

15 ACROSS AMERICA

A COMPARISON OF A RIDE ACROSS AMERICA ON ORDINARY BICYCLES IN 2004 WITH THE FIRST BICYCLE RIDE ACROSS AMERICA BY THOMAS STEVENS IN 1884*

GARY SANDERSON

In 1884, Thomas Stevens was the first to ride a bicycle across America. In 2004, a hundred and twenty years later, Peter Matthews, from Dublin, Ireland, and Gary Sanderson, from Verona, New Jersey, rode across America on ordinary bicycles similar to the bicycle used by Thomas Stevens. From the accounts of these two trips, the riders enjoyed the experience and the adventures encountered along the way. These two rides were similar in many aspects, but they were also very different in many ways due to the many significant changes, demographically and geographically, which have taken place in the intervening years. This paper is a look at these similarities, and the contrasts, in these two rides.

THE RIDERS

Thomas Stevens was born in 1855 in England of poor, working class parents. He was one of the few fortunate boys to have had a chance to go to a free school where he learned to read and write. He was a young man when he moved to Missouri to join his family, which had immigrated there a short while earlier. Thomas worked at several different jobs as he moved from Missouri to Wyoming, and

then to Colorado. Importantly, these jobs included some stints as a newspaper reporter. He was working in Denver, Colorado in the early 1880s and became aware of the rapidly growing interest in the new machine—the bicycle. The reasons for Stevens’

* This article has been condensed. Various more detailed accounts of Stevens’ and Sanderson’s and Matthew’s rides can be found in various recent issues of *The Wheelmen* magazine.

decision to ride a bicycle across America, and then to continue his ride until he had ridden around the world, are not known with certainty, but it is likely that he came to believe that he might gain fame and fortune if he were to be the first person to accomplish this feat. What we do know with certainty is that he decided to ride a bicycle across America, even though he had never ridden a bicycle before. Having made this decision, Stevens scraped together enough money to move to San Francisco and to buy a bicycle and a few items of special clothing that he wanted to take on his journey. He was 29 years old when he left San Francisco on the morning of April 22, 1884, to begin his ride around the world.¹

The two contemporary riders who crossed the United States in 2004, a hundred and twenty years after the crossing by Thomas Stevens, were Gary Sanderson and Peter Matthews, who were 69 and 68 years old, respectively, at the time they left Perth Amboy in New Jersey to begin their ride. These riders were forty years older than Stevens when he rode across America. Gary was born on a farm in Southern California and Peter was born near Dublin. Gary was a chemist who had retired in 1997, and Peter a photo technician who had retired after a serious bicycle accident in 1996. For us, there was no expectation of fame or fortune, but we both had a life-long involvement with bicycles, we were experienced long distance riders, and we had developed a strong interest in riding our high-wheel bicycles across America. The successful completion of this ride did provide us with a sense of fulfillment and satisfaction with our accomplishment.²

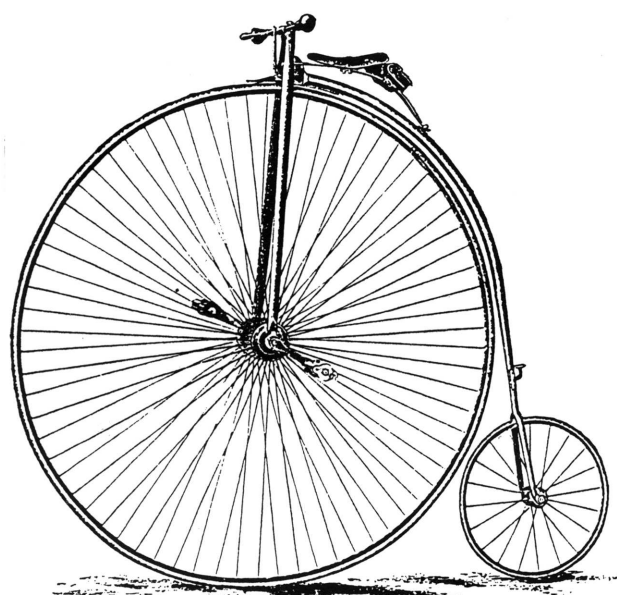
It is significant that Thomas Stevens rode alone and we rode as a pair. Stevens chose to ride alone because he wanted to be the first to ride across America and then around the world. He also rode alone because he believed that this was the safest way to ride—most important in the Asiatic countries he rode through when he left America. In contrast, we chose to ride together for companionship. We had no expectation of being first at anything important, and our safety depended mostly on our riding skills in towns and on busy highways.

BICYCLES AND EQUIPMENT

The bicycle purchased by Thomas Stevens for his historic ride was an 1883 or 1884 50-inch Columbia Standard (see Fig. 15.1). Stevens began his ride in San Francisco on April 22, 1884. He traveled alone without the benefit of any accompanying support vehicles, so that the amount of equipment he took with him was limited to what he could carry on his person or on his bicycle. A list of these items has been compiled (see below) from a careful reading of his written account of the trip and the drawings that were included. A bicycle similar to the one that Stevens rode is shown in Fig. 15.2.. This bicycle is loaded as it might have been on this trip, although none of the drawings in Stevens' account of this ride show more than a tool kit attached to his bicycle.

ITEMS CARRIED BY STEVENS ON HIS RIDE IN 1884

- Carried on self: slouch hat, shirt, neckerchief, knickerbocker trousers with belt, set of



STANDARD COLUMBIA

Fig. 15.1. The 50-in. Columbia Standard Bicycle that Thomas Stevens rode across America, as shown on page 14 of the Columbia catalogue for 1884.

underwear (author's supposition), leggings, sheath knife on belt, "bulldog" pistol, money.

- Carried on the bicycle: long gossamer coat, rubberized, spare shirt, spare pair of socks, spare set of underwear, one or more notebooks, pen and ink or pencils (author's supposition).³
- Carried in the tool kit on back of bicycle seat: bicycle wrench, small screw driver, small can of oil, pocket knife, small sharpening stone (author's supposition), small prospecting glass.

