

## Cindy Lange-Kubick: On the road again 6/23/10



CLAY CENTER -- Ride a bike 60 miles? Shower in a swimming pool bathroom? Sleep in a tent?

Get up and do it again?

And again and again and again?

That's crazy.

That's what I once thought, and that's what I told my friend Susan Rodenburg the first year she asked me to ride Tour de Nebraska, a bicycling "adventure" she's organized with her husband, Rich, every June for 22 years.

I like to ride my bike, I told her.

I have fun riding my bike, I said. On short, sweet, relaxing rides. On bike trails with ice cream waiting at the end.

And I want it to stay that way, thank you.

And then one year a friend at work decided to train for the tour. And my friendly spinning instructor started talking up the tour. And another friend decided he might give the tour a try.

And now I'm in Clay Center, waiting for Day One of my third Tour de Nebraska to *finally* start so I can ride my bike 60 miles a day and shower in a swimming pool bathroom and sleep in a tent and get up and do it again.

It's Tuesday evening, and I'm with 221 other riders who are almost as excited as I am to have nothing to do but watch Nebraska unfold from a bike saddle for five days.

(Except for the first-timers who are still thinking: This is crazy.)

Susan and Rich and Elsie the basset hound are around here somewhere.

Doctors and hair stylists and machinists are getting ready to ride. Retired people, grad students, a judge, a school counselor, artists, scientists. There's some guy who claims to be a "Bud Stud" and another who listed "raconteur" as his occupation on the sign-up sheet.

There's my team, 10 in all, with a clever name -- Paper Pedalers -- and jerseys to prove it.

A Penske truck is waiting by the fairgrounds to be filled with tents, camp chairs, sleeping bags, duffel bags, 624 cans of beer, 768 cans of soda, 648 bottles of water, 176 oranges, 88 apples, 480 bananas, give or take.

The Rodenburgs will buy more beer and more bananas down the road at Minden or Cambridge or Alma or one of the dozen or so small towns bikers will pass through this week.

The towns make the tour, Susan says.

She spends the winter plotting a route, making sure highways aren't under construction. She and Rich drive every mile in March, meeting contacts all along the 303-mile route -- the sleepover towns and the just-passing-through-but-we're-hungry-and-thirsty towns.

"The hospitality is unbelievable. We couldn't do it without them," she says.

She means it.

If only they could cook the weather the way they whip up pancakes.

It's a Clay Center send-off Wednesday morning. Then on to Glenvil, Ayr, Roseland, Holstein (and the Cowtown Bar), Norman and Minden 61 miles later.

Crazy.

Reach Cindy Lange-Kubick at 402-473-7218 or [clange-kubick@journalstar.com](mailto:clange-kubick@journalstar.com).

## **Cindy Lange-Kubick: Even the fittest bicyclists can use a little luck on Day 1. 6/24/10**



First time tour riders Rhonda Revelle, Diane Miller and Sunny Smallwood celebrate finishing their first day on the Tour in Minden. (CINDY LANGE-KUBICK / Lincoln Journal Star)

MINDEN -- On a lonely highway 28 miles from [Tour de Nebraska](#) ground zero, the 4-H club members of tiny Ayr, Neb., left behind personalized road markers for road-weary cyclists.

May the wind be with you! (It wasn't.)

Good luck getting up that hill! (We need it.)

Keep pedaling! (What choice do we have?)

Three hours earlier, organizer Rich Rodenburg gave cyclists similar advice before they set off for the first day of the five-day ride.

"Drink before you're thirsty. Eat before you're hungry. And don't grind it out in your high gears."

More than 200 riders listened while Elsie the basset hound walked around, licking legs and hoping for a free breakfast.

Many of the cyclists were ride vets who greeted one another Wednesday morning at Clay Center's mud puddle-pocked fairgrounds like long-lost friends.

There were hugs and happy how-are-yous to people seen only once a year -- and then only recognized in spandex and funny shoes.

But for about a third of the riders, this was all brand new.

And those 70 riders have a million questions.

The biggest: Can they do it?

My spinning instructor at the YMCA was one of those newbies.

Rhonda Revelle is fit. She does pushups by the dozen, coaches the Nebraska softball team, and gets up crazy-early two mornings a week to teach spinning.

But she hadn't ridden -- or owned -- a two-wheeled bike since she was a kid.

Then in May, she outfitted herself with a road bike and recruited two other coaches and friends -- Diane Miller (softball) and Sunny Smallwood (women's basketball) -- to join her on the Tour.

