

Tulsans kick off bike ride

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The men found that early departures make for a more enjoyable ride.

ANTLERS -- For friends Kip Gurley and Mike Blackburn, leaving earlier than everyone else not only helped them receive the distinction of arriving first, but also allowed them to reserve first dibs on a camping spot.

The two were the first to complete the first leg of Oklahoma FreeWheel 2005, a 48-mile ride from Paris, Texas, to Antlers on Sunday. They said that while others chose to leave Paris about 7 a.m., they left about 6:40 a.m., arriving in Antlers about 9 a.m., ahead of more than 800 other riders.

"We like to beat the heat and get it done, get it over with," said Gurley, a resident of Tulsa. "That seat's not the funnest thing to sit on. So we beat the heat, get here early, and we get to goof off the rest of the day."



*Head start beats the heat
Cyclists in Oklahoma FreeWheel 2005 speed past at the start of the event at dawn from Paris Junior College in Paris, Texas, on Sunday. FreeWheel continues across Oklahoma through Saturday.
STEPHEN HOLMAN / Tulsa World*

Oklahoma FreeWheel is a cross-state bicycle ride taking place this week. This year, riders are traveling in a northerly direction from Paris, Texas, to Caldwell, Kan.



*FreeWheel cyclists Lynnette Taylor of Norman (left), Barby Pryor of Morris and Jerry Neville of Tulsa leave Paris, Texas, during the first leg of Oklahoma FreeWheel 2005 on Sunday.
STEPHEN HOLMAN / Tulsa World*

Gurley said hitting the pavement early is a good way to truly enjoy the experience.

"It's not like a vacation if you're on the bike seat too long," he said.

Gurley first took part in FreeWheel 12 years ago.

"I had a friend that had done it several times," he said. "I was kind of intimidated by the distance, but I went ahead and did it and did fine. It was a blast."

Since his first year, Gurley had participated in the ride a few other

years. But he's completed the ride each of the last seven years.

"This is my hunting trip. I don't hunt, so I do this," he said.

Blackburn, Gurley's friend and also a Tulsa resident, is participating in FreeWheel for the first time. He said Sunday's leg was not hard at all.

"I think the third day will be worst," he said. "That's what everybody tells me."

Along the route there were various rest and lunch stops, but the duo did not stop once.

"We didn't stop anywhere," Blackburn said. "All the way -- just straight on."

FreeWheel organizers have arranged campsites at each overnight stop along the route. Riders who choose to camp outdoors sleep in tents.

Those who'd rather be indoors can stay in designated gymnasiums and other buildings in towns along the route, using air mattresses, sleeping pads and sleeping bags. The overnight buildings also have showers and toilets. Additional portable toilets will be set up at each campsite.

After making it to the campsite in Antlers, Gurley and Blackburn said they planned on getting something to eat and finding a place to swim.

From Antlers, the ride will continue through Saturday, with legs to Talihina, McAlester, Wetumka, Drumright, Ponca City, and Caldwell, Kan.

Blackburn and Gurley plan to leave early again on Monday.



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