

**Happy Thanksgiving from Susan and Hewes, Back home in Montana!**  
**11/27/2008**

Hello and warm wishes for Thanksgiving (or at least for an especially nice day for our Canadian and English friends.) We had a great finish to our Southern Tier ride, finishing in beautiful and interesting St. Augustine, Fl. As we rode into town we were met by Paul's wife Alice and our good friend from Odyssey 2000, Sharon, who drove all the way from her home near Tampa to help us put our front tires in the Atlantic. Needless to say we had a terrific celebration.

In all we rode about 2800 miles in 50 days of riding with eight more 'rest' days along the way. We will remember: the heat in the California Arizona desert at the outset but then almost perfect weather thereafter, including zero days of riding in the rain; slogging up mountain passes and sailing down the other side; great places to stay or camp and a few dumps; being chased by more dogs than I have ever experienced in Louisiana and Mississippi, but only one not serious (luckily) incident; meeting a lot of great people, and just a few jerks; lots of beautiful quiet roads and a couple of the scariest roads I have ever ridden on . In short, though it had its moments it was a great trip overall and we arrive home safely. We could not ask for more.

Thanks for sharing the journey. All the best, Susan and Hewes

**Into and through the deep south with Susan and Hewes**  
**11/8/2008**

Greetings, all. Pretty interesting week for the world, and for us. We are presently in De Funiak Springs, Florida, about two days ride east of Pensacola. Since, leaving St. Francisville, LA, one of the real highlights of the trip we completed our ride through LA and then ventured through very southern, rural Mississippi and along the coast of Alabama and then entered Florida. As much as we enjoyed Louisiana, our route through MI now northwestern FL brought on a different perspective. If anyone believes we do not have significant work to do in our country on race relations, they only need to be in rural southern MI or and this part of FL on the days surrounding an election involving an African American candidate for President, and especially the day after he wins the election. You cannot imagine the level of venom openly expressed in public by individuals (totally unsolicited by us, believe me) or expressed in letters and even OP ED pieces in the newspapers. Scary is the only description I can find to describe what we have seen and heard. That said, I realize this is neither a new or solely southern phenomenon. This is not meant to be a political statement about the outcome of the election, just a reaction to something I was certainly aware of but had heretofore never experienced personally.

Back to the bicycle trip. After traveling through very similar forested terrain for several days since leaving the Hill Country of Texas, we had a terrific ride along the Gulf Coast of Alabama with its numerous bridges over all the rivers, creeks, inlets, etc. that feed into the Gulf of Mexico. There is still much evidence of preceding hurricanes, most obviously in the downed trees and occasional meetings with displaced people under various circumstances. Probably the highlight of this leg was the several mile causeway and bridge from the mainland out to Dauphin Island where spent the night and saw the election returns come in. The island was absolutely beautiful. The next day we visited the interesting fort on the island, a key spot in the Battle of Mobile Bay during the Civil War where Admiral Farragut uttered the famous words, "Damn the Torpedoes! Full speed ahead." From there we took a half hour ferry back to the

mainland, then ventured for 50 more miles along the Gulf, through a combination of beach front development and beautiful sand beaches, most now protected by being parkland. We rode right through Pensacola, passing the Naval Air force Base, home of the famous Blue Angels, some of whom were buzzing overhead, then through the lovely "old town." Now we are on the last leg of our journey, taking a day off in another town filled with beautiful old homes- this time Victorian in nature, and staying in a lovely old hotel in the center of the town that has been redone as a very nice B&B, with an ever nicer restaurant. The town was started as the southern branch so to speak of the famous Chautauqua movement in western NY, where we have previously visited. For those of you who are worried about us becoming too soft, you will be happy to know we have had a few more rather basic camping experiences and survived. I will say again that the camping on this route is far less appealing than on our previous trips across America, but sometimes there is no alternative.

