

The Gainesville Cyclist

April 2008

The bi-monthly newsletter of the Gainesville Cycling Club, Inc.

HAPPENINGS

April 20 (Sun)

Earth Day Picnic

The Spaghetti Sauce Challenge at San Felasco, High Noon. Whip up a batch of your best spaghetti sauce and enter it into competition. Chandler will provide pasta and a bland "comparison" sauce. The club will also have a big batch of salad to balance out the meal.

For rides, you have the obvious option of doing the dirt trails. This ride is suitable for mountain bikes. There are trails for riders of all abilities. The ride meets at the San Felasco Trailhead at Progress Park in Alachua at 9 am.

Road Group Captains are encouraged to schedule rides departing from the Sid Martin Center parking lot in Progress Park.

Entry to the State Park is \$2 per vehicle (regardless of number of wheels or people involved). Also \$2 if you are on foot.

May 3 (Sat)

Standard Ride Start Times Move to 8 am

But watch your email for groups who may switch earlier or later!

May 17 (Sat)

A Ride To Remember

A fully supported Century event with rides on the Gainesville Hawthorne Trail or into Ocala horse territory. Road rides of 50, 75 and 100 miles are supported, with anything from 1 to 32 on the Trail. Registration opens at Boulware Springs at 7 am, ride departs at 8 am. See page 7 for more details.

May 25 (Sun)

Adopt-A-Road Cleanup 4 pm

Meet at 4 pm near the west end of Millhopper Road to get organized for a 4:15 pm sharp deployment. Please don't be late; it's hard to get you supplied and assigned after we have started. We need from 9 to 14 people for an optimal crew. Please RSVP to diann@piercepages.com or call Diann at 378-7063. The club will help pay for dinner after the cleanup.

May 26 (Mon)

Memorial Day Picnic at Hart Springs

Ride the back roads of Gilchrist County to work up an appetite for barbeque and a need to jump in a cool spring. Time your arrival for gate-opening at 9 am if you will be doing a ride from Hart Springs. Food is planned for noon.

Entry into Hart Springs is \$3 per head. If you are arriving by bike, please stop and pay (those doing rides from the park don't have to pay to get back in).

Depending on where you are coming from in Gainesville, it can take up to an hour to drive to the park, which is southwest of Bell. Take SR 24 west from Gainesville (Newberry Road). In Trenton, turn north (right) onto US 129. After around 3 ½ miles, turn west (left) onto CR 344. At CR 232, turn right and after half a mile left to remain on CR 344. The park is on the right before you get to the end of the road.

You must be a club member to participate in the feast. We will sign you up on the spot if you're not a member (\$15 or \$20 for a whole family). Bring deserts and salads to complement the meaty fare, and a lawn chair.



From The Editor

Roger Pierce

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Thanks to the following donors who provided door prizes for the Annual Meeting and Party this year:

Bike Route
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Let me know if I left anyone off the list.

Thanks to our article contributors this month, our regular Gary Kirkland and a special feature from Stephen Perz.

Start working on your entries for the Festival T-shirt design contest. We'll do the formal announcement in the next newsletter.



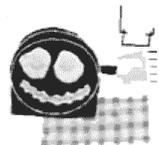
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President's Letter



The Gainesville Cycling Club is many things to many people. In addition to the obvious benefits of the physical exercise, ours has always been a great social organization as the plethora of picnics and such that we have proves. In many cases (including my own) this socialization has led to wedded bliss. It is my privilege to congratulate Rob Wilt and Velvet Yates as March 12th they joined a growing fraternity of GCC cyclists who have tied the matrimonial knot. The wedding was held at San Felasco Hammock Preserve State Park off-road bicycle riding area

(where else?). Perhaps we need a whole new designation of romance@GCC.org (don't try it, it will bounce back). Seriously though I would like to wish the newlyweds all the best as they proceed.

