

Day 4 – Flightpath Deviation

While aircraft are on approach to a carrier the shipboard crew runs its checklist of procedures for landing. Fire crews are readied. Sick Bay goes to alert status. Non-essential personnel leave the bridge. The chaplain offers a silent prayer. All crew focuses on the task at hand of safely securing returning flight crews. Nothing else is as important.

A checkpoint in the Iron Butt Rally runs through similar preparations. The pathway into the parking lot is kept clear and the lot is roped off. Official timekeeper, Ira Agins, takes up position at the door so riders can stop the clock immediately upon arrival. Food stations are erected with proteins, carbs, greens and liquids. Rooms are pre-keyed and beds are readied. Some 30 volunteers will be on hand to help riders with bike or equipment issues. 13-14 scorers, trained in Tom Austin's scoring program, will work with riders through the scoring process. Riders must present their assigned identification card to the top the clock. Once their arrival time is noted, they have the earlier of 60 minutes or 10 PM to present themselves for scoring. Once seated at the scoring table, riders cannot leave until completed. The IBR volunteer staff makes this entire process as seamless as possible.

Day 4 has not been without its issues for riders.

Rookie Brian Bumpas called at 7:46 AM, stranded near Lamar, Colorado, with a dead Gold Wing. A rutted county road had clearly shaken something loose, but Brian was dumbfounded on what it could be. Lisa Landry knows more about how to kill a Gold Wing than any 10 men alive and walked him through basic diagnostics, fairly certain the culprit was failed battery connection. Unable to affect repairs himself, rally staff located a shop in nearby La Junta, Colorado for a tow. With the ground cable repaired, Bumpas was back on the road at 12:22 returning to the scene of the tow to resume his ride, just with 4 ½ fewer hours to make it to Albuquerque. As of 3 PM he was still 388 miles from the checkpoint. He may make it back, but most likely in the penalty period. What should have been an easy day has become a nail biter for the rookie rider.

As early as 8 AM, rally staff began running the math on what it would take for Nahum Sloan to make the checkpoint within the window. Sloan pressed 400 miles Wednesday to the Oregon Caves National Monument in the far southeast corner of that coastal state, only to then backtrack the same 400 miles, all for 322 points. It is a routing conundrum we cannot fathom and suspect he buried something in that park years ago that it was now time to retrieve. For whatever reason, the math just didn't compute. At 12:48 PM Sloan too reached the same conclusion and called Lisa with the bad news. He, too, had concluded that he would not make the checkpoint in time and was withdrawing. Staff was only slightly less disappointed than Nahum.

Despite riding a BMW R1200GS, Margaret Peart went down while off-roading unexpectedly in a rest stop parking area outside Provo, Utah, coming to rest behind parked truck. With bruised ribs and a swelling hand, she was unable to upright the Beemer. So the tired Aussie found a brilliant solution to her two problems. She left a note for the sleeping trucker that she was behind him and asking for his help when he awoke. And then she proceeded to lay down by her bike and take a nap. Both got sleep, both righted the bike, and both went on their way, with

Margaret reporting slight damage to one saddlebag. At 12:55 PM (MDT) she reported in from Page, Arizona, overheated and in pain, and had stopped for a rest. She was moving again by 3 PM, but with 388 miles to the checkpoint. It is not looking good for the resourceful Peart but we're not ready to count out this world traveler.

Sam and Sydney Liles reported intermittent starter failure with their brand new BMW K1600GTLE. While able to continue for now, arrangements are being made to secure a replacement through Sandia BMW in Albuquerque. This may be one of the advantages of riding 2-up although Sydney is reportedly getting tired of pushing for bump starts.

Eric Jewell continues his indirect approach, having ridden due east yesterday to collect the Harry S Truman National Historic Site in Independence, Missouri, just east of Kansas City. Based on his tracking data, Eric's route coincides with a tornado reported in the area around the same time. Unfazed, Jewell has continued to sweep up Kansas bonuses, turning west again. Except, rather than point towards Albuquerque 800 miles away, he headed to Colorado first before turning south. If successful, he should have cleaned up 11 states and twice as many parks in Leg One, and be sitting in the Top Ten.

Will Barclay didn't take the bait in California last night. After collecting the John Day Fossil Beds National Monument, he turned southeast towards the checkpoint. For some reason, his spot tracker stopped sending data at 5:57 AM just south of Provo, Utah, not resuming until 6.5 hours later in Mesa Verde National Park in Cortez, Utah, some 307 miles away. It remains to be seen where he rode during that gap, but the lack of consistent tracking data may jeopardize some of Barclay's bonus points. Still, he is on track to nab 15-16 states with two legs still to go. If he takes a similar approach to Leg Two, without any more tracking snafus, Mr. Barclay may meet the finisher criteria by the weekend and spend the last leg big game hunting just for sport. Of course, he still has to check-in tonight within the window.

