



Lucas Eckels and Anne Williams

STORY BY ALEX STRICKLAND



“I LOVE THE DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVE ON A LANDSCAPE BICYCLE TRAVEL GIVES YOU COMPARED TO DRIVING.”

Commuters-turned-tourers strike out on the road as a family

→ LUCAS ECKELS AND HIS WIFE, Anne Williams, were quite a sight trudging up the final, unrelenting 13 percent grade near the top of Mount Diablo east of their Bay Area, California, home last June. Prepping for a tour later in the summer, the couple had dismounted along the last pitch and were pushing their bikes with a simulated touring load and a trailer carrying their two-and-a-half-year-old daughter Ruth. It was their anniversary, and Anne told Lucas that she had a present to give him once they finally gained the summit.

“I thought she was crazy,” Lucas said, “It meant that whatever it was, we’d be carrying it all the way up there.”

Finally on top of the nearly 4,000-foot mountain, Anne pulled out the gift: a (mercifully light!) printout confirming the couple’s life membership to Adventure Cycling.

“The magazine helped inspire us to graduate to a full week-long tour and I thought what Adventure Cycling was doing was wonderful,” said Anne, who initially became a member after the couple received a free one-year membership with the purchase of an Arkel bag for an overnight ride the year before. “I wanted to support them in a big way.”

After commuting by bike for years (Lucas still does, 15 miles to and from his job as an engineer) and striking out

on increasingly ambitious rides through the rugged terrain of Central California on the weekends, the couple were bit by the touring bug.

A few short overnight trips later, and they started to lay out plans for a six-day, 250-mile loop through the Oregon Cascades, including the Aufderheide Scenic Byway, cycling hot-spot Bend, and a stop at the Dee Wright Observatory, a unique lava stone structure at the top of McKenzie Pass with commanding views of the craggy peaks along the Cascade range.

“I love the different perspective on a landscape bicycle travel gives you compared to driving,” Anne said. “We drove along the first few miles of our Oregon route the day before we started and when we cycled on it the next day, it was like a completely different road. There was a roaring river alongside that I had completely missed and little waterfalls all over the place. The hills were steeper too.”

It wasn’t just the sights and sounds, either, Anne credits bicycle travel and cycling in general with giving a bit more of measured approach to challenges in life.

“Climbing hills has taught me to be patient with myself and take things one stroke at a time,” she said.

Preparing for the challenges of their first big tour, the couple knew bringing a toddler in addition to gear would be a

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tough task, but quickly discovered that with Ruth in tow behind her mom in a trailer, Lucas could load up with the necessary food, water, and assorted gear for the family's long days on the road. And although the pair carefully chose a route to avoid steep grades ("We could do five to six percent slowly, but anything beyond that was kind of a breaking point," Lucas said), their inaugural multi-day route hardly skimmed on elevation, featuring more than 14,000 feet of climbing.

"I don't know exactly how we figured

out how to make it work, but you just pedaled until you made it to the top of the hill," Lucas said.

Lucas chronicled the family's first big tour — plus their training rides and a few preparatory overnight trips — on an online travelogue (lucaseckels.com/travelogue) that charts not only detailed maps and elevation profiles of their travels, but also the joys and challenges of traveling by bicycle, sometimes in the company of a toddler.

"It was starting to get late, and Ruth hadn't napped yet. When we were

getting ready to get back on the road, she kept telling us to 'stay this hotel,'" Lucas wrote about Day Two of their trip, following an unexpected delay due to road construction through a tunnel on Oregon's Route 58. "It took some convincing that there was no hotel there, and we needed to keep moving. Then she napped for the rest of the ride; Anne pointed out that she slept better in the trailer than she did on the drive up to Oregon."

Before their ride through Oregon was even complete, Lucas and Anne were already planning their next, far more ambitious trip, this time eyeing a much more ambitious route down the length of the West Coast from Canada to Mexico.

"On the last day of the ride, Anne was planning out loud; 'How long would it take?' 'Could I get off work for that long?'" Lucas said. "I just knew we had started a lifetime of adventures."

Lucas and Anne will be putting their cross-country ambitions on hold, at least for a little while. The couple is expecting their second child and since they've already experienced riding with their young daughter, they expect the family's new addition will be read to hit the road in no time.

"We won't be able to do the West Coast this year, or probably next," Lucas said with a chuckle. "Multi-day tours are too much for a one-year-old and parents, but for a two-year-old, no problem!" **AC**

Alex Strickland is the managing editor of Adventure Cyclist.

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