



CROSS-COUNTRY BICYCLING

A READ WRITE & RIDE LESSON

Do you think you could ride a bike across the country? A trip across the United States is more than 3,000 miles long. A number of people have tried it. Many give up before they complete their trip. Some actually make the entire trip.

The first person to bike across America was Thomas Stevens in 1884. He started in San Francisco and ended in Boston.

Mr. Stevens could not take much with him on his trip. He had a bag on the handlebars. Everything he took with him had to fit in that bag. He took extra socks, an extra shirt, and a raincoat. When it rained, he used the raincoat as a tent. When it was not raining, he used the raincoat as a blanket. He also had a gun with him so he could hunt for food.

There were not many good roads in those days. Mr. Stevens had to ride his bicycle on wagon trails and beside railroad tracks. Sometimes he had to push his bike. Sometimes the weather was so bad he could not ride at all. It took him 104 days to make the trip. That's more than three months.

Today, there are many good roads. It is still very hard to ride a bicycle that far. Riders must be in good shape.

Riding on public roads can be dangerous. Riders must be careful because there are cars and trucks on the road with them. There are bike trails where cars and trucks are not allowed. Some riders like to ride on these trails instead of on the roads. It takes longer to ride across the country on trails because the route is not as straight as it is with roads.

Many people who take very long bicycle rides go with a group. Riding with a group is safer than riding alone. Riders in a group have someone to talk to along the way. Riders can encourage each other. The group can share things like a first aid kit so that not everyone has to carry one.

Some long-distance riders pull a bike trailer so that they can carry more supplies with them. They can take more items with them, but the trailer slows them down.

Some long-distance riders even have a support crew. The support crew drives a car behind the rider. The support crew carries food, water, and extra clothes. It also carries tools for repairing the bicycle. It carries some medical supplies in case the rider gets hurt or sick.

There is a bicycle race across the country called Race Across America. It is held every year. It begins in California and ends in Maryland. Riders in the Race Across America do not carry much with them. They want to go fast. Anything they carry could slow them down. They wear a helmet for safety. They have a water bottle that attaches to the bicycle, but not much else.

They have a support crew that can carry everything else they need. Most winners finish the race in only eight or nine days. That means they must ride more than 300 miles per day!

Mr. Stevens took more than three months to ride across America. Winners of the Race Across America take only eight or nine days to make the same trip. How long do you think it would take you to ride across the country? What would you take with you?