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THE JERSEY SHORE TOURING SOCIETY
KEEPING BIKE RIDING FUN SINCE 1981

The Shore Thing

In 1988, more than a year before the Berlin Wall fell, Club Member Andy Melnick joined the first American group permitted to bike in the Soviet Union.

Biking In The Soviet Union

In 1988, I joined the first American group permitted to bike in the Soviet Union. Most of this discussion will be about what is now the Former Soviet Union (FSU) rather than about cycling. The group consisted of a dozen Americans and I still suspect one was with the C.I.A.

We flew into Warsaw and then bused to the city of Brest which was at the western border of the FSU. We would bike from Brest to Red Square in Moscow, a distance of about 800 miles. We would take about 2 weeks including a day in Minsk and a day in Smolensk. Most of this trip was through Byelorussia—then a republic of the FSU---and now an “independent” country.

The organizer supplied the bikes. The choice was either a road bike or a hybrid. As it turned out, I was lucky to choose a hybrid. Two in the group chose road bikes and by the end of the ride they were very unhappy they did. We biked on the main roads but the surface of even the best roads in the FSU were worse than the poorest secondary roads in Monmouth County. The roads were macadam but for some reason the Soviets had not figured

out how to make a smooth black top. As a result, those using road bikes really got beaten up.

As I indicated we biked along the main roads. We cycled at the end of August

ian trucks. The fact that the Soviets had to use their military trucks for civilian purposes suggested that the readiness of the Soviet military was not comparable to the U.S.



and as far north as we were, it was not summer weather. As we biked, we had to deal with strong, cold cross-winds from the Arctic and there were few trees to block the wind. When we cycled on these roads, the trucks hauling consumer goods were Soviet military vehicles, not civil-

When we biked through the small towns and cities along the way, many Russians grunted at us the German word “swine”. They thought we were a German biking group. The hatred for the Germans, as we learned, was very pronounced. Frankly this was understandable based on the fact

**SMARTER
RIDING**

The Jersey Shore Touring Society



that the German Armies wiped out every town in Byelorussia during the war. We viewed many memorials to “The Great Patriotic War”.

In Brest, I walked around the town and went into a pharmacy, I am not sure why. The pharmacy was not comparable to an American pharmacy. The store was small with dark wood walls and no products of any sort on display. The pharmacist was a woman in a white smock and cap. When a customer gave her a prescription for a particular drug, the pharmacist used the old fashioned pestle and mortar to mix and prepare the drug. There were no pre-prepared capsules and pills. All the drugs were prepared by hand.

I went into a food store in one smaller city. It was not a supermarket; I never saw one in all our travels. Again the store was small, with dark wood walls. The food supplies consisted of potatoes, cabbage, “meat” and milk. The meat was a slab of gristly, fatty meat that a butcher cut for the shopper. The meat cuts were limited because Russians were allowed a meat ration of 1 ¼ pounds of meat per person per month. I wondered how they ran the McDonalds in Moscow. Were you limited to 5 quarter pounders? The milk was packaged in glass bottles with a thin cardboard lid that fitted into the bottle top. The last time I saw milk packaged like this was a long time ago. And then the smell of the food store. The best way I can describe the smell in that store is the smell of a bag of recycled beer and soda cans.

In another small city I wandered through their “department” store. The racks of women’s dresses consisted of only 2-3 dresses on each rack. The record album racks had few albums and the cardboard covers were split at the edges. I humorously described their system as the just-in-time delivery system. What I saw was shoppers standing on the receiving dock

and awaiting the next shipment to see if there was something in the delivery they wanted to purchase.

The Soviets had set up hotels between the Polish border and Moscow to provide lodging to those traveling by car from Poland. So the best hotels were in just two major towns along the route---Minsk and Smolensk. However, because we were traveling at a slower pace, we were staying mainly in smaller cities where auto travelers normally did not stay. What can I say about these hotels? Awful would be complimentary. Besides terrible rooms and beds, the facilities were primitive. Simple things like a bath towel turned out to be about the size of a cloth table napkin with the same thickness of that napkin.

