

No Small Bike Ride

Rivendell Students Plan Quebec Trip

CYCLING

By JARED PENDAK
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ORFORD — Rivendell Academy juniors Zach Dexter and Wyatt Guillette have steadily progressed in distance bicycling, taking on the 35-mile version of The Prouty ride in 2015, followed by the 50-miler two years ago and the 100 last year.



Wyatt Guillette

This summer will offer a unique — and much longer — opportunity for the pair as they join other RA students, staff and faculty on a road cycling excursion to Quebec City. The planned two-week journey begins the day after school lets out in June, featuring 30-80 miles of pedaling per day to cover the roughly 600-mile round trip.

“I was a little surprised a school our size would offer something like this,” said Guillette, a soccer player for the Raptors who began cycling primarily as a mountain biker, but has transitioned to the road. “Traveling is one of my main hobbies and so is cycling, so I think this is going to be a lot of fun.”

It’s the brainchild of social studies teacher Kirsten Surprenant and special education teacher Story Graves, who have so far recruited 12 students and seven additional Rivendell employees for the trip. They hope to commit more students following an upcoming assembly.

While Surprenant’s an experienced triathlete, it will be her first bicycling tour approaching this length. The concept is nothing new for Graves, a former Mount Anthony Union High teacher who previously led three student trips from that school’s Bennington, Vt., campus to Montreal. Planning for overnight accommodations, meals and culturally significant stops along the way is the easy part, Graves said. Like the MAU journeys, Rivendell’s will be trailed by a support vehicle to tote provisions

like camping gear, food and water and maintenance equipment.

It’s the physical and mental barriers riders must overcome that present the most challenges.

“You might think all the work is being done by your legs, but it’s really your whole body that’s working while you ride,” said Graves, who also cycled coast to coast across the continental U.S., from Oregon to Virginia, with a friend in the 1980s. “It’s a lot of core strength, a lot of shoulder work. You just have to keep pushing on.”

There will be plenty of hills, especially during the initial leg as the group travels northwest through the foothills of the Green Mountains to cross the international border at Richford, Vt. That’s better than heading due north from Orford because of a rich network of bike paths and bicycle-friendly Quebec roads readily accessible north of central Vermont.

“We don’t have our whole route planned out yet, but crossing the border there will give us a lot of options for the Canadian side,” Graves said. “There are a lot of bike paths with campgrounds and places to stay, and when you are on the roads, there (motorists) are used to having a lot of cyclists around, so it’s safer than if we started off on Route 5, for example.”

Surprenant has implemented classroom curricula to help anticipate the voyage, devoting this semester’s global studies class to the examination of how bicycles impact political, economic and social systems. They’ve studied how bicycles are becoming increasingly relied upon for recreation and transportation worldwide, playing a key role in access to health care and other services.

The class has also studied the journey of Burlington resident Cameron Russell and two friends, who rode more than 12,000 miles from Patagonia in South America to the Vermont/Canada border beginning last January.

Surprenant and Graves are hoping Rivendell’s own trip will be equal parts valuable learning experience and fun, early-summer adventure.

“We’re spanning two countries, so right there, it’s global,” Surprenant said. “A lot of the kids who are coming have never been to Canada. French is the primary language in much of Quebec, including Quebec City, where we’re going to be spending two nights, so communicating could be a challenge. There will be a lot of outdoor recreation skills that come into play — camping, cooking, dealing with inclement weather. And then there is bicycle maintenance.”

Rivendell seniors Karina Ricker and Sarah Parenti are both in Surprenant’s class and will embark on the journey, their first significant cycling of any kind since they rode together along River Road in Orford and Lyme several years ago. Parenti was a bit dubious about the trip when she first learned, but she has warmed up to the opportunity.

“At first I was kind of like, ‘Really? Canada? That kind of sounds ridiculous,’” Parenti said. “I thought, ‘Where are we going to eat and sleep?’ But the class we’re taking has talked about how you can do so many things on a bike. Now I’m just really excited about it.”

The group is in the early stages of accumulating resources for the trip, still in need of bikes and indoor bike trainers, repair tools and spare parts to aid in the journey. It’s attempting to raise \$5,000 to help offset expenses such as the purchase of used bikes (if necessary), safety gear and cycling-specific clothing, along with the costs associated with campground reservations, food, the support van and a two-night hostel stay in Quebec City.

As of Wednesday, the group had received \$385 in online donations (<https://www.gofundme.com/rivendells-cycling-trip-to-quebec>) and one bicycle, a seasoned Miyata 10-speed currently sitting in the classroom of math teacher Laszlo Bardos.

Bardos, a distance cycling veteran of several 135-mile trips to Cape Elizabeth, Maine, is looking forward to joining the group to Quebec.

“I’ve fallen in love with biking, because it makes you feel like a kid again,” Bardos said. “You feel a tremendous sense of freedom in the fresh air, the scenery. You look around and just enjoy the journey.”

To help train for the outing, some students and staff have been utilizing RA’s recently revamped fitness center. That’s where science teacher Rachel Sanders was spotted performing bench presses on Tuesday afternoon.

“I’ve never ridden more than probably 20 miles at once, but I’m incredibly excited for this,” she said. “There will be challenges every day, but every day we’ll get over them. That’s what success is.”

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