I would like to express my appreciation for the new road markings along Millhopper Road between 43rd St. & Hwy 241. I was a little bit leery when it was first explained to me but after riding that stretch several times in recent months I have grown to appreciate it more and more. For those of you that have not ridden it recently a second white stripe was added approximately three feet to the left of the existing stripe that has always gone along the right hand side of the road. The placement of angled

stripes between the two have in effect setup a "no man's land" to encourage automobile traffic to obey the recent law mandating a three foot distance between cars and cyclists. An ideally sized rumble strip was added to let motorists know when they were getting too close and yet it is not large enough to hamper cyclists. It is my understanding that similar striping may be added to other roads in the area encouraging safe cycling. I hope to see more of them soon.

As always, stay safe and ride often.

Bob Newman



GCCMail News

Roger Pierce, List Manager

Around two thirds of GCC members are signed up for GCCMail. Since most of our rides are announced on GCCMail, it is difficult to be an active club member if you do not get these messages.

I want to apologize again for the one time incident that resulted in a large number of SPAM messages being sent to the list all at once. Our list provider has corrected their software to prevent this in the future.

List Operation and Etiquette

When posting a message on GCCMail, it is important to remember that you are not just talking to a small group of your friends. Imagine yourself standing at a podium in an auditorium filled to capacity with over 400 persons. Then compose your message as if you were delivering it as a short speech or announcement to that group. Make sure that what you have to say is of sufficient import to require each of these persons to deal with the receipt of your message,

either reading or discarding, in any case, taking their time.

Topics that we expect to see on GCCMail include announcements of rides and bicycling related events, cycling related stuff needed or for sale, and limited information about current cycling related topics (there are plenty of other venues for those who are into specific topics to get information). If you are moved to comment on another post, imagine that you are standing up in the 400 person audience and shouting your comment.

Due to the number of subscribers and the avowed purpose of the list (information), GCCMail is not a good venue for carrying on extensive discussions. What these amount to is a group of persons up on the stage in front of that auditorium of 400 persons, most of whom are there to learn information, not listen to a discussion. Discussions also generate significant traffic that has to be dealt with in often crowded in boxes.

We expect all users of GCCMail to exercise proper decorum when

posting to the list. Anything that you say about another person should be something that you would not hesitate to say from that podium in the auditorium, and that you feel that you can defend if sued for libel. In general, you should avoid negative comments about individuals in GCCMail.

Do NOT forward mail from others that was sent to you personally to the list without their express permission. This is particularly true of "discussion" topics.

All posts may be screened before they are sent out. This will not always be possible, so please think twice before hitting Send. If steam is coming out of your ears as your write, put it in the Draft folder and look at it again tomorrow.

Because mail may be screened, there can be a delay between the time you send and the time it is sent to the list. Please take this into account. Rides posted in the evening for the next day will not make it in time for anyone to show up.

For work I regularly travel to Brazil, where I collaborate with other researchers in the southwestern Amazon on the impacts of roads on the environment, people's livelihoods, and so forth. Consequently, I've had the opportunity to watch the city of Rio Branco, in the tiny western Brazilian state of Acre, grow and change. Over the past decade this has included considerable expansion of bicycle facilities, which has drawn my attention more and more to cycling in this city, and the surrounding Amazon countryside.

Many, many people get around in Rio Branco by cycling. Most bikes are the utility type, heavy with one gear, simple hand brakes, and often a rack in the front and/or back. Then I stumbled across a newspaper article for a criterium bike race right in the middle of Rio Branco. This was one of a circuit of such races around cities in the Brazilian Amazon, and the big question was whether the local racers could win. That year (2005), they didn't, more recently (2007) they did indeed, and it was front-page news in Rio Branco.



Bike facilities between car lanes, Rio Branco, 2007

My work requires considerable travel among the towns in the southwestern Amazon, and I was impressed one Sunday morning on a return trip to Rio Branco to find a cycling team on a training ride, complete with motorcycle escorts and pace car. It was a strange combination: racers at speed on high-quality machines, in the deforested roadside Amazon landscape, complete with huge

remnant castanha ("Brazil nut") trees towering above.