The two riders making the trip in 2004 rode ordinary bicycles similar to the one used on Stevens' earlier trip. Gary Sanderson rode on a 1993 54-inch Whitney ordinary bicycle made by James Spillane Jr. and James Spillane, III, in Madison, Connecticut. Peter Matthews rode on an 1888 50-inch Coventry Machinists ordinary bicycle made in Coventry, which had been highly restored (see Fig. 15.4). We began our ride on June 12, 2004, and we rode unsupported for the first eight days, after which we were joined by Irene Sanderson, Gary's wife. From this point on, Irene accompanied us and provided support services, consisting of carrying our extra clothes, meeting us at points along the route averaging about 10 miles apart where we

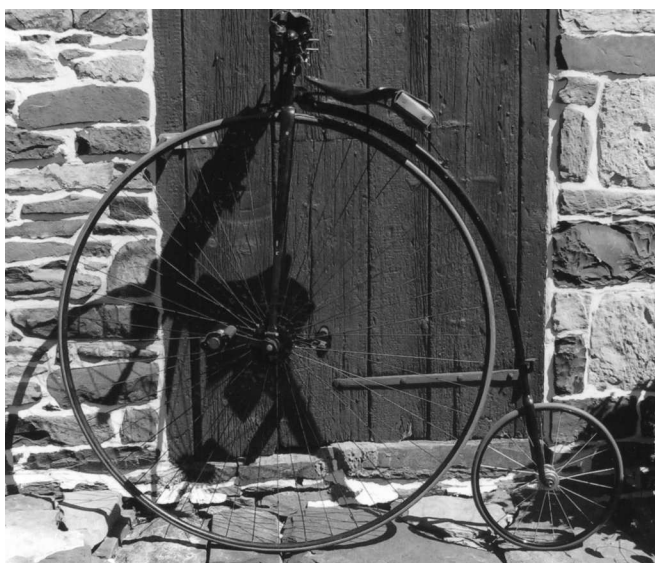


Fig. 15.2. A bicycle similar to Stevens', loaded as it probably was during his ride across America in 1884.

could get water and other refreshments, and making arrangements for accommodations at the destination chosen for the day. The items we carried are listed below.

ITEMS CARRIED BY SANDERSON AND MATTHEWS ON THEIR 2004 TRIP

- Carried on self: bicycle helmet, bicycle riding jersey, bicycle riding shorts, bicycle gloves, money and credit cards, water bottle on shoulder strap, water in "camel back" back pack.
- Carried in an MIP bag fastened to backbone of bicycle or in a tool kit fastened to back of seat: tools such as an adjustable wrench, a screw driver, small bottle of oil, small canister of grease, etc., rain jacket, digital camera, on the handlebars: modern cycle computer.
- In the support van: rain jacket and rain pants, snacks, extra water, fruit juices, extra clothes, extra parts for the bicycle, lap-top computer.

Comparison of these two lists reveals much about the differences in the conditions under which these two trips were made. For instance, we wore bicycle helmets while we were riding. In contrast, Stevens wore a slouch hat until it blew away in a storm encountered between Rock Creek and Lookout (near Laramie) in Wyoming, and this hat was replaced a few days later by a military summer helmet given to him by the commanding officer of Ft. Sidney (Nebraska) when he visited this army post set up in the late 1860s to protect the railroad from the Indians. Stevens prized this helmet, and wore it until he reached Karachi in India more than two years later. Of greatest importance, Stevens carried a pistol at all times on his trip and a hunting knife on his belt at least during the first part of his trip, whereas we carried no weapons. Finally, we carried a supply of water in contrast to Stevens who apparently depended entirely on water in streams, ponds, or wells that he found along the way: Today, Thomas Stevens' primary sources of water would be difficult to find along our roads. In fact, we avoided drinking water from open sources for fear that it

might be contaminated with harmful microbes and/or toxic chemicals. In McCall, Nebraska, the motel where we stayed displayed a sign warning that the city's water supply contained nitrates at a level that might be dangerous to drink.

ROUTES TAKEN

The routes taken by the riders on the two bicycle trips are shown in Fig. 15.5, and they are compared below. The destinations for each day's ride are summarized in the Appendix.

COMPARISON OF THE ROUTES TAKEN

- ❑ Direction from start to finish: Stevens rode west to east (San Francisco to Boston), and we rode east to west (Perth Amboy, New Jersey, to Newport, Oregon).
- ❑ Inclusive dates of the rides: Stevens rode in 1884 from April 22 to August 4 (93 riding days, 104 days overall) and we rode in 2004 from June 12 to August 21 (61 riding days, 71 days overall).



Left: Fig. 15.3. Gary Sanderson's 54-in. Whitney bicycle.

Right: Fig. 15.4. Peter Mathews' 50-in. Coventry Machinists bicycle.

- ❑ General description of the route: Stevens followed the trans-continental railroad from San Francisco to Omaha, Nebraska, and then established roads, mostly unpaved, on to Chicago and Boston. We followed paved highways across the country choosing roads designated as "bike-routes" whenever possible
- ❑ Obstacles encountered: Stevens encountered many hardships, including snow, cold rain, cold weather, dangerous wild animals, uncertain sources of food and accommodations, lack of rideable road surfaces, many streams and rivers without bridges that had to be forded. The most serious hardships were all encountered during the first part of his trip as he rode from San Francisco to Omaha. We faced head-winds on most days as we rode through the east and the mid-west.
- ❑ Distance traveled: Stevens estimated that he rode 3,700 miles. Gary's cycle computer indicated that he and Peter rode 3,365 miles on their crossing of the USA.

Thomas Stevens chose to start his ride in San Francisco. It is likely that this choice was made because: a) San Francisco was a center of cycling and it was relatively easy to outfit himself for such a ride, b) this city was near Sacramento, which was the western terminus of the trans-continental railroad that

