



Tuesday, January 27, 2026

## **53<sup>rd</sup> Annual RAGBRAI to Overnight in Boone on July 21**

Community leaders reacted to the Saturday announcement that RAGBRAI, a cross-state bicycle ride that attracts thousands of riders from around the world, will be overnighting in Boone on Tuesday, July 21.

RAGBRAI Director Matt Phippen said the route's 391.4 miles makes it the shortest ride in the event's 53 years, but its 16,027 feet of climb mean it will be hillier than all but nine of the past rides. RAGBRAI LIII will begin in Onawa on July 18 and end in Dubuque on July 25.

The announcement was not a surprise to Boone County Convention and Visitors Bureau Executive Director Kris Blocker. She's known for a while that Boone would be one of six stopover communities but had to hold that secret fairly close until she began to assemble a planning committee a few weeks ago.

"For the past 10 years that I've been doing this job, I've always submitted an application for Boone to be one of the stopover communities, Matt reached out to me and asked if we could talk and I knew that was probably a good sign," she said.

Boone was an overnight stop during the 1975, 1988, 1998 and 2011 rides and a pass-through community in 1973, 1976, 2008 and 2018. Fourth Ward Councilman Terry Moorman, who chairs the council's economic development committee, said this year's stopover will help spread the word about Boone's various attractions.

"The city is excited to host another great event brought here by Visit Boone County, that will highlight what Boone and the people who live here have to offer. Participants may not be able to spend enough time here to enjoy all of Boone's attractions, but they certainly are welcome to return and enjoy all that Boone has to offer, including Rail Explorers, Boone Scenic Valley Railroad, Ledges and the Iowa Arboretum Treehouse Village, just to name a few" Moorman said. "Not only will this have a significant impact on the businesses, attractions and restaurants, but it gives Boone an opportunity to showcase our community."

Mayor Dave Casotti, who was also in on the secret, echoed Moorman's sentiment, noting that he couldn't be happier with the news. "I'm thrilled that it's coming through. It will be huge for the City of Boone, our businesses and our profile as one of Iowa's destination spots. Beyond the economic impact, the festivities are going to be as fun for Boone residents as they will be for the riders."

While the ride's exact route has not been set, *The Des Moines Register's* coverage noted, "Any time RAGBRAI visits Boone, the specter of Pilot Mound looms. ... Just beyond the 70-foot glacial mound that gives the area its name, the road plunges 600 feet to the Des Moines River, a high-speed run that challenges riders' nerves. Then it tests their stamina with an equally steep climb up the other side of the valley that is anything but quick. There is an upside to Boone's rough-by-Iowa-standards terrain. Rail Explorers offers a 12.5-mile tour via open-air, four-wheel rail bikes that includes crossing the 156-foot-tall Bass Point Creek High Bridge that passes over a Des Moines River tributary."

Noting that 60% of RAGBRAI's riders come from other states and 20 countries, the *Register* story continued, "Phippen said, organizers are always looking for ways to turn RAGBRAI from a bike ride into a vacation by bringing riders near attractions like the Rail Explorers ride. 'The job that

these towns have is we're bringing them a captive audience,' he said. 'Whatever that attraction is, if it's something that is very unique to their town, what is the town doing to show that off?'"

While there are economic benefits to being a pass-through community, the impact of being a stopover community is exponentially greater. "During a pass-through, a lot of riders will spend a little money to grab a drink or something, but they'll get back on their way. With the overnight stop, they'll get to enjoy a lot more time here," Blocker said. "Economically, it's a huge difference. It's going to be great news for our restaurants, business owners, convenience stores, hotels and Airbnbs. All of those different entities are going to benefit."

That's especially true considering the ride from the previous day's stop in Guthrie Center will be an estimated 59.5 miles – a relatively short distance compared to many RAGBRAI legs over the years. Many of the estimated 20,000 riders begin their rides early in the day to beat the heat and arrive in the next community in the late morning or early afternoon before the bulk of novices or more leisurely riders appear by late afternoon.

Riders who don't book hotel rooms or Airbnb homes will camp at McHose Park, the Boone County Fairgrounds and perhaps even Ledges State Park. The fairgrounds will be a busy place as the Boone County Fair will end less than 48 hours before the swarm of riders reaches town.

Blocker said the planning committee met for the first time about a week ago and its members also were sworn to secrecy until the official announcement. "We knew what was at stake and we didn't want to spoil the surprise for anyone and now we want to offer the best of Boone that we can offer when the riders come," she said. "We will definitely plan for them to have a great time while they're here in Boone."

Blocker encouraged anyone with questions about the RAGBRAI visit to contact her at [kris@visitboonecounty.com](mailto:kris@visitboonecounty.com).

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