Wednesday morning, they hung on Rodenburg's every word and then hit the highway.

They bought granola bars and water from the 4-H girls in Ayr (population 98, pronounced "Air"). They left their bikes by a mulberry bush where riders gathered like kids at an ice cream truck to stain their fingers and eat the sweet black fruit.

Then it was off to Roseland for lunch. Or to Holstein for Cowtown burgers at the bar.

The wind never cooperated, coming from the north and west as Revelle and the rest of the riders headed against it to Minden, where the townsfolk waited in Santa hats and aprons to serve burgers, brats and brownies.

Revelle's crew made it to the school by midafternoon, smiling in red Husker gear and layers of sweaty sunscreen.

Miller and Smallwood challenged her the last few miles: Pass the woman on the bike with a basket with flowers who had buzzed by her earlier.

She did.

Then they rolled into town.

"I've never been so excited to stand," Revelle said.

And excited to finish her first 60-mile ride.

And Thursday?

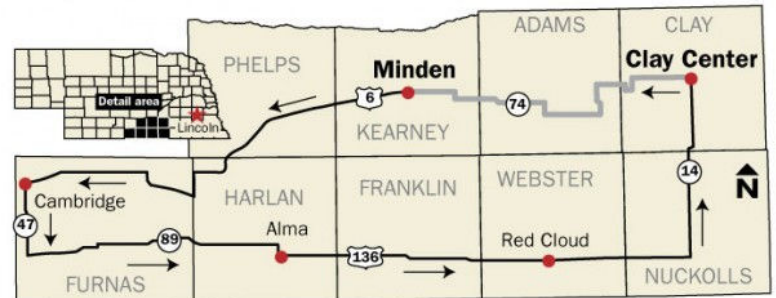
Her first time riding 78.

May the wind be with her.

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## 2010 Tour de Nebraska

Today riders will travel 61 miles from Clay Center to Minden.



SOURCE: Tour de Nebraska

SHEILA STORY/Lincoln Journal Star

## Cindy Lange-Kubick: For many, friendships make the Tour ride. 6/25/10



Joe Kellner of Lincoln gets ready to get back on his bike on the second day of the Tour after taking a break in Axtell. He had 70 more miles ahead of him Thursday. (PETER SALTER / Lincoln Journal Star)



CAMBRIDGE -- Joe Kellner and his Team Zoo Bar crew made it to Axtell before 9 a.m. Thursday, parking themselves in the dining area of the tiny town's grocery store.

They would have been drinking at the bar around the corner, but it wasn't open yet, the Lincoln man said.

Kellner, a bike man with a mustache to match, has 18 Tour de Nebraskas on his bike pedals.

As for the bar bit? He was only half-joking.

Kellner and Co. once had team jerseys made: Drinkers with a Biking Problem.

It's part of the fun. A beer -- maybe two -- in the little towns along the route, meeting the locals, slowing things down.

Kellner started the fun. He met a woman on his first tour who became his friend.

Then Gayle Resh joined them in 1994, her first tour.

Now she's up to 17.

"We've made such great friends," she said from across their table in Axtell. "It transcends the biking."

For lots of Tour veterans, the friendships make the ride.

"It's like one big dysfunctional family," said Mike Smith, on board for tour No. 17.

He remembers the first year he came, alone.

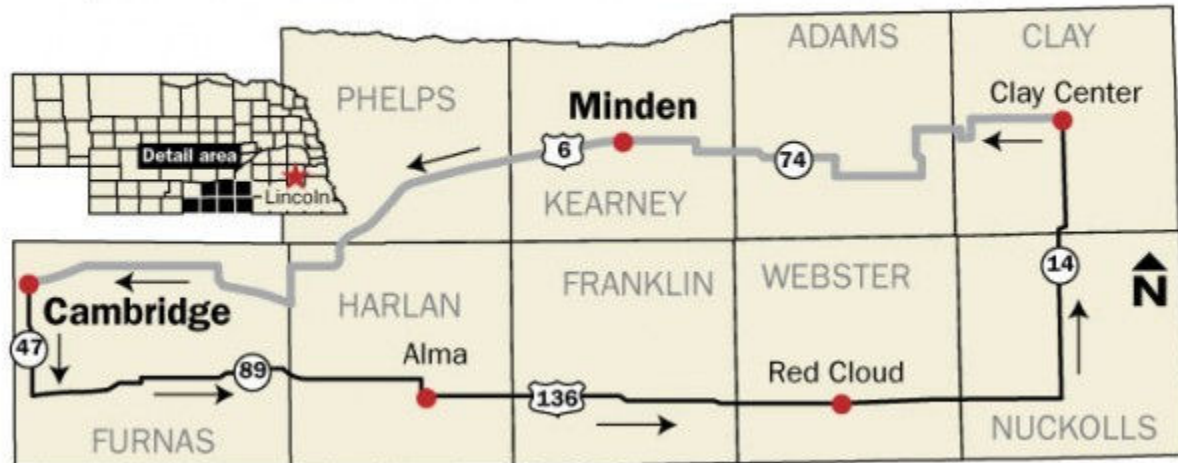
But you don't know anyone, his wife had said.