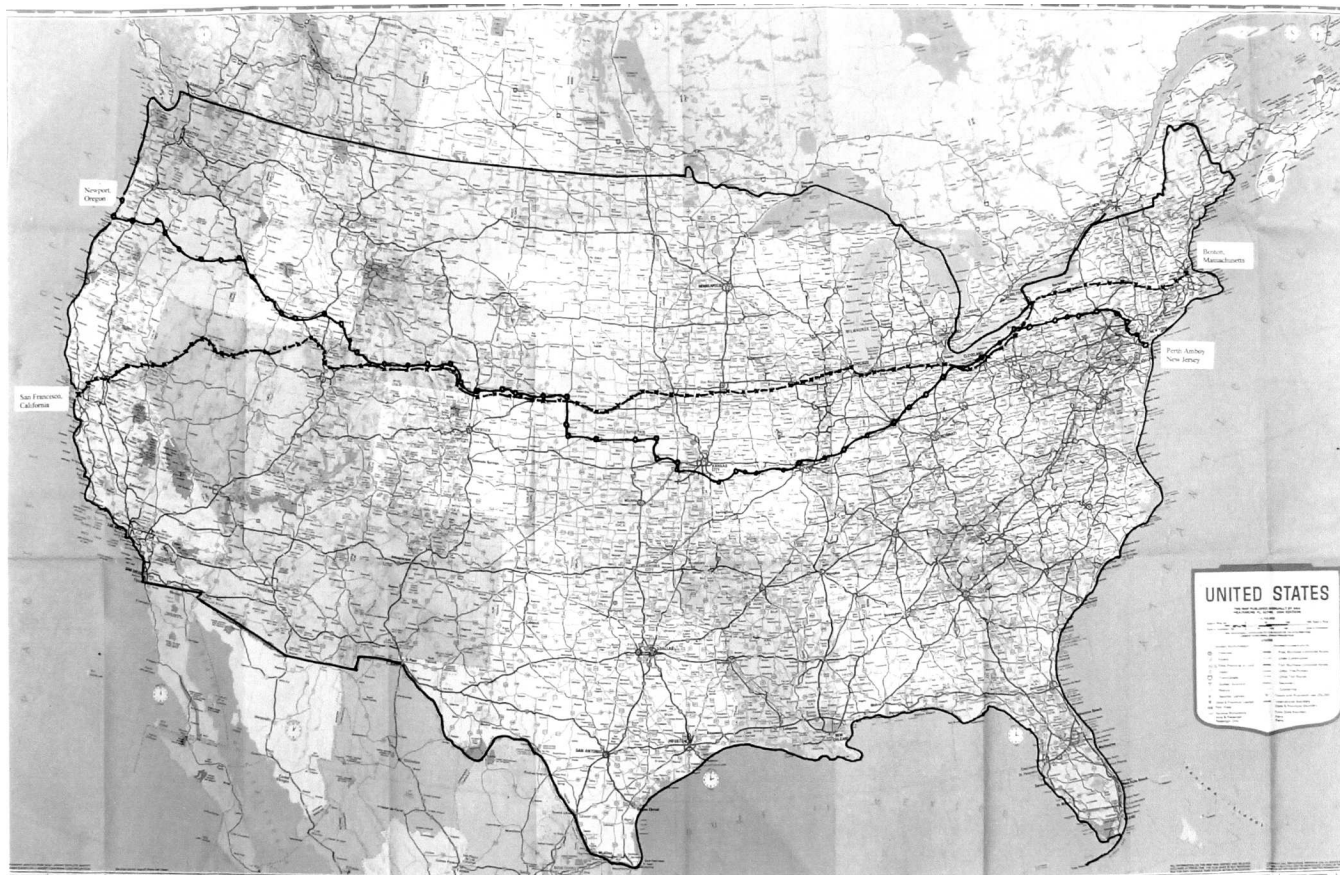


he intended to follow through the sparsely developed western part of the country, c) he probably wanted to take advantage of the prevailing winds that blow from west to east, and d) it was a major port on the Pacific Ocean which would be relatively easy to find passage to on his return from the orient.

We chose to start our ride on the Atlantic Ocean in Perth Amboy, New Jersey for several reasons. First, Sanderson lives in New Jersey and he wanted to start near his home, and second, we did not want to try to duplicate the Thomas Stevens ride. What we did want to do was to travel on a scenic route at a pace that allowed us to absorb the interesting towns, geography, and historical features along the route. It is noteworthy that four of the five ordinary bicycle riders who made this trip in the 19th century rode from east to west. All the ordinary bicycle riders who have completed the trip in the 20th and 21st centuries have followed the Stevens route as closely as possible except for us. We wanted to strike out on a route of our own which we believed was very much in the true

tradition of Thomas Stevens. As a result of this decision, we were the only people to have crossed America on ordinary bicycles from east to west since the 19th century and the price that we had to pay for our decision was the many days of headwinds we had to contend with, more than two-thirds of our riding days.

Stevens followed the railroad because it was an established route that was graded to a reasonable incline, and the route over the Sierra Nevada Mountains in California was protected by snow sheds, making it possible to cross these mountains early in the spring. Most important, there were towns and/or railroad stations located approximately six miles apart along the entire length of this railroad from San Francisco to Omaha, where Stevens expected to be able to get the food and shelter that he would need to survive. This information was readily available to travelers in guide books, which provided detailed information about the route of the trans-continental railroad (see Fig. 15.6). There were no alternative routes Stevens could have taken in 1884 that had as many



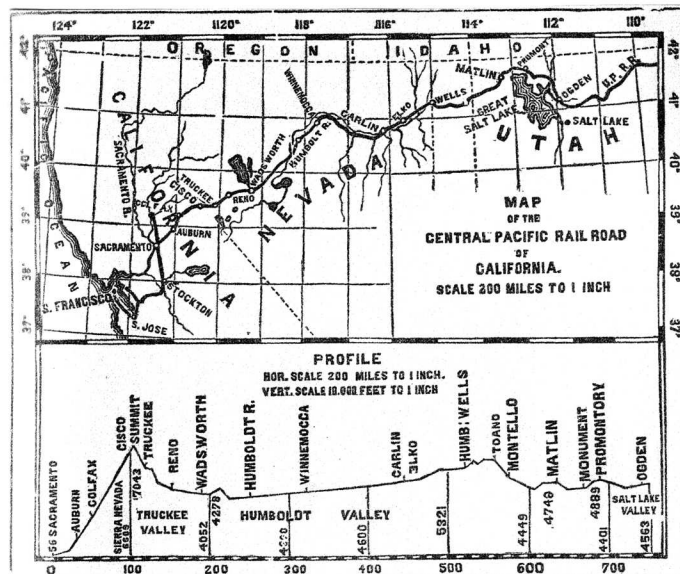
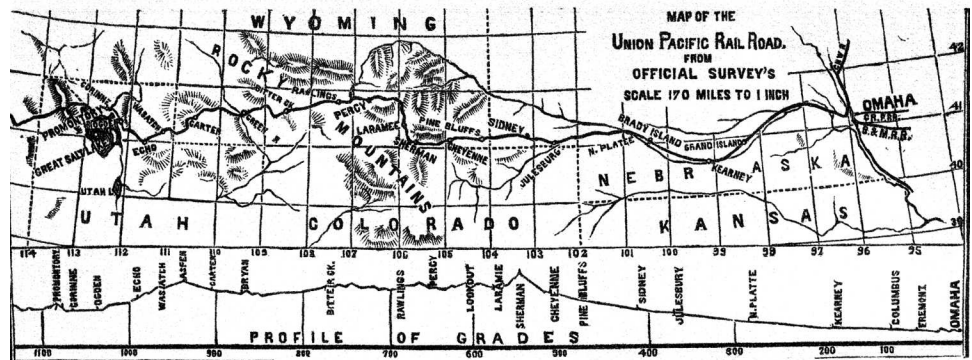
attributes favorable to the success of his trip. However, while Stevens had a route that was passable, and one that afforded food and shelter at the required intervals, much of the surface over which he traveled was unsuitable for cycling, which meant that he had to push or carry his bicycle for many miles until he got to the Midwest, where he finally found more roads were suitable for bicycling.

