

RAGBRAI/On a 500-mile journey

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Campers set up in and around S.T. Morrison Park, where vendors, volunteers, and entertainers greeted them — including Bush, which cemented its rock-band status in the 1990s and took the main stage at 8:30 p.m.

Some cyclists told The Gazette the long day bookending the long week might have them heading to sleep early — before taking off Saturday morning for a ride through Kinnick Stadium and on to West Liberty, eventually dipping their tires in the Mississippi in Davenport to wrap one of the longer RAGBRAIs at 500 miles.

'HEAT IS A FOOTNOTE'

The excessive heat warning in Johnson County pushed temperatures in Coralville to 99 degrees — amplified by heat index, or “feels like” temperatures, up to 109, thanks to the humidity.

The earliest of early-rising riders, in an effort to beat the heat, made it to Coralville around 4 a.m. But most arrived late morning and into the afternoon.

The city, tallying six times as an overnight host, began planning for thousands of RAGBRAI riders and support crew members in January — recruiting around 800 volunteers, some of whom started work around 6 a.m., with first luggage trucks arriving around 8 a.m.

Shelly Maharry, president and CEO of the Community Foundation of Johnson County, opted to volunteer this year, having completed three RAGBRAIs previously.

She and her staff spent Friday manning the information booth.

“RAGBRAI is one of the most wonderful weeks,” Maharry said.

Abby Noelck and Jenn Coleman were happy to cover the shuttle information booth, despite the heat.

“It’s great to be part of such a big event and helping Coralville shine,” said Noelck, who has lived in Coralville for a decade and was volunteering for the first time.

Given its expanding history as an overnight host, Coleman said RAGBRAI is growing into a Coralville tradition.

“The heat is a footnote in a great day,” Coleman said.

CHALK ART WITH A PUN

Dean Wicklund, of Cedar Rapids now living in Coralville, was finishing up a cycling-themed chalk drawing late Friday morning that he’d started Thursday and covered with a plastic tarp — on the chance it rained.

The blue bicycle under a quote bubble saying “I’m Two Tired” would have invited exhausted cyclists to lay down for a photo — were it not for the scalding pavement.

Wicklund said he first chalked the bicycle during RAGBRAI 2018 on the Pentacrest.

“I’m trying to do things people can participate in,” Wicklund said.

FROM NORWAY TO IOWA

When Linda Ripel and Alexander Hansen made the journey from Norway to Iowa for last year’s RAGBRAI, they said it was going to be a one-and-done deal. But, when the two learned this year marked the 50th anniversary, they decided to make their trip across the world a two-and-done deal.

Decked out in matching shirts with Norway’s flag, as well as a flag attached to their shared bike, Ripel and Hansen said many participants had approached them to chat about their Norwegian heritage or other personal connections to the country.

“It takes a little extra time, but it’s all in good spirits,” Ripel said.

This year, the two brought a few items to give out to fellow racers and people in the host towns. With Norwegian spirits and coasters for the adults, and stickers with the Norwegian flag on the state of Iowa for kids, Ripel and Hansen



Bicycle riders roll into Chelsea, their first stop of the day, during day six of RAGBRAI on Friday. Temperatures reaching over 100 degrees made the 80-mile journey from Tama-Toledo to Coralville a challenge for all riders. (Geoff Stellfox/The Gazette)



David Wheat of Colorado cools off Friday in the splash pad at the Coralville community pool in S.T. Morrison Park in Coralville. This is his second year riding RAGBRAI. (Savannah Blake/The Gazette)



RAGBRAI participant Ellen Hedrick of Illinois sets up her tent for the evening Friday at S.T. Morrison Park in Coralville. This is Hedrick’s third year participating in the cross-state bike ride. (Savannah Blake/The Gazette)



A RAGBRAI participant cools off in the public pool Friday at S.T. Morrison Park in Coralville. (Savannah Blake/The Gazette)

wanted to provide an opportunity to share a bit of their culture with others.

“People are really happy, especially when they ask to take a picture of us,” Ripel said. “A lot of people either have a friend who is Norwegian or have studied with them, so when they get that they’re excited.”

SUPPORT FROM THE SIDELINES

When Kim Maas arrived in Marengo, it was not with her bike and helmet. Instead, Maas had her two kids with her, and signs reading “Just keep biking!! You got this!” and “We love you Papa and Joyce!!”

Despite not riding in RAGBRAI themselves, the Williamsburg family came out to cheer on Maas’ dad and his wife as they crossed the state for the first time with the ride.

Maas and her kids set up outside the Williamsburg Lions Club tent, where her husband was working and near the cyclists’ entry point

from Belle Plaine — making it the ideal spot for finding their family.

“They’re having a great time,” Maas said.

A NEW FAMILY TRADITION?

Growing up, Jessica De-brower remembers hosting a lemonade stand in Marengo for RAGBRAI riders to stop at for the classic roadside quaff. This year, she helped her kids, Laney and Jessica, make their own lemonade memories.

“This is the first year my kids have ever experienced it,” she said.

The lemonade stand was accepting freewill donations, but both Laney and Jessica said the best part was watching the thousands of bikers pass through their hometown. Laney even said he’d consider riding when he gets older.

'DON'T FEEL GOOD RIGHT NOW'

Although Joshua Haines, 44, of Kansas City, said he has no plans to end his first-ever RAGBRAI attempt early, the

extreme heat Thursday and Friday has him questioning whether he’ll do this again.

“This is straight up dangerous,” he said. “A lot of people aren’t finishing. It’s supposed to be a fun family event, a recreational event. But people are dropping like flies.”

Haines suggested the organizers come up with better contingency plans in the case of extreme weather — and shared that several people from his charter had left early and gone home.

“All the stages are way too difficult,” Haines said. “I used to race. And these are even hard for me.”

He also suggested more shade and cooling stations at the overnight camp sites, before crawling under one of his group’s support vehicles to lay down out of the sun.

“I took a lot of precautions today,” he said, noting he took off in the early morning hours to save himself some of the late-morning heat. “But I don’t feel good right now.”

'I STILL LIKE WARM SHOWERS'

Lois Scholbrock, 64, of Des Moines, shortened her ride a bit Friday — starting in Marengo. Instead of riding the whole week, Scholbrock jumped in Tuesday, just in time for a ride through Jack Trice Stadium in Ames.

“I’m an Iowa State grad, so I had to wear my Iowa State jersey that day,” she said. “We rode through the concourse, lined with cheerleaders and fans and everybody cheering me on. And then I got to ride across the new bridge.”

“That was probably the highlight.”

Having made it to Coralville despite the heat, Scholbrock was ending her RAGBRAI there.

“I’m ready for some nice cold — well, I still like warm showers — but air conditioning and to sleep in my own bed,” she said.

CAPTURING THE MOMENT

Typically, Riley Schreder focuses her social media posts on DIY projects and the like. But, as a RAGBRAI first-timer, she thought it would be fun to use her TikTok reach to share the experience.

Schreder’s videos follow her from breakfast with host families to mishaps ending in a ditch.

“It’s kind of interesting, because I almost didn’t post those,” Schreder said. “My friend was like, ‘you should do a day in the life of RAGBRAI every day along the whole week.’ I didn’t think it would really take off, especially on TikTok because it had the Instagram watermarks on it, but it has been fun.”

Schreder said different vendors have been commenting on her videos, giving recommendations and telling her where they’ll be. Some followers unfamiliar with RAGBRAI have been inquiring too.

“It has been fun to share that with people across the country,” Schreder said.