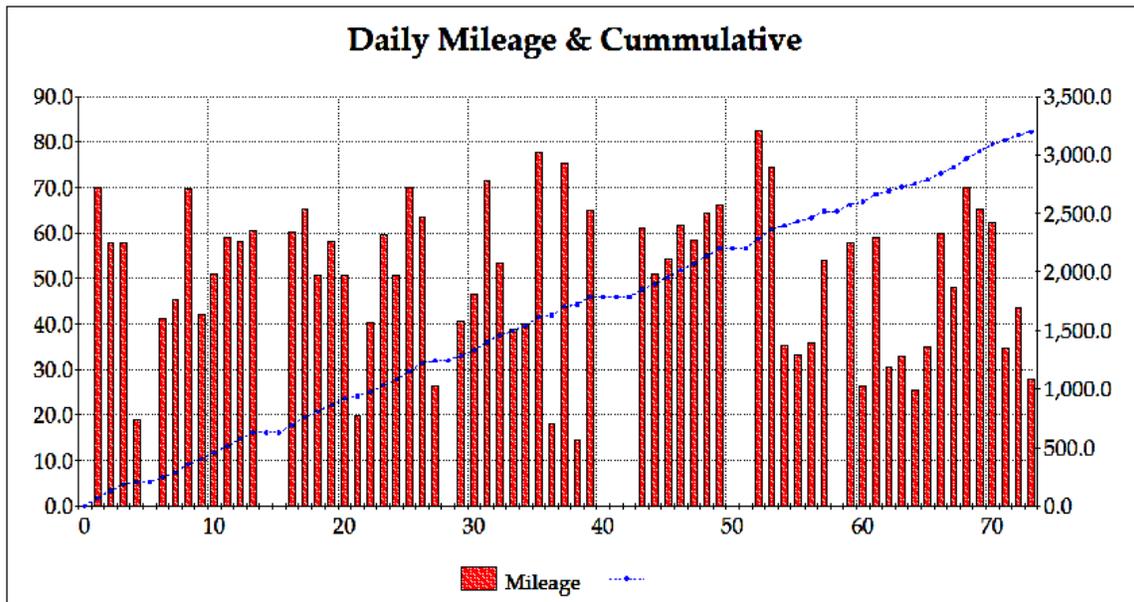
Major Passes

- Arizona: Arizona Divide at 7344 ft on Day 13
- Colorado: Continental Divide (Wolf Creek Pass) at 10,800 ft on Day 24
- Colorado: La Veta Pass at 9400 ft on Day 25
- North Carolina: Eastern Continental Divide at 3800 ft on Day 63

Elevation Gain/Loss on Our Route

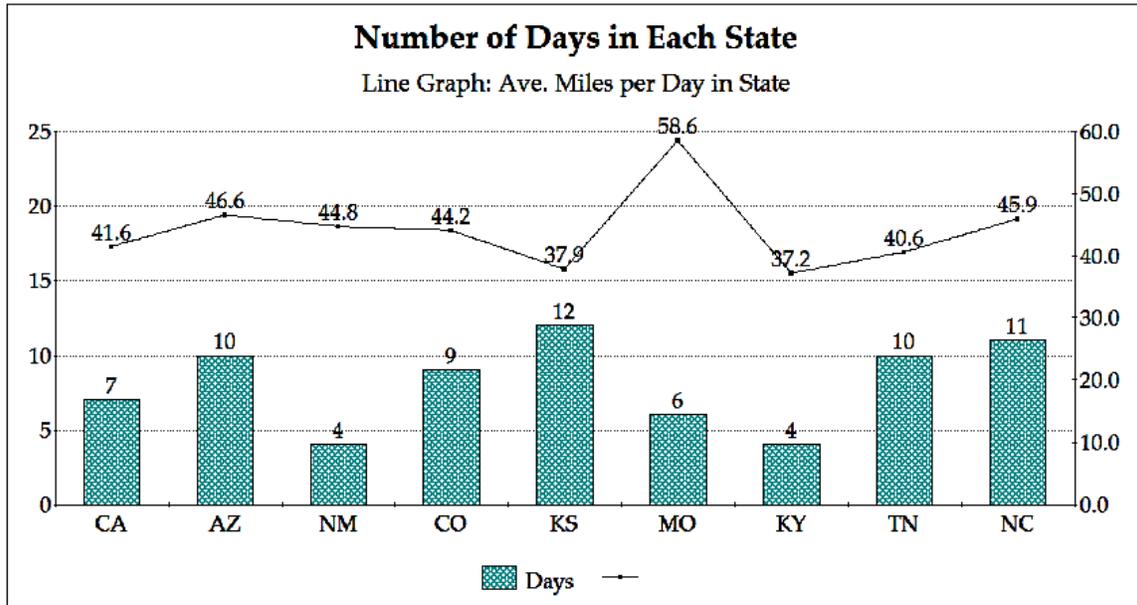
- California: Started at sea level and then gained some elevation to Corona before dropping back down below sea level just past Palm Springs. From there we climbed up to Joshua Tree National Park and then over the pass inside the park at approximately 4500 ft before dropping back down again to Twentynine Palms. Eventually, we descended down to approximately 500 ft at the Colorado River where it divides California and Arizona.
- Arizona: Arizona is where we went from 500 ft at the Colorado River to over 7344 ft when we passed over the Arizona Divide about 13 miles west of Flagstaff (Day 13). From Flagstaff we descended down 2000 ft or so to Winslow and continued to Gallup where we gained back up to