One hundred and twenty years later, we had plenty of good, hard surfaced roads to choose from. Our problem was to pick roads that were friendly for bicycle travel, and which had accommodations at about 60 mile intervals, the planned daily travel distance, along the way. This was relatively easy until we reached Wyoming, when the towns became fewer, with greater distances between them (see Figs. 14 & 15). We followed closely the route taken by Stevens through Wyoming, and found that most of the railroad stations and many of the settlements which had been along

the railroad in 1884 had completely disappeared by 2004. In fact, we found that in Wyoming and western Oregon many of the small towns and stations which had been established along the railroad and the stage-coach routes in the 19th century no longer existed, even though the name of the location continues to be shown on the maps of the area.

BREAKDOWNS AND REPAIRS

Thomas Stevens only reported one mechanical problem with his bicycle which occurred in the foothills of the Sierra Nevada Mountains in California. What is known about this problem is that the repairs were made by a blacksmith, and that Stevens missed his dinner that night! Either he had no other problems, or he simply did not report them. Certainly, he did want to make a favorable impression on Col. Pope, and so he may have



Facing page: Fig. 15.5. Map of the USA showing the routes followed by Thomas Stevens (—x—x—) and Sanderson and Mathews (—o—o—) respectively.

Right: Fig. 15.6. Maps from *Croftutt's Guide*, showing the route of the Transcontinental Railroad from San Francisco, California, and Omaha, Nebraska.

decided not to draw attention to any problems that he may have had with his Columbia bicycle.

In contrast, we did have several problems. Peter had problems with spokes breaking and with his rear wheel. On average, Peter would break a spoke a day. After the 15th day out, all of Peter's spare spokes had been used for repairs and he then limped along until he got to Indianapolis (Indiana), where he made more spokes. Peter had a new rear wheel on his bicycle that proved to be slightly out of round with the result that a flat area would develop in the rubber on this wheel within 100 miles on the road. Finally, in Illinois, after all of Peter's old used tire rubber was used up, we swapped his rear wheel for one of the spares only to find that the rubber was loose on this wheel. It was so loose that it came off on the road in Wyoming and had to be replaced with the new rubber that Peter was carrying. He had not replaced the rubber earlier because he wanted to save his new rubber to use if absolutely needed. It was needed!

Five spokes broke on Gary's bicycle during the trip. He had no spares for the V-shaped spokes on his machine, so he bent modern spokes around the old broken spokes to extend them as required. The repaired spokes were probably stronger than the originals. A more serious breakdown occurred in Northport, New York, on the sixth day of the ride, when the backbone of his bicycle broke apart at the neck. Luckily, a passer-by stopped and volunteered to take Gary, and the bicycle that was in two parts, to a shop that made repairs on garden and farm equipment. The owner of this shop stopped his work and spent two hours welding Gary's backbone back together, enabling Gary to get back on the road in time to reach our day's scheduled stop before nightfall.

DANGERS ENCOUNTERED

The dangers encountered by Thomas Stevens in 1884 were very different from the dangers we encountered on our ride in 2004. In the early part of his trip in the western part of the United States and its territories, Stevens faced the distinct possibility of dying from starvation or lack of water. As we know, Stevens did find the nourishment that he

required to survive, but he did have to work hard at times to make this happen, and he did not always eat at regular intervals.

The second most serious danger that he faced was attack by wild animals. Stevens writes about meeting a mountain lion face-to-face in Five Mile Canyon in the Humboldt Mountains of Nevada. He shot at the lion, missed it, but the dust raised does cause the lion to turn away. Soon after this episode, Stevens encountered some bears. He decided not to use his gun but to edge slowly away, keeping his bicycle between himself and the bears. Later, in the middle of a thunder storm, Stevens was confronted by a stampeding herd of wild mustangs coming straight at him down a mountain trail. Again, he fired his pistol and managed to divert the animals from a head-on collision. Finally, there is an encounter with a rattle snake in Nebraska. He was saved from a bite on the leg by the thick canvas of his gaiters, and he "metes out a fierce punishment" on the snake with his pistol.

The dangers that we faced on their ride were entirely different. The only encounters with wild animals were at a distance, and they were exciting for the opportunity to see these animals in their natural habitat. We saw many animals in the wild on their ride, but the most exciting sight was the mountain lion chasing a herd of antelope in Wyoming. Cars and trucks on the highways that we were riding on posed the greatest danger to our safety. Usually, drivers of motor vehicles were either simply courteous, or they were eager to let us know that they saw us and that they approved of what we were doing. However, on three or four occasions, out of the thousands of cars and trucks that we encountered on our 3,350 mile ride, car drivers passed us and then cut in front of us so closely that we would have been hit if we had not back-pedaled with force to abruptly slow our forward motion.

However, the most frightening and dangerous part of our ride came on a 20-mile stretch of I-90 just south of Boise, Idaho that was being repaired. This was a 4-lane divided highway on which all traffic was diverted to one of the two-lane strips of highway. This meant that high speed traffic (cars and trucks) was using the eastbound part of the two lane roadbed, and the shoulder on the right side of

this road was very narrow, just wide enough for an ordinary bicycle to pass with about 12 inches to spare. And, to make it worse, the road passed over the Snake River several times on bridges that were about 100 feet above the river. The road climbed most of way through this situation which meant that we had to maintain a straight line of motion to stay on the narrow shoulder and out of the way of the high speed traffic, while at the same time struggling with our wheels to maintain forward motion up the climbing road. We were very glad when we finally arrived safely in Boise and found our motel for this night.

ACCOMMODATIONS

Thomas Stevens stayed in whatever accommodations he could find at the end of the day. He stayed in hotels and bed and breakfast houses, when these were available. However, between San Francisco and the Wyoming border, railroad workmen and farmers who lived in shanties along the railroad frequently provided his accommodations. Stevens would approach such a shanty hoping that someone was living there, and that they would be agreeable to giving him a place to stay for the night. Most often the occupant of the lonely shanty would give Stevens the shelter that he requested, but the amenities were sparse. For example, on one night spent between Reno and Wadsworth, Nevada, Stevens had to sleep on the floor of a lonely farmer's shanty with only one thin blanket to keep him warm, and at the Stone House section-house (Nevada), he had to sleep in the out-building without blankets. On one cold, wet night, he had to sleep the night in a deserted wagon in the Wyoming countryside, when nothing else was available within riding distance. In contrast to the nights when Stevens had to make do under difficult conditions, there were occasions when he had excellent accommodations. For instance, in Willard City (Utah), he was directed to a hotel in which he received a bountiful, well-cooked meal served by a pretty maid who informed him that this was to be expected in Mormon land.

Settlement of the land increased steadily as Stevens rode eastward from Utah, but he followed

the trans-continental railroad to Omaha (Nebraska) through towns and forts that existed at regular intervals. However, hotel accommodations continued to be difficult to find, and so Stevens spent several nights in farmhouses along the way.