Well, I left Susan finishing the laundry, a chore we actually have shared along the way, so will say good bye. One more week to St. Augustine. Take care and enjoy life wherever you are.  
Hewes

### **Over the Mississippi with Susan and Hewes 10/30/2008**

Greetings from St. Francisville, LA, just passed the ferry that brought us across the Mississippi R. Hope all is well with you, as it is with us. After the rigors of the earlier part of the trip, the last week or so has been pretty benign and enjoyable as we start to experience fall in this part of the country that is completely new to us. The weather has been near record cold, but this just means it is cool (mid 30s) early in the morning but rapidly warms up to the mid sixties. Pretty ideal cycling, though the camping can get a little cool. The terrain has flattened out ever since leaving Texas and has been very flat for the last three days as we approached the Mississippi. On the east side it is going to get more hilly and possibly more interesting riding, though the winding, sometimes serpentine route we have been on has been great. It has been very rural through beautiful farmland and forests. We have passed cotton farms (in east Texas), rice paddies, sugar plantations as well as the usual corn fields, etc. The leaves are just showing a hint of changing, there is a sense of fall in the crisp air, and the sun has been shining, so all in all its been pretty great. We camped one night in little museum and historical park in tiny Merryville LA and had a great tour of the very interesting museum. We have stayed in a couple of lovely B&Bs, one in the pretty town of Washington, LA and now in this beautiful, historic village complete with lovely old homes and nearby historic plantations which we will visit this afternoon. We have also stayed in a couple of dumps, but nothing unexpected on a bike trip.

The only news of note is when we came out of Navasota, TX after our last day off. We were going up a moderately steep hill right out of town and what should come sweeping by us but two riders pedaling slightly funny looking recumbent bikes. They were really moving, which seemed a little strange as recumbents tend to be a little heavy so somewhat slower (not than us) on hills. I only had time to say hello and ask where they were going before they were gone. Paul took out after them to chat them up, but they left him in the dust as well, which really got our attention. At lunch we expressed our admiration for their prowess, and were feeling pretty feeble ourselves. That night at dinner, our waitress mentioned the two cyclists on little bikes who had stopped in for lunch. As we were expressing our admiration for them making it to the restaurant

for lunch a couple of hours even before Paul got to town, she happened to mention that she thought it was curious that they had asked to use electrical outlets to which they connected up their bikes. Aha! Electric motor enhanced recumbents! Pretty cool, but also much easier to swallow. Well that's the news. We are 5/7 through the journey, at least in total distance. Take care all. We have voted already and will be glued to the TV Tuesday night. Best wishes, Susan and Hewes

## **Through the Hill country of Texas and beyond with Susan and Hewes 10/22/2008**

Greetings from Navasota, Texas. Hope all is well wherever you are. We have had a great eight days of riding since I last reported in, having traversed the well named "Hill Country" which extends west from Austin for a couple of hundred miles. It felt like old home week for much of this journey as we had traversed a lot of it a couple of years ago on a circular ride out of Austin. At that time the Bluebonnets, Texas state flower, were in bloom, which was beautiful. Even so it is a rugged, gorgeous part of TX. Once again we were struck by the huge ranches, most of which are surrounded by 8 foot barb wire fences. We discovered these are almost all game ranches that cater to private hunters. They contain exotic wildlife from Africa and other locales or local game, well nourished domestic animals. We only saw a few of these 'wild beasts'. Actually the concept was not that appealing.

The cycling has been great. After Del Rio it took a day to get to the 'hills.' From there it has been up and down, often quite steeply, but always in great terrain. Once again we find camping much more of a challenge than on previous cross country routes so we find ourselves jitneying around to find places to stay, which actually is kind of fun, usually. We have stayed in great places including a farm stay, advertised as just off the highway, but in truth two or three miles up and down a very twisty, rutted, dirt road. Once there it was quiet and lovely and our host even brought in vittles so we could make our own dinner as there were no stores for miles. Well worth the effort. Our favorite place was tiny Blanco, TX, with one great little motel where the locals were having a Saturday night music fest-mostly country oldies- and appreciated the expanded audience we provided. One motel only but about eight restaurants of all persuasions, including Papa Joes. The waiter/owner was terrific as was the Italian food (or were we just starved!) During the last three days, as we came to the eastern end of the hill country and continued on, the hills have mellowed a lot, though there have been a few real stinkers thrown in, so we have been doing 60 to 70 miles a day. We get out just after sun up, about 7:30 AM here and ride to well into the afternoon. We have to stop with a little cushion on when it turns dark, which is pretty early this time of year, 6:30 ish, so these days have been about our max. The weather continues to be wonderful- 50 or so in the AM and into the low 80s in the afternoon with just enough wind, always from the east, the direction we are headed to be cooling without being too obnoxious.