“By the end of the tour, we all needed some real food.”

The eating places along the route were smelly and the food was limited in quantity and quality. By the end of the tour, we all needed some real food. When we reached our hotel in Moscow, they offered an all you can eat buffet. Every member of the group took advantage of the unlimited food. As a result, each member ate at their own table because their plates took up so much of the table.

In Minsk, we bicycled with the Minsk Bicycle Club. The club members were led by a Soviet Olympic cyclist. He rode a rusted children’s bike. Despite that handicap, he left us all behind in the dust. In Minsk, we used a bus to do some touring. Over the windshield at the front of the bus was a bumper sticker with the words “New Jersey and you better together”. While I was in Minsk, I called my boss in New York. The call took over 24 hours to complete.

We biked into Moscow around commuting time and so it was quite hectic. And just like that we biked into Red Square, what a sight—Lenin’s tomb, the Kremlin

The Jersey Shore Touring Society is a bicycle club whose primary focus is on social rather than competitive riding. We have “leader led” as well as “route sheet” rides. On a leader led ride you stay with the ride leader and the group goes only as fast as its slowest member, unless there is an advertised pace. On a route sheet ride, you can proceed at your own pace or hang around with others of the same ability. You can’t get lost because you have a route sheet. We welcome newcomers to our club rides and ask that each rider wear a helmet and complete a waiver available at the sign-in before the ride begins. We have monthly meetings and we publish a monthly newsletter. If you like the club, please join by paying dues.



The Jersey Shore Touring Society
www.jsts.us

and St.Basil's Cathedral.

One of the interesting reactions I had about Moscow was its lack of color and overall drabness. As I thought about it, one of the reasons for the lack of color came from the absence of retail store signage, there was none. The only indication of what the store offered was the black lettering on the windows with generic titles---i.e. butcher store.

One interesting part of Moscow at that time was the square, I believe, just off Red Square. On one side was Detsky Mir, the Toys R Us of Moscow. That one toy store was world famous for its ingenious toys. Directly across the square from Detsky Mir was the

Lubyanka which was the headquarters of the Soviet secret police—the KGB—as well as a notorious prison. My last observation from Moscow was of the long lines in the middle of the day to buy vodka.

"the end result was the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War"

When I returned to the U.S., I was asked to make presentations of my thoughts to institutional investors in New York and Boston. My first comment was that the Soviet Union was a Less Developed Country with nuclear missiles. I expressed the opinion that we had won the war without firing a shot—sounds like the achievement of

a military genius—whoever that might be.

Most of those I talked to could not believe me when I described what I had seen in the FSU. I then quoted our Russian guide who was a Moscow State University student. He commented at dinner one night: "I cannot believe what my country is like". In the next year or two, commentators said the living standards of the Soviets were continuing to decline. Based on what I saw, I could not believe they could get much worse than what I experienced. But the end result was the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War.

~ Andy Melnick

The President's Corner May 2009

Way back in 1986 when I first joined JSTS, the only way for people to contact other people with club news was either by phone or by the monthly newsletter that was sent out at that time. The newsletter always contained information about riding and JSTS club rides. One of the features that always caught my eye was the "President's Corner". This feature was kept up until the mailed version of the newsletter was done away with around 10 years or so ago.

Times have changed!!! Yes we have a newsletter thanks to Lee Beaumont and Lee has done a great job. But now there are NEW ways to contact people what with our website and the email system we use to keep folks informed about bike club happenings.

When Lee brought out the newsletter earlier this year and after I became president, I resolved to once again start the President's Corner. My goal is to inform you about club happenings when necessary but also

talk about current biking issues. In addition, I would certainly be happy if people were to write in their requests for whatever issue or concern they have. I can't promise that my articles will come every month but I hope to at least be informative and also give advice if needed...or even ask for it when needed.

So...since I don't have any advice to give, I'll ask for some!!

