

## The Lake Itasca Ride 6 25 11

The Lake Itasca ride was for me a truly wonderful ride...we had 7 bikes and 9 riders. The riders were Michael, D'Aversa, Bob Crawley & Kathy Weglarek, Dawn & Charlie May, Tracey & Stephanie Stewart, Ken Kutschke and me.

We met that morning early for breakfast at Larry's diner in Plainfield. Bob Crawley & Kathy Weglarek and Dawn & Charlie May left a bit later, rode the interstate and met us that night in Little Falls, MN. But for the rest of us we had a slower and mostly back roads ride as we made our way west to the great Mississippi River. We hit the Mississippi in the East Dubuque, Ill area where we rode north to La Crosse, Wisconsin. We crossed the river and took back roads north along the river as we encountered brief and very light rain fall all the while it appeared that we could be completely drenched at any moment.

Minnesota is a beautiful State to ride in and one that I had never visited until this ride...lakes everywhere and true forest wilderness.

We arrived at the hotel in Little Falls, MN., finding Bob, Kathy, Dawn and Charlie waiting for us in the parking lot and who also already had eaten dinner...wondering where we had been! Checking into the hotel was a very special treat...as we were all tired, hungry and frankly wanted a few LARGE beers. We were met by an older gentlemen from the area who checked us in at record SLOW time. Dawn had already warned us about him...as she apparently had dealt with him earlier herself. When anyone said a word...he stopped working...soooooo after several attempts to get checked in...we learned to be silent and just wait...and you can imagine how mad that was for our group.

Finally we got checked in and we were assured that the Mexican restaurant next door would gladly accommodate us for dinner...we did not argue and we all ran across the parking lot in search of food and beer. Dinner was great, the conversation was fun but I must say that the 32 ounce beers were heavenly.

The next morning we were off to find the actual headwaters of the Great Mississippi River but not before we all enjoyed a wonderful breakfast at a fabulous restaurant where we enjoyed the talents of a chef who was trained at the Le Cordon Bleu academy in Paris, France...yes the same one that refused to graduate Julia Childs! Little Falls is the home town of Charles Lindbergh, something that its clear the town is still proud of...very nice place.

On well...about another 100 miles north and we found the Itasca State park and ultimately the actual source of the Mississippi River...it was magnificent in my opinion.

Lake Itasca appears to be a mid-size inland lake which on one side gives birth to the Mississippi River. A section approximately 30 feet wide and about 1-2 feet deep...continuously empties water out to form the Mississippi Headwaters.

Further, at the headwaters there is a marker which says...among other things...The Old Northwest Territory, The First Colony of the United States!

Coming home lead us to Red Wing, MN., for the night where we enjoyed another wonderful group dinner and refreshments together. The next morning I decided to leave early (5am) and everyone else wanted to leave later so I took, watched the sun come up as I rode along the great and beautiful Mississippi down to La Crosse and across central Wisconsin and home to Plainfield by noon. A great ride!



## Mississippi River Facts

**Speed:** At the headwaters of the Mississippi, the average surface speed of the water is near 1.2 miles per hour - roughly one-third as fast as people walk. At New Orleans, on 2/24/2003, the speed of the river was 3 miles per hour.

**Length:** River length is a difficult measurement to pin down because the river channel is constantly changing. For example, staff at Itasca State Park, the Mississippi's headwaters, say the Mississippi is 2,552 miles long. The US Geologic Survey has published a number of 2,300 miles (3,705 kilometers), the

EPA says it is 2,320 miles long, and the Mississippi National River and Recreation Area maintains its length at 2,350 miles.

**Width:** At Lake Itasca, the river is between 20-30 feet wide. The Mississippi is widest just downstream from its confluence with the Missouri River (near Alton, Il.) where it is nearly 1 mile across. [\[Note: In the first mile of the river, just out from Lake Itasca, there were places where you could touch both banks of the river with your canoe paddle, certainly less than 20 feet in width\]](#)

**Depth:** At its headwaters, the Mississippi is less than 3 feet deep. The river's deepest section is between Governor Nicholls Wharf and Algiers Point in New Orleans where it is 200 feet deep.