We had a very different experience. We stayed in motels most nights, and occasionally at bed and breakfast places. These accommodations were generally readily available throughout the trip and they usually provided some type of breakfast. However, on two nights we were not able to find accommodations on our route. In Wamsutter (Wyoming), all the motel rooms in this small town were taken by railroad men who were working on a railroad repair, and farmers who had come to town for a conference. In this case, we rode 20 miles further up the road to Table Rock (no motel there), and loaded our bicycles onto the sag van for a ride to Rock Springs, 60 miles further on, where we found a motel for the night. The next morning the sag van carried us back to Table Rock to resume our ride from the same spot that we had quit the night before. The second time this happened was in western Oregon. We had ridden 60 miles from Burns to Hampton only to find that Hampton was a former stage stop. The only structures at this location were a small restaurant which was closed, and a roadside taxidermy shop open only during deer and antelope hunting season. Again, the bicycles were loaded onto the sag van and riders and bicycles were driven 60 miles ahead to Bend (OR) for the night and back again the next morning to reconnect with our ride across America.

Besides food and a bed for the night, Gary needed a room with a telephone so that he could make his internet connection for updating news about this ride on the web site being maintained by Karen Turner of The Wheelmen in Detroit, Michigan. This was not a factor for Thomas Stevens, who traveled in an age before computers and the internet. More about this later.

PEOPLE MET ALONG THE WAY

Thomas Stevens began his trip on the west coast of the United States and its Territories,⁴ and the people he met as he rode through the sparsely settled

western part of the country were critical to the success of his journey. During this part of his ride, Stevens was entirely dependent on the people he met for food and shelter. When traveling through Nevada, Utah, and Wyoming, most of the people he encountered were men working for the trans-continental railroad and farmers living on isolated farms. Stevens did meet some Native American Indians as he rode through the west, but these encounters were generally unpleasant reminders of the degradation that these once-proud people had undergone. The fact that Stevens completed his ride without serious mishap is testimony to his skill in dealing with people of all types.

As he approached Laramie (Wyoming), Stevens was met by a group of wheelmen who had come out to greet him. This was the first time he had seen a wheelman since he had departed from San Francisco thirty-eight days earlier. He did meet other wheelmen on his trip, and a summary of these encounters that are recorded in his written account of the trip are noted in the Appendix.

We also made a special effort to meet with wheelmen along their route, and this led to several nights on our ride being spent as guests in the homes of wheelmen. These were very special nights characterized by warm camaraderie and sharing of stories related to the ride and bicycles in general. And there were numerous other people met along the way who injected warmth and friendship into the journey. On almost every occasion, people would gather when we stopped for any reason, to ask about our ordinary bicycles. The usual questions were asked (i.e., How do you get up? Why is the front wheel so big? Are these bicycles hard to ride? Where do you find bicycles like this?), and advice was given to the riders about the road ahead, the weather, where to eat, etc. These encounters were always pleasant, and an effort was made to always give friendly, informative replies to all questions.

FOOD: WHERE? HOW? WHAT?

Several factors were extremely important in determining what Thomas Stevens ate on his ride across America in 1884:

- From San Francisco to Omaha, Stevens was riding through sparsely settled country. As noted above, he followed the inter-continental railroad in order to be assured of finding some type of habitation (i.e., small towns, railroad maintenance shanties or isolated farms) from which he planned to get food and shelter.
- Stevens was obviously resourceful and capable in his dealing with people of all types. He always managed to get enough food to survive.
- Stevens was willing to eat whatever was available, and his strong constitution enabled him to subsist on the food that he was offered.
- There is no evidence that Stevens carried any water with him. Apparently, he was able to find water to drink in the streams and wells that he passed to satisfy his requirements for this essential substance. Even in the deserts of Nevada, Stevens found enough water to continue his trip without interruption. Again, traveling along the route of the trans-continental railroad was probably critical to finding enough water to survive.

When in towns, Stevens stayed in hotels, bed & breakfast establishments, or in homes with friends, and he ate normal meals that probably consisted of meat, potatoes, vegetables (if available), bread, and possibly some dessert. The beverage would have been coffee, water, or milk, although there are hints in his account that modest amounts of alcoholic beverages were consumed when they were available. More interesting is what Stevens ate when he was traveling in the very sparsely settled parts of the western United States and Territories (i.e., Nevada, Utah, and Wyoming), and he found himself dependent on the hospitality of the people occupying the habitation encountered. Sometimes he was welcomed in and offered food, and sometimes he had to use all of his considerable skills of persuasion to overcome a rejection of his request for shelter and food.

EXAMPLES:

- Shortly after leaving Sacramento, Stevens was riding through ranches owned by Latino rancheros. At noontime he encountered one of these ranches and he was welcomed in for a fine lunch. After lunch he recounted: "I find myself, before I realize it, illustrating the bicycle and its uses, to a group of sombrero-decked rancheros and dark-eyed senioritas." This was one of his good meals on the road.
- Stevens' worst meal was a lunch of "plan-cae" prepared for him by a Chinese cook who worked at a railroad section house east of Mill City, Nevada. On this occasion, the cook refused to give Stevens any food until after he offered to pay 50 cents (two two-bit pieces) for something to eat. On learning that he would earn 50 cents for his effort, the Chinese cook replied, "All li; you gib me flore bittee me fly you Melican plan-cae." This turned out to be "a chunk of tenacious dough, made of water

and flour only, and soaked for a few minutes in warm grease." As hungry as he was, Stevens could only eat half of the plan-cae with the help of a generous amount of "tea."

- A thirsty Stevens reached a deserted railroad section house east of Tacoma, Utah and found a cistern with water that was alive with "wrigglers." He reached down to drink and fell into the cistern. Luckily, he was able to climb out of the cistern presumably after he had drunk all the water he could hold.
- Another notable "good" meal experience came in Willard City, Utah. Here Stevens found a hotel where he got a meal that he described as one of the best on the entire trip. One wonders if the pretty Mormon girl who waited on him did not have some influence on how well this meal was received.
- The 24 hours before reaching Carter Station, Wyoming, were described by Stevens as "the

