

THE ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER

PRICE: 50 CENTS • Saturday, Nov. 24, 2007 • FOUNDED IN 1905

THE MORNING READ

THE RIDE OF HIS LIFE

For adventure and charity, a cyclist rides the Pacific coast of North America.

By **ANDREW GOOD**
THE ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER

Life is like a bike ride: a punishing climb up a rain-soaked hill one moment, a windy, rollercoaster ride to the bottom the next.

That's the perspective you develop cycling down the North American coast, as former Seal Beach resident John Roersma has for two months. Earlier this year, the contract software developer gave up his apartment, put his belongings in storage and prepared to live off the road. It would be his first time "adventure cycling" and would eventually take



ROSE PALMISANO, THE ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER

him a total of 2,464 miles. He would go 400 miles north from Washington to the Sunshine Coast of British Columbia, then

SEE **RIDE** • PAGE 2

LONG HAUL: "It's a day-to-day existence. It's a lot of work," says John Roersma of his 2,464-mile bicycle journey. He is on a mission to raise money for the Mustard Seed Ranch.

RIDE: Cyclist discovers that the open road is a great equalizer

FROM PAGE 1

south to the Mexican border.

The thrill of it called to him. Besides that, his church, Rock Harbor, was heading a fundraiser around the time he was contemplating the ride. He asked if there was a cause he could sponsor and was directed to Tustin's Mustard Seed Ranch. It's a real, working ranch that shows, breeds and trains horses. It also uses animal therapy to rebuild the trust and emotional well-being of foster children and kids living in group homes.

It sounded like a good cause to Roersma, who approached the Ranch and asked to represent them on his ride. After he met with director Ray Johnson and toured the facility, they agreed.

"I loved the people there," Roersma said. "Lots of the staff there are in drug recovery programs. So they're doing a lot of hard work turning their lives around and keeping the ranch going."

Some of the money he raised might go to building a new chicken coop, Johnson said, but the majority will benefit the kids for things such as children's saddles and helmets.

"These aren't kids who get a one-off experience riding a horse," Johnson said. "These are kids we're committed to working with for a long time ... It seems like (Roersma) made a bit of a sacrifice to help out."

It wasn't a sacrifice that went unnoticed. Roersma was a hero to the ranch staff, who hung up his photo and talked about him daily, Johnson said. They followed his blog at www.roersma.net/CoastForKids and would pull out a map during meal times to track his progress.

THE JOURNEY BEGINS

On Sept. 15, Roersma and his Bianchi Volpe touring cycle left Lynden, Wash., where he was staying with family. He pedaled 64.6 miles that first day, with fine weather and the only hiccup being a single flat



PHOTOS: ROSE PALMISANO, THE ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER

FLOOD OF MEMORIES: Roersma makes his way through Dana Point toward the end of his trek.

tire.

The rest of the trip would not always be as smooth.

Adventure cycling is exhausting in more than just a purely physical sense. There's planning involved, Roersma said, and you quickly have to adjust to living a day-to-day existence. You have to buy groceries each morning and find restaurants open late at night. Following a planned cycling route can take you past gorgeous scenic beauty but can also take you away from Internet cafés, where you can catch up with the rest of the world and maintain your blog.

There's lots of obstacles, such as flat tires. Roersma went 1,000 miles after his first day without one, then got two a day for three days. Raccoons were another problem. At least twice they stole his food. He and two other riders woke up one morning and found they had to pedal 10 miles to the nearest town to get breakfast.

Weather proved to be the greatest challenge. It took a little more than a week before Roersma started riding in the



LONG TRIP: Roersma takes a break from his solo journey at Crystal Cove. "I am looking forward to going home," he said.

Find out more

Visit John Roersma's blog at www.roersma.net /CoastForKids. Donations can still be made to help the Mustard Seed Ranch. Make out checks to Rock Harbor Church, 345 Fischer Ave., Costa Mesa 92626, Attn: "Go" Campaign - Coast For Kids Bike Ride. Learn more about the Mustard Seed Ranch at www.rescuemission.org.

rain, about the time he was traveling via ferry between British Columbia's islands. It rained nonstop for six days.

hills, he felt "almost hypothermic." He was shivering, wet and hungry, and none of the motels was open. On his fifth try, he found a room.

Life's like that, he said. Despite the challenge, you persevere, and God provides.

Later in the trip, he would experience this again while traveling through Elk, Calif., with some other cyclists. It had been a tough day, full of climbs and strong headwinds. They expected to get dinner and find a motel in Elk. To their surprise, most of the town was closed, including the grocery store. A fancy restaurant was still open, though, so they had a nice meal, then rode out under the moonlight, with no traffic to worry about on Highway 1.

"We had the moon reflecting off the ocean on one side and forested hills on the other side, riding at night with no one else on the road," Roersma said. "It just turned out to be a great experience. It's a good metaphor for life, really. That day in particular was a lousy day... Then, three hours later, after a good meal, everything had completely changed. It was a highlight of the ride."

FRIENDS ALONG THE WAY

Isolating introspection is a part of being on the road, but so is sharing a beer over a campfire. Roersma met plenty of other cyclists along the way and would ride with them for a few days. Up and down the coast, there are "hiker biker" campsites, where they'd gather and share stories: Remember those hills a few miles back? Wasn't the rain awful?

Small bands form and dissolve, and traveling, Roersma learned, is a great equalizer. Being messy, sweaty, cold or exhilarated together forms a quick bond.

"After being out on road for so long, it's nice being able to just hang out," he said.

He met two Canadians riding together, a bartender from Victoria and another who was a serious environmentalist, a "very low-footprint kind of

guy." He liked to live off the land and believed planting trees was just a tool used by the logging industry. The bartender belonged to a certain breed of traveler Roersma met, adventurous to the core and willing to throw himself into the unknown. Roersma had never cycled for this long before but knew what he was getting into; the bartender didn't know how to change a flat tire before starting out.

The variety of people Roersma met were one of the best things about the trip, he said. Traveling this way, you're not your job, your house, your education or your wealth. Nothing separates you from the other riders.

"We're all out there with the stuff in our bags and our bike," Roersma said.

HOME AGAIN

Roersma entered Orange County on Nov. 9, riding past the places he's lived for the past decade: Seal Beach, Corona del Mar and Dana Point. They brought back a flood of memories, including at Crystal Cove State Beach, where he used to ride on the way to a biking spot in El Moro Canyon.

He reached Border Field State Park two days later, elated over his accomplishment. His rear wheel didn't fare as well: After reaching the border and wheeling his bike away, one of the spokes poked through the rim. It wouldn't have lasted another couple miles.

Exhausted from the traveling, Roersma rested for a few days - then took his bike back out for a quick ride (with a repaired wheel) a few days later.

ONLINE EXTRAS

For a map of Roersma's route, go to www.ocregister.com/extras