Time constraints meant I generally got around in town via taxi, but last year that changed when I took a research leave to spend the fall 2007



Training ride and pace car, Inter-Oceanic Highway, near Rio Branco, 2006

semester in Rio Branco. A priority the first week down was to find a decent road bike. After canvassing local bike shops and pestering local cyclists, it became clear that to get a road bike in Rio Branco you leave and bring one back. Then I stumbled across a mountain bike with an 18-gear getup and haggled with the store owner a deal with a water bottle, bike lock and bar ends thrown in. No helmet, though; I plan to change that on future trips down.

Ignoring grim advice from my colleagues, friends, neighbors, and others - but not my family, who were supportive - I set out one fateful morning from our house for the state university, a ride of about 8 km through rolling hills and urban buildup. Based on what a large number of non-cyclists had told me, this would surely be suicidal. "Go thru the neighborhoods, the main route road is too busy / narrow / hilly / dangerous..." I couldn't reconcile these warnings with the facts already before me, however: these warnings apply as much or more to a typical US city. Compared to Rio Branco, motorists in the US have larger vehicles on average, roads are much more crowded, and I've been a commuter cyclist in Austin, TX and now Gainesville for 15+ years, and I've

yet to have a serious collision or injury. That, and Rio Branco has more bicyclists than Gainesville. It couldn't be worse than in the US! (Could it?)

So I departed. The new bike had pretty sloppy shifting, but it was geared low, a plus for all the climbs, and the brakes worked great. My route: down Rua Isaura Parente, this busy, narrow, potholed, hilly road (think "death wish"), then out on Avenida Ceara, a much wider road with bike lanes but faster traffic and more trucks, and then on to the federal highway, BR-364, through the industrial district, a yet higher speed road without bike lanes and lots of trucks and buses. Based on what I'd been told I figured I had even odds of surviving; but based on long-time experience riding in US cities I figured I had a 90% chance of living to tell the tale. In my favor was the hour: 2 PM, not very busy. The hills weren't bad - in fact, they actually felt good.

And then the epiphany happened. To my pleasant surprise, the motorists understood immediately and responded correctly - every time - to hand signals, even when it meant they had to yield, even at roundabouts. The euphoria was a dizzying high when this realization came.



Cyclist training (motorcycle escort), Inter-Oceanic Highway, near Rio Branco, 2006

Dripping with profuse sweat, I made it from the house to the university in less than 20 minutes. My head and feet both felt like they were on fire.

Everybody there looked at me like I was an extraterrestrial just emerged from the mother ship. But IT CAN BE DONE, BY GOD. Life was good.

My colleagues were especially impressed. The gringo rode a bike... all the way out here! Then I discovered one of the new faculty also rides his bike, and the story exchange was on. One of his senior colleagues used to race back in São Paulo, and was quite the sprinter, even winning some races. Their impressions of me seemed to inch upward several notches, and mine of them. Then I was late to a meeting one day because I felt I had to change out of my biking spandex. The director of one of the graduate programs told me afterwards that it was no problem to wear spandex to an informal meeting. Life was really good.



Bike facilities between car lanes, Rio Branco, 2007

The days went by. Even in heavy traffic the motorists, while pushy as in any city, followed the law as regards the right-of-way for bikes, and the culture on the street, while intense, was basically one of tolerance without hostility, which was refreshing. Mind you, accidents do happen in Rio Branco as in any other city of 250,000+, and I avoided rush hour and riding at night. But the balance in the traffic in Rio Branco recognizes that there are many cyclists out there, though the number of cars is growing.

Then I tried some training / fitness rides on the weekends. By continuing past the university, one leaves town in the direction of the airport, a road I knew - with bike lanes, or at least shoulders - and with rolling terrain and a series of big hills. Ignoring warnings about banditry on the open road, I set out on a glorious Sunday morning. The heat was not unlike here in Florida, though as we moved into November,

the beginning of the Amazon's rainy season, one had to be wary of cloudbursts and heavy downpours. The first time out was great, and the second, and the third, and the tenth. Far from encountering bandits, I instead met plenty of people riding bikes to church or to the weekend family barbecue, and the occasional racer. One Sunday the local cycling team held an individual time trial on the same route: over the hills and out to the airport. I was invited to participate but passed, already tired and fearing utter embarrassment.