- 6468 ft on Day 18.
- New Mexico: From Gallup we descended down to Farmington at ~5300 ft.
- Colorado: We ascended over the Continental Divide at Wolf Creek Pass at 10,800 ft. The day before, however, from Durango to Pagosa Springs on US 160 was challenging with three or four major “up’s and down’s” through mountains and valleys carved out by glacial run-off. Once over the pass the route was mostly down to Holly (just 4 miles from the Kansas border) at 3387 ft .
- Kansas: Though in general elevation was lost from 3387 ft at the Colorado and Kansas border down to 846 ft at the Kansas and Missouri border, Kansas was NOT flat! Rolling hills made it challenging and unfortunately we had mostly headwind the whole time in Kansas.
- Missouri: Missouri, from Day 43 to Day 48, was NOT flat. In fact, we experienced a lot of rolling hills and mountains as we passed through the Ozarks. We finally made it to the Mississippi River and Ohio River junction just 20 or 30 miles east of Sikeston, MO. It was our lowest elevation (~300 ft) since Palm Springs.
- Kentucky: Mostly rolling hills.
- Tennessee: Tennessee was mostly rolling hills -- rarely a flat moment! We began to gain elevation through rolling mountains as we approached the Appalachians.
- North Carolina: We passed over the Eastern Continental Divide at ~3800 ft and began the rolling descent down to the “low lands” east of Reidsville. It wasn’t until Weldon (Day 69 of 73 days) that we were on flat land.

