

RAGBRAI Training

Des Moines Sunday Register GC

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How to train

Cycling is one of Iowa's most popular recreational activities and a great way to develop or maintain physical fitness. You don't have to ride RAGBRAI to enjoy this sport, but that may soon become one of your fitness goals.

Riding a bike is relatively easy on the body compared to many other sports. It is classified as an aerobic, nonimpact sport. Because it is relatively gentle on the body, it is a great way for people to begin a fitness program, especially if they are older or rehabilitating from an injury or illness.

So, here's what you need to do to start cycling in 2006:

● **BIKE:** The very best bike for a beginning rider is called a "hybrid." This bike puts a rider in a more upright position and has a wide range of easy-to-pedal gears. It is versatile enough to ride on trails and take on RAGBRAI. Most bike shops have a selection of entry-level hybrids for less than \$500. Take the bike for a short test ride before you buy.

● **HELMET:** This essential piece of safety equipment may keep you riding forever. Bike shops have a variety of helmets available at different price points. The most expensive helmet won't necessarily provide better protection. Look for a helmet that is comfortable and has an adjustment mechanism

on the back. Ask a bike shop employee to size and fit the helmet on your head.

● **CLOTHING:** Many new riders complain that the bike seat is hard on their bottom. A quality pair of padded bicycling shorts will help lessen the pain. There are casual styles available that look like walking shorts, as well as the tighter Lycra-styles worn by many cyclists. Choose whatever style you are most comfortable with.

The shorts are designed to be worn without underwear. The padding is placed in strategic comfort-enhancing locations and may also contain bacteria-fighting compounds.

● **ROUTE:** Start by riding around your neighborhood. This will help you become comfortable with how the bike steers, shifts and stops. As you become more familiar with the bike, start riding the trails. The Neal Smith, Great Western, Raccoon River and Chichaqua Valley trails are among the more popular paved ones in central Iowa.

● **INFORMATION:** Numerous Web sites, but start with these two: www.bikeiowa.com and www.ragbrai.org.

— Randy Catron

Randy Catron is a USA Cycling licensed expert coach. He is also director of the Iowa Cycling Academy and Des Moines Orthopaedic Surgeons/Bike World racing team.

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By **RICHARD DOAK AND
BRIAN DUFFY**
REGISTER STAFF WRITERS

If you're the type of cyclist who likes to coast downhill, RAGBRAI XXXIV is for you.

OK, we know what you're thinking. For every downhill there's an uphill. But let's not dwell on the negative.

Envision the variegated landscape of central Iowa. Look forward to some picturesque towns the cross-state bicycle tour has never before visited.

Expect the usual assortment of Iowa oddities and interesting sites along the way, plus the abundance of friendly Iowans and great food that make the

RAGBRAI XXXIV **July 23-28** **Sergeant Bluff to Muscatine** **444 miles**

- **Seventh shortest RAGBRAI**
- **Sixth most difficult (miles times feet of climb)**
- **Fourth in feet of climb**

Register's Annual Great Bicycle Ride Across Iowa what it is.

As a bonus, for the second straight year, the ride will manage to traverse the entire state

without resorting to any gravel roads (barring last-minute route changes).

What better way to spend seven days in July? The only way to spoil it is to not train sufficiently.

Don't let the relative shortness of the route this year lull you. It is not for the weak-kneed.

It totals only 444 miles, making it among the shortest RAGBRAIs. On two days, the rides are less than 50 miles, and no day is longer than 77 miles.

But there are plenty of hills packed into those few miles. For hill aficionados, there are all

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kinds — closely spaced rollers where your downhill momentum carries you part way up; some big, stand-alone hills with no momentum to help; straight hills; winding hills; stair-step hills that give you a breather on the way up and occasional gentle undulations along ridgelines.

The climbing will be rewarded with some fine panoramic views from the hilltops, especially from the Loess Hills onward in the western half of the ride.

This will be a ride to get to know new overnight towns and renew acquaintance with old ones. Two fast-growing suburbs, Sergeant Bluff and Waukee, as well as the Iowa County seat, Marengo, (named for the terrain's resemblance to a Napoleonic battlefield) have never hosted RAGBRAI overnight.

Ida Grove (noted for its castle-and-moat motif) was last an overnight town in 1988. It has been 20 years since Audubon (home of Albert the Bull, the world's largest inedible bovine) was an overnight host. Newton (home of Maytag and soon a motor speedway) has not been an overnight host since 1975.

Some other landmarks along the way, in no particular order: The quirky Battle Hill Museum of

Natural History in Battle Creek; the Hoover Presidential Library in West Branch; Old Capitol (atop a bluff you'll climb) in Iowa City; flags of the world displayed in Brooklyn; the mile-long bridge across Saylorville Lake north of Des Moines.

The route occasionally follows noteworthy roadways, including segments of the Western Skies Scenic Byway, old transcontinental U.S. Highway 6 (now mostly

county roads) and the Diamond Trail, which began as a stagecoach route.