Near the end of my research leave, it came time to figure out what to do with the bike. I had a couple offers from students, and had pondered the possible option of giving it to a neighbor. By then I had come to admire the folks who rode bikes for utility purposes - and out of necessity - through the difficult hilly urban landscape of Rio Branco, often with family on board and heavy loads of groceries and other purchases as well.

My last weekend in Rio Branco I went out on one last ride toward the airport. By then I was accustomed to easily passing up folks on their one-speed utility bikes on the climbs. I noticed a guy riding his utility bike on the bike trail, which parallels the highway part of the way out to the airport, as he seemed to be moving along quite well, at least on a downhill. On the first of three big climbs, I left him behind and thought no more of it. But then he caught me back on the following descent. I again opened a gap on the second climb, and sure enough, he caught me again on the second descent. The third climb is by far the hardest; it's the longest, the steepest, and the third. By then I'd realized this guy was trying to show me and my multi-gear bike what he could do. And then it happened: on the third climb, I opened a gap, but then hit the wall, and the guy on his utility bike closed the gap and overtook me! I had to laugh and cheered him on, even as he opened a gap of his own in front of me... and reached the summit first!

I seriously considered giving him my bike right then and there, but by then I'd already struck a deal with someone else. Such is life. But it brought another epiphany, this time concerning

the lessons to be learned about fitness from riding regularly on heavy bikes with families and grocery loads up a series of hills in the hot and rainy Amazon. Not bad fitness training, I'd say!



First (?) touring cyclist, Inter-Oceanic Highway, Madre de Dios, Peru, headed toward Cusco, 2007

I continue to pester my colleagues about the notion of a bike race or tour from the lowlands of the southwestern Amazon up to Cusco in the Andean highlands. With the paving of the Inter-Oceanic Highway through this region, economic integration is coming, and needed are more forms of international exchanges between Brazil, Peru, and Bolivia, which all meet in this region. What better way to appreciate other cultures than by riding a bike across frontiers and climbing up a few thousand feet from lowland rain forests to highland mountain valleys! The highway is projected to be paved by 2009, perhaps 2010. Anyone up for a different type of ride?



Bike facilities between car lanes, Rio Branco, 2007

Stephen Perz, GCC Member since 1998, LAB LCI #864, 374-8867, sperz@gator.net

Cycling Sold Merkner on Gainesville

Jim Merkner is a rider who can say that it was cycling that brought him to Gainesville.

In the early 1990s he was living in Northern Indiana, not far from his hometown of Chicago. He was a competitive cyclist itching to get back out on the road after another hard winter where lifting weights in his basement was about his only form of exercise. A fellow official in the United States Cycling Federation gave him a tip to check out a city in North Florida that he admits he'd never heard of. He received a pleasant surprise.

"There were so many people involved, and I was so accepted," Merkner says.

So for a couple of winters he made a cycling pilgrimage to Gainesville, rode with racers from the University of Florida and hit the road with the A riders. In 1993 he and his wife and fellow cyclist, Mary Lou, made the move to Gainesville, a city that was active, had great cultural offerings, and yes, nice winter weather.

Riding and riding fast is in his genes. His father, Edward Merkner, was the national amateur champion in 1925 and 1926. He says his father neither encouraged nor discouraged him from cycling.

"His theory was to let people develop their own passions," Merkner says.

Instead it was his high school machine shop teacher, Tom Baacke, who planted the cycling racing seeds and helped nurture them. Merkner says he found he was drawn in by the excitement. It was a different kind of bike than today, fixed gears, no coasting, a glove on the front wheel and pedaling backwards were the braking system. He says in the early 1950s when the derailleur first became legal for racing, it was a major breakthrough.

