



FROM THE PRESIDENT AND CEO CAROLINA (BDR) ON MY MIND

BY ROB DINGMAN

Earlier this year, I participated in the Backcountry Discovery Routes 10th Annual Smoky Mountains Adventure Ride Weekend Fundraiser in Fontana Dam, N.C. On the first evening, I had the opportunity to speak to the crowd of over 100 participants about the important partnership that exists between the AMA and the BDR.

The AMA can help the BDR through our government relations efforts and promotion of the BDR to our members while the BDR helps the AMA by promoting AMA membership to adventure riders. AMA members can show their support for the BDR with a special BDR-themed membership card.

The event organizers provided six different self-navigated GPS routes. Some loops included only paved roads, like the famous Tail of the Dragon, and some provided a mix of paved and dirt sections. Some included portions of the recently released South East BDR.

On Friday morning, I took off with some new friends from Pennsylvania I'd met the previous evening — Mike, Dave, Gary and Mary — and headed out on a 149-mile route called the Waucheesi Loop...which was remarkable. One portion had us climbing until we found ourselves in the middle of a cloud, where visibility was limited to a single bike length.

On Saturday, our same group chose the 139-mile Snowbird Loop, but would first try to ride an off-road section of Friday's loop that had been closed. Mike had studied the map and had a plan to get from that section to the Snowbird Loop.

Mike and I were able to talk with each other by intercom as we rode.



AMA members can choose the BDR affinity card to show their support.

When we got to the previously closed section, I thought I heard Mike say in my helmet speakers that the land managers at the entrance were waving us off.

What I did next was admittedly really boneheaded. Since I thought the section was closed, I followed someone I thought was Mike who made a right turn in front of me. He accelerated quickly and I lost audio contact. Thinking he had just ridden out of range, I stayed on the throttle to try to catch up.

Before I knew it, I was back riding in the cloud we had ridden through the day before. I couldn't figure out why he was pulling ahead so fast, and I eventually realized that none of our group was behind me, either. After several miles following with extremely limited visibility, Mike pulled over into a scenic pull-off area. As I pulled up next to him, I realized it wasn't Mike. It was BDR Routes Manager/Film Director Michael Bielecki, who was riding ahead to situate himself for filming.

I backtracked to where I had lost the group, but by the time I got there, they were gone. Since I had been relying on Mike to lead us from the off-road section to Saturday's route, I didn't know how to get back on track. The

previously closed section was now open, so I rode it hoping it would lead me in the right direction. It didn't.

I thought about just going back to the hotel but was determined to ride the intended route, even if I was now to go it alone. After doubling back

more than once, I finally found the route and could follow on my GPS.

This may have been the best adventure loop I have ever ridden, and I was happy I hadn't given up. When I got back to the hotel just before dinner, I reunited with the group, and we had a good laugh at my foolishness.

Since Gary and Mary were the only two from the Pennsylvania group who weren't planning to leave until Monday, I enlisted them to ride with me on Sunday on the Balsam Loop, a route that passed near the Wheels Through Time Museum. They would continue on the loop back to Fontana Dam, while I would visit the museum and head home from there.

Mary, Gary and I were very fortunate to have ridden on Sunday, as this route too was superb and I wouldn't have wanted to miss it. If the South East BDR is anything like the routes we rode during the BDR Smoky Mountains Adventure Ride Weekend Fundraiser, I can't wait to ride the longer, 1,300-mile Florida Panhandle to Damascus, Va., version!

Rob Dingman is the President and CEO of the AMA, and a Charter Life Member.