

Sep 28th 2010
To: Tom Anspach,
From: Chris Venters

I'm sharing a write up that I forwarded to all my riding, running, walking and hiking friends. Sending this to you is more of a *thank you* than request to be published. You may include this on the web site if you like but I know it's kind of wordy. Chris

That's right folks you are receiving a ride report from me, Chris "dusty wheels" Venters. It's been one of those summers where I just did not commit much time to cycling, however I found that I still know how to keep two wheels down.

This Saturday, after experiencing the thrills of watching (yes, I was a bystander) over 400 participants race the 11Th annual Bee Bumble 5 and 10k race in Burnettsville we loaded up the rig and drove over to the Pan Handle trail for a spin.

What is the Pan Handle you ask? Well let me tell you that the Panhandle is a fine stretch of paved rail trail beginning in Winamac, IN coming south to very near France Park. See this link for a bit more including a map. <http://panhandlepathway.org/>

I rode along with my 13 year old son Kade and my favorite mother-in-law. I think it was Linda who after seeing one of her three daughters marry coined the phrase "behind every successful man stands a surprised-mother-in law".

We left Monticello on Hwy 24 East driving 2 miles past Lake Cicott turning north on CR 600N at the first intersection we found a beautiful old church. We parked in the church parking lot, mounted the steel horses we ride and headed for the the Pan Handle trail located .2 mile down the hill from this parking lot. At the trail head we found a gravel parking area so there is no need to park at the church next time.

We traveled north on a paved surface so new that road crossings and other signage were not yet on the trail. We occasionally crossed intersecting county roads and went over a number of short bridges. There was a pretty good mix of riding within trees and along open farm fields.

Overall the 7 mile ride to Royal Center was very pleasant. So pleasant was our ride that we continued north 4 more miles to what we believed was Thornhope, IN. Not much in Thornhope except a nice looking road side rest area with shade trees and picnic tables but NO restrooms. This rest area is located on the other side of Hwy 35 but could serve as nice rest stop for those who might pack a lunch.

Our flat, straight out and back ride to Thornhope was about 22 miles in length. We stopped at a convenience mart in Royal Center for a Coke and a smile and learned that there is a really cool frozen custard / hamburger joint in town. We'll search that out next summer.

Returning to the trail head near our car we decided to ride the trail south a mile or so going under hwy 24. We came upon the southern most trails end. Another nice rest stop area with bike racks and tables.

Wild life along the trail was abundant. We saw a deer, several squirrels and a cub scout pack (more on how to ride through a cub scout pack later) We shared the trail with other cyclists of all ages and a few couples walking their dogs.

Families and individuals who enjoy the outdoors should defiantly visit the Pan Handle. Walkers and runners will appreciate the smooth surface. Nature lovers and bird watchers might enjoy the many park benches along the way. Cycling enthusiast will enjoy the speed of the trail. Parents riding with their children can do so safe from vehicular traffic.

Children and dads like me will surely enjoy watching out for deer, stopping to throw rocks into a creek or finding a frozen treat in Royal Center.

We are already preparing to ride the Pan Handle as a family all the way into Winamac for lunch and a long break before the return trip. This trail system is something our community is missing. So for the short drive it takes to find I think it's well worth it and hope you will too.

Chris - Monticello, IN