

5th Annual Tour de Coal Bicycle Ride

Contributed by Rande Johnson
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Join the Coal Country Chamber of Commerce on its fifth annual Tour de Coal bicycle ride on Saturday, Sept. 25, 2010, at the Benld City Hall-Civic Center, 201 E. Central St. in Benld, Ill. (62009).

- The Tour de Coal is for riders of all ages and abilities who have an interest in cycling in the Macoupin County, Ill., area.
- The ride will be held in conjunction with the 12th Annual Fall Festival held at the Benld City Park.

Choose from a 13-mile family ride, a mid-length 36-mile ride or a metric century (66 miles). The terrain is flat to rolling with some hills.

- Registration is from 7 a.m. to 9 a.m. at the Benld City Hall-Civic Center on the day of the event.
- On the day of the ride, the cost is \$20 per person and \$50 for family of three or more people living in the same household
- You can save money by registering in advance either by mail or through Active.com.
- Advance registration is \$15 per person and \$40 for a family of three or more people living in the same household.

Visit www.coalcountrychamber.com for online registration and more information. . You also can download a paper registration form at the website or pick one up at St. Louis, Metro-East, and Springfield, Illinois area bicycle shops.

New in 2010: Out-of-town visitors to the Tour de Coal can camp Friday night (Sept. 24) at Benld City Park, which is just north of the Benld Civic Center. For information about camping, contact Mickey Robinson at (217) 839-4888 or mrer@madisontelco.com.

Proceeds from Tour de Coal will be used by the Coal Country Chamber of Commerce to improve the communities of Benld, Dorchester, Eagarville, East Gillespie, Gillespie, Mount Clare, Sawyerville and Wilsonville. The Chamber sponsors events such as a free Summer Concert Series, the Fall Festival and Breakfast with Santa.

The Gillespie/ Benld area has a rich heritage because of its ties to the coal industry. The region has sizable numbers of people of German, Irish, Italian, Slavic, Scotch and Russian descent drawn to the region by mining. The region is dotted with more than 27 old coal mines; and the Tour de Coal routes pass several of them.

Benld (pronounced ben-neld) is home to the Coliseum Ballroom, which once played host to musical giants such as Tommy Dorsey, Duke Ellington the Everly Brothers and Ray Charles. Benld is also home to The Holy Domitian of the Theotokos Russian Orthodox Church, the only church in Illinois under the jurisdiction of the Patriarchate of Moscow and All Russia.

Both Gillespie and Benld are on the original alignment (1926-1930) of Route 66 through Illinois. The 66-mile route uses alignments of Route 66 in the Staunton-Mount Olive area and passes by the grave site of Mary "Mother Jones" Harris, a prominent labor activist in the late 1800's and early 1900's. The 66-mile route also goes through the community of Bunker Hill, home to one of the ride's rest stops.

Joseph Magnani, a bicycle racer who saw success in big European races in the 1930's and 1940's, grew up in nearby Mount Clare.

For more information about the Tour de Coal, contact Coal Country Chamber of Commerce Executive Director Mickey Robinson at (217) 839-4888 or mrer@madisontelco.com.