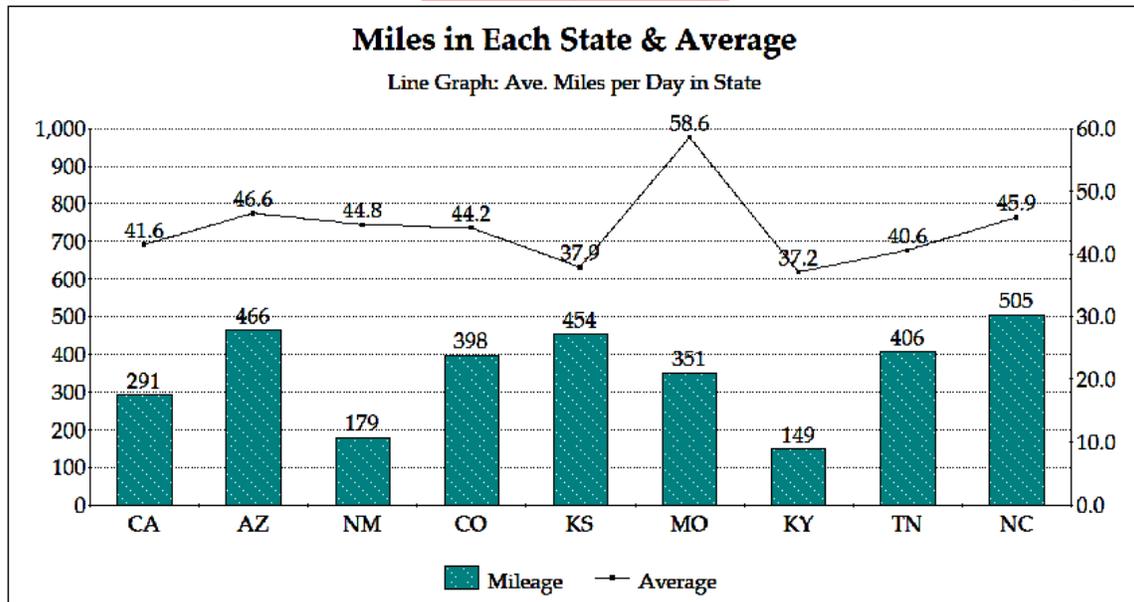


The graph above illustrates our daily mileage (Rest Days are where we had zero mileage). Missouri runs were our most ambitious days (Day 43 to Day 48) with back to back 50 to 65 mile days. Near the end we pushed it until the last three days when we

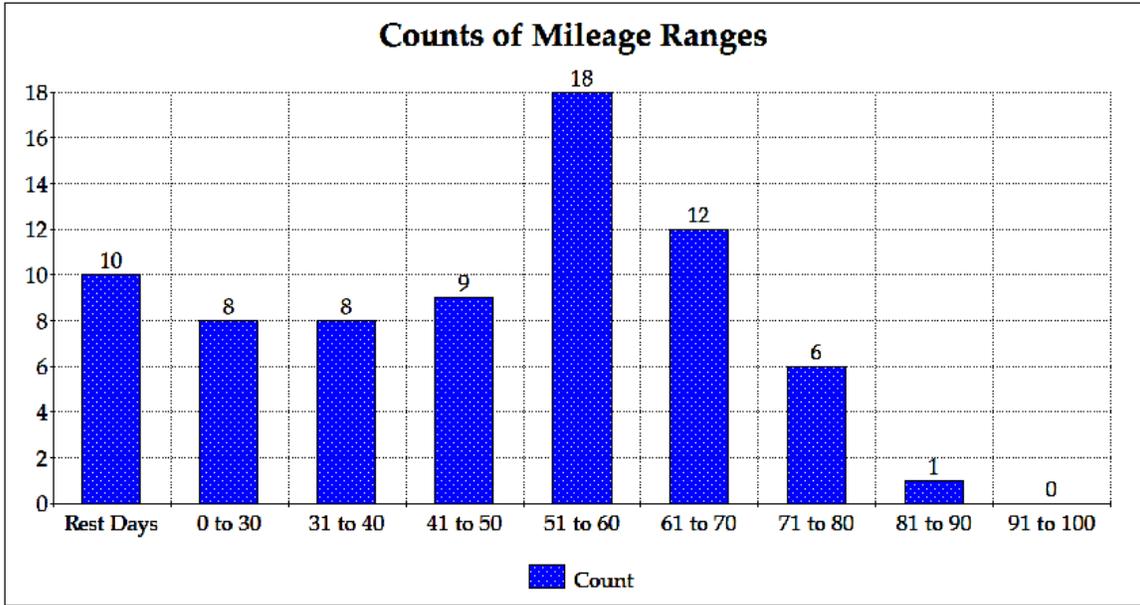
calculated that we had enough time to arrive at the Outer Banks on September 19th.