"It was more fun and more practical," he says.

And through high school, competitive cycling was part of his life.

Then he packed up and went to Purdue, and cycling did not make the move to college. In fact, his next two-wheel transition was to motorcycles, where he earned his own national title. In 1968 he was the national champion in the motocross 250 class, and he owned a Honda motorcycle dealership.

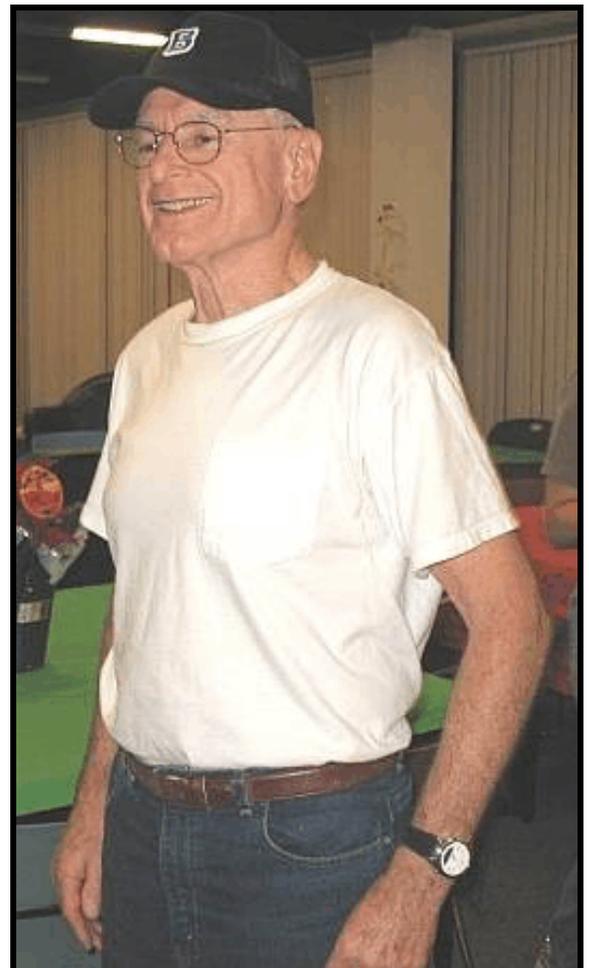
He eventually made it back to the bike, however, jumping into masters competition. And whether it was in competition or for recreation, riding with other fast riders is what he enjoyed most. But that changed in one ride four years ago. He was riding a pace line in the 24-26 mph range near LaCrosse when a motorist deliberately drove into the group. He missed the car but went down into the pile-up.

Now, at 72, he still will occasional ride the roads or paved trails, but most of his riding is on the off-road trails at San Felasco Hammock.

"It's a lot more complicated, and requires a lot of balance and strength," Merkner says.

For enjoyment he has hooked up with several cross-state rides, and he and Mary Lou have taken two-wheeled vacations, including a tour of Prince Edward Island and the Finger Lakes of New York. And since his first arrival in Gainesville, he's been an active member of GCC.

"It's very helpful and very friendly," he says of the club.



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The Gainesville Cyclist is published bi-monthly with cover dates of even-numbered months. All submissions are welcome. Classified ads will be run free-of-charge for club members; email or mail to the editor. Ads are \$20 for a standard size ad, \$40 for a quarter page ad, and \$80 for a half page ad. A one year (six issue) subscription for standard size ads is \$100.

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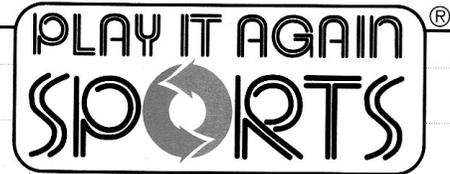


APRIL 2008 ISSUE Mailing label with expiration date identifies current member.

2008 Gainesville Cycling Festival - 18-19 Oct - Santa Fe Century - Horse Farm Hundred

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