

THE ROAD TO KAMP KIA KIMA:



Two hours by car...
Two days by bicycle!
By Brooks "Robinhood" Gooch

Well, let me think. It was either late May or early June of 1960. I was 19. Turned 20 in July. I had planned to ride my old Schwinn Black Phantom to Kamp Kia Kima from Memphis. Two of the guys in my Explorer Post (24) were to make the ride with me. Things didn't work out for them, so they didn't make the trip.

I started making training rides every day. I would come home from Memphis State University, sling my leg over that old Black Phantom and strike out for Germantown. I lived at 1090 Poppen Dr., near Barron and Semmes. I would time the ride to the sundry store near the RR tracks on Poplar Pike, buy a cold drink (in a glass bottle...remember those?) On the return ride I would time the trip again. I had measured the route with the speedometer in the family car. Using my trip times I determined that a leisurely pace for the trip was about 7 miles per hour. Based on 7 MPH and 7 or 8 hours riding time per day, I planned the trip. I intended to camp out 2 nights, arriving at KKK late afternoon or early evening of the third day.



For those of you who don't know what a Schwinn Black Phantom was, here goes...It was a 26", balloon-tired, single-speed, heavy steel-framed bicycle with a spring-loaded front fork. Every time you put your weight on the pedal for the power stroke the spring would compress, absorbing a lot of the power. I converted the bike to a fixed front fork and replaced all the bearings in the fork, wheels and crank. I also replaced the pedals 2 or 3 days before I made the ride. The night before I was to start, my Mother informed me...*"You are not going to ride that bicycle across this city and that bridge. You put the bicycle in the trunk of the car and I'll drive you to West Memphis and you can start there."* Here I am almost 20 years old and Mother is worried that I'll get run over on the way to the bridge. Mothers are like that. Yeah, they are. At about 6:00 AM the next morning, as I was unloading the bike from the trunk of the car, Mother tells me to call her every evening before I make camp to let her know where I am and that I'm ok. Mothers are like that. Yeah they are. The best laid plans of mice and men, you know the rest.

I carried cooking gear, extra clothing, 2 canteens and a bed roll. The bike had a luggage rack and saddle bag baskets. I put half of an army pup tent over the rack and baskets pushed it down into the baskets. I had packed the items I needed to keep dry in the baskets and covered them with the rest of the shelter half. The other half was used to wrap my bedroll. A musette bag was strapped to the handle bars with my canteens and miscellaneous small items.

I fought a diagonal head wind, which squashed my "leisurely" 7 MPH plan. So I had to pump it up to 10 MPH. Great...if you want to tighten your legs to the tinsel strength of a Chinese slingshot. I didn't, but I had no choice. I had the wind problem all the way to Jonesboro and had to get off and push the bike several times. I arrived in Jonesboro at about 6:00 PM and, like a good son, called Mother. Mothers like that. Yeah, they do. I had planned to rent a bed for the night at the YMCA. Not in Jonesboro in 1960. Plan squashed. The Y was just a community center. The manager called the Chief Scout Executive of the East Arkansas Area Council, BSA. The Exec. said that he would meet me in the park behind the Y after he attended a meeting, and he would make arrangements for a place to spend the night. Plan squashed.



By 10:00 PM I gave up on the Exec. And spread out one of the shelter halves, put my bedroll on it and covered it with the other half. Sleep came at last, but made a hasty exit. At about 3:00 AM. I sat up and wondered why I was sitting up when a brilliant flash of lightning and the immediate boom of thunder told me why. Just before I started gathering my gear, several large drops of rain began to splatter the shelter half. When I tried to jump up, my legs wouldn't respond. Slowly, I did manage to roll up my bedding, wondering where I could go to get out of the weather, which was surely coming. My legs were as hard as cedar fence posts. But when I moved slowly there was no pain.

I remembered that the doors at the front of the Y were set back in a sort of alcove, so I headed for cover with my bedroll, the rest of my gear and the bike. I covered the bike with the top shelter half, spread the bedroll behind it to cut off the wind and rain, which is surely coming full force. Wind and rain? Nope, all I got was a few more big drops. I finally dozed off and on until about 6:00 AM, then packed my gear and wrote a thank you note to the manager of the Y. He had told me that he would come early and let me in to take a shower. Then I stopped at a small restaurant and had breakfast.

By the time I was in the hills of Crowley's Ridge, my legs had loosened up. This day came on clear and hot. After I crossed the Ozark Escarpment at Black Rock I stopped at a rock-walled cemetery on the right side of the highway, changed into short pants, and continued my adventure.

In the hills I pedaled furiously downhill to build up speed and momentum to climb the next up grade. This plan worked during the rest of the trip, except for one hill. That hill is about 12 miles southeast of Hardy. I got so hot going up this hill that I began to feel dizzy. The highway right-of-way on this stretch of road is cleared for about 20 yards on either side, but there was no shade available...except from a road sign. Leaning the bike against the sign post, I tried my best to stay put in that little spot of shade. I took off my hat, poured it full of water, and put it back on. I had pushed the bike for the last 50 to 100 yards up that hill. It was the only hill that beat me...the only one that forced me to push the bicycle.

As I sat on the side of the road, a pickup truck passed going my way and I thought that if another one came I'll try to get it to stop, maybe hitch a ride for me and my bike. However, traffic in those days wasn't as heavy as it is now. No more pickups came by. Plan squashed. The water seeping out of my hat cooled me down after about half an hour. So, I started pushing the bike up the hill. The grade was less near the top, so I got back on the bike and pedaled slowly up the remainder of the hill. About eight miles out of Hardy there used to be a country store. It was about where the VFW lodge is now. I stopped for a coke and talked with the old man who ran the place. The store was dimly lit, so I took off my Ray Ban sunglasses and laid them on the counter. When I left the store...I left the glasses.

Somewhere between Blackrock and Hardy, on a long downhill run I caught up with an old man in a pickup truck. It was the same truck that had passed me on the up hill side of that ridge. I wasn't about to lose my speed and momentum, so I crossed to the left of the center line and passed him. The old man looked at me with his jaw hanging down as I passed him. I would guess that I was going about 50-60 MPH on the down hill grade. Of course he passed me going up the next hill, probably thinking, "*There, young feller...get a truck!*" I was in Hardy at about 3:00 PM and at the low water bridge by 3:30.

In case your memory fails, the low water bridge was indeed low, with water flowing over the concrete slab. And it was very slick except in the area where the car and truck tires kept the algae worn away. Being late spring, the volume of water in the South Fork was still fairly high. I stood looking at the flow over the bridge trying to decide whether or not to push the bike across. Decision made, off came my shoes and socks. Positioning myself on the upstream side of the bicycle, I started across. Slowly I moved forward, but when the strong current got both wheels of the bike, the South Fork tried to take my bicycle. I managed to lift the bike and everything loaded on it. Then I backed slowly off the bridge, thinking...plan squashed. So, I rode back up the hill and headed for the dock across from the waterfront.

I found the gong had been hung in the Sycamore tree near the dock. I knew that there were supposed to be other staff members in camp early, and that Staff Week would start the following Monday. I rang the gong and waited. Nothing. Rang it again. Nothing. On the third gong, I heard a familiar voice. It was Sam Tuminello. He was in the area near Cedar Rock. "*I'm coming dammit! I'm coming!*"



Sam rowed one of the new aluminum boats across to get me. He said, "*I'll have to make 2 trips...not enough room for you and the bicycle.*" I emptied my pockets, took off my belt and shoes, threw them in the boat with Sam and said, "*Meet you on the other side.*" I swam across the old South Fork, and the water was fine.