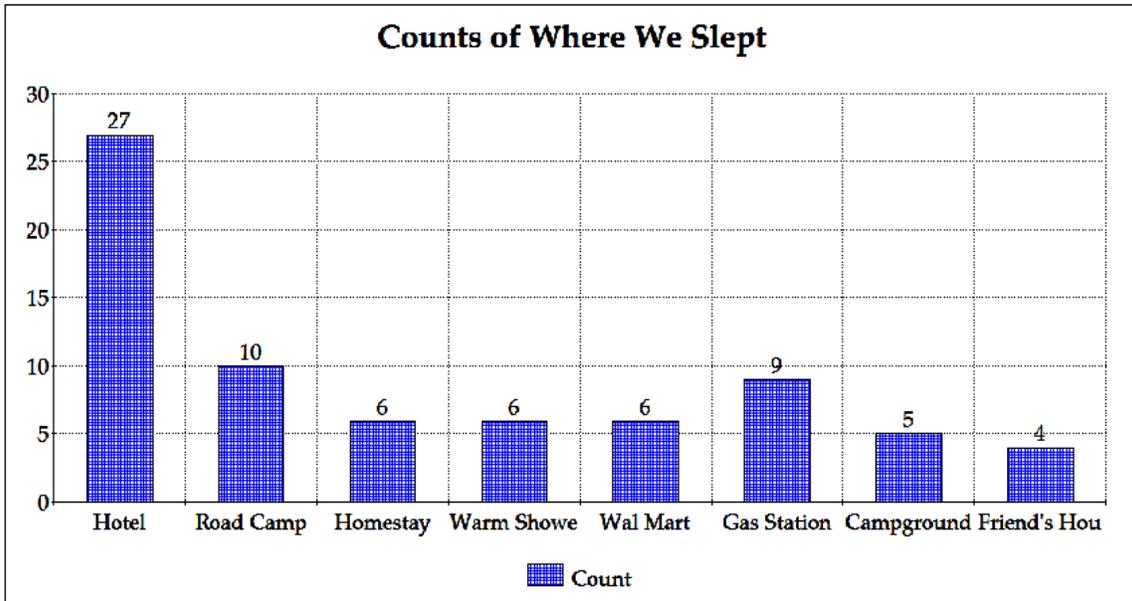
We spent the most days in Kansas (4 days in Fort Scott just 4 miles from the Missouri border) because it was big and we were concerned about tornado warnings. Our highest average per day was in Missouri -- we just felt like riding and the roads were good with wide shoulders for most of the way. (Averages include zero-mile rest days.)



The graph above illustrates the mileage per state. North Carolina was the longest. (Averages include zero-mile rest days.)



The graph above illustrates the number of times we rode a certain mileage range. Our most popular range was between 51 and 60 miles in a day. Our most ambitious day was in Kentucky where we rode from Paducah to Hopkinsville, covering 82.5 miles.

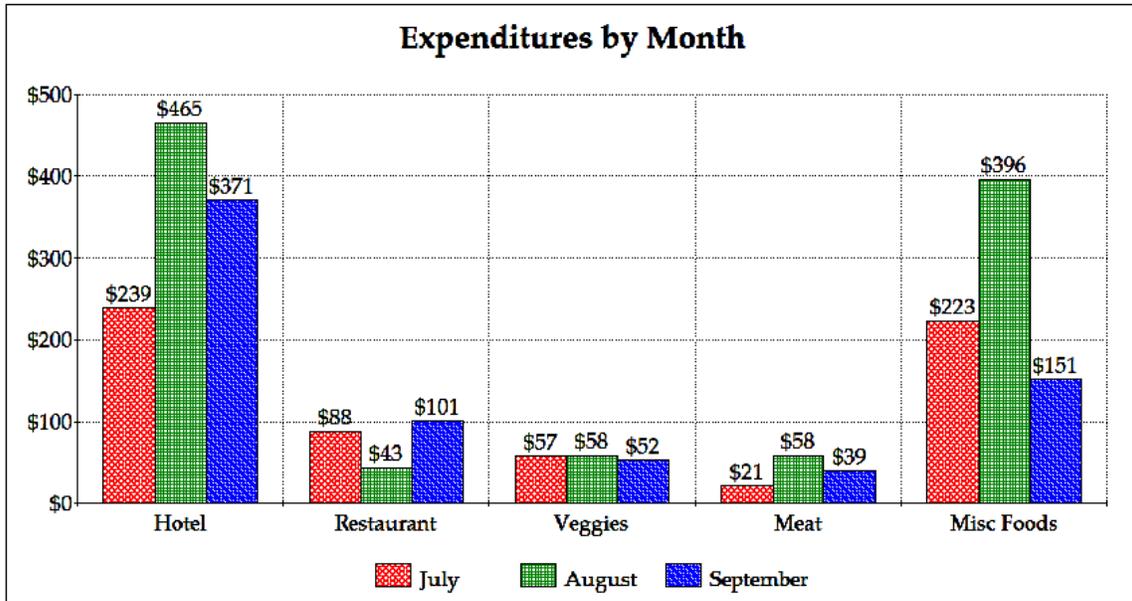


This graph illustrates where we slept every night -- 27 nights in a hotel!

