

# Des Moines Register

RAGBRAI

## Easy riders: 2025 RAGBRAI route will be among shortest, flattest, announcement reveals



**Philip Joens**

Des Moines Register

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RAGBRAI riders in 2025 will have it easy.

After the hilliest Register's Annual Great Bicycle Ride Across Iowa ever in 2024 and a 500-plus-mile ride in 2023, this year's edition will be among the flattest and shortest.

It also will feature the ride's first visit in more than a decade to one of Iowa's favorite tourist attractions.

Back north after a foray into the slopes of southern Iowa last year, RAGBRAI 52's list of overnight towns was announced at the annual route reveal party Saturday night, held for the first time at Vibrant Music Hall in Waukee. The ride will start in Orange City on July 20 and end in the Mississippi River town of Guttenberg on July 26.

Along the way riders will camp in Milford, Estherville, Forest City, Iowa Falls, Cedar Falls and Oelwein.

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There will be 10,487 feet of climb, the sixth-least on record for RAGBRAI, and the ride will cover 406 miles, the second-shortest distance after a 370-miler in 1977.

As a result, Ride Director Matt Phippen said, no one day of this year's ride sticks out as particularly tough. Just two days will be longer than 70 miles, with the longest being 74.1 miles on July 22 from Estherville to Forest City.

Pass-through towns and the full route will be announced in April. Phippen said he hopes the distance between towns will average 10.5 miles.

“Obviously the longer days are going to be a little bit tougher,” Phippen said, adding that having plenty of pass-through towns where riders can pause and refresh “makes the overall chunk that much easier.”

Though this year will be dramatically flatter than 2024, when there were 18,375 feet of elevation gain, Phippen warned there will still be hills.

“You live in Iowa, you ride your bike in Iowa, there’s hills everywhere you go,” he said.

And adverse weather conditions like rain or heat can always make a ride more challenging, he said.

## **Riders will visit a favorite Iowa vacationland**

**More:** The towns of RAGBRAI 2025: What to know about the communities along the route  
Milford, population about 3,300, will be the first overnight town. It’s the gateway to one of Iowa’s top vacation destinations: the Iowa Great Lakes.

It will be Milford’s first time as an overnight town, though it served as a pass-through town on five previous rides, most recently in 2014, when the overnight town of Okoboji hosted the ride’s latest visit to the clear, cool glacial remnant lakes near the Minnesota border.

Phippen said he is excited to show off Milford, which sits just southeast of West Lake Okoboji and is a haven for summer vacationers.

“The goal is to showcase why people live in some of these communities,” Phippen said. “If RAGBRAI can do it, that’s the easiest way to do it.”

## **Summer's flood damage shapes the ride**

The charms of the lake community are in contrast to neighboring cities that are still recovering from historic flooding that hit northwest Iowa in June 2024. Towns including Rock Valley, Spencer and Sheldon — all past RAGBRAI overnight stops — were submerged and thousands of residents were displaced after unprecedented rainfall sent rivers surging far beyond their banks.

Phippen said he had to carefully map the route through the region.

“There are towns that are still dealing with impact from last year,” he said. “It’s very hard for me to take a ride to a town that still has people displaced.”

RAGBRAI in 2024 visited another disaster scene, Greenfield, only two months after it was hit by an EF4 tornado. Generous riders left behind \$50,000 in contributions to benefit the survivors. But the circumstances were somewhat different: Greenfield was announced as a pass-through town before the tornado hit, and with the downtown unscathed, the town's ride committee chose to keep it on the route.

One particular impact of the flooding on the 2025 ride is that Iowa Falls will be an overnight town despite having served as one just four years ago in 2021. The scenic spot was a favorite among riders who spent a sunny afternoon splashing in the Iowa River, and Phippen would have preferred to save it as a highlight for another year.

“I wanted to give them some more time based on them hosting in 2021,” he said of the city.

But there’s a benefit for overnight towns that are willing to step in when needed: RAGBRAI has increased the support it provides them to \$50,000.

“You don’t want to burn towns, communities out,” Phippen said.... “But with our give-back and how we’re supporting the (cities)... they’re more receptive to having us back because they’re receiving money and funds to pull it off.”

## **Why will RAGBRAI be so short in 2025?**

Geography caused the brevity of this year’s ride, Phippen said. For 2023’s 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary ride, RAGBRAI set off from the original starting town of Sioux City and ended in in Davenport, just as it had in 1973. It was a route that carried riders 500-plus miles from the banks of the Missouri River to Davenport in the eastward bulge defined by the Mississippi River that’s known as Iowa’s nose.

This year’s route, beginning in Orange City, will set off about 25 miles east of the Missouri River and the ending town of Guttenberg is on the nose’s bridge. It’s a significantly narrower crossing of the state.

“There’s not much distance there,” Phippen explained.

## Northwest Iowa will host RAGBRAI again

This year's ride will mark the fourth time in five years RAGBRAI will have started in northwest Iowa, only deviating in 2024 when it launched from the south Iowa city of Glenwood.

Why are northern routes so popular?

"It's beautiful," Phippen said. "It's towns that have hosted before that understand what RAGBRAI is."

And except on the edges, the north of Iowa also isn't quite so hilly as the endlessly undulating south.

Here's the full list of overnight towns for 2025.

### Day 1, Sunday, July 20: Orange City to Milford

**Length:** 70.1 miles.

**Feet of climb:** 1,522.

### Day 2, Monday, July 21: Milford to Estherville

**Length:** 44.6 miles.

**Feet of climb:** 1,395.

### Day 3, Tuesday, July 22: Estherville to Forest City

**Length:** 74.1 miles.

**Feet of climb:** 1,308.

### Day 4, Wednesday, July 23: Forest City to Iowa Falls

**Length:** 68.3 miles.

**Feet of climb:** 1,449.

## **Day 5, Thursday, July 24: Iowa Falls to Cedar Falls**

**Length:** 49.5 miles.

**Feet of climb:** 1,262.

## **Day 6, Friday, July 25: Cedar Falls to Oelwein**

**Length:** 38.2 miles.

**Feet of climb:** 1,210.

## **Day 7, Saturday, July 26: Oelwein to Guttenberg**

**Length:** 61.2.

**Feet of climb:** 2,341.

*Philip Joens has ridden parts of 19 RAGBRAIs. He has completed the river-to-river trek eight times. He covers retail and real estate for the Des Moines Register and can be reached at 515-284-8184 at [pjoens@registermedia.com](mailto:pjoens@registermedia.com) or on Twitter @Philip\_Joens.*