



HISTORY PRIMER

The early years of bicycle travel



→ AS WE APPROACH the 40th anniversary of Adventure Cycling Association, it's worth noting that people have been traveling by bicycle virtually since the two wheeler was created. Thomas Stevens is credited with being the first person to ride around the world in the mid-1880s but surely people were riding bicycles for the purpose of travel well before

then; which is precisely what it was invented for. It seems we modern humans forget that the word "travel" wasn't invented for leisure's sake, but that travel used to be an essential part of the pre-industrial existence. For instance, if a person wanted to meet someone from another village or county, they didn't just jump in their car and zip 50 miles along the highway, have a meeting, and then return the same day. People relied mostly on horse power and a 100-mile round-trip journey was an adventure fraught with peril, possibly of a wide variety. If one were on foot, well, the risk was likely even greater. And adventure was rarely purposefully sought by the average person but something they hoped *not* to encounter.

Enter the (modern) bicycle. Suddenly, a vehicle existed that, unlike horses, didn't need to be fed and was simple enough to be understood and operated by the everyday person. It's hard to overstate the social and economic implications. The bicycle was a freedom machine of sorts. It's no wonder that so many people of the time were photographed posing so proudly with their cherished machines, as are Australians George Burston

and Harry Stokes on the cover of this issue.

Looking back it seems natural that people would eventually use the bicycle for the purpose of adventurous leisure travel. In this issue, much like the previous several June issues we've published, we've assembled a selection of stories that harken back to those times.

We follow William Sachtleben and Thomas Allen in 1891 as they cross Persia and pedal into the Russian Empire in this the third and final installment of their adventures in *Adventure Cyclist*.

In what seems like a timely story, we tag along with Bill Foster and Bob Miller as they make a bicycle excursion from their homes in Missouri through the South, on to a very recently revolutionized Cuba, and back in 1959. They surely didn't realize then that soon, Americans wouldn't legally have the opportunity to visit the Caribbean island by bicycle, nor any other means.

Finally, we again present a roundup of various characters who used the bicycle for travel and purposeful adventure in the latter part of the 19th century through the middle of the 20th. Once again, we have John Weiss to thank for these stories and the remarkable photos that accompany them. Weiss' curation of these valuable historical materials, and his willingness to share them with *Adventure Cyclist* readers, has been indispensable to our efforts to bring them to you. Thanks John!

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