WEST FROM OMAHA.		SACRAMENTO TIME.		EAST FROM SAN FRANCISCO.		
Daily Emigrant and freight.	Daily Express, 1st & 2d Cl's	Distance from Omaha.	STATIONS.	Elevation	Daily Express, 1st & 2d Cl's	Daily Emigrant and freight.
5.00 a m	11.30 p m	1655	Lv. †TRUCKEE. Ar	5845	11.00 p m	9.00 p m
5.25	12.00	1662	Strong's Canyon	6780	10.32	8.15
6.45	12.35 a m	1671	Summit	7017	10.00	7.25
7.18	12.57	1675	Cascade	6519	9.40	6.50
7.40	1.10	1679	Tamarack	6191	9.27	6.25
8.00	1.23	1683	Cisco	5939	9.15	6.05
8.50	1.55	1691	Emigrant Gap	5229	8.40	5.10
9.25	2.15	1697	Blue Canyon	4677	8.15	4.30
10.15	2.42	1702	Sandy Run	4154	7.35	3.40
10.55	3.00	1706	Alta	3612	7.10	3.00
11.10	3.07	1708	Dutch Flat	3403	6.55	2.30
11.30	3.15	1710	Gold Run	3206	6.45	2.15
12.15 p m	3.35	1617	C. H. Mills	2691	6.20	1.25
12.45	3.52	1721	Colfax	2421	6.00 *	12.45 p m
1.15	4.08	1725	N. E. Mills	2280	5.16	11.50
1.35	4.20	1728	Applegate	2000	5.02	11.20
1.55	4.31	1732	Clipper Gap	1759	4.50	11.00
2.35	4.55	1739	Auburn	1362	4.22	10.15
3.05	5.12	1744	New Castle	969	4.02	9.30
3.40	5.32	1750	Pino	403	3.40	8.45
4.00	5.45	1752	Rocklin	248	3.25	7.45
4.10	6.02	1757	Junction	163	2.57	7.22
5.00	6.12	1760	Antelope	154	2.48	7.05
5.32	6.30	1767	Arcade	55	2.32	6.30
5.53	6.42	1771	A. M. Bridge	53	2.09	6.05
6.10 p m*	6.55 a m*	1775	Ar. †SACRAMENTO Lv	30	2.10 p m*	5.45 a m

Fig. 15.7. Example of a time table from Crofutt's Guide, listing habitations along the way. Similar time tables were shown in this guide covering the entire route of the Transcontinental Railroad.

† Day Telegraph. † Day and Night Telegraph. * Meals.
 — The passenger's attention is directed to the elevation of each station.

toughest 24 hours of the entire journey.” On this occasion, he had decided to leave the railroad at Piedmont Station so that he could visit Fort Bridger. He wrote: “I had to ford no less than nine streams of ice-cold water; get benighted on a rain-soaked adobe plain, where I had to sleep our all night in an abandoned freight-wagon; and, after carrying my bicycle across seven miles of deep sticky clay, I finally arrive at Carter, looking like the last sad remnant of a dire calamity—having had nothing to eat for twenty-four hours.”

Thomas Stevens’ circumstances changed markedly after he reached Omaha. From this point on, he was able to find accommodations and meals regularly and without notable difficulty, except for the night of July 1, when he was refused a room at three different farm houses and was forced to ride late into the night to reach Yorkville, Illinois, where he finally found a hotel. Besides eating in hotels, he also had many opportunities to eat in the homes of wheelmen. This was probably true in Laramie and Cheyenne in the Wyoming territory, in Chicago, and it was certainly true in New York state.

We had no particular trouble finding places to eat along our route until we came to the western Oregon where there were stretches of 50 miles, or more, without any habitation. However, we did not suffer because Irene with her sag wagon was available at least once every 10 miles to give us food and water. However some features of our food supply do stand out:

- The highlights of our ride were the meals offered to us in the homes of Wheelmen. Besides the good food, the camaraderie made these occasions most enjoyable, and they greatly contributed to our good spirits.
- Peter Matthews is a celiac, meaning that he is allergic to gluten (the major protein in wheat and some other grains). Finding foods that contain the energy needed for a ride across America, but that do not contain gluten, required considerable effort on Peter’s part. However, many people along the way helped

out by telling us where to find gluten-free food products.

- We were never forced to miss a meal. The worst situations we encountered were several times when we had to ride an hour or two longer than we wished to before finding a place to eat. Finding food was certainly easier for us than it was for Thomas Stevens in 1884.
- Finding water was very different for us than it was for Stevens. Peter carried a water bottle, and Gary wore a Camel Back water system on his back. These water-carrying systems were refilled as required at restaurants, gas filling stations, or private homes if necessary. Also, bottles of juices and soft drinks were available to us in stores and in vending machines that occurred reasonably frequently on most of the roads that we traveled.

MONEY

Thomas Stevens financed his ride across America from his own resources. He purchased his 1883 or 1884 Columbia Standard ordinary bicycle in San Francisco and he outfitted himself for the ride at that time. Stevens had enough cash left over to purchase the food and lodging that he needed on his ride across the country to Boston, and on to New York City. And he must have carried the cash needed for this trip on his person. However, Stevens did intend to ride around the world from the outset of his ride, and it is clear that he hoped to obtain financial backing for the continuation of his ride from New York City around the rest of the world, a ride that would take two more years to complete.

We also financed our ride from our own resources, but we had the convenience of having credit cards. We carried enough cash on our persons to meet the normal daily expenses, but most expenses (motel room rent, major meals, etc.) were paid with credit cards. Also, additional cash was obtained from ATMs as required, and this worked for Gary, and it worked for Peter even though his bank was overseas in Ireland.

PUBLICITY: TELLING THE STORY OF THE RIDE

Both Stevens and Sanderson were dedicated to creating an account of their journeys. Both kept daily journals recording the most interesting events that occurred, and they were both involved with getting this information disseminated by the means available to them. In Stevens' case, he apparently sent regular reports on the progress of his ride to newspapers and possibly to the League of American Wheelmen, probably using the mail and the telegraphic services available in the towns and railway stations located regularly along the railroad that he was following: This is attested to by the fact that the Laramie, Wyoming, wheelmen road out of town to meet him as he approached, and the Cheyenne wheelmen were found to be informed about his ride. In Sanderson's case, each night that a phone line with an appropriate connection to the internet was available, he sent his journal entry for the day, and any former day's entries that had not been sent earlier, and digital pictures taken during the day, to Karen Turner, The Wheelmen web-site manager located in Detroit for posting on The Wheelmen web-site.

At the end of their rides, their journal entries were converted into printed form by both Stevens and Sanderson. Stevens spent the winter of 1884/5 in New York City writing a long account of his ride, with drawings of important events, for serialized publication in *Outing* magazine,⁵ and Sanderson submitted a written version of his journal (with digital pictures) for publication in *The Wheelmen* magazine. Later Stevens would convert his magazine articles into a book that was published in two volumes, and Sanderson would write this article comparing the two rides.

During the journey, we were approached by two television stations and at least twelve newspapers across the country for interviews, which we always agreed to do. Generally we were too busy maintaining ourselves and our bicycles to watch television for the report of our ride, and usually we had ridden out of the area before the newspaper account of our ride through the area was on the newsstand. We assume that Stevens had the same

experience with newspapers, but, of course, there was no television coverage in the 1880s.

