



www.raceacrossamerica.org

## Route Commentary

1/3

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The Insight Race Across America begins at San Diego harbor and runs from “from sea to shining sea” – some 3052 miles. Competitors will climb 110,000 vertical feet and cross thirteen states as well as all four of the continental United States’ time zones, before arriving at the historic Atlantic City Boardwalk.

### California

The parade leaves downtown San Diego and heads north along the Pacific Coast Highway into the Mission Valley. Soon after passing Qualcomm Stadium, the riders turn up a short grade and start the official race. A series of continuous gradual climbs along I-8 frontage roads steps the riders to the 4000 foot Tecate summit in the longest continual section of climbing of the entire race. Once over the top they pass the first of 57 time stations, at Pine Valley. The terrain gets much drier as the course dips south to within a stone’s throw of the Mexican border before plummeting into the heat and haze of the Sonoran desert. North of El Centro, California, the race dips to its lowest elevation (100 feet below sea level). If the Santa Ana winds are blowing, crossing the spectacular Imperial Sand Dunes will take the racers’ full attention, as drifting sands could bury much of the road. Finally, at Blythe, the racers cross the Colorado River and leave California behind.

### Arizona

Arizona offers no relief. East of Quartzsite the course bends north of I-10 and gradually climbs across barren country. The stretch between Wenden and Gladden will be more mentally tough on the racers than almost any other part of the course: for over twenty miles the road is perfectly straight and nothing changes, not even the string of telephone poles along the left side of the road. Having survived this, the racers are subjected to punishing climbs up the Yarnell Grade as they climb out of Congress toward Prescott. Yet this is only the beginning of a long ascent: the 160 miles from Congress to Flagstaff includes some 10,000 feet of climbing. The route passes through Williams, before heading out of Arizona.

### Utah

The route heads north at Kayenta and takes a bite out of the Southeastern corner of Utah. Riders will pass through the majestic Monument Valley. A strawberry moon will light the valley for some, with the full moon occurring just after midnight (race time – EDT) on June 22. A reasonably easy 100 miles ends at Aneth, where the road begins the long climb to Cortez, Colorado and takes the riders out of Utah.

### Colorado

One of the reasons for inserting Colorado back into the route in 2005 was to include the cycling-mad city of Durango, host of the inaugural unified mountain biking world championship back in 1990. With hundreds of cyclists expected to greet the RAAM competitors, the atmosphere should be festive, and that is the good news. The bad news is all the climbing. Cortez is only half way up a climb that summits at 8,431 feet some 12 miles west of Durango. And riders will need all the cheer they can muster with two 7,000 foot+ passes in quick succession to look forward to after leaving Durango.



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But these are only a warm-up for the 10,857 foot Wolf Creek Pass 25 miles northeast of Pagosa Springs. Once the high point is reached, then comes the payoff: a series of VERY long descents. The warm-up to these is a 70-mile downhill that drops some 3,000 feet to Alamosa. The next 150 miles to Kim, at an altitude of 5,700 feet, are undulating with a couple more big climbs lest they forget. And finally comes the 322-mile downhill in which the course gently drops 3,200 feet, or 10 feet a mile, propelling the riders clear out of Colorado and deep into Kansas.

### Kansas

Kansas is true plains country, gently tilting from 3000 feet in the west to 1000 feet in the east. The Insight Race Across America passes so close to the Wild West town of Dodge City, that riders, as they head east from its limits, could be said to be 'getting the hell out of Dodge.' Small towns in the traditional American image, along with their water towers, regularly interrupt the continuity of sunflower-lined roads. Halfway across the state, the route leaves US 54, to skirt around the busy Wichita traffic, and make a bee-line for the hub of the Time Stations at El Dorado. Shortly after this departure point, 13 miles east of Mount Vernon, riders pass the halfway point. With any luck at all, the winds will behave and speed the riders along.

### Missouri

At Fort Scott, the race enters Missouri. Immediately, rolling hills and distinctive "lettered" state highways will clue the riders that they aren't in Kansas any more. Midway across the state, the route crosses two widely separated arms of the massive Lake of the Ozarks, where the racers will be challenged to negotiate the throngs of vacationers. A short while later, the course passes the magnificent rotunda of the state capital at Jefferson City and crosses the Missouri River. For the next 70 miles or so, the road never strays far from the river and is fairly flat. That is, except for two sections of short, extremely steep twisty climbs through the neighboring bluffs. Finally, a bit north of St. Louis, racers will cycle over the mighty Mississippi on a magnificent golden yellow suspension bridge into Alton, Illinois.

### Illinois & Indiana

RAAM slices through the farming country of southern Illinois and central Indiana, following US 40 for most of the way. The historic National Road spurs off at several spots—including once to pass through an old covered bridge within sight of the race route. Along the tree-shaded boulevards of Terre Haute, Indiana the race enters the Eastern Time Zone. The race then retraces the RAIN (Ride Across Indiana) route, skirting south of Indianapolis and on to Richmond.

### Ohio

Considering that Ohio is the seventh most populous state, racers may be surprised at how rural this section of the race is. The course gently rolls north of Dayton (reaching its northernmost point outside Urbana) before trending southeast just west of Columbus. The Hocking Hills region, which has hosted several US National Championships in



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road racing, offers a litany of steep hills before more moderate grades around Ohio University's sprawling campus and athletic fields in Athens.

### **West Virginia & Maryland**

The Insight Race Across America traverses the Ohio River and enters West Virginia on US highway 50 and starts a series of climbs through the Appalachian Mountains. As the road narrows it climbs over the Eastern Divide at 3000 feet above sea level, then climbs again to the ominously named Mt. Storm before dropping into Maryland. Some of the most intense grades of the entire race are found on scenic US route 40 in the forty miles between Cumberland, Maryland and Hancock. The fourth of these climbs scales Sideling Hill, climbing 1000 feet in about two miles.

### **Pennsylvania**

Once the route enters Pennsylvania the major climbs will be behind the racers. Unfortunately, the interminable short rollers will continue to take their toll on tired legs. After passing through Gettysburg and by several Civil War battle sites, RAAM crosses the Susquehanna River and enters Pennsylvania Dutch "horse and buggy" country. Southwest of Philadelphia, the course starts a painfully undulating descent shortly after Parkersburg, and bobbles into Delaware, where, for the first time in the race's history, it crosses the Delaware Memorial Bridge into New Jersey.

### **New Jersey**

The last one hundred miles of the race are mercifully flat. Tall pine trees line most of the route across New Jersey. The increasing traffic presages the approach of the finish line. After one last time station, the route joins the Atlantic City Expressway and crosses the Intracoastal Waterway. Finally, the casino-dominated skyline of Atlantic City emerges in the distance. Entering the city, the racers cross familiar "Monopoly" streets—Atlantic, Pacific—and they reach their ultimate destination on the Boardwalk, a few feet short of the Atlantic Ocean.