

Retracing Rochambeau's route, on bicycles

By Sam Rathbun

SHARON — First Selectman Brent Colley and cyclist Sal Lilienthal (owner of the Bicycle Tour Company in Kent) took a trip back in time on Sunday, Aug. 16, as they retraced a 128.3-mile trail from Rhode Island across Connecticut into New York.

Known as the Washington-Rochambeau National Historic Trail, it is the route taken in 1781 by Jean-Baptiste Donatien de Vimeur, the Count of Rochambeau, as he led nearly 7,000 French soldiers to meet up with General George Washington and the Continental Army during the American Revolutionary War. The two groups then marched on to Yorktown, Va., where they defeated the British at the Battle of Yorktown, a decisive victory for the colonists.

The purpose of the bike trip was to bring attention to the trail, which is Connecticut's only historic trail.

It was Lilienthal who came up with the idea for the ride. In addition to being an avid cyclist, he is also an amateur Revolutionary War historian, specializing in the state of Connecticut. He reached out to historical societies in each town the route passes through and received tremendous support.

When it was time to make the trek, the two men met in Rhode Island on the morning of Aug. 16. They were joined by Stephen Shaw from W3R, the Washington Rochambeau Revolutionary Route. He came dressed in a Revolutionary War uniform, to add authenticity to the adventure. He followed behind the cyclists in a support van.

The early section of the trip was fairly moderate; each steep incline was followed by a lengthy decline that allowed they cyclists to catch their breath. However, as they approached the town of Bolton, Lilienthal was faced with a decision: go the historically correct (and much more physically demanding) route or take the flatter, easier route.

Much to Colley's dismay, he chose the former and the two



PHOTO SUBMITTED

First Selectman Brent Colley, cyclist Sal Lilienthal of Kent and Stephen Shaw, in historic garb, retraced the Washington Rochambeau Historic Trail on bicycles on Sunday, Aug. 16.

began a grueling stretch of road as they made their way toward Hartford.

Luck was on their side, though. They were soon joined by six cyclists from a local riding club, who offered to lead them into the state capital. The six men lined up in front and both Lilienthal and Colley were able to draft behind them, making the ride much easier.


As the group coasted into Hartford, they were led by another group down back roads to the old state house, where they stopped briefly to pose for pictures and speak about the landmark.

Then it was right back on their bikes and they made their way toward Avon and Farmington before taking Route 10 toward Southington.


Here Colley bowed out, taking a seat in the support van after having traveled roughly 70 miles of the 128-mile ride. Lilienthal

had been training for the trip by riding 80 miles per day. He kept going at such a fast pace that at one point the support van actually

lost him for 15 minutes before catching up with him on the way to Waterbury. The ride ended on Route 116, near Salem, N.Y.




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SHARON CALENDAR

Tuesday, Sept. 1 — Housing Authority at Town Hall, 5 p.m.