

Bike Ride Raises \$7,000 for Assistance Dogs

California man's 715-mile journey benefits assistance dog training group Canine Companions.

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Soon after Bruce Ross completed his 715-mile bike ride down the California coast to raise funds for Canine Companions for Independence, he was already talking about his next cycling trip to benefit the nonprofit organization that provides highly trained assistance dogs to adults and children with disabilities.

Ross, 55, started his journey May 17 in Santa Rosa, logging an average of 60 miles per day, and as many as 100 miles on some days. He stayed focused by keeping in mind that this was a "purpose-driven ride," he said, with an ultimate goal to further the mission of Canine Companions.

Joining Ross in his support van for the length of the trip was Zena, the third puppy he has volunteered to raise for the organization. After spending 16 months with a puppy, program volunteers then return the dog to CCI for advanced training before they are matched with an individual.

During the 11-day bike ride, Ross faced the challenges of pedaling up many hills as well as dealing with high winds. He said the 50-mile ride from Carmel to Big Sur stands out as the toughest.

"It was very challenging at times to just keep the legs moving – as well as disheartening at times because just when you thought it was over at a peak, the road would drop down and you'd have to climb again," he said. "Then there was Hurricane Point halfway between the two cities. We found out why it was named that after almost being knocked over on the bike."

On Saturday, May 31, Ross rode the last 50 miles and arrived in Oceanside, where he faced the task of returning Zena for her advanced training. He gave a brief presentation during a ceremony, and presented CCI with a check for the funds raised on his trip.

"Yes, I made it back in one piece," said the Irvine, Calif., resident. "In fact, didn't even get a single flat tire along the ride. The final mileage was 715 miles – and it looks like we will exceed \$7,000 with some late donations still coming in."

Ross said he plans to receive his fourth puppy from CCI in a few weeks to start a new adventure all over again. Part of that experience will also include a benefit bike ride.

"In fact, I am already planning a 'National Ride for CCI' that will start in New York City and end in Oceanside trekking 3,000 miles across the United States for Canine Companions," he said. "Call me crazy."