Here's a look at the route day by day:

Sunday

The day begins flat across the Missouri River valley from Sergeant Bluff and ends with a flat run along the Maple River into Ida Grove. In between, it's virtually all big hills. Steep cuts through the

HOW WE ORGANIZE

Beth Richardson, 39

RAGBRAI planning board member, Waukee
www.ragbraiwaukee.org



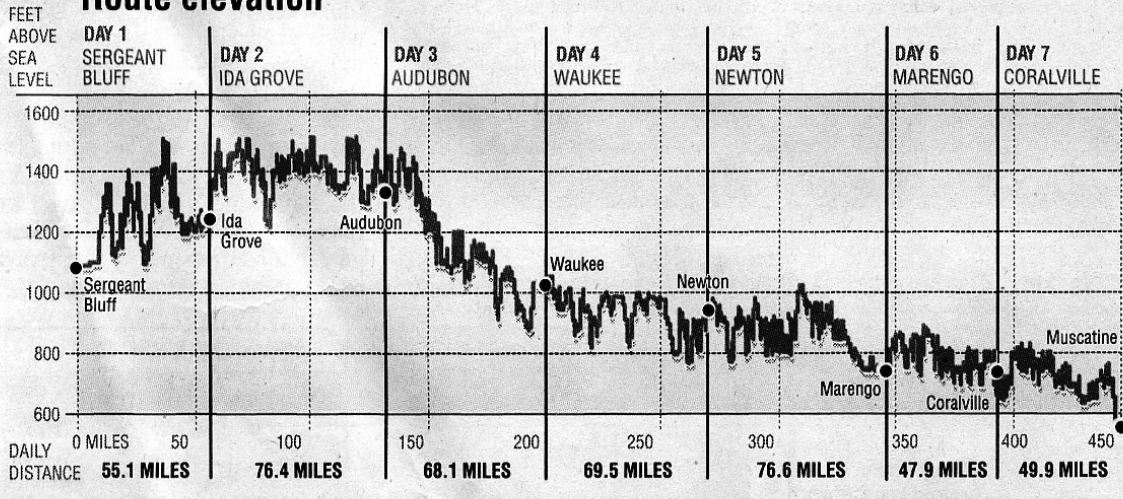
Richardson

"We've been working on RAGBRAI since the second we got the call we were an overnight town. We decided on a Hawaiian theme, 'Wau-Ke-Kee: Ride the Waves,' with a luau, a pig roast and Hawaiian dancing.

"We're so excited. Already we have 20 committees and even more subcommittees. We've been meeting every other Wednesday, and the chairs are doing a great job. So hopefully, we'll have everything covered — camping, entertainment, housing, vendors, hospitality, medical, law enforcement and the beverage garden, which seems to be a favorite, and the rest.

"So far, 80 people have volunteered to help plan, but we'll need 1,000 volunteers to pull off RAGBRAI July 25-26. It will give us a chance to show off Waukee, our friendly town and its people."
(Board member Nancy Shirk also contributed to this article.)

Route elevation



Loess Hills and views of terraced hillsides provide fine scenery.

Monday

The big hills resume, for a 77-mile day. The combination of terrain and mileage provide the most feet of hill climbing of any day. Pass-through towns include Manning, which has done much to celebrate its German heritage. RAGBRAI has never visited the town of nearly 1,500.

Tuesday

Still more big hills. The stretch from Audubon to Guthrie Center is more than 26 miles of almost unbroken hills. The hills finally subside outside of Redfield, and then it's a fairly flat ride through Adel into Waukee. The route here roughly parallels the Raccoon Valley Trail.

Wednesday

The route skirts north of the Des Moines metro area, crosses the mile-long bridge near Polk City and crosses Interstate Highway 35 (the traditional halfway point) near Elkhart, a town RAGBRAI has never passed through. From Mitchellville to Newton, the route is the same as that taken in 2000. This day has the least hill climbing of any during the week.

Thursday

This day includes the optional John Karras Loop for riders who want to experience a century, or 100 miles. The loop heads north out of Lynnville before backtracking east, then drops back south for another pass through Sully. On the regular route, several interesting towns should provide good rest and refreshment, including Montezuma, seat of Poweshiek County, and Brooklyn, the city of flags.

Friday

It's less than 48 miles from Marengo to Coralville, which means riders should arrive in plenty of time to enjoy the activities in Coralville, which riders



CHRISTOPHER GANNON / THE REGISTER

Ray Hollenbeck of San Diego slept outside his campsite in Algona during last summer's RAGBRAI. Riders camp or stay in motels or private residences. Every overnight town offers a campsite.

remember as an eager host city in 2001. Williamsburg is the only sizeable pass-through town this day. The terrain is mostly rolling, with a bit of nearly flat cruising along the old Black Diamond Road.

Saturday

RAGBRAI XXXIV follows the

same route from Coralville to Muscatine taken in 2001. There's a steep climb out of the Iowa River valley and rolling hills into West Branch and West Liberty. From there, it's fairly easy, with a long, gentle descent into Muscatine, perfect for team parades to the Mississippi riverfront.