**Volume:** At Lake Itasca, the average flow rate is 6 cubic feet per second.

At Upper St. Anthony's Falls, the northernmost Lock and Dam, the average flow rate is 12,000 cubic ft/second.

At New Orleans, the average flow rate is 600,000 cubic feet per second.

There are 7.489 gallons of water in a cubic foot. One cubic foot of water weighs 65.4 pounds. A 48 foot semi-truck trailer is a 3,600 cu. ft. container. At Itasca, it would take 10 minutes for one semi-trailer of water to flow out of the lake into the Mississippi. At St. Anthony Falls, the equivalent of 3 semi-trailers full of water go over the falls every second. At New Orleans, the equivalent of 166 semi-trailers of water flow past Algiers Point each second.

**Elevation:** The elevation of the Mississippi at Lake Itasca is 1,475 feet above sea level. It drops to 0 feet above sea level at the Gulf of Mexico. More than half of that drop in elevation occurs within the state of Minnesota.

**Sediment Load:** The Mississippi carries an average of 436,000 tons of sediment each day. Over the course of a year, it moves an average of 159 million tons of sediment. Averages have ranged from 1,576,000 tons per day in 1951 to 219,000 in 1988.

**Watershed Area:** The Mississippi River Basin or Watershed drains 41% of continental United States. Thirty-one states and 2 Canadian provinces are included in the watershed. The total area drained by the watershed is between 1.2 and 1.8 million square miles.

**Water supply:** Communities up and down the river use the Mississippi to obtain fresh water and to discharge their industrial and municipal waste. We don't have good figures on water use for the whole Mississippi River Basin, but we have some clues. A January, 2000 study published by the Upper Mississippi River Conservation Committee states that close to 15 million people rely on the Mississippi River or its tributaries in just the upper half of the basin (from Cairo, Il. to Minneapolis, MN). A frequently cited figure of 18 million people using the Mississippi River Watershed for water supply comes from a 1982 study by the Upper Mississippi River Basin Committee. The Environmental Protection Agency simply says that more than 50 cities rely on the Mississippi for daily water supply.

**Commerce:** For nearly 200 years agriculture has been the primary user of the basin lands, continually altering the hydrologic cycle and energy budget of the region. The value of the agricultural products and the huge agribusiness industry that has developed in the basin produces 92% of the nation's agricultural exports, 78% of the world's exports in feed grains and soybeans, and most of the livestock and hogs produced nationally. Sixty percent of all grain exported from the US is shipped via the Mississippi River

through the Port of New Orleans and the Port of South Louisiana. In measure of tonnage, the largest port in the world is located on the Mississippi River at LaPlace, La. Between the two of them, the Ports of New Orleans and South Louisiana shipped more than 243 million tons of goods in 1999. Shipping at the lower end of the Mississippi is focused on petroleum, iron and steel, grain, rubber, paper and wood, coffee, coal, chemicals, and edible oils.

**Wildlife:** The Mississippi River and its floodplain are home to a diverse population of living things:

- At least 260 species of fishes, 25% of all fish species in North America
- Forty percent of the nation's migratory waterfowl use the river corridor during their Spring and Fall migration
- Sixty percent of all North American birds (326 species) use the Mississippi River Basin as their migratory flyway
- From Cairo, Il, upstream to Lake Itasca, there are 38 documented species of mussel. On the Lower Mississippi, there may be as many as 60 separate species of mussels
- The Upper Mississippi is host to more than 50 species of mammals;
- At least 145 species of amphibians and reptiles inhabit the Upper Mississippi River environs.

**River traffic:** To move goods up and down the Mississippi, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers maintains a 9-foot shipping channel from Baton Rouge, La. to Minneapolis, MN. From Baton Rouge past New Orleans to Head of Passes, a 45 foot channel is maintained to allow ocean-going vessels access to ports as far upstream as Baton Rouge.

**Towboat statistics:**

- On one gallon of fuel, 1 ton of cargo can be moved 60 miles by truck, 202 miles by rail, and 514 miles by barge.
- One barge holds as much as 15 jumbo rail hoppers and 58 semi truck trailers.
- One barge load of wheat is enough to bake 2.25 million loaves of bread.

Kindest Regards,

Jim Copas, ride leader