"I'll meet someone," the 50-year-old father of two answered.

He did.

## 2010 Tour de Nebraska

Today riders will travel 78 miles from Minden to Cambridge.



SOURCE: Tour de Nebraska

SHEILA STORY/Lincoln Journal Star

You could see the camaraderie Thursday -- groups in matching jerseys, pedaling through gold and green Nebraska farmland.

Even the new riders felt at home after a day in the saddle.

Jan Schiefen took in Day Two's 78 miles like a pro.

She's racing up the hills, said her husband, Paul Koerner, when I caught up with them in Oxford (876 people, six churches, three horses and an infinite amount of hospitality).

Schiefen took off fast and didn't slow down, all after a night of schoolyard camping that included barking dogs, rumbling trains and the attendant insomnia.

It didn't hurt that the wind was in her favor.

Blowing Schiefen past windmills and wetlands and wheat fields, down busy highways and deserted Republican River valley roads.

Still, it was nearly 80 miles on a nearly 90-degree June day.

But there were bars with beverages. Team Zoo Bar hit three in all: Oxford, Arapahoe, Holbrook.

And in Edison, when bikers overran the restroom in the town's tiny cafe, a local girl was dispatched on a toilet paper run, which she made by bike.

Two small boys gawked at the cyclists as they waited in line.

One wondered aloud: "You guys are biking around the world?"

To which a sweaty biker answered: It feels like it.

But by late afternoon, with the world waiting and forgotten, 200 tired and very happy bikers pedaled as far west as Cambridge.

Where they stopped.

And where beer coolers were waiting in the city park, along with camp chairs.

And a potluck at the community center, set up by the local church ladies.

Which Mike Smith attended, walking down a sidewalk in the middle of Cambridge with a pack of friends, met on tour.

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## Cindy Lange-Kubick: With all that riding comes all that eating. 6/26/10



Bicyclists on the Tour de Nebraska refueled early Friday in the Republican River valley town of Wilsonville. (PETER SALTER / Lincoln Journal Star)



ALMA - The day was still cool and the sun still low in the Wilsonville sky Friday morning when the town's community center was overrun with hungry bicyclists.

The No.1 question from the locals serving cinnamon rolls, pumpkin bread, tubs of watermelon and vats of coffee?

*Are they about done coming?*

Sorry, but no.

A bicycle tour is about bike riding.

And it's about seeing things you've never seen before, like Wilsonville, population 118, and 5-year-old Conner Snyder escorting you into town, a happy boy on a green Hot Wheels bike.

And it's about food. Lots of food in lots of places.

So much food that the folks in Wilsonville -- a mere 16 miles from Cambridge, where 200 bike riders polished off breakfast No. 1 -- were running low halfway into breakfast No. 2.

Don't you worry, Tour de Nebraska organizer Rich Rodenburg told them. But keep the water and coffee coming if you can.

Rodenburg and his wife, Susan, rely on the hard work of dozens of volunteers to make sure their cyclists are well-fed.

From the world's best brownies in Minden on Wednesday to a smorgasbord in Cambridge on Thursday to yummy homemade granola bars in Beaver City, 16 miles beyond the gooey cinnamon rolls in Wilsonville, riders eat.

Jan Hunt of Lincoln gained weight after her first tour, she said.

All that riding. And all that food.