Kirsten Talken-Spaulding also turned southeast from John Day and is pointed to the checkpoint. She is having a tremendous Leg One and should be in good position when the scoring dust settles.

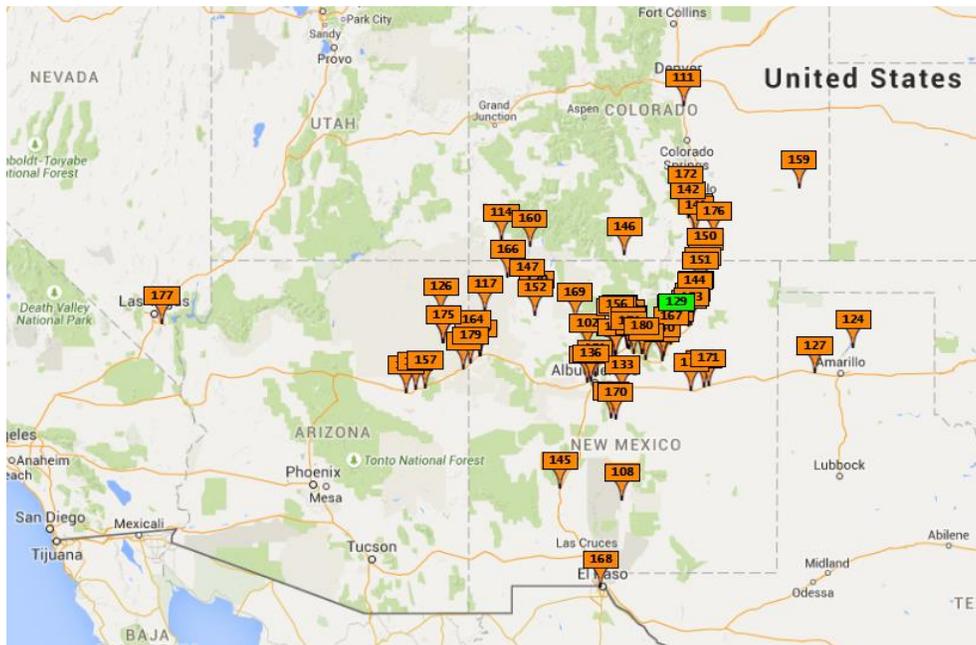
Jim Owen continues to wind down a beautifully efficient route. It may be just 7 states but with 20-22 parks, lots of points and well-rested, Jim is projected to be in the Top Five for this leg, while Josh Mountain, projected to be this leg's leader, will have ridden 1,000 more miles for a 2,000 point lead. Chris Sakala and Eric Jewell are also projected to be near the top, although again not as rested as Owen.

Hopeless Class Ninja 250 rider, Kurt Worden, is on approach. To keep from cramping from the lack of buzz at the checkpoint, he is planning to strap vibrators to each arm. Such is his commitment to finishing on the little MSF training bike. Fellow Hopeless Class rider, Jack Cheasty, must have sorted through his GPS issues from yesterday. After realizing he would not need all 35 hours to ride from Salt Lake City to the checkpoint, he headed off towards Wyoming and Colorado, adding two more states to his leg. Unfortunately, Cheasty may have a self-fulfilling prophesy about missing a checkpoint. As of 3 PM, he was still 350 miles out.

Tonie Cowen may be on the checkpoint bubble as well. She's developed tire problems on her Yamaha Super Tenere while trying to collect the Rocky Mountain National Park bonus north of

Estes Park, Colorado. Estes Park is never an easy area to ride through when it's not near a busy 3-day holiday. She's picked her way through stop and go traffic to get to I-25. But the 3 PM cutoff for this post, Cowen had cleared the beltway around Denver, but was still 434 miles out.

As of 3 PM, 40 rider spot dots were lined up along I-25 heading south for a steady glide path into the checkpoint, right into the mouth of the thunderstorms already firing along that same line, with several riders reporting blinding rain. Current forecasts predict more storms to the west, where another 23 riders are poised to land. The balance of the field, except for Nahum Sloan, is on approach from the south and east, already in heavy rain. The next 8-10 hours will be frenetic as riders cycle through and points are tallied. I hope to post an updated report by midnight with rider standings, along with a link to the list of the available parks.



Chris Cimino
Iron Butt Scribe
Iron Butt Rally©