As many of you know I have not done a road ride recently and I think it's fair to share with you my reasons. If anyone has any advice on how to deal with the issues I'm raising, please feel free to email me. I have not done a road ride since September. Why? In late August I almost got hit by a police car while on the Manasquan Reservoir ride. This incident took place only about 2 tenths of a mile before the conclusion of the ride. Obviously ALL of us have had various incidents where cars have come VERY close to hitting us...but when it's a police car, it's a different story. To me it

was scary. Then a few weeks later I heard about a very serious accident involving two long time club members right on the Brookdale campus.

I suppose all of this made me very gun shy. So, my question to all of you as club members is: What advice would you give me to get over this? I feel like I'm on my way. I have been slowly getting back in shape and hope to join some club rides in the VERY near future. (When hopefully the weather will improve for GOOD!!) I know the old story...if you fall off a horse the best thing you can do is get back on...but it's easier said than done.

So any advice is welcome...just email me with any suggestions. Others I know also have this problem and I promise to share any advice in future newsletters.

In the meantime: RIDE SAFE!!!!

~ Steve Karger, President, JSTS



Howard Lamhut captured this unique view of JSTS club members enjoying the annual Champagne ride.

In this fifth article in the series, new member Charlie Kirlew tells how he joined the club and quickly became very active. I would like to keep this a regular feature of the newsletter, so please send us your story.



JSTS Story Book

The only thing that is constant is change and change is what brought me to JSTS last July. I went through a number of major changes in my life recently; one of the happier ones was getting a new job. It is close to home and has fairly normal 9 to 5 kind of hours. I could actually plan some regular events in my life. I also was coming up on a minor age milestone. I needed to get some exercise.

I have ridden my bike off and on most of my life. I even had a paper route when I was younger. (Do they even have paper boys any more?) I've done organized rides up in Vermont and even rode from Metuchen to Cape May over part of a Memorial Day weekend. So I

got out my bike and started in on a local bike trail. I was a little concerned about riding out on the open roads and I only knew the high traffic areas. I have a tendency to take unknown routes so I do get a little lost at times. On a bike, that can add a lot of miles. Not something I would look forward to.

My bike was fairly high tech when I got it but that was about 30 years ago. The tires were showing their age so I started looking for a bike shop on the web. One that I found had a link for bike clubs. Most of them were racing oriented and I'm not interested in that, nor am I in shape for it. Then I saw JSTS! It was very local to home and work, and a friendly club. What could be better?

I checked out the ride schedule and there it was, the Thursday Pizza ride. An excuse to eat pizza! No, not an excuse, a reason, maybe even a mandate. OK, mandate is a little strong.

The first ride I went on I had a choice of the "D" ride of 10 or so miles or the "C" ride of 40. I had been riding what I thought was a

fair amount so I wanted more than what the "D" offered, but 40 miles? OK, I went for it anyway. I handled the first 35 miles OK. The last 5 were a little tough but I got through it with a little encouragement from the other members. (One of them being the editor.) I went home and found a nice soft chair to recover in.

"Of course, I love the people."

I do most of the Thursday Pizza rides and I try for at least one ride on the weekend. I look forward to the new places and the connections to places I've been before. Whether it's near the shore or in the back country, there always seems to be something new to see, feel, or maybe a different place to eat even if it isn't pizza.

Of course, I love the people. No one bugs me about how old my bike is. There is plenty of advice if I want or need it. I've also led a few rides and I attend most of the club meetings now.

That minor age milestone went by last month. I celebrated it by leading the Champagne Ride. It was a beautiful day except for an incident with two of our members. The old bike is still working well. There's no room in the budget for a new one right now. But that's an interesting thing about life, there will always be change and I'm looking forward to what's down the road.

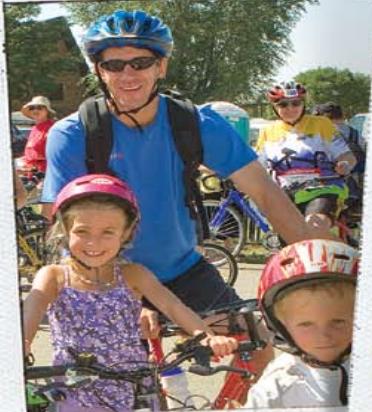
~ Charlie Kirlew





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