



2013 FTW Ride

February 15-24, 2013

Event Highlights

For the first time in Follow the Women's nine year history, the bike ride did not take place in Lebanon, Syria, Jordan and Palestine. FTW 2013 was held in United Arab Emirates on February 15-24. The UAE consists of seven emirates. The capital and second largest city is Abu Dhabi and the biggest city by population is Dubai, with more than two million residents. The ride went through all seven culturally different Emirates with the opportunity to meet many local women, women's organizations, NGOs, and universities. FTW 2013 was organized by the UAE Women's Union, Follow the Women UK and Heba Sarairah, a Palestinian from Jordan, now living in Dubai and a veteran of many past FTW rides.



10 member United States team — 6 from California, 2 from Princeton, NJ and 2 from Wenatchee, WA.

Itinerary

Feb 15	Arrivals
Feb 16	Opening Ceremonies, Dubai
Feb 17	Cycling Dubai
Feb 18	Cycling Ras al-Khaimah
Feb 19	Cycling Fujairah
Feb 20	Cycling Umm al-Quwain
Feb 21	Cycling Ajman
Feb 22	Cycling Sharjah
Feb 23	Cycling Abu Dhabi
Feb 24	Closing Ceremony Abu Dhabi



PARTICIPATING COUNTRIES

Belgium
Bulgaria
China,
Denmark
France
Italy
Japan
Jordan
Lebanon
Netherlands
Singapore
Sweden
Syria
Tunisia
Turkey
United Kingdom
United States



Biking along Abu Dhabi's Corniche (seaside road), the riders passed many mosques including Sheikh Zayed Grand Mosque, one of the largest in the world."

The UAE provided 125 new bikes for riders — mostly too large for so many small women. By the second day the bike issue was sorted out and everyone had a suitable size bike. The hybrid bikes had fat tires even though the routes were mostly on asphalt. Riders cycled about 40-50 kilometers a day in pleasant 70 degree Fahrenheit temperatures.



Left — Palestinian participants came from numerous Middle East countries (Palestine, Jordan, Syria, UAE) reflecting their Diaspora status.



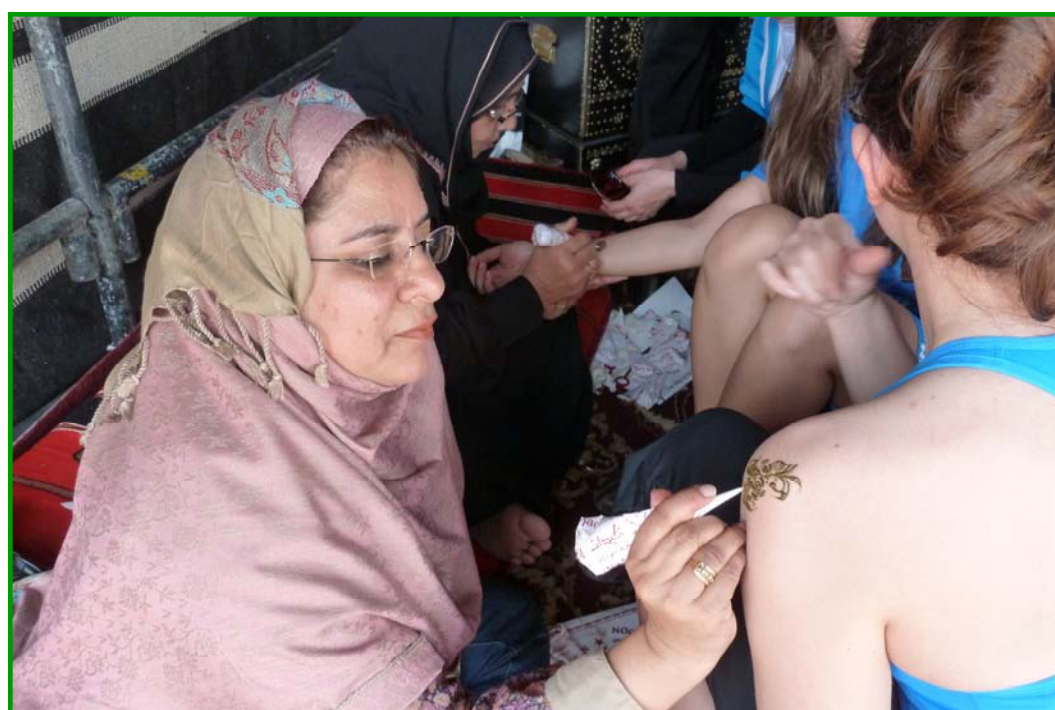
Right — China's team captain dropped out and no one on the team spoke English. The new team leader is a friend of American Betsy Schwartz (not pictured here) who worked hard with the team to help them understand where and when they needed to show up. The team was wonderful and they even put on a dance at the closing ceremony.

Even though the UAE Biking Federation, sponsor of the ride, has 14 women members, none were able to join the caravan. Eight young women, all veiled in black robes according to Arab tradition, assisted the group during breaks. They were immaculate: dizzying heels, painted nails, henna on their hands, with eye and lip makeup, in sharp contrast to the biking women.

There were virtually no other bikers on the roads. A bicycle culture does not exist in the UAE. The abundant oil gushing from wells in the desert is spent on modern highways and overpasses, so that even the shortest trip is by car. This results in serious traffic and pollution in the cities.



Above — The American team covered their heads, especially inside and near mosques, in respect of the local culture.



Left — The Women's Association sponsored a delicious lunch plus activities. Local women applied henna tattoos on riders who wanted them on any part of the body: arm, face, neck, leg, etc.

Right — The Women's Association invited an art teacher who brought paintings made by his students ages of 8 through 16. The face mask is seen everywhere.

Right — American Betsy Schwartz with local girls. Many women riders from Arab countries wore headscarves under their mandatory helmets. Pants had to extend over the knees and shoulders were covered. Many European women wore skirts, often with tights to the ankle.

Below — American Lilly Ann Popken interviewed by a local English language television station. She is wearing the FTW jersey of the USA team.



Above—Detta Regan, FTW's founder, speaking at a ceremony.

Left — Riders from Middle East countries give FTW women their perspectives and information of the current situation in Syria.



Many schools put on cultural shows for the FTW visitors. The most meaningful was at Ras al-Khaimah. The children performed a dance that involved a short storyline with happy children, "men" with guns and then roses given to the "soldiers" who put down their guns. The students clearly understood FTW's "Pedal for Peace" theme. A helicopter noisily circled overhead during the performance. The noise was irritating but when the riders got back on their bikes the helicopter came low, the door opened and red roses showered everyone.



Above — American Lilly Ann Popken receiving a gift from hosts at the closing ceremony.





Above — FTW members were invited to eat a traditional meal in the Bedouin style which means everyone eating out of a communal plate using your fingers. You pick up the food, and roll your thumb so that the food then jumps in your mouth. Quite messy for Americans! Easy for the locals.

Bottom Left — A traditional Bedouin style chicken with rice eaten with fingers by the locals and with forks by foreigners.

Bottom Right — Police women who escorted FTW joined the dinner

