

Beating the heat on family bike trip



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"An excessive heat warning means you should stay indoors if at all possible. If you do need to go outside, wear light-colored clothing, drink plenty of fluids, and avoid any strenuous activity."

Temperatures above 100 degrees for three days in a row are nothing to fool with. Our main mission for the trip was to avoid heat exhaustion. Our strategy was three-pronged: ride early, never pass up water, and find shade — or better yet, air conditioning — whenever possible.

Our route this year would take us to Noah's Ark water park in Wisconsin Dells. We had never been there, but it seemed like a worthy destination given the soaring mercury. Of course, we could not ride on I-94. That would be only 137 miles. Rather, we chose a route that doubled our distance but followed off-road bike paths for over half our route.

I wasn't too worried about David. At 16, he was already a veteran of a 175-mile bike ride to Duluth when he was 11, and another 236-mile ride to Lambeau Field when he was 12. Twelve-year-old Simon, on the other hand, had never ridden more than 35 miles in one day. So I wasn't quite sure what to expect with him.

I was assuming his sense of adventure would kick in, but we were prepared to go slow or cut the trip short if needed.

I'm proud to say we were up by 4:45 and on the road by 5:30 a.m. every day of the trip. Early mornings are beautiful, even on oppressively hot days.

We found that riding on bike trails not only avoids traffic, events out the hills, and shelters the wind a bit, but it often features shady trees.

After eating breakfast at the McDonald's on Craig Road that first morning, we filled our six water bottles with ice and hopped back on the trail to Durand.

We were in Durand by 10:45! I had called the city pool earlier in the week to find out what time they closed, thinking that may be our first day's destination. After all, at 46 miles, it was already Simon's biggest riding day ever.

I never thought to ask them what time the pool OPENED. Unfortunately, it was not until noon. So instead of swimming, we sat in yet another McDonald's, cooling down our body cores while eating lunch and drinking some frozen beverages.

The bike trail ended there, so we had to ride from Durand to Nelson on Highway 25. When we reached Maxville, the one town in that 18-mile stretch, we

stopped and knocked on the door of a house asking to fill up our water bottles.

Normally you would have no trouble riding from Durand to Nelson on one water bottle, but this was not a normal day. Riding on the highway meant we lost our shade cover, and the black-top made it even hotter.

I also wanted full bottles whenever possible, just in case we got a flat and had to spend a half hour fixing it. In this heat, you need to drink constantly, even if you're not exerting.

Our new water was enough to get us to the Nelson Cheese Factory, where we were obligated by our strategy to once again sit in air conditioning and eat ice cream cones. (For medicinal purposes, of course.)

We carried our tents and sleeping bags with us, but we did something I had never done before on a bike trip — we slept in air conditioning every night. The second word of "heat exhaustion" came to mind when I imagined trying to fall asleep at 9:30 when it was still over 90 degrees.

It was a different kind of bike trip, eating and sleeping indoors instead of camping, but it was still a blast. The coolest part of

the trip, literally, were the amazing tunnels on the Sparta-Elroy trail.

We could feel the 55-degree air oozing out onto the trail from a quarter mile away. We probably spent an hour in that first tunnel ... it was even better than McDonald's.

Our strategy worked like a charm, allowing us to pedal 70, 80, 70, and 40 miles. We rode 256 miles without a single case of heat stroke: Mission accomplished!

We did have a broken spoke, however, in Elroy. We had already decided to get a hotel, so I figured we'd just end the trip there and have Beth pick us up at the hotel the next morning instead of meeting us at Noah's Ark 40 miles away.

Simon would hear nothing of it. He insisted that David could stay in Elroy while Simon and I rode on to the Dells Saturday morning. He wanted to FINISH THE TRIP. I guess that sense of adventure kicked in. Final score: Arnebergs 3, Heat 0.

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