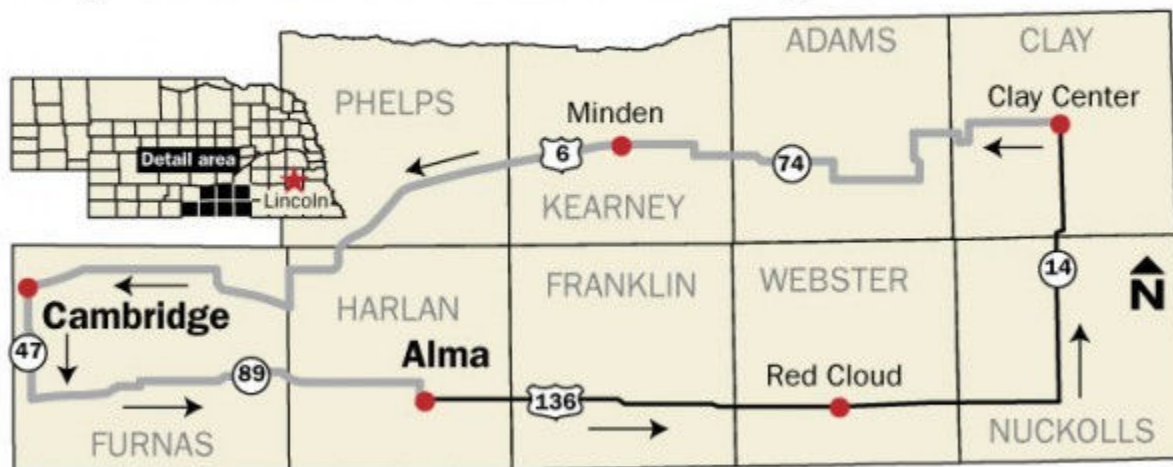
Susan Rodenburg tells riders to expect an extra few pounds at the end of the five-day ride. She puts it in her tour handbook.

Hard to believe, but it's only day three and you can see the tummies sticking out from spandex shorts. I can vouch for mine.

Ride to eat, that's my philosophy.

## 2010 Tour de Nebraska

Today riders will travel 61 miles from Cambridge to Alma.



SOURCE: Tour de Nebraska

SHEILA STORY/Lincoln Journal Star

Fellow rider and co-worker Jeff Korbelik discovered he could track his mileage (and calorie burning) on his fancy phone during the last half of Friday's ride.

After the last 24 miles, his phone informed him he'd burned 1,207 calories.

This seemed to make him happy, because he got off his bike, promptly sat down and opened a beer.

Friday had turned hot -- 96 degrees in Alma by mid-afternoon.

Bikers were sunburned, sweaty and crabby as they rolled the last three miles against a hot south wind.

But Alma made them happy with hot showers at the school, a pork chop dinner and a beer garden.

I visited all the tour towns this spring, driving with Susan to check out the accommodations.

In Alma, I found a set of vintage Anchor Hocking mixing bowls I'd been longing for at the Country Store.

I didn't have the \$75, but owners Jim and Jan Rojewski told me to take them home anyway. Send a check, they said.

Jim even carried them to the car.

"Money doesn't mean much to us," Jan said when I rolled into town Friday. "We don't have much, but we trust people."

I'm glad I'd sent the check.

And like nearly every other biker on the tour, I don't bring a lock for my two-wheeled transportation.

In the morning, my bike is always where I left it, ready to ride to the next breakfast, nearest pie stop, a reasonably priced hot meal in a small town.

As the sun crept higher in Wilsonville Friday, the locals ran home to raid their refrigerators, hauling back Tupperwares filled with fruit and salads.

And they started cutting those gooey cinnamon rolls in half, making sure there would be enough for all the riders, who gratefully ate them before biking down the road to breakfast No. 3.

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## Cindy Lange Kubick: Biking on the greatest day. 6/27/10



Albert Maxey, 72, relaxes in Red Cloud after the fourth day of his eighth Tour de Nebraska. Maxey won the Tour's Spirit Award last year. (PETER SALTER / Lincoln Journal Star)

*Cindy Lange-Kubick is riding - and writing about - the Tour de Nebraska, a five-day, 303-mile bike ride.*

**Saturday's ride:** Alma -- Republican City -- Bloomington -- Franklin -- Riverton -- Inavale -- Red Cloud: 48 miles

RED CLOUD - The first day of my first Tour de Nebraska, I ran into a very fit man in a very pink biking jersey in a very crowded small-town bar.

How you doing? I asked, happy to have not yet cried, crashed my bike or otherwise given up in shame.

"Greatest day of my life," he answered.

His name is Jim Nixon. He rides with a group of Kansas City men who call themselves Team Spirit, and every day in every bar (and every cafe, every Git 'n Split), he gives the same answer.

