

The 2013 Iron Butt Rally: Day 6

Chasing Ghosts

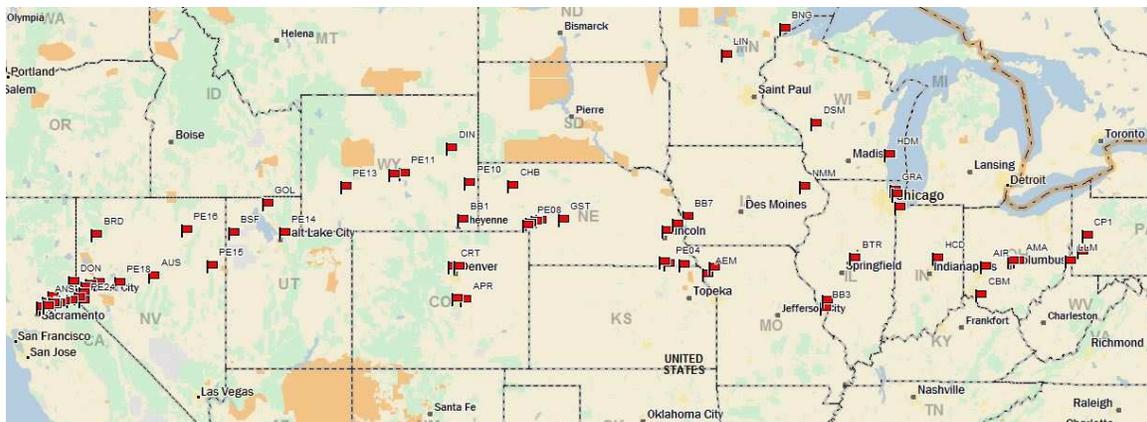
Wanted. Young, skinny, wiry fellows. Not over 18. Must be expert riders. Willing to risk death daily. Orphans preferred.

For reasons easy to understand --- this iconic ad being one of them --- the Pony Express occupies a disproportionate part of the history of the American West. How long do you think it lasted? As long as The Hundred Years War, maybe? No, that endured for 116 years. For as long as Franklin Roosevelt was president? No, that was 81 years, though it seemed longer. Twenty? Ten? Not even five? Try eighteen months. The telegraph put it out of business overnight.

Who would want such a job? Cruel hours, terrible weather, life-threatening hostility in every direction, and poor prospects for a defined-benefit individual retirement account. To ride uncertainly through trackless and forbidding territory, to sleep fitfully on a hard, cold bench and be awakened by the sound of gunfire, to eat a cold leg of mutton while standing in a driving rain, to stop only briefly and then just to piss on a flat rock. What price would you demand to take such an awful job? Wait, you say you're an Iron Butt rider and will do it for nothing? Oh.

Yes, throughout human history there have always been applicants willing to perform insane, dangerous tasks for very little pay. Invariably they are called young men. Without them there would be no *Jackass* movies, Mexican drug gangs, headlines in Panama City, Florida, during spring break, or Darwin Awards. In truth the managers of the Pony Express never had any trouble finding riders, and the ad quoted above is very likely apocryphal. No one has ever been able to find the original source or date of publication.

With transportation as the rally motif this year, Tom Austin created some waypoints that resemble a modern variant of the Pony Express route of 1860-61.



Leg #2 bonus locations: Cranberry Township, Pennsylvania, to Rancho Cordova, California

Some artistic license is required with this theme, of course. Rex LeGalley is about the size of four of the original riders and Donald Jones is not someone we think of as “wiry.” We can also question whether recent BMW motorcycles are as reliable as the most worthless horse. But Austin’s blueprint does cover the 1860-61 express route from St. Joseph, Missouri, to Sacramento, California, which itself followed the well-established Oregon and Mormon pioneer trails. With 31 pages of bonus instructions thus in hand our riders and their ponies --- fed, rested, shod, and oiled --- departed after dawn Friday morning. They have at least 2,500 miles to go in the next 65 hours.



The Loneliness of Three Long-Distance Runners

We have been remiss in not explaining further how Mark Crane today finds himself among the bottom ten instead of the top ten scorers. When we last mentioned our star-crossed hero, he was fixing a gas leak in his BMW. So grateful was Mark for the assistance of a nameless Canadian gentleman that he decided to sit down and have dinner with the man. We call this sort of behavior a “George Zelenz moment,” after the truly gifted but completely unpredictable rider who during the 2005 IBR spent an entire evening in a hotel resort’s Jacuzzi. Mark later ran out of gas --- had he really fixed that leak after all? --- on the Mackinac bridge and had to be rescued by a Harley rider.

The Henry Ford Museum bonus had not been kind to Jerome Byrd. Midway through taking photos of the required 25 exhibits, Byrd’s camera battery began to

fail. He ran out to his bike, swapped batteries, and tried to return to the museum. It had closed. He had not intended to spend the night in Dearborn, but he did. The next morning he returned to the museum, paid the entrance fee again, and finished his photo shoot. At the scoring table, he received full points.

Rex LeGalley's problem at the Ford museum was different. Although he didn't know it at the time, he had taken a photo of something that wasn't on the bonus list. That would be bad but not fatal. Then he couldn't locate a 1916 steam traction engine, though apparently it is the size of a dwarf star. He asked a docent for help. She told him it was in Greenfield Village, adjacent to the museum. And so it was. LeGalley paid the \$20 to go there, found the engine, took the photo, and happily scampered back down the road.

The scorer told Rex that there were two engines, that Greenfield Village was not in the museum, and that he had shot the wrong engine. One missed photo is a 10% loss of points. For missing two of the 25 exhibits, the loss is 100%. His trip to the museum got him nothing. Was he upset? Nothing seems to upset him.



What, Me Worry? LeGalley, hair on fire, at the start of Leg #2

The Way West

If you're going to visit the Pony Express trail, why not take in a museum along the way, or an express station, or a marker, statue, or monument? Why not do 34 of them from St. Joseph to Sacramento, taking a photo at each stop? Austin thought this would be a clever idea, so clever that if you can maneuver yourself through this maze, all but one of which are available during daylight hours only, you'll knock down 5,373 points for nailing the individual stops and receive a

10,500-point bonus for running the table. The recommended minimum number of points to be roped in by riders for the second leg is 11,000. Bagging this combination bonus takes care of that kind of pain and a lot more besides.

An easier ride west would be simply to follow I-80 most of the way. It's not a dramatic or demanding effort, the points are all right, and there will be some rest time at the finish for you and your pony.

The third option Austin offered was to make a straight shot to Pikes Peak on I-70. Riding to the top is worth 8,666 points. Combining that with some other bonuses in Colorado Springs, Denver, and Golden, the 11,000 minimum should be as close to a cinch as things on the Iron Butt ever get.

When Tom Austin put his preliminary route options to Jim Owen and Jeff Earls, the fellows who finished 1st and 2nd on the 2009 IBR, Owen liked the Pony Express route. Earls favored the Pikes Peak ride. Total points for each option were almost identical. If there's a better way still, someone will soon show us.

As the riders began to string out on the way west yesterday, it was soon apparent that most of them were taking I-70 toward Pikes Peak. Their tracks, with scrambled rider IDs, have been made available on a public page, courtesy of Spotwalla's Jason Jonas (<https://spotwalla.com/locationViewer.php?id=168>). And who should soon be giving them a cheerleading wave from an overpass but our old friend George Zelenz. We don't encourage this sort of stuff, but, as you can see, George rarely needs much encouragement.



Bob Higdon