



2007 FTW Ride

April 6-20, 2007

Event Highlights



U.S. Team in Beirut, 2005. Cheryl Wolfe is third from right

There were only four women on the U.S. team in 2007. Team leader that year, Cheryl Wolfe of Massachusetts, recorded her day to day experiences, reprinted here. The blue statistics about Palestinian refugees were written by Cheryl as well.

In contrast to typical FTW rides starting in Lebanon, the 2007 ride started in Syria first and then went to Lebanon. It was also a first time to go north in Syria to Aleppo and Lattakia, on Syria's Mediterranean sea coast.



SYRIA

April 6. Participants are arriving in Aleppo, Syria. It is sunny and green there. Today is a day for being tourists in Aleppo as others arrive. Laurie and I arrived in the morning. Our sponsor in Syria Areeba met us and made sure we all were comfortable.

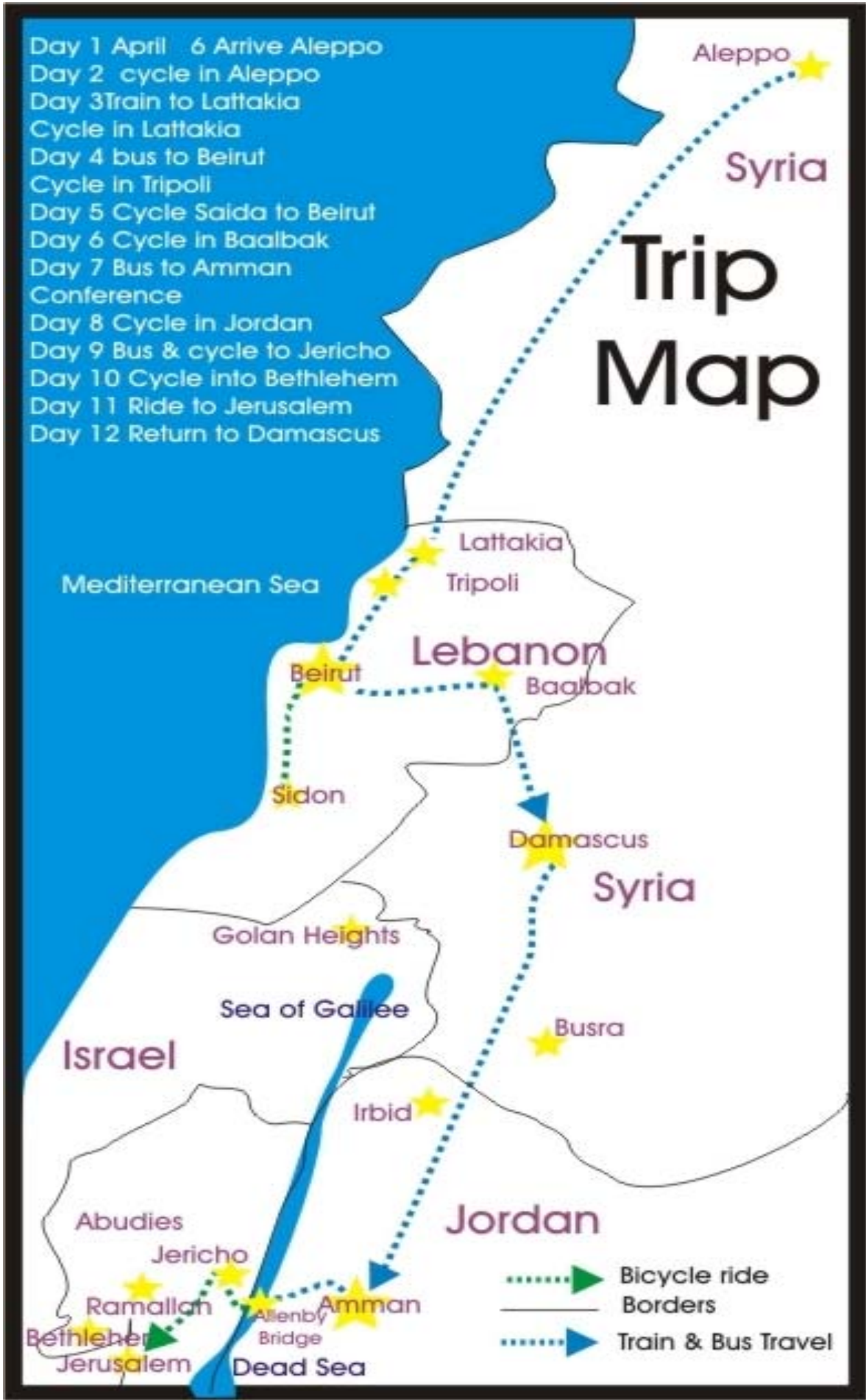
Friday night we went to the Christian section of Aleppo. On Good Friday people go to seven different churches in a procession. My sandwich and drink for supper cost 1 US dollar. A few years ago it was illegal to use dollars in Syria.

There are 432,048 Palestinian Refugees in camps in Syria and 700,000 Iraq refugees since US invasion.



