

News

## A mother and her son continue an Erie Canal bike trek tradition

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SARATOGA SPRINGS — Continuing a family tradition, Rita Grant and her 15-year-old son, Hanson, were two of more than 500 cyclists who took part in the 11th annual Cycling the Erie Canal bike tour, a 400-mile trip from Buffalo to Albany, from July 12 to 19.

Riders average 40 to 60 miles a day with about two-thirds of the tour taking place on the Canalway Trail. This is Grant's second trip; her first was two years earlier with her son, Garrison.

Originally from the Finger Lakes region, Grant always wanted to bike cross-country. After an unsuccessful attempt in her 20s, Grant satisfies the urge by biking across New York state each time one of her children turns 15.

"Two years ago, I decided I wanted to do a one-on-one trip with each child. It's neat to do something individual with each kid," Grant said. To start the tradition, Grant chose 15 as the age in which she'd take each child.

She learned of the trip in a newspaper article and heard more from friends. "I like the idea that it's fully supported," Grant said. There's baggage transport, breakfast, dinner and snacks, and should a rider break down or get exhausted, transportation to the nightly destination.

During the eight-day tour, riders could participate in guided tours of the canal, historic sites and museums, including the Women's Rights National Historic Site, Erie Canal Museum and Village, Fort Stanwix National Monument and a boat tour through several locks. In addition, riders take in the scenic views of the "Eighth Wonder of the World," as the man-made Canal was dubbed in 1825.

The mother and son opted to take a ride in the locks, stop at a village reenacting the way life was when the canal was built and take a trip to a local beach. "It's very well-run — well-organized," Grant said.

She and Hanson camped each night along with many other cyclists. Most nights, "tent city," as it's called, was set up on school or college campuses along the route. One special night was a stay at a zoo in Syracuse complete with breakfast with the animals. Riders could pay to stay at dormitories two nights or make their own reservations at hotels or B&Bs along the way.

Hanson said he thought cycling the Erie Canal "was way better" than he had envisioned. When asked about her favorite aspect of the trip, Grant said "Besides the people, I think its pretty neat going into the lock, riding up and down in the lock."

Hanson added, "And getting pulled by the mule on the tow path," of an option to ride a boat down the Canal the old-fashioned way.

"It's really a treat to spend eight days on the road one-on-one. You don't need to parent — just be," Grant said. "It's a gift."

Grant said she hopes to instill a love of biking in her children, and it appears Hanson has it.

"I'm doing my own trip to Boston," said Hanson, who started planning the next venture during their Erie Canal trip.

Grant is also eager to get back out. There's one trip left with daughter Martina, 11.

"Maybe I'll take her at 13 rather than 15 — girls mature faster than boys," she said. She might also ride the route with her husband, Skip, who hasn't yet participated. He does the drop-offs, the pick-ups and is the support crew and enthusiast, Grant said. "Maybe I'll take him in two years and my daughter in four," she said. "I don't want to wait."

Of those cross-country dreams, "I still might," Grant said, adding that she'd love to do it with her children.

For information on Cycling the Erie Canal, go to [www.ptny.org/canaltour](http://www.ptny.org/canaltour) or call 434-1583.

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