*Greatest day of my life.*

Bike riding can be like that.

It makes a person happy.

And every year since 1996 -- when a Team Spirit member found a handle-less soup ladle on the side of a highway and turned it into a trophy -- the tour has given out the Spirit Award.

Albert Maxey choked up when they called his name last year.

Saturday afternoon, the 72-year-old retired Lincoln police lieutenant relaxed in the Red Cloud city park, ready to hand over the soup ladle.

While the rest of us battled hills and heat between Alma and the home of Willa Cather, Maxey spent the morning at the local country club.

He got in nine before the women's tournament started.

The day before, he squeezed in 18.

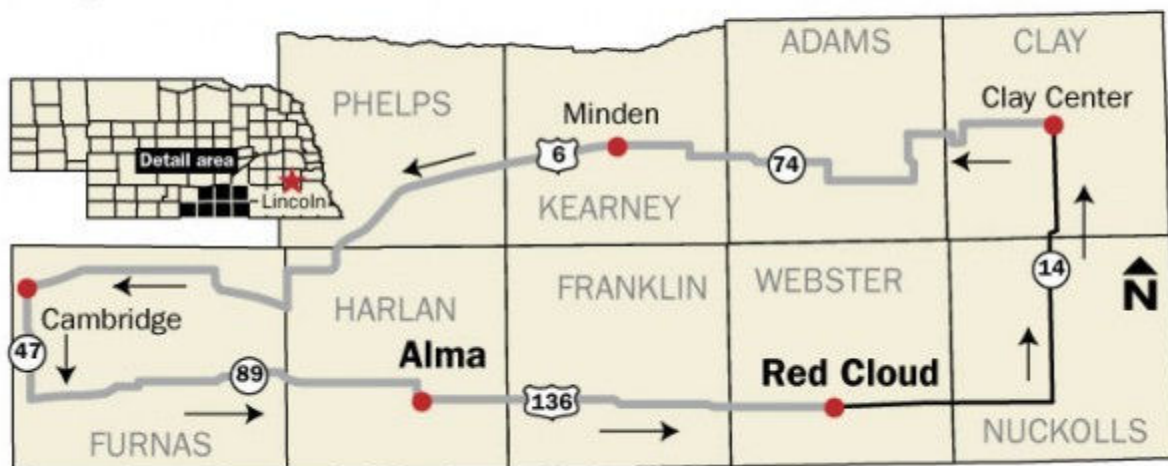
Maxey still has spirit, but blood clots in his left leg last summer keep him out of the saddle for long periods of time. Doctor's orders.

"But he didn't say anything about golf."

He rode a few stretches along wildflower-lined highways and camped and ate lunch in downtown Red Cloud with his buddies, Ross Greathouse and Lynn Lightner.

## 2010 Tour de Nebraska

Today riders will travel 48 miles from Alma to Red Cloud.



SOURCE: Tour de Nebraska

SHEILA STORY/Lincoln Journal Star

The Palace's dining room was packed with World Cup fans and former Spirit Award winners -- and plenty of other cyclists filled with varying degrees of good cheer and camaraderie.

Jim Ferguson, a Jim Belushi look-alike who won the trophy in 1999, sat at the bar eating his burger and fries.

Cheery Mary Torell and her husband, Bob, were there -- 2002 trophy winners.

And Mike Smith, awarded the prize in 1997 with his wife, Karen.

Nearly 50 miles earlier, he was sitting down to a breakfast of egg casserole and banana nut muffins in the Alma school gym.

There was talk of the firecracker wake-up some teens had provided in the campground the night before. And the cyclist who knits socks every Tour (hopefully not while she's riding) and the 78-year-old from Colorado riding with his three daughters (who can't keep up).

And all the other interesting people you meet during five days on two wheels whose full names you don't know. The Fairbury Girls. Crazy Dan. Map Girl. Lawrence of Arabia. Butter.

"Did you meet a new person yet today?" Crazy Dan asked Smith at 6 a.m.

Not yet, but Smith was sure he would.

"I try to meet someone new every day -- even if they don't want to meet me."

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## **Cindy Lange-Kubick: Back in our cars again. 6/28/10**



CLAY CENTER -- On Saturday afternoon, heat melted my bicycle grips.

That night, storm clouds rolled into Red Cloud's city park and spoiled the sleep of Tour de Nebraska campers.

And by a bleary-eyed Sunday morning, a hot south wind had shifted, doing its best to push us to Kansas instead of north to Clay Center and our air-conditioned car rides home.

