

The Great Bike Ride Across Iowa

A fourth grade class "travels" over 400 miles on a stationary bike and picks up facts and figures about the Hawkeye State on the way

BY DIANE McCARTY

Last year, my fourth grade class and I kicked off an Iowa sesquicentennial celebration that turned out to be a remarkable experience. We decided we'd bike across the state* to "discover" it for this momentous milestone in Iowa's history. Throughout the project, the

integration of math, science, language arts, health, geography and social studies took place naturally.

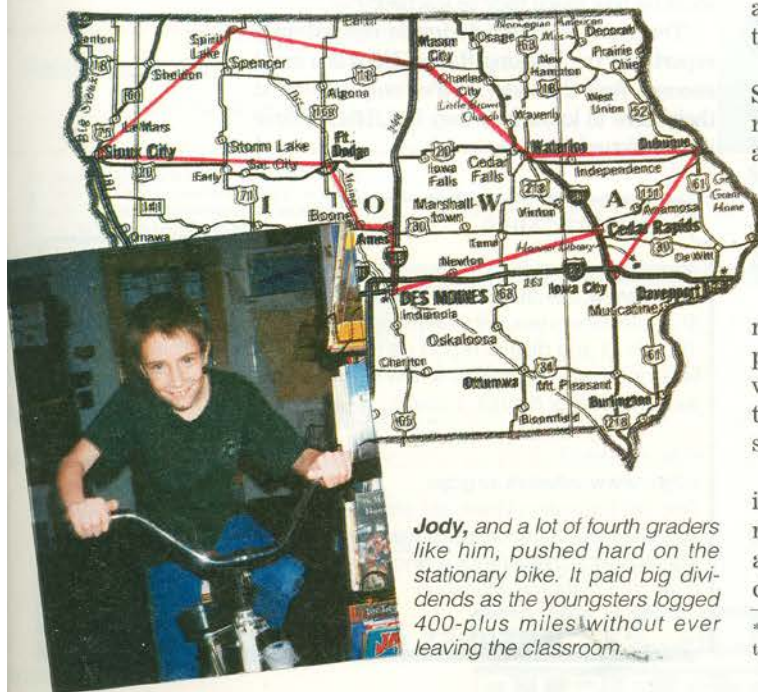
But first, we needed a bike! It would have to be a "pretend" bike trip, of course, so we were on the hunt for a stationary bike with a functioning odometer. We posted a notice for one at a parent/teacher conference and almost immediately we had a family volunteer that there was such a creature in their basement and that they'd be willing to lend it to us for the bike trip.

Starting point. Next, we needed to decide our route. I asked the class, "Do you want to start at the east or west border of our state?" The response was, "Won't we start where we live? In Cedar Falls?" I thought that was a pretty practical idea (even though I hadn't come up with it first), so that's where we began.

The students went home that night with maps of Iowa and instructions to list five places they wanted to visit in the state. They were asked to find the places on the map and tell us why they wanted to go there. Parents' suggestions were welcome as well.

The next day, following a great brainstorming session, we selected 20 cities. We took our maps home again and each child figured out an organized, logical route that would put each city into our itinerary. In class the following

* This activity was adapted from an idea by Diane McAnally, a teacher at Logan Intermediate School in Waterloo, Iowa.



Jody, and a lot of fourth graders like him, pushed hard on the stationary bike. It paid big dividends as the youngsters logged 400-plus miles without ever leaving the classroom.

day, we talked through a route that was acceptable to everyone and then highlighted it in pencil on our maps.

How far? Parents became involved again as they helped their children determine the mileage on our route. Once all the estimated distances were plotted on a transparency, the word *range* was introduced, as in the total mileage *ranged* between 750 and 1050 miles.

Inevitably, there was a class discussion about why the families had come up with different totals. The distance projections were generally accepted by the class, though, except for a small group of students who really thought we should have a more accurate total mileage.

This group met at recess, at lunch time and during writers' workshop. At the end of day two, they decided that the actual mileage was 873 miles. They had used the mileage chart of their Iowa map to record the distance from city to city and had then used calculators to find the total mileage. Their work was prominently displayed in our room for check-off purposes as we "tooled" around the state.

We were off and rolling, but a few questions remained. How long does each child bike? Will this be a fair distribution of time on the bike? The students decided that about a mile would make the biking worthwhile each time they got on the bike. This, by the way, led to a discussion of exercise and its value to cardiovascular health.

Since it doesn't take a 10-year-old very long to bike a mile (about four or five minutes if the child is really pushing it), we were able to go from one student to the next in a relatively short time. As for distributing time on the bike, we kept a laminated sheet with everyone's name, numbered differently each week.

One more question arose at this time: When would we find time to bike? It was a question easily answered. When we had individual work time and during literature time seemed to work best. Some days we couldn't fit bike riding into our schedule; on other

Diane McCarty teaches fourth grade at Malcolm Price Laboratory School, University of Northern Iowa, Cedar Falls, IA.

days, we really pushed hard.

