

Tamiami Trail by Bike

by Oscar Rattenborg

I had the honor of participating in the 6th Annual “72 Hours to Key West” fundraiser for children this past November. The first day was from Ft Myers to the outskirts of Miami. The route involved smaller roads paralleling the Gulf Coast. Nice riding with lower traffic loads. The Everglades portion was limited to following US 41 from Naples to Krome Avenue outside of Miami.

The Naples to Collier-Seminole State Park road way was a dream with a bike path as well as a wide shoulder next to the road. The wide shoulder allowed for fast bicycle travel without the stops associated with the bike path. The next section to Everglades City was not as pleasant. The bike path stopped and the road narrowed as did the shoulder. To add to the levels of stress, the bridges were narrower than the shoulder and forced bicyclists to merge into traffic to pass. The lead-up to each bridge also had elevated road markings (*see photos*) that jarred your body at each traverse. We won't mention that cars at times pass coming towards you at high speed. To say the least, this section is far from a relaxed country ride – limited sightseeing.



The Everglades City to Shark Valley section is beautiful with many vistas, more birds and alligators as well as options to explore the Miccosukee culture. The road shoulder is in better condition and lacks the raised markings.

Shark Valley to Krome Avenue has new pavement with nice shoulders. The only challenge is the water control structures which narrow the road. Not as natural an environment, but still enjoyable. After 130 miles, the Miccosukee Resort (where we had reservations for the first night) lights were a welcoming sight.

The proposed River of Grass Greenway could make this adventure both safer and more enjoyable. A separate path would allow for more of a focus on the beautiful nature than marking the next car passing you. It would be like riding the beautiful path at Shark Valley with the nature of the Everglades surrounding you. I bet that many organized events as well as bicycle tourists would embrace the River of Grass Greenway as a safe and rewarding adventure. Currently, many bicycling touring companies would rather send you across SR 80 to Lake Okeechobee than attempt US 41.

For more information about this ride, visit website <http://72hourstokeywest.com/>.