

thought I was in the middle of nowhere. I revised my opinion about that in week two. It's a question of scale. And space. Empty space. Lots and lots of it.

Following advice from local cyclists, I stuck to US Route 12 across arid eastern Washington state. I stayed with it through Idaho, over the Rockies and right across the hills and vast plains of Montana and the Dakotas to Minnesota. That is almost half of the USA. Although it felt counter-intuitive, following this main road was a life saver in these vast open spaces. Perhaps literally.

Within a few days, the daytime temperature had risen to over 100 degrees Fahrenheit. The occasional small towns and gas stations offered essential refreshment and hydration opportunities, not to mention air conditioning! I wasn't used to this but I found it less punishing than I feared. While you are moving, you create your own breeze. Only when you stop does it truly feel like you are in an oven.

UPPER MIDWEST AND CANADA

My choice of route made it difficult to get lost. There were many, many miles of long, straight, empty highway, occasionally punctuated by a place of substance like Lewiston, Idaho on the Snake River, or the pleasant small Montana cities of Missoula and Helena.

Until now I was mostly passing through attractive countryside, following big rivers through forested hills and crossing mountain passes. After Helena things changed. For 10 days, I passed through endless miles of farming country, with grain silos, ranches and not much else for company.

The biggest empty space was 80 miles to reach Baker, Montana. But it was often a few hours of hard cycling to the next run-down town, which seldom amounted to much when I arrived. I stayed in motels, which were all similar and perfectly comfortable but short on character. Aside from a couple of people's homes, the only accommodation that stood out was a bizarre add-on to a speedboat showroom, clearly designed for hunters, complete with fridges and instructions for what to do with your kill! Luckily I was alone.

The Twin Cities of Minneapolis and St Paul and their urban sprawl came as a major cultural and physical change. I had reached the Mississippi River and symbolically moved from West to East. I followed the equally hot, but more populated, scenic and historic Mississippi River valley for three consecutive nights, and then shot east across the abundant state of Wisconsin. I really liked its capital city of Madison, surrounded by large lakes, and also enjoyed myself in Milwaukee on the shores of Lake Michigan. The big news here was that their 'Bronze Fonz' statue, celebrating the famous TV character from Happy Days, had been sprayed black overnight. As a token visiting foreigner I made the local news, although my bike got no mention.

I took a ferry across the lake to Michigan and another much smaller one from there to Ontario, Canada, where I hugged the north shore of Lake Erie for a couple of very pleasant days. The Great Lakes are well named – they feel like the ocean but for the lack of salt in the air. I was passing through unassuming ►



Fact file Boring to Dull

Distance: 3,861 miles of cycling from the Pacific Coast (average per day 74.3).

Route: Columbia River Gorge, then US Route 12 through Washington, Idaho, Montana and the Dakotas to Minneapolis. Down the Mississippi and east to Milwaukee, Michigan, Ontario, then Hudson Valley to NYC. Flights to Reykjavik, then Dublin. Ferry from NI to Islay, then across Scotland via Gourrock, Loch Lomond, Callander and Killin.

Conditions: Six weeks of sunshine across America, with many days above 100 degrees Fahrenheit. Unrideable winds in Iceland. Fine autumn weather between the storms in Scotland.

Bike: Sonder Colibri AL.

Maps: Google Maps.

I'm glad I had... Sun cream; extra capacity for carrying water.

Next time I would... Start in spring to arrive in Iceland and Scotland in summer.

Further information:
boringtodull.com

