

Tow rope helps Scout finish bike trip



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We enjoyed great weather last weekend for our annual Boy Scout bike trip. We rode north this year, from our home base at Chippewa Valley Bible Church to Brunet Island State Park.

Troop bike trips are simple: ride there on Saturday, spend the night, and ride back on Sunday. Our camping gear is brought up in the troop trailer, so we can travel light on the bikes.

When biking with Scouts, we stick to off-road bike paths. Fortunately, the Old Abe Trail goes all the way from Chippewa Falls to Brunet Island. It may be a bit bumpy in spots (to be fixed in September), but it's paved and out of the traffic.

Riding 52 miles over two days seems like a lot for a newbie, but in our 10 years of troop bike trips, we've never had a single Scout ride in the "sag wagon," the pickup truck hauling the trailer. Boys can ride farther than they think.

During our lunch break Saturday at the Jim Falls Cenex, the boys all marveled at Nathan LeMay's new bike. "New," of course, was relative, as the latest license sticker on the frame was from 1986. But he got it from a neighbor for only one dollar.

It may have been old, but it had skinny tires and was lighter than the mountain bikes some of the boys were riding. Those

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You can see photos of the Boy Scout bike trip at Troop72.com.

qualities, along with Nathan's inner drive, allowed him to stay at the front of the pack the whole day, even though this was his first Scout bike trip.

When we reached the 17-mile mark, those of us in the lead group observed a new all-time record for Nathan, the most miles he had ever ridden in one day. We celebrated with ice cream at the Main Scoop in Cornell, just off the bike trail.

At Brunet Island State Park, the ranger let us camp in a picnic area in exchange for us performing service projects. On Saturday, the Scouts filled several tarps with fallen sticks that would interfere with lawn-mowing. Sunday morning was beach cleanup — there are worse jobs than throwing the bigger rocks on the beach back out into the lake.

At the campfire Saturday night, Randy Cassellius led the troop in a solemn flag retirement ceremony for old and tattered U.S. flags.

Last time we were there, we invited all the other campers to witness this, but this year we punted on the invitations due to an ill-timed rain shower.

At the close of the campfire, we went around the circle to let each Scout and dad share a "rose" (something he liked that day), a "thorn" (something he didn't like) and a "bud" (something he's looking forward to). Nathan's "bud" was hoping that his old and brittle tires on his dollar-bike wouldn't explode on the ride back.

On the ride home Sunday, not one but TWO Scouts needed to ride in the truck. One had a good excuse, as he was recovering from a bike accident a few weeks earlier. The other one was just plain tuckered out. Oh well, I guess there's a first time for everything.

I was a little disappointed about breaking our no-sag-wagon streak, when something happened to renew my spirit.

We normally get spread out on the trail, but when we approach Chippewa Falls, we all ride together to cross the streets more safely.

We were held up for a while because word had it that Nathan's chain had come off. When he finally caught up to us, we realized it wasn't just his chain; he had lost his ENTIRE DERAILEUR! The chain hanging limply around the frame meant that his pedals were now useless.

I got out my cell phone to call Pablo in the sag wagon when Nathan stopped me. He was very resolute — he had ridden 48 miles, and wanted to do the last four miles under his own power.

So we took off again, 24 of us pedaling normally, and Nathan pushing off with his feet on either side of the bike like he was riding some awkward scooter. That would be OK down to the Seymour Cray Bridge, but we could already see the uphill slope on the other side.

That's when Plan B kicked in. Collin Schrader, a Life Scout, began asking if anyone had rope. But who would carry rope on a bike trip?

Fortunately, our troop has our own "MacGyver,"

Cassellius, who always seems to have a tool on hand for any trouble.

Collin used the rope to tow Nathan the rest of the way to church, and the trip was saved. Nathan made it all 52 miles. Technically, the last four miles weren't under his own power, but at least he managed to escape the dreaded sag wagon.

Now he gets to borrow his dad's welder to try and re-attach that derailleur in the comfort of his own garage.

It's fun to see the boys' ingenuity, perseverance and true desire to work together to solve a problem. Maybe we can all learn from that.

And remember: Always pack a tow rope.

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