When we arrived at our first site, Backbone State Park (outside the town of Strawberry Point), the students wanted to know what they were going to do there. Here's where our research and knowledge from students who had visited the park paid off. These children said that if we were there, we'd probably have a picnic, go fishing, climb the trails, look at the rocks and read under a shade tree.

I said, "We can do all of that without leaving the classroom. All we have to do is be a little creative." Ideas started flying and here are the results:

- **Picnic.** We ate our lunch on the classroom floor in an area that was covered by a picnic tablecloth.
- **Fishing.** We fished for multiplication facts with magnets in a "pool" set up in a corner of the room.
- **Rock exploration.** We used magnifying glasses to look at rocks (including geodes) in another part of the room.
- **Hiking.** We designed a route, with chairs strategically placed beside desks, so that we could hike in our room.
- **Reading.** I read to the class out of the current literature book as the students rested under their shade trees (their desks).

Activities like the above took place at each site. They slowed our progress on the biking somewhat, but they enhanced our learning to such great depths that it would have been a mistake to skip them.

At Dyersville, we couldn't pass up the opportunity to play an indoor nerf ball game at our version of "The Field of Dreams" (popcorn included). The game, by the way, was taped



First stop: a class picnic at Backbone State Park outside the town of Strawberry Point.

Professional Groups

Thinking of taking a classroom bike ride across your state? Remember, there are many professional organizations, like the National Arbor Society and the Soybean Association, that can provide you with literature and videotapes.

How do you find them? The *Encyclopedia of Associations*, published by Gale Research, Inc. (ISBN 0-8103-8317-9) lists nearly 22,000 associations, with addresses, publications and descriptions of services.

The three-volume *Encyclopedia* can be found in most local libraries.

Continued on page 74

Iowa bike ride continued from page 73



One highlight of the Great Bike Ride was a field trip to the "Field of Dreams," where the baseball sequences in the movie were actually filmed. The class was invited by members of the local Chamber of Commerce, who wanted the youngsters to experience the "real thing."

and shown on TV. At Dubuque, we viewed the city by riding the cable car to the top. We learned how to create a human cable car (a child sat in a chair pushed by another child), which initiated our study of simple machines. We eventually created our own simple machines for racing in science class.

(These were much faster than our human cable cars.)

On the Mississippi River in Bettendorf, we glided lazily on a river cruise boat as we designed a cake decorated with the outline of Iowa. Actually, we just pretended to be on a cruise boat. The cake was real, though; we shared it with our friends across the hall after we all sang "Happy Birthday" to Iowa.

Bread and ciookies. On to Cedar Rapids and the creation of cookies rolled in oatmeal from the Quaker Oats plant. To highlight our visit to Amana Colonies, an Amish community, a parent baked some bread as it's made by the famed Amana Colonies Bakery. Some students also brought in woolen clothing items

purchased in the Colonies so that classmates could see and feel this fine work. Students kept a record of the happenings at each site we visited. They recorded in their journals such items as distance, city name, landmarks, events and the excitement they felt.

We did *not* finish our bike ride. We ran out of time, even though we had rounded up a second bike after finding out what was practical for us to bike during the first month. Combining these totals provided training in mental math. Neither odometer could be reset and so we had to add on to existing miles – but the students knew exactly where we were at each mile of the route. On the last day of school, we found that we had "traveled" 410 miles.

Outside help. Through the librarian, we were connected with the Iowa chapter of the National Arbor Society which gave us a film-strip and cassette tape about Iowa's trees. Actual tree seedlings we could plant were included in the kit.

The Soybean Association helped acquaint the fourth graders with soybeans (one of our major crops) and soybean products by providing a video and soybean packets. This naturally led to discussions of corn, pork, beef and dairy products. A local grocer came to talk about produce and meat that are grown and raised in our state.

During the last week of school, we again contacted the Dyersville Chamber of Commerce. They arranged a field trip for us to their community. We started off at "The Field of Dreams," then on to a tour of a farm toy museum and a toy factory. They were happy to do this for us – especially after they saw our indoor, nerf-ball version of "The Field of Dreams" on a local TV station. They wanted us to enjoy the real thing.

The "Great Bike Ride Across Iowa" was a great learning experience. It was definitely a cross-curricular activity that highlighted integrated learning activities. It included parents, local businesses, state organizations and other communities. As one student commented in her journal, "The Great Bike Ride helped me discover a lot about my state + it was fun!" ↓

HISTORY & GEOGRAPHY

E2QUEST

<http://www.oxbow.anoka.k12.mn.us/e2quest/e2quest.html>

Follow the bicycle trip of first and second graders "traveling" in their classroom from California to Florida. Look at student journals and comments from the communities they traveled through using email and the Internet.

YAHOO! MAPS

<http://maps.yahoo.com/yahoo>

Generate maps for your bicycle trek in your state at this site. Point-to-point driving directions with detailed maps between any U.S. cities within 300 miles of each other.

INTERNET CONNECTIONS