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Missoula trio plan bike trip to Yellowstone

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MISSOULA, Mont.--

To most of us, covering 500 miles on a bicycle in eight days would be an impossible task. For three Missoulians such a trip should be an easy one.

The three cyclists are Frank Winkler, 49, and his son, Wesley, 17, 2113 Charlott Ave., and Thomas J. Pontrelli, 17, 405 King Street. The trio will leave on their 10-speed bikes from Virginia City, Montana, at 6 a.m. Sunday (June 30) for Yellowstone National Park and the return trip to Missoula.

This will be the fourth extended bicycle trip for the elder Winkler, who is a night printer in the University of Montana Printing Department, and his son. It will be the third trip for young Pontrelli, who is son of Mr. and Mrs. Al D. Pontrelli.

The first long-distance bicycle trip by the Winklers was a round trip to Glendive, Montana, in the summer of 1965 at the suggestion of John F. Winkler, another of the Winkler sons. The Winkler trio--Frank, Wes, and John, who are all natives of Glendive--covered 1,089 miles in 14 days that time, so the upcoming trip for Frank and Wes should be a relatively easy one.

This will be the third consecutive bike trip for young Pontrelli, also a Glendive native, who admits getting some bike-riding encouragement from the Winkler family. In 1966, Frank, Wes and Tom made a 6½-day round trip north to Eureka, Montana, from Missoula. Last summer the trio completed a six-day round trip journey to Virginia City.

On their visit to Eureka, which included crossing the Canadian border, Frank, Wes and Tom covered 515 miles. During their 1967 round trip to Virginia City, they peddled and coasted a total of 500 miles.

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If the Winklers--Frank and Wes--complete the upcoming trip to Yellowstone, they will have traveled a total of 2,604 miles on their long-distance summer bike journeys and Tom Pontrelli will have 1,515 miles to his credit.

On each trip the trio tries to avoid retracing any highway segment it has traveled on before, so they and their bikes will be taken to Virginia City from Missoula by truck this year to avoid unnecessary travel duplication.

In addition to exercise, each of the cyclists agrees that "seeing the country" is the main reason for making such extended highway trips by bike.

"You don't see the same country the same way in a car," Frank Winkler explains. "What's fun about a bike trip is meeting and talking to a lot of new people. And we get to see everything, read every sign and stop many times."

Two of the most interesting aspects of the 1967 trip included stops at Robber's Roost, west of Virginia City, and at Big Hole National Battlefield, west of Wisdom, Mont.

Averaging 10 miles per hour "is a good speed" when traveling long distances by bicycle, young Pontrelli said. A good day's travel for the cyclists is 90-100 miles, though they have done better.

Tentative sleeping places for the adventurers include Quake Lake Campground, Sunday; Yellowstone Park, Monday and Tuesday; Chico Hot Springs, south of Livingston, Wednesday; Wilsall or Ringling, Thursday; Townsend or Canyon Ferry Dam, Friday; MacDonald Pass Campground, west of Helena, Saturday. The group plans to arrive back in Missoula sometime Sunday (July 7).

The trio will sleep in sleeping bags at various campgrounds or other places along their travel route and they plan on eating at drive-ins or cafes. Bicycle travel supplies include a rain cape, emergency food rations, a ground cloth and a change of clothing for each cyclist.

As on previous trips, the wind probably will be the cyclists' worst weather enemy. As Frank Winkler says, "The rain and sun don't bother us much."

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