

Mighty Mississippi Gold



The Mighty Mississippi Route

2020 has been a challenging year in a lot of different ways. With the COVID pandemic going on, a lot of events that we normally participate in have been cancelled. This has allowed me to accumulate some vacation time that I would have taken to attend those events.

The pandemic also has me working from home. As of this writing, I have been working from home for 6 months, now. This can cause another effect known as “Cabin Fever”.

Wikipedia - Cabin fever refers to the distressing claustrophobic irritability or restlessness experienced when a person, or

group, is stuck at an isolated location or in confined quarters for an extended period of time. A person may be referred to as stir-crazy, derived from the use of stir to mean 'prison'.

The extra vacation time on my hands and restlessness from confined quarters has allowed/coerced me the opportunity to attempt some IBA (Iron Butt Association) rides this year that I wouldn't normally had the chance to attempt.

I was ready for another challenging ride and The Mighty Mississippi Gold would scratch this itch!

The IBA Mighty Mississippi ride: This ride is from the headwaters of the Mississippi River (Lake Itasca, MN) to the end of the Mississippi River (Venice, LA) in less than 36 hours (or reverse). If completed in less than 24 hours, it would be considered a “gold” or “Insanity” ride.

Of course, I'll go for the gold!

On multi-day rides, I create an itinerary to see what it looks like on paper. For this ride, I would need to ride 447 miles south to start the ride in Venice, LA or 1,070 miles north to start at the Itasca State Park in MN.

Initially, you would think that starting at the closer location would be best. I like to maximize my free time and prefer to get in some miles after work instead of waiting until the next day. Looking at the trip as a whole, riding north to MN would maximize my time.

If I rode south to start the ride, by leaving after work at 3:00 pm, I would arrive in Venice, LA after dark on Wednesday. That would mean I would have to wait until Thursday to scout the area and take pictures, then waste an entire day before starting my trip early on Friday. (I prefer an early morning departure time.) I would arrive in MN late on Friday night. Saturday morning would be scouting around

the area and taking pictures before I head home (1,070 miles). I wouldn't arrive home until sometime late afternoon or evening on Sunday. There would be no down time before the workday on Monday.

By leaving after work at 3:00 pm and heading north, I could be up at the Mississippi headwaters (Itasca State Park) before 3:00 pm on Thursday. This would allow me plenty of time to scout out the area up there and take pictures and get some sleep before starting the ride early Friday. Then, I could finish the ride late Friday night and return home on Saturday (447 miles home). This would allow a full day of down time on Sunday!

Too much wasted time on the southern start option, I'll head north and start the ride up there! Also, if I start Wednesday afternoon and return back home on Saturday afternoon (prior to my start time on Wednesday), I would complete a Saddle Sore 3000 (3,000 miles in 3 days). As they say "Plan the ride, ride the plan". This worked out perfect!!!

Working from home does have its advantages, I was out of the house at 3:00 pm and down at the Shell Station for a start receipt. Official start time: 3:07 pm (make note of this time).

I had a reservation at a Holiday Inn Express in Cedar Rapids, Iowa 575 miles away. I had a great ride up there arriving a little after 11:00 pm.

By the time I checked in and took a shower, I was in bed by 12:00 midnight. I had a wakeup call for 6:00 am. At 4:30 am, I was wide awake! I might as well get up and go! Cancel the wakeup call and I'm on my way!

Thursday morning was light fog and drizzle which later turned into light rain through the rest of Iowa. By the time I reached the Minnesota state line, the sky cleared, and the sun was shining. There was a lot of construction as I rode around Minneapolis. The rest of the ride to Itasca State Park was awesome! I arrived there at 1:30 pm. This gave me plenty of time to ride through the park and stop at the Mary Gibbs Mississippi Headwaters Center for pictures.



The tree trunk memorial at the headwaters state:

"Here 1475 feet above the ocean the Mighty Mississippi begins to flow on its winding way 2552 miles to the Gulf of Mexico"

What is strange is the Mississippi River begins at Lake Itasca and flows north! If you follow the river on a map, it makes a huge circle

throughout the state of Minnesota before it finally flows south. I would not have imagined this!

