Making is Epic
by CAROLYNE WHELAN

While winter is a quiet, muted season with snow hushing the ambient noise of city life and many animals in hibernation, we at Adventure Cyclist have been indefatigable. While our friends and freelancers make our staff (and hearts) feel large, we are only three people at the core of the magazine department and as a nonprofit, when a decision is made to make a big shift, it’s typically done internally with the resources available. This means a lot of time, sure, but more importantly a lot of heart and passion to make the best magazine we want to read, a celebration of a pastime that betters all our lives.

In conversation with myself and Managing Editor Dan Meyer (and with a lot of moral support from Adventure Cycling Art Director Daniel Mrgan), Adventure Cyclist Art Director Ally Mabry took inspiration from one of Adventure Cycling’s core components — maps — to use as a visual and philosophical guide to her design. In addition to new typefaces, colors, and textures inspired by actual vintage cycling maps, you’ll find our own map legend icons to help you navigate the magazine, as well as portraits of columnists illustrated by Noël Kalmus. Our logo, developed by Bobby Dixon of KLCTVE, is a nod to both the iconic national park signage we love (and love to ride through) as well as to bicycle head badges that adorn our most beloved metal pals. We also wanted to further our mission of providing a platform where epic meets accessible, so we’ve added columns each issue that help break down some of the challenges that keep new and seasoned riders from heading out with ease: what to eat (page 14), how to manage pain (page 11), how to fix what breaks (page 62). We also follow one cyclist as she rides around the world (page 16), and another who’s just learning how to bicycle tour (page 63).

This first issue is on the creation of epic routes, often with the spirit of rebuilding: rebuilding a life after genocide and discovering a love of bikes (page 18), rebuilding a region after forest fires with the power of a bike community (page 26), rebuilding a nation after war and economic travesty with the development of cycling tourism (page 48), and what it takes — and took — to literally create an epic cycling route (page 36). This feels fitting, having worked on an epic project for the past year that will rebuild a beloved magazine. Routes are created out of love, fueled by a dream of something grander than seems feasible, and powered by collective participation. The same is true for this redesign. There will no doubt be some tweaks here and there, and new features rolled out once winter’s white carpet pulls back, but we are so excited to show you what we’ve been developing behind the scenes.

When it was decided that we were going to this bimonthly, perfect-bound model, and that a redesign was on the fast track, it felt similar to the moment I realized the Great Divide trip I had promised my friend Meghan I would ride with her was a few months away and I couldn’t back out (without hurt feelings). It was scary, it is scary, being at that precipice, the day we headed out hurt feelings). It was scary, it is scary, being at that precipice, the day we headed out on our bikes from Calgary to Banff and the day this magazine goes to the printer.

Epic, of course, means something different to everyone. A first job or a first bike overnight are both epic. Eventually, they seem like accessible first steps to a new life chapter. I hope this magazine redesign feels epic in the best ways, and I’m so excited to take you all on this first ride with us.

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Music to My Ears
A DJ’s winter commute turns into an epic life-changing tour

BY JABIG

Still Beautiful
Plumas County in the wake of the Dixie Fire

BY KURT GENSHIEIMER

Making it Epic
Three new epic routes get cyclists down and dirty with ecology and history

BY CHARLES MILLER

Albania Flat
The new UNESCO Cycle Route loops around the southern half of Albania, passes four World Heritage Sites, and offers travelers and cyclists alike