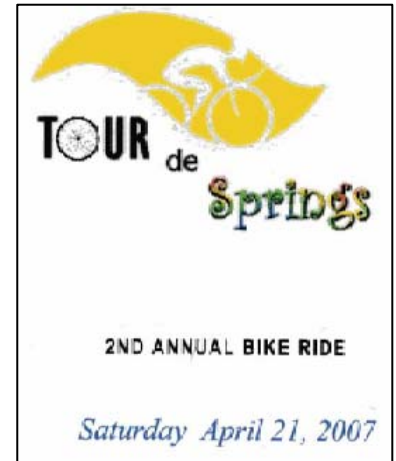


Three Hilly Rides by Ed Stokes

Rosanna and I like to get out of town occasionally. I mean, there's nothing wrong with riding in Waxhaw and Harrisburg, but North Carolina is a big state, with a lot of great places to cycle. This year, we managed to do a few out-of-town rides in the foothills, all of them within 100 miles of Charlotte. We approached all three with some trepidation, due to the expectation of, ahem, large hills, and so we bravely took one of the shorter mileage options each time.

The **Tour de Springs** on April 21 was the first, and easiest, of the three. We rode the 30 mile option on the tandem. The ride started at Gardner-Webb University football center in Boiling Springs, with plenty of room for parking and registration for the 100 or so riders. There is a fairly steep climb a few miles in, after which the route winds through the rolling terrain west of Shelby on nice country roads. It's great to pass through and enjoy the small towns, you know, the ones your pre-biker self never knew about, because they are off the main highways. Such were the old villages of Mooresboro and Lattimore, snapshots in time. The ride held an added bonus for us, because it passed by Rosanna's ancestral family graveyard at an old country church, where we stopped for a while to ponder the meaning of it all. The approach back to GWU had a little traffic, passing down the main streets of Boiling Springs before turning back into the GWU campus. This ride is sponsored every year in the spring (how could it be otherwise?) by the town of Boiling Springs; see <http://www.tourdesprings.com>.



I am relatively new to road biking, with just a couple of years, but I have been a bluegrass music fan for decades. The first weekend of June is always the time of the Mount Airy Fiddler's Convention, where the local fiddlers all congregate for the weekend with their bands. It's also the weekend of the annual "**3 Mountain Madness**" ride in nearby Pilot Mountain. So this year I decided to combine the two. Rosanna was not able to get away in time for tandeming, so I packed my solo bike and camping

gear and met some old friends in Mount Airy. After a late night of music, I awoke (ugggh) to my cell phone alarm in my tent at the fiddler's convention, and drove over to Pilot Mountain. This year's "3 Mountain Madness" was a large ride, with 657 riders from 14 states, and parking was tight; mental note: arrive 30 minutes early next year. There were multiple options, and the really serious riders chose a 95 mile route that included the peaks of Pilot Mountain, Hanging Rock, and Sauratown Mountain. I chose the 42 mile route, the full course with none of the actual mountain climbs. It was adequately hilly for me, with fabulous views of all three mountains, and a few really nice climbs and descents. This ride is held every year for local charities; see <http://www.3mountainmadness.com> for more info.



Finally, the first weekend of August brought **Bikestock** in Mount Airy, the ultimate event for us bike and music enthusiasts, with rides in the morning, and live music in the afternoon. This year's route started downtown at the amphitheater where the music was held later on. I'm guessing there were about 150 riders with just enough parking. We chose the 35 mile option on the tandem, and it proved to be the most challenging of the three rides. The route traveled through the downtown streets with full police escort, followed a riverside greenway for a few miles, then out of town on the streets, again with full police escort, and finally up through the hills toward Virginia. There was one absolutely brutal hill, the worst of the three rides, a few miles out of town, after which the route crossed under the steep I-77 grade around the state line, passing what appeared

to be a runaway truck graveyard. After one more significant climb, the remainder of the ride was surprisingly pleasant, with mostly rolling hills, and spectacular views of the Blue Ridge Mountains, before a dramatic descent back into Mount Airy. The concert Saturday afternoon featured local (Charlotte) bluegrass band Candlewyck, and singer-songwriter Darrell Scott. Bikestock is held every year as a benefit for local charities; see <http://www.bikestockfest.com> for more info.

FYI especially for the non-North Carolinians among us, Mount Airy and Pilot Mountain are thought to be the inspiration for the TV towns of Mayberry and Mount Pilot in the old Andy Griffith show. Mount Airy especially is a living shrine to Andy Griffith, being his hometown, with many things named after the TV show (or maybe it's the other way around?), like Floyd's Barber Shop, Snappy Lunch, Aunt Bea's Bar-B-Q, etc. Anyway, and despite the name, we found that "Goober's 52" is a nice little bistro with outdoor seating to unwind after the rides, located where else but on Highway 52, the Andy Griffith Parkway, a few miles north of Mount Airy.

Which ride was the best of the three? It's hard to say. I think Rosanna might vote for the Tour de Springs. As for myself, I might have to do them all again next year before I can decide for sure. Maybe I'll actually climb a mountain...

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