CONCLUSIONS

Thomas Stevens' ride across America ended in Boston with the dipping of the wheel of his ordinary bicycle in the waters of the Atlantic Ocean. For Stevens, the end of this ride was but the start of the remainder of his ride around the world. He earned considerable notoriety from his ride, but he had to sit in a hotel room in New York City during the winter of 1884/5 writing a detailed account of his ride to justify being hired to report on the remainder of his ride around the world for *Outing* magazine.

Our ride across America ended in Newport (Oregon) with the ceremonial dipping of the front wheel of our ordinary bicycles in the Pacific Ocean. For us, the end of our ride was a long-held dream come true. Our Wheelmen friends helped us celebrate, and that was a reward far beyond anything that we had expected. Knowing the elation that we experienced in having made the ride across America, we only hope that the telling of our experience will encourage others who dream of doing a similar ride to actually do it.

RECORDS SET BY MATHEWS AND STEVENSON

Thomas Stevens was the first person to ride a bicycle across America (and then around the world). As a result, all other records are made in comparison with the standards that he set on this "first" ride.

Sanderson and Matthews believe that they set the following records:

- At the ages of 69 (Gary), and 68 (Peter), we were the oldest people to ride ordinary bicycles across America.
- We were the 1st and 2nd persons to ride ordinary bicycles across America traveling from East to West since the 19th century.

- We were the fastest riders to cross America on ordinary bicycles riding from east to west.
- We had more days of headwinds than any other people making this ride across America (at least we complained more about headwinds).
- We were the first to ride ordinary bicycles over the McKenzie Pass in Oregon.
- We rode with more Wheelmen along the way than any other rider has done.
- We enjoyed our ride as much, or more, than any other person riding an ordinary bicycle across America.

APPENDIX: DESTINATIONS FOR EACH DAY OF THE RIDES

A. STEVENS, 1884

(Accommodations are assumed to be boarding houses or hotels unless otherwise indicated):

- Day 1 (Apr. 22): San Francisco, CA, to a house in the tuiles.
- Day 2 (Apr 23): to Elmira, CA.
- Day 3 (Apr 24): to a hotel in Sacramento, CA.
- Day 4 (Apr. 25): to a boarding house near Rocklin, CA.
- Day 5 (Apr. 26): to a “half ranch, half roadside inn” in Clipper Gap, CA.
- Day 6 (Apr. 28): to Blue Canyon, CA.
- Day 7 (Apr.29): to the Summit Hotel in Summit House, CA.
- Day 8 (Apr. 30): to a hotel in Verdi, NV.
- Day 9 (May 1): to a “little shanty” on a ranch on the Truckee River in NV.
- Day 10 (May 2): to Hot Springs, NV.
- Day 11 (May 3): to Lovelocks, NV.
- Day 12 (May 4): to Mill City, NV.
- Day 13 (May 5): to a hotel in Winnemucca, NV.
- Day 14 (May 6): to an empty Chinese bunkhouse at Stone House, NV.
- Day 15 (May 7): to a ranch on the Humboldt River, NV.
- Day 16 (May 8): to Palisade, NV.
- Day 17 (May 9): to a hotel in Carlin, NV.
- Day 18 (May 10): to a boarding house in Halleck, NV.
- Day 19 (May 11): to a CP section house, NV.
- Day 20 (May 12): to Tacoma, UT.
- Day 21 (May 13): to Matlin, UT.
- Day 22 (May 14): to a room at the salt works at Salt House, UT.
- Day 23 (May 15): to a farmhouse near Corrine, UT.
- Day 24 (May 16): to a hotel in Willard City, UT.
- Day 25 (May 17): to Ogden, UT.
- Day 26 (May 18): to a hotel in Echo City, UT.
- Day 27 (May 19): to Castle Rocks, UT.
- Day 28 (May 20): to Evanston, WY.
- Day 29 (May 21): to Hilliard, WY.
- Day 30 (May 22): to an abandoned freight wagon on the Wyoming plain.
- Day 31 (May 23): to Carter Station, WY.
- Day 32 (May 24): to near Grainger, WY.
- Day 33 (May 25): to Rock Springs, WY.
- Day 34 (May 26): to a ranch on the way to Rawlings, WY.
- Day 35 (May 27): to Rawlings, WY.
- Day 36 (May 28): to Carbon, WY.
- Day 37 (May 30): to Lookout, WY.
- Day 38 (May 31): to Laramie, WY.
- Day 39 (June 2): to a boarding house in Cheyenne, WY.
- Day 40 (June 3): to Pine Bluffs, WY.
- Day 41 (June 4): to Potter Station, NE.
- Day 42 (June 5): to Lodge Pole, NE.
- Day 43 (June 6): to the “dug-out of a homesteader” on the Platte River, NE.
- Day 44 (June 7): to Ogallala, NE.
- Day 45 (June 8): to a “dug-out” on the way to Brady Island, NE.
- Day 46 (June 9): to Brady Island, NE.
- Day 47 (June 10): to Plum Creek, NE.
- Day 48 (June 11): to Kearney Junction, NE.
- Day 49 (June 12): to Grand Island, NE.
- Day 50 (June 13): to Duncan, NE.
- Day 51 (June 14): to North Bend, NE.

Day 52 (June 15): to Fremont, NE.
 Day 53 (June 16): to Omaha, NE.
 Day 54 (June 18): to a farm near Nishnebotene, IA.
 Day 55 (June 19): to a farm near Griswold, IA.
 Day 56 (June 20): to a farm near Menlo, IA.
 Day 57 (June 21): to a farm near DeSoto, IA.
 Day 58 (June 22): to Altoona, IA.
 Day 59 (June 23): to Kellogg, IA.
 Day 60 (June 24): to Victor, IA.
 Day 61 (June 25): to Tiffin, IA.
 Day 62 (June 26): to Moscow, IA.
 Day 63 (June 27): to Rock Island, IL.
 Day 64 (June 28): to Atkinson, IL.
 Day 65 (June 29): to La Moile, IL.
 Day 66 (June 30): to Yorkville, IL.
 Day 67 (July 1): to Naperville, IL.
 Day 68 (July 2): to Lyons, IL.
 Day 69 (July 3): to Chicago, IL.
 Day 70 (July 11): to Miller Station, IN.
 Day 71 (July 12): to a wheat shock in a field on the way to Goshen, IN.
 Day 72 (July 13): to Goshen, IN.
 Day 73 (July 14): to a farmhouse in Indiana on way to Ridgeville, OH.
 Day 74 (July 15): to Ridgeville, OH.
 Day 75 (July 16): to Empire House, OH.
 Day 76 (July 17): to Bellevue, OH.
 Day 77 (July 18): to a village near Cleveland, OH.
 Day 78 (July 19): to Madison, OH.
 Day 79 (July 20): to a roadside hotel near Erie, PA.
 Day 80 (July 21): to Angola, NY.
 Day 81 (July 22): to Buffalo, NY.
 Day 82 (July 23): to LeRoy, NY.
 Day 83 (July 24): to a farm near Canandaigua, NY.
 Day 84 (July 25): to Marcellus, NY.
 Day 86 (July 26): to East Syracuse, NY.
 Day 87 (July 27): to an inn in Erie Canal Inn, NY.
 Day 88 (July 28): to Indian Castle, NY.
 Day 89 (July 29): to Crane's Village, NY.
 Day 90 (July 30): to an inn in Westfall's Inn, MA.
 Day 91 (July 31): to Otis, MA.
 Day 92 (Aug. 1): to Palmer, MA.
 Day 93 (Aug. 2): to Worcester, MA.