Our friend Paul moves quite a bit faster. He often scouts out the day's destination for places to stay, if we have not made prior arrangements, and does countless other things to make our lives better- like having a beer ready when we arrive. Yesterday we came to a little store out in the middle of nowhere about twenty miles from the finish. When we walked in the young lady behind the desk said, "Your friend left half a bag of ice for you out in the freezer," for our drinking water supply. What a guy!

So all is well and we continue to have a great adventure as we head into eastern Texas and Louisiana. Take care all and thanks for dropping a line when you have a moment. Susan and Hewes

**Susan and Hewes make it to El Paso  
10/12/2008**

Hello and Greetings from El Paso, 900 miles into our Southern Tier ride. We hope your fall is going well, though we just got the word we had 18 inches of snow with downed limbs and trees in Billings, quite a contrast from here. Having said that, since starting to climb out of the desert floor we no longer are experiencing the oppressive heat reported upon in our first communiqué, as we had hoped would be the case. The days still tend to get pretty warm, but nothing like our earlier experience and some of the nights have been down right cold, which is fine. Since our last report, the main theme of the trip has been some serious climbing. Leaving Tempe, from whence I last reported and which is about 1100 feet above sea level, we have had multiple significant climbs, including five mountain passes. These have tended to go up 2,000 feet plus or minus and then drop down about 1000 feet. In this step-wise fashion we have climbed a total of 19,000 feet topping out a couple of days ago at 8,200 ft Emery Pass, the highest point on our route. I will have to admit peddling a roughly 450 pound tandem and contents up some of these climbs is not what it was 15 years ago, but we have plugged along, often at 3mph. What a great feeling when we get to the top! We have now passed through our New Mexico sector and the scenery, particularly in the mountains, has often been spectacular.

We have finally done some camping which is good since we are carrying all this junk. The first time came in Three Way, AZ, near the NM border and in the valley between a 4,800 ft pass and a 2500 ft climb to a 6,300 ft pass. There wasn't much out there but a private RV campground, the Ponderosa C/G that unlike the vast majority of RV campgrounds allows tents. There is a huge copper mine just a few miles away and the RV parks are filled with the workers. It was really a wonderful evening, for the most part. We were the only tenters and as we pulled in were welcomed by some of the folks staying there in their RVs or mobile homes. We then met Susan and Fred who are the owners. Both were very friendly and Fred is a real historical buff, particularly for the mountain man era. He regaled us with many great stories. He had erected a tepee several days earlier for a couple on bicycles but without tenting equipment and invited us to use it. As it was roomy and had two cots, the invitation was quite seductive. I decided to use our tent and Susan opted for the tepee. Bad choice! During the night we had two of the most awesome thunder, lightning and rain storms I have ever experienced. There is nothing quite like thunder and lightning, particularly as it seems to be right on top of you, as it rolls around and echoes off the mountains. Combine this with deluges of pounding rain and it is quite an experience. In our tent, I was snug as a bug in a rug, as they say, and enjoying every minute of the fireworks. In the tepee, however, which is generally a wonderful structure, when it rains that hard there is no way to keep the water from coming it through the little hole at the peak of the canvas cylinder where the lodge poles exit and eventually through the canvas as well. The water then runs down the poles and you can guess the result. As a consequence at 5AM we found Susan in the ablution center with her tiny travel hairdryer trying to dry all her stuff. Luckily she was daunted but not defeated, still smiling, and a rock on the next days ascent and

descent to another campground, now in the state of New Mexico. This time there were no fireworks, just a pleasant night as we both snuggled in our little tent!

