

## **Linda Ader Bikes Through Israel - May 2006. Thoughts and Observations.**

Record Number of Bicyclists Arrive in Eilat After a 6-Day Journey From Jerusalem  
Fundraising Goal for Arava Institute Exceeded \$500,000

Tuesday, May 16, 2006, Eilat, Israel - Yesterday afternoon, over 125 men and women from 5 different countries cycled into Eilat, completing a 265-mile journey that started out in Jerusalem some 6 days earlier. These men and women were participating in the annual Arava Institute Hazon Israel Ride: Cycling for Peace, Partnership And Environmental Protection.

Now in its 4th year, hundreds of people have participated in the Arava Institute Hazon Israel Ride since its inception. This year's Ride included 5 Bar and Bat Mitzvah children riding with a parent. These young teenagers decided that in lieu of gifts for their coming of age, friends and family should sponsor their participation in this remarkable event. The participants came from Israel, Canada, Brazil, Australia, England, with most of them coming from 19 different states in the United States. The riders ranged in age from 12 to 69. There were 15 sets of multi-generational family combinations, including married couples, parents with children, siblings, and cousins.

The funds raised from this ride go to support the programs of the Arava Institute for Environmental Studies as well as Hazon in New York City. The Arava Institute is the premier environmental teaching and research center in the Middle East, preparing future Arab and Jewish leaders to cooperatively address and resolve the region's environmental challenges. Hazon's mission is to revitalize Jewish life, to foster new vision and to encourage Jews, as Jews, to live healthier and more environmentally sustainable lives.

In addition to raising much-needed funds for the Arava Institute and Hazon (this year's Ride is expected to raise more than \$500,000), the Ride raises awareness about the ways that environmental issues impact Israel and its neighbors as well as how they can serve as a bridge for dialogue and cooperation. The message – that nature knows no borders. The Israel Ride fosters a community that crosses all the national, religious, and ideological divides. There is a strong educational component to the Israel Ride; along the route riders can put their experiences in an historical, environmental, and religious context through the Ride's scholars-in-residence: Rabbi Michael Cohen, Jacob Fine, Nigel Savage, Bill Slott and Dr. Alon Tal.

The ideals of the Arava Institute for Environmental Studies are incorporated into the Ride through its staff and crew. Most of the Israel Ride's 30 staffers are alumni of the Arava Institute, coming from Israel, Jordan, East Jerusalem, and the United States. These Jews, Muslims, and Christians demonstrate that coexistence and peace are attainable when there is common ground – in this case, a love of the land. Participants in the Ride took a week out of their busy lives to make this 288-mile trek in the name of environmental preservation and peace-building..”

Two residents of Southampton Village since 1999, participated. Sandy Ader (69) was this year's oldest rider. Sandy has never been much of a bike rider, but his wife, Linda (67) is always up for a challenge. The Aders' four children initially thought they were crazy for wanting to participate, but realized how important it is to them. “This keeps you young. It's not chronology, but how you feel about yourself”, he said. They trained on Middle Line Highway, Great Hill Road and Meadow Lane, as well as rides to East Hampton. You are attached to the land when you are attached to a bike one rider exclaimed. The 106 degrees of heat in the desert and the miles and miles of mountain climbing were so personally challenging that the total experience was immensely rewarding.

No matter how many pictures you take or how well you try to describe it, it will fall short of the actual experience – seeing Israel in a way that very few Americans have seen it.

For further information or to participate in next year's 5th anniversary ride, please visit <http://www.israelride.org>.

### **Five Days on A Bike in Israel - Linda Ader**

We rode out through the magnificent city of Jerusalem, past the Western Wall, past the museums, the Knesset, the Hospitals, The Old City, the Dome of the Rock, and through the green hills and mountains of the suburbs of the city, the city of David, and then past the ground of his battle with Goliath. For two days we rode through greenery, trees planted in a land that was empty and arid in 1948. And then the desert.

Being in the vastness of the Arava Desert, the complete tan-ness - bareness of the landscape was awesome in the real sense of that word.

Some of the sand formations- oddly enough- looked like sand sculptures- perfectly formed as though for a contest. Once in a while I'd see a camel, and then a herd, and then a shepherd.

I'd pass a thousand ostriches and know I was coming to our destination. We'd be climbing a mountain and I'd hear the heavy breathing of the rider behind me and feel his energy mixing with mine.

Together we pulled to get to the top of this enormous climb that seemed to go on forever. And then a glorious downhill as a reward for our efforts and a lovely shaded pit stop with friends waiting - cool water and quiet conversation. Once we rested at a reservoir that supplies water for almost the entire southern half of the country. We stared across this huge reservoir at the Gaza Strip and the new "Wall". A huge bear of a General described to us that 40,000 Palestinians every day pass from Gaza to go to work in Israel, each of them checked by name, fingerprints and photo.

We stopped once alongside the Egyptian border and watched the Israeli soldiers pulling their barbed wire sand scrapers alongside the Israeli border. These are used as telltales for footprints of breaches of the borders up and down the entire length of the country. And then in the middle of all this desert- acres and acres of palm trees, and pine trees and grass- kibbutzim. The shock of this to my eyes and my mind was beyond words, but brought tears. My- what a people with a goal can do ! It's Hadassah- It's Arava- It's Hazon- It's Ketura.- It's JNF- It's Young Judea- It's every group that started with an idea and a handful of believers. It's all those Chalutzim that created a habitable land out of dust and rocks. I remember thinking - my goodness- how could this have happened without the blood and sweat and tears of so many young and old. Their wars. The loss of so many young boys fighting for this land that I'm riding through. And here I am experiencing the magnificent completion of their toils...a kibbutz- dark green in the midst of a vast desert. And the war goes on.

And as we rode on toward the sea, more desert, 106 degrees, more animals, more physically challenging climbs than this 67 year old thought was possible to do. And then- we gathered -all 120 of us for a 7 mile 20,000 meter descent into Eilat- the end of the journey-288 miles- and a jump into the sea. An unforgettable experience - bike and I- one with the land. And what a Land !