Day 94 (Aug. 3): to Boston, MA.

B. SANDERSON AND MATTHEWS, 2004

(Accommodations were in motels unless otherwise indicated)

Day 1 (Jun. 12): Perth Amboy, NJ, to Gary's home in Verona, NJ (35 mi.).
 Day 2 (June 15): to Andover, NJ (55 mi.).
 Day 3 (June 16): to Port Jervis, NY (35 mi.).
 Day 4 (June 17): to Long Eddy, NY (59 mi.).
 Day 5 (June 18): to Kirkwood, NY (66 mi.).
 Day 6 (June 19): to Elmira, NY (62 mi.).
 Day 7 (June 20): to Hornell, NY (59 mi.).
 Day 8 (June 21): to Olean, NY (61 mi.).
 Day 9 (June 22): to Lakewood, NY (60 mi.).
 Day 10 (June 23): to a Erie, PA (56 mi.).
 Day 11 (June 24): to Perry, OH (70 mi.).
 Day 12 (June 25): to Lakewood, OH (41 mi.).
 Day 13 (June 26): to Bellevue, OH (67 mi.).
 Day 14 (June 27): to Findley, OH (54 mi.).
 Day 15 (June 28): to St. Mary's, OH (73 mi.).
 Day 16 (June 29): to Muncie, IN (62 mi.).
 Day 17 (June 30): to Indianapolis, IN (79 mi.).
 Day 18 (July 2): to Terre Haute, IN (60 mi.).
 Day 19 (July 3): to Effingham, IL (68 mi.).
 Day 20 (July 4): to Greenville, IL (51 mi.).
 Day 21 (July 5): to St. Charles, MO (72 mi.).
 Day 22 (July 7): to Herman, MO (66 mi.).
 Day 23 (July 8): to Hartsburg, MO (54 mi.).
 Day 24 (July 9): to Booneville, MO (41 mi.).
 Day 25 (July 10): to Sedelia, MO (34 mi.).
 Day 26 (July 11): to Clinton, MO (37 mi.).
 Day 27 (July 12): to Baldwin City, KS (100 mi.).
 Day 28 (July 18): to Topeka, KS (53 mi.).
 Day 29 (July 19): to Manhattan, KS (55 mi.).
 Day 30 (July 20): to Marysville, KS (57 mi.).
 Day 31 (July 21): to Belleville, KS (50 mi.).
 Day 32 (July 22): to Phillipsburg, KS (90 mi.).
 Day 33 (July 23): to Oberlin, KS (64 mi.).
 Day 34 (July 24): to McCook, NE (28 mi.).
 Day 35 (July 25): to North Platte, NE (65 mi.).

- Day 36 (July 26): to Ogallala, NE (50 mi.).
 Day 37 (July 27): to Sidney, NE (66 mi.).
 Day 38 (July 28): to Kimball, NE (38 mi.).
 Day 39 (July 29): to Cheyenne, WY (63 mi.).
 Day 40 (July 30): to Laramie, WY (44 mi.).
 Day 41 (July 31): to Medicine Bow, WY (57 mi.).
 Day 42 (Aug. 1): to Rawlins, WY (57 mi.).
 Day 43 (Aug. 2): to Table Rock, WY (60 mi.).
 Day 44 (Aug. 3): to Rock Springs, WY (49 mi.).
 Day 45 (Aug. 4): to Dimondville, WY (84 mi.).
 Day 46 (Aug. 5): to Cokeville, WY (46 mi.).
 Day 47 (Aug. 6): to Soda Springs, ID (60 mi.).
 Day 48 (Aug. 7): to Pocatello, ID (53 mi.).
 Day 49 (Aug. 8): to Burley, ID (78 mi.).
 Day 50 (Aug. 9): to Twin Falls, ID (39 mi.).
 Day 51 (Aug. 10): to Hammett, ID (43 mi.).
 Day 52 (Aug. 11): to Boise, ID (83 mi.).
 Day 53 (Aug. 12): to Vale, OR (71 mi.).
 Day 54 (Aug. 13): to Jantura, OR (53 mi.).
 Day 55 (Aug. 14): to Burns, OR (59 mi.).
 Day 56 (Aug. 15): to Hampton, OR (65 mi.).
 Day 57 (Aug. 16): to Bend, OR (63 mi.).
 Day 58 (Aug. 17): to Belknap Hot Springs, OR (60 mi.).
 Day 59 (Aug. 18): to Eugene, OR (57 mi.).
 Day 60 (Aug. 19): to Florence, OR (70 mi.).
 Day 61 (Aug. 21): to Newport, OR (52 mi.).

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ENDNOTES

- 1 Thomas Pauly, Introduction in reprint of Thomas Stevens, *Around the World on a Bicycle* (Stackpole Books, Mechanicsburg, PA, 2001), pp. i-xxi.
- 2 To date, 27 ordinary bicycle riders are known to have ridden across America (23 are listed in Ref. 7 to which must be added Steve Stevens in 2000, Don Stewart in 2003, and Gary Sanderson and Peter Matthews in 2004). Four of these riders made the journey in the 19th century, and the remainder did it after 1970. Four of the riders in the 19th century rode east to west, but all the modern day riders have followed the Thomas Stevens route as closely as they can using modern roads, except for Sanderson and Matthews who traveled a unique route of their own choosing.
- 3 It is not known how Stevens carried these items. It is certain he did carry them, but the drawings in his published account do not show things being carried either on the handlebars or the backbone of his bicycle until he reached Europe. Carriers that attached to either the backbone of the bicycle or the handlebars were available in 1884, and it is assumed that Stevens' availed himself of one or the other of these contrivances.
- 4 In 1884, much of the territory between California and Nebraska was still classified as territories of the United States, i.e., statehood had not yet been conferred on these lands. A trans-continental railroad had been completed in the late 1860s, but there were far fewer roads, especially in the west where roads were a rarity, than there were in 2004, and most of the existing roads were unpaved.
- 5 Thomas Pauly (2001). List of articles by Thomas Stevens published in *Outing* magazine, in reprint of *Around the World on a Bicycle* (Stackpole Books, Mechanicsburg, PA), pp. xvii–xviii.