After taking some pictures and riding around the park, I head to The Pines Motel in Lake George.



The motel was small and very modest. But, what can you expect for \$65.00? I'm glad I had a reservation!

After I checked in, I went down the road to a Mom and Pop café for dinner. I ordered the Walleye dinner. It was great! I spoke to one of the locals there. I asked what kind of wildlife was in the area. He said, "We have everything but grizzly bears. We have deer, moose, black bears, and timber wolves. As a matter of fact, it's bear season right now. A guy staying in your motel just shot one! The owner of the motel put him on a stand. They had seen wildlife camera footage of 7 or 8 nice sized bears around this stand!"

I told him about the ride I was preparing to do. He said, "There was a guy up here from Texas on a motorcycle a few weeks ago." I told him that I talked to that guy last

weekend in Dallas. His name is Christopher Ross!

While attending a long distance RTE (Ride to Eat) in Dallas last weekend, I got the chance to meet and talk with Christopher. We have been friends on Facebook for several years. I knew he had completed this ride a month or two ago. He gave me some great advice! The long-distance (Iron Butt) community is a small tightknit group that are always willing to help other riders accomplish their goals!

After dinner, I went back to the motel to take a shower and prepare for the big ride the next day. I set my phone alarm for 2:00 am, but like the night before it wasn't necessary. I was awake at 1:20 am, tossed and turned, then decided to jump up and get on the road!

Since there are no local businesses open at 2:00 am to get a receipt, I needed to take a picture of my bike GPS information. Official start time by my GPS was 2:02 am. I will get a receipt at the first opportunity.



You can see the outside temperature on my GSA display was 41 degrees. It didn't take long for the

temperature to dip down to 37 degrees as I rode south.

I stopped at the first gas station in Park Rapids. It was closed, but the gas pumps were working. Dang! The receipt was no good! So, I ride a mile into town. There's a convenience store on Main Street. I add a little fuel in the tank hoping for a good receipt. Bingo! Good receipt! Great! Now, I'm ready to ride!

It's 37 degrees as I head south although it didn't feel as cold as the day before in Iowa when it was 42 degrees and raining! I was glad I brought my electric gloves along with my electric jacket liner. I was warm and toasty.

As I approached the perimeter of Minneapolis it got foggy. Real foggy! I got behind a well-lit car and followed him through the thick fog. Once around Minneapolis and headed south, the fog dissipated. Life was good until I hit Iowa!

In Iowa, I rode through rain the day before. There must have been a weather system that stayed in that area over these two days. Nothing that slowed me down, just a nuisance. Fortunately, my riding gear keeps me very dry! It can be pouring down rain and I'm very comfortable. The rain just makes me more alert, focused and tense. Eventually, the rain stopped. The overcast skies cleared by the time I entered Missouri!

No issues riding through Missouri. St. Louis was roughly the halfway mark of this ride. Riding around St. Louis as I whittled down the miles was very satisfying. The next milestone would be Memphis!

The ride down I-55 from St. Louis to New Orleans was very familiar territory. I had been down this route many times. I did hit Memphis right at 5:00 pm. The traffic was thick, but very manageable. Now, my fuel was low. I knew I could make it to at least Hernando, MS just south of Memphis.

As I was crossing into Mississippi, I was thinking about where to stop for fuel. How about Hernando? The traffic there can be very congested this time of day on Commerce Street. I'd better not get into that. How about the next town, Coldwater? Yeah, that might be a quick in and out!

But, unbeknownst to me as I ride by the Mississippi Welcome Center/I-55 Rest Area just south of Hernando, I had a stalker! Karen was there with a poster hoping I would see it! Unfortunately, I was on a mission and in "ride mode". I missed it! 😞





As I rode through north Mississippi the sun was shining and the temperature was 96 degrees. The ride down to the Louisiana state line was uneventful. By then, it was dark. Traffic was thick in New Orleans! But, this was expected since it was Friday night. So, the ride was slow going as I snaked my way to the south side of town.

