

Rain's both friend and foe to FreeWheeler

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Initially an irritant, the showers are better than the steamy heat left in their wake.

BRISTOW -- Thursday's rain pelted Oklahoma FreeWheel bicyclists who sped toward the shelter of nearby gas stations and the Methodist church to take a lunch break and wait out the sudden downpour.

Melissa Broaddus, 16, a FreeWheeler from Jenks, reviewed her options while standing in the church's doorway watching for a hint that the rain would soon subside.



Jennifer Broaddus, 18, laughs with Shannon Sullivan, 18, while on a break in Okemah during the fifth day of Oklahoma FreeWheel.

LARA COOPER / Tulsa World

"If it doesn't stop, I'll take the car," she said with a laugh. "But there are a lot of people that'll keep riding. Some people just don't care."

She was among hundreds of riders taking part in FreeWheel, a weeklong cross-state bicycle ride. On Thursday, participants rode from Wetumka to Drumright, a leg of just less than 73 miles.

Kay Nantz of Broken Arrow also got caught riding when the flood gates opened and sought refuge at the church, where she ate lunch with her friends. She said the rain was refreshing, but it took her by surprise.

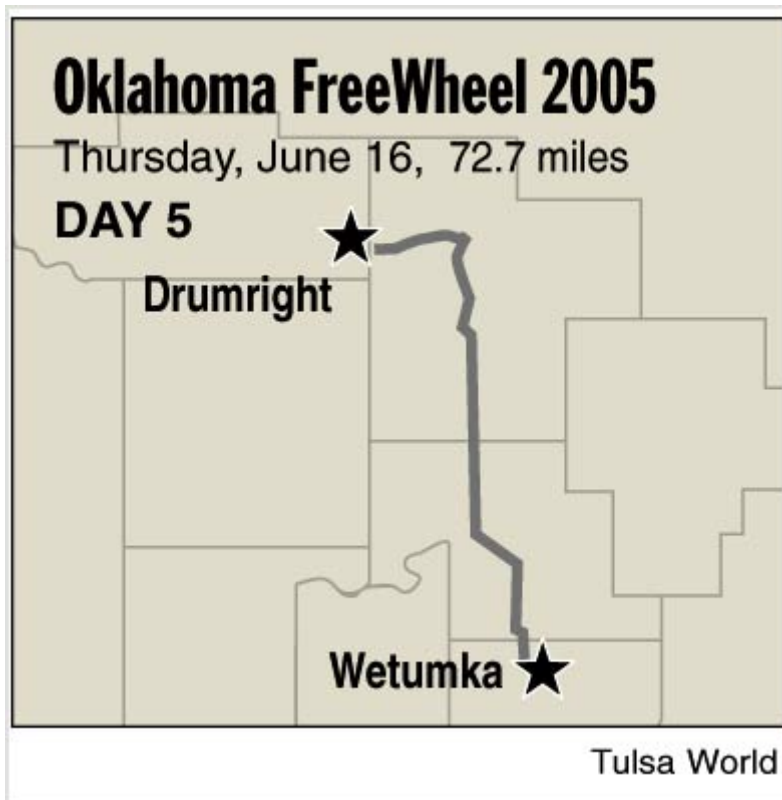
"We waited until the rain was gone in Wetumka before we left this morning. It made the ride nicer and cooler, but then all of a sudden it was pouring and we got soaked" she said.

Greer Nichols of Broken Arrow said he and his group arrived in Bristow and were indoors eating just before the harshest of the rain began.

"There was a little rain this morning, but we got lucky -- just missed the worst of it," he said.

However, Nichols said he still got dirty riding through the muddy water and described how his bike tires flung wet dirt onto his calves and lower back. To boot, his socks got wet -- which is what Nichols said he hates most about biking in the rain, along with the aftermath of a rainstorm.

"After the rain, when the sun comes out and it gets hot and steamy -- that's when you wish for the rain again," he said.



His brother, Dave Nichols of El Reno, agreed that once everyone gets used to the cool weather brought by the rain, it makes the heat intolerable.

"After the rain, you look for a break in the clouds and then pray that God will close it," he said.

Traveling with the two brothers, Gina Feioch of Broken Arrow said the rain might deter some people from continuing to bike, but a little water won't hurt her.

"When it starts pouring like this, some people just might forget it, and if it starts lightening and thundering, then it won't be safe to ride," she said. "Sprinkling -- I can handle that -- but storming, it's not worth getting hurt."

Several bikers, including Jim Flesher of Stillwater, welcomed the rain because it offered a break from the dreaded heat.

"The rain makes it nicer because it's cooler, so most people just keep going," he said.

FreeWheel continues with stages from Drumright to Ponca City on Friday and from Ponca City to Caldwell, Kan., on Saturday.

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