I could go on with many more stories of nice people and great experiences but enough for now. Our friend Paul is whipping up the passes, leaving our poor tandem in the dust. But he insists he enjoys our company, actually mainly Susan, so things are great. We are kind-of in Texas as we are staying with Paul's wife Alice's (who has joined us for a few days) wonderful friends Bev and Paul. I say kind-of in Texas because they live in El Paso and the state line with NM goes through their back yard. We have had a delightful couple of days off. Tomorrow we have opted to drive to Del Rio rather than ride. This bothered me at first but after reading multiple blogs of people doing the trip, and seeing the logistical challenges of the distances involved between any type of support services in relation to the monotonous terrain of West Texas, it seems like a good choice. So next will be the Hill Country of Texas with more challenges and I am certain new adventures. Best to all, Hewes

### **Greetings from the Agnews on the edge of the desert!** **10/1/2008**

Now that the test seemed to work: Hello and welcome to the first update of our latest bicycle adventure as Susan and I, with our friend Paul Grmoljez, attempt to cycle from San Diego to St. Augustine, FL. First though, we hope this finds all of you well, as are we, and having an enjoyable fall. We are now on the 12th day of our trip and it has been, to say the least, a real challenge, or to quote Susan, 'the toughest bike trip I have ever taken.' Back in San Diego in our Pacific Beach Motel, while reassembling the tandem with sea breezes wafting over us, I made the comment that it was so pleasant 'we should just hang out here for a couple of months, fabricate a few progress reports and forget the cycling.' Three days later when we hit the desert and the temperatures soared over 110\* by 10 AM and continued to rise, my joke didn't seem so funny. Now we hope the worst of the desert heat is behind us after ten days of cycling through it. Yesterday we rode 55 miles to get through the sprawling Phoenix AZ metropolitan area. Tomorrow we start climbing out of the desert with the strong possibility that the heat issue will start to subside, the further east we get. We have survived, learned a lot of new survival skills and spirits remain high.

Despite the rigors of the trip, in many ways it has been great. The AZ desert in particular is quite spectacular with the desert floor covered with shrubbery and various cacti and surrounded by jagged mountains. We have stayed in some funky motels in out of the way small towns that we would never even notice driving in a car. For instance, in Quartzsite, AZ, the motel is called the Quartzsite Yacht Club, so named by its whimsical, now deceased, founder who thought a yacht club in the middle of the desert a good marketing tool. This proved to be true as there are 'members' from all over the US Europe and beyond. This is true even though it is basically a RV site, a few of the RVs used as a 'motel', and most importantly a great bar cafe. By the way, the tag line behind the name is, 'Welcome! Long time, no sea.' We happened to be there on a Thursday which, along with Friday, is karaoke night. This draws a big following, there being not much to compete. I even got to do my Elvis thing and didn't embarrass myself. The only down side was next morning when Paul and to a lesser extent Susan had evidence of food poisoning, which compounded the problem heat causes as we traveled to Salome AZ. By the time we arrived, it was clear that we would need a day to recover so we hung out in Salome, probably not

the first choice for a day off but it seems to have gotten the job done as all are feeling strong once again.

All along the way we have met interesting and kind people, including Marjorie at the motel in Salome who insisted and then arranged for someone to check out Paul to certain he was not severely dehydrated- just mildly; or Carl, an elderly man just arrived to get his BBQ place ready for the impending deluge of snowbirds, who ran out to offer us cold drinks, gratis as we were cycling by, and then got a friend to help get Paul into town when he was obviously too ill to safely ride. (Two days later Paul rode back to where he got the ride. While he was testing himself to be sure all was OK, I suspect he wants to ride all the miles- EFI in cyclist's parlor. We have also met a couple of very nice and interesting cyclists, not the least being Klaus from Wiesbaden, Germany. Klaus started at his home heading east through Poland, Belorussia, Russia and Siberia, across the Gobi Desert in Manchuria, into China to Beijing and the Olympics. He then flew to the US to do the trip we are on. We took some solace from his feeling the conditions he had just come through were as difficult as any on his sojourn, some of which were pretty unbelievable!

Finally, the one constant theme through this part of the world is everyone is just waiting for the deluge of snowbirds that starts in a couple of weeks. For now the place is pretty deserted, but we are told that soon it will be a madhouse. I guess this a major consolation for fighting our way across the desert in this heat. On that note, I will say goodbye and, again, wish you all the best.  
Hewes