Christopher Ross advised me to get a receipt at least 60 miles before I reach Venice since there are no businesses open late at night down there. Venice is 80 miles south of New Orleans. So, I stop in Belle Chase, a suburb south of New Orleans. From there, traffic thinned down to nothing! It was dark and mysterious as I rode the rest of the way down. I was wondering what this ride would look like the next day when I head home. Luckily, I did find a gas station four miles from my destination. The station was closed, but I was hoping I could still get a receipt from the gas pump. I did! The receipt reads 11:29 pm!

I continue to the Venice Inn, my room for the night. At the motel, I take another picture of my GPS information to verify that I made it

to the required destination for this ride, Venice, LA.



Official end time by my GPS was 11:39! I did it! I completed the Mighty Mississippi Gold! I was ecstatic! Final stats: 1,511 miles in 21 hours and 37 minutes. It's not just the accomplishment of a ride like this, it's the actual ride itself! I love riding through the rural areas and the big cities of America! These IBA rides lead you to some out of the way places that are just incredible! I would probably never have ridden here. Thanks to the IBA for creating such interesting and challenging rides!

I check into the motel, take a shower and crash! It's after midnight by the time I hit the bed. I didn't set any alarm for the next morning. I was up by 6:30 am. Now, it was time to scout out the area and take pictures!

I wanted to get a picture of the most southern point sign in Louisiana. It was about 5 miles south of the motel. About a half mile prior to reaching the sign, there was standing water in the road! Probably not a foot deep, but close. (I wouldn't know this until after I rode through it!) And, it was a long

stretch of road that was covered in water! Maybe close to a quarter of a mile!



I didn't come this far to NOT get a picture of the sign. I'm going through! Worse case, I have to turn around! I made it, no problem!



Goal accomplished! I love this stuff!

I rode around the area and took a few more pictures before I decided to head home. I was thinking about eating oysters in New Orleans for lunch, but it was too early. I might as well head home. If I arrive before 3:07 pm, I will qualify for an SS3000.

The ride home was great until the last 70 miles. From Grenada, MS to Batesville, I rode in rain. A couple times there were some hard downpours and wind. Again, the

riding gear worked as designed! I stayed dry!

Now, I notice it's 2:40 pm and I'm 30 miles from home. I won't be able to make it to Hernando by 3:07 pm. So, I stop in Senatobia, MS for an official end receipt. End Time: 3:01 pm. End stats: 3,064 miles in 2 days, 23 hours, 54 minutes! What a way to end a great memorable ride!

Mississippi River Facts:

On May 8, 1541, Spanish explorer Hernando de Soto became the first recorded European to discover the Mississippi River in the area of what is now Mississippi.

The word Mississippi comes from Messipi, the French rendering of the Anishinaabe (Ojibwe or Algonquin) name for the river, Misi-ziibi (Great River).

The Mississippi River water source is fed by Lake Itasca in Northern Minnesota and flows all the way down into the Gulf of Mexico.

The Mississippi River is the third longest river in North America and flows 2,552 miles from beginning to end.

It takes 90 days for a single drop of water to travel the Mississippi River's entire length.

From its source, Lake Itasca, to its end, the Gulf of Mexico, the Mississippi River drops 1,475 feet.

The deepest point on the Mississippi River is located near Algiers Point

in New Orleans and is 200 feet in depth.

At Lake Itasca, the river is between 20 and 30 feet wide, the narrowest stretch for its entire length. The widest part of the Mississippi can be found at Lake Winnibigoshish near Bena, MN, where it is wider than 11 miles.

In 2002, Martin Strel swam the entire length of the Mississippi in 68 days.



Mighty Mississippi Gold Ride Stats

Distance: 1,511 miles

Time: 21 hrs, 37 min.

Average Speed: 69 mph

Fuel Used: 46.296 gal

Fuel Mileage: 32 mpg

Low Temperature: 37°

High Temperature: 96°