Day 1 April 6 Arrive Aleppo
 Day 2 cycle in Aleppo
 Day 3 Train to Lattakia
 Cycle in Lattakia
 Day 4 bus to Beirut
 Cycle in Tripoli
 Day 5 Cycle Saida to Beirut
 Day 6 Cycle in Baalbak
 Day 7 Bus to Amman
 Conference
 Day 8 Cycle in Jordan
 Day 9 Bus & cycle to Jericho
 Day 10 Cycle into Bethlehem
 Day 11 Ride to Jerusalem
 Day 12 Return to Damascus

Trip Map



April 7 Marci, a member of the American team was a day late because her luggage was lost in Amman Jordan. Today we cycled 40 Km through the countryside and had lunch at St. Simions another Christian site. It rained on our way home. Tonight we are going to the souk

April 8 Today we took the train to the Syrian coast on the Mediterranean. It was a lovely ride through fields of olive trees, sheep with lambs and artichokes. There we bicycled for 40 km. Part way into the ride I realized the woman bicycling beside me was Mrs. Assad. She rode the full ride which included two difficult hills. I talked with her about her husband's appearance on Good Morning America. Tonight we are in a hotel overlooking the sea. I rode half the ride with an Iranian girl who was a novice biker. Our days are intense starting around 7am and ending with dinner and dancing around 10:30pm. We have not had time for sightseeing but we are all learning about each other as we ride.



FTW billboard in Syria



LEBANON

April 9 We had a lovely night in Latakia, Syria. Leaving early to make the Syrian/ Lebanese border. There all our plans for the day collapsed. There were concerns about the Palestinians. Five hours sitting in a bus in the sun before they let us through. We experienced a tiny bit of the hardships the Palestinians encounter almost everywhere. We had a great supper overlooking the Mediterranean in Beirut. Everybody danced our frustrations away. [404,170 Palestinian refugees in camps in Lebanon](#)



April 10 We cycled 50 km from Sidon through Beirut. Sidon is a lovely town that in the past was a Phoenician settlement, then a trading village. We were welcomed with juice and butter cookies. It was a lovely ride with the sea on the left and fields on the right. One child gave me a necklace made of orange blossoms. It smelled good the whole way. Mary Bennett from Massachusetts joined our USA team today making us 4, Laurie from Vermont, Marcy from Maryland and me.

April 11 We split up. Marci going to Tripoli and Laurie going to an ancient city, while Mary and I went to Bekka Valley. We had an excellent ride past grape vines and vineyards. We had a lunch by a lake.

April 12 We toured the ruins at Baalbek, converted into a fortress during the Byzantine era, the former temple changed hands several times during the Arab invasions in the 7th and 8th centuries. We spent the night in a hotel outside Damascus, Syria.

April 13 Crossing by bus into Jordan, we stayed at a youth hostel outside Amman. The conference planned was shortened to one evening due to time constraints.

1,827,877 Palestinian refugees in Jordan.

April 14 Today we cycled up Mount Nebo, a long and hilly ride. Mount Nebo is one of the most revered holy sites of Jordan, located 10 km west of the Roman Byzantine town of Madaba, for this is where Moses was buried.



JORDAN



Upper left, Jordan Bedouin military bagpipe band at border. Lower left, local cyclist rides with us in northern Jordan. Right, Areeba (Syria mobile phone sponsor) t-shirt with peace written in many languages.



PALESTINE

April 16 Today we rode into Bethlehem and along the wall. It snakes around through neighborhoods separating neighbors. We stopped at a university and painted our own graffiti on the wall. We are staying in a Greek Church Guest House in Beit Sahour.

April 15 The 110 of us who were not Arab or Persian passed through Israeli checkpoint at the Allenby Bridge and after a bus ride and another checkpoint rode bikes to Jericho. It took the group 5 hours to get through the border checkpoint. The ride into Jericho is always amazing. We were greeted with home cooked food and friendship. We are sleeping at a Hotel in Jericho tonight.



699,817 Palestinian refugees in camps in the West bank. 986,034 Palestinian refugees in Gaza.

Hala Khoury of Palestine Ministry of Youth and Sport

April 17 After going through another checkpoint we rode into Jerusalem! Oh the hills! Oh the traffic! We toured the city. It was amazing. We had lunch at a school that was originally an orphanage for Palestinian children. It is not that there are any fewer orphans than before, but they are not allowed into Jerusalem.

April 18 After many hugs we left our Palestinian members and rode back to Jordan where we split up.



Left, Israeli separation wall



FTW mural and teams at the Wall

The Wall. Aided by U.S. tax dollars, Israel built a wall in the West Bank that is four times as long and in places twice as high as the Berlin Wall. Israel claims the "fence" was built for security to stop suicide bombers. If this were true, then the Wall would border the 1967 Green Line, but instead much of the Wall extends into Palestinian land. Eventually, the Wall will succeed in annexing over 50% of Palestinian land to Israel.

The Wall currently is 750 kilometers long, despite a border with Israel of only 200 kilometers. The Wall divides families, splits towns in two, separates farmers from their fields and there is even a case in Al Walja village of a family's home divided in half — they must use a neighbor's bathroom because theirs is on the inaccessible Israeli side. The village of Abu Dis is cut in half. Yakin al-Rajabi, a resident, lives 100 feet from his carpentry shop but it is on the other side of the wall, forcing him to drive 9 miles to get to work.

Thousands of homes and businesses, *thousands*, have been demolished by Israeli bulldozers to build the Wall. Thousands of acres of rich Palestinian farmland and olive trees are destroyed to make room for the Wall and highways for settler use only. In Qalquilya the 26-foot high Wall formed a concrete dam that flooded land and homes. Gates allowing access from one side of the Wall to the other are often locked and opened at the whim of Israeli soldiers, akin to open air prisons.



Photo Right, Every day schoolboys in Jubara must wait for soldiers to open a gate and then walk in a single line past them to go to school.