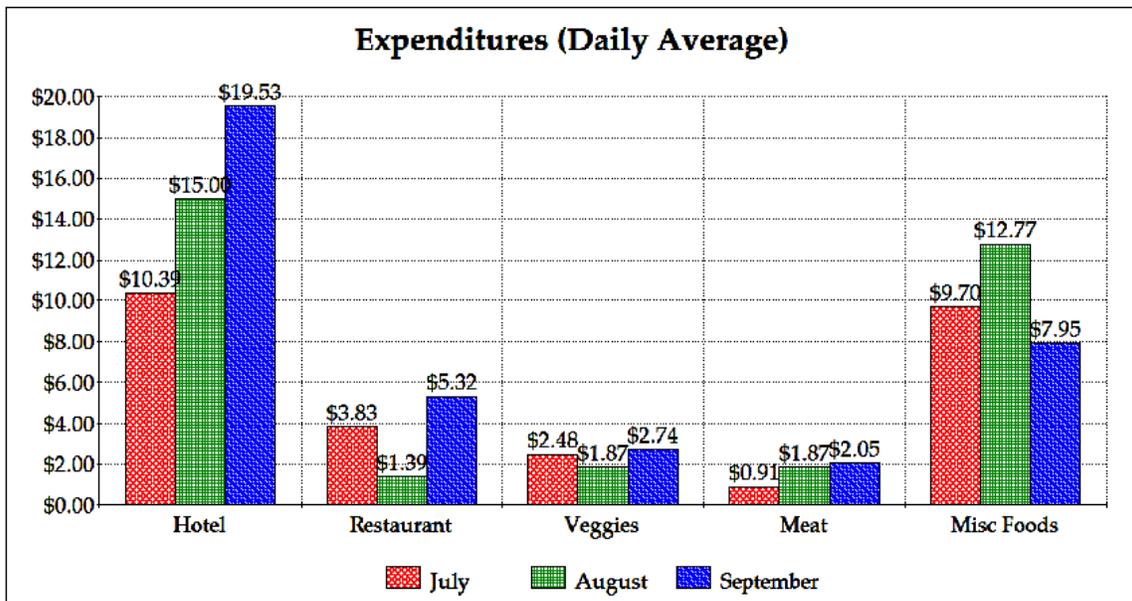
Finding a place to sleep each night quickly became the crux of each day. It was easy out west in the desert. As we moved east, the country became gradually more populated. In the heartland, it was easy to ask permission to camp beside the numerous Wal-Marts or gas stations. Occasionally, we were lucky to run into people who invited us into their homes. We learned about Warm Showers halfway through the trip and had many welcomed stays with folks through that network. By the end of the trip, dense population and weather caused us to use hotels more often.

Month	Spends
July	\$800
August	\$1,213
September	\$782
Total	\$2,795

The chart to the left breaks out spends per month. An additional \$225 for two return from Norfolk, VA to Phoenix, AZ and \$145 for shipping the bike back to Phoenix need to be added, making the total \$2795 + \$370 = \$3165. Just to note, we did make this trip as comfortable as possible. We probably ate more “unnecessary foods” and stayed in hotels more often than needed.



The graph above illustrates our expenditures by month by the categories listed. July was from the 9th to 31st and September from 1st to 19th.



Perhaps a better way to look at the values is to take the daily averages, which takes into consideration the number of days in each month that spends were recorded. In this

way, we can see that September was high in hotel spends -- this was true in that we were wanting to enjoy more of the ride by relaxing in hotels after a hard day of riding (especially through the humidity).

On the whole, the trip was a very positive experience. We both agreed that it was a far more intimate way to experience the country. We had only good encounters with people. The bike often acted as a conversation piece with people interested in speaking with us, offering us food and even money once they found out that we were both visually impaired. Modern comforts allow us to hide in the security of our homes, cars and cell phones; but life on a bike allows people to break out of these barriers and discover that people, even strangers, are good.



Not only would we recommend this trip to anyone with an interest to ride across America, but anyone who wants to stretch their mental comfort boundaries.

We are now planning our next big ride ...from the southern tip of South America to the northern tip of North America. It was strange to think that, at the end of the ride, as we started thinking about the Americas, that this "trial" run was only the beginning ...as most wonderful and amazing things are.