My feet hurt. My thighs hurt. My head hurt. My butt hurt.

My butt *really* hurt.

For a week, more than 200 riders had forgotten about nearly everything but which way the wind was blowing, how high the temperature was climbing and where to find the coldest beverage (The Palace in Red Cloud) or best ice cream in small-town Nebraska. (Big Mama's in picturesque Cambridge.)

We had discovered places we'd never been before.

Stamford. Orleans. Norman. Riverton. Bloomington. Inavale. Edison. Atlanta. All in Nebraska -- where most of us lived or had ties.

"I didn't even know Bloomington existed," said Jim Ferguson, who took a photo of the town and sent it to his parents in Bloomington, Ind.

"Kudos to the organizers," said Luke Chretien, a Papillion man who checked out the charm of Joe Camera Coffee House in Alma Friday.

"We have a chance to see parts of Nebraska we've never seen."

We watched Keith Jacobshagen-worthy horizons unfold under an umbrella of big Nebraska sky.

Some of us stopped to take pictures.

Some of just rolled past making memories.

On Saturday night, 200 bikers cleaned up and sat down together for a banquet celebrating our week.

Awards were given for acts of kindness. A fixed flat. A ride into town. Encouragement, advice, a push up a long Nebraska hill.

People raised their hands when organizer Rich Rodenburg asked who was a rookie, who lived in Lincoln, Omaha and who came the farthest - Seattle, Tucson, Nova Scotia.

He found the oldest rider, 80.

The youngest, 13.

On the last day, Dick Cornwell, the tour's oldest participant, ate the last tour meal in the Nelson fire hall.

The wind was rough, the Colorado man said.

Trey Seibel ate, too, a 13-year-old Lincoln boy who pedaled every mile - 303 -- with his dad, Bryan.

The pair finished and headed north. He'll be back next year.

Dick wasn't so sure. He motored the last stretch from the front seat of a minivan.

By that final day I knew Crazy Dan's last name (Lee) and the name of the woman who knitted socks (Christie Emler, who even lent me a dollar so I could eat the world's best baked potato in a fire hall).

All of us finished, sooner or later. Most on two wheels.

We all traded bikes for cars. Not caring so much anymore what way the wind blew.

Or whether setting up camp under a street light and by the railroad tracks was such a smart idea.

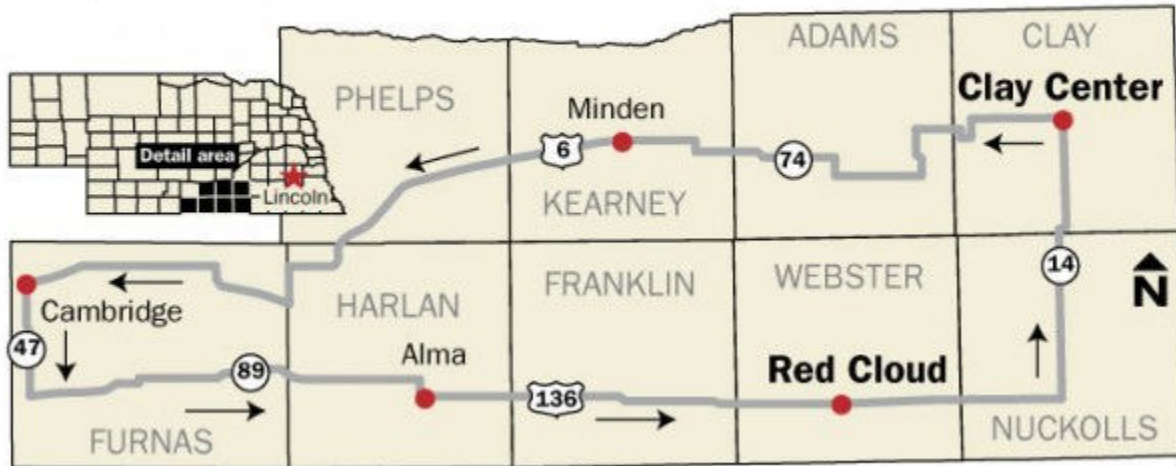
Or what the church ladies might cook us for dinner tonight.

The world started rushing back.

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# 2010 Tour de Nebraska

Today riders will travel 55 miles from Red Cloud to Clay Center.



SOURCE: Tour de Nebraska

SHEILA STORY/Lincoln Journal Star