

No. **3914**

Why don't we bicycle to Alaska?!

PHOTOGRAPH BY GREG SIPLE STORY BY MADELINE MCKIDDY

→ LEANN BOLLIN AND BENJAMIN WELCH started their journey to Alaska in Duluth, Minnesota. The pair had never taken a bike tour before. In fact, before they decided to ride from town to town using public libraries for local information and charting their course one day at a time, neither had ever ridden a bike more than 20 miles. With makeshift panniers made of children's luggage and empty cat-litter bins bungeed to their bikes, they pedaled out onto the open road.

Their tour ran smoothly in the more populated areas, but once they left those behind, their luck began to change. First, they were charged by a grizzly bear on the Icefields Parkway — the bear came within 30 feet before being scared away by a passing truck. Then, about a week later, Ben hit a rain-slick bridge going a little too fast and wrecked badly. LeAnn managed to get him to a rest stop, where they stayed for two days. “I let Ben rest in the tent while I scooped up water from puddles on the road and sifted some of the dirt out with my bandana,” LeAnn said. With their food supply getting low, they moved on and ended up in the small village of Iskut, where the convenience store had a layer of dust covering most of its products. “We settled for a container of honey and five bags of discounted Wonder Bread buns, which we later discovered were moldy.”

They made do that night with the less-moldy bits of bread and a pound and a half of black bean flour. “Everyone has to cook their best and their worst meals sometime, and this was definitely Ben's worst,” LeAnn remembered. “He made a massive pot of black bean flour boiled in water. It was a treacherous mound of grayish-black paste.”

Their luck turned around the following day when, after a grueling 20-mile pass, they descended into Dease Lake, British Columbia, where they were able to do laundry and stock up on food. “We splurged on everything from 12 packs of pudding to mac n' cheese to brussels sprouts with butter.”

106 days after embarking on their journey, Ben and LeAnn arrived safe and sound in Anchorage. After recuperating for three weeks, they hitched a ride back home to Duluth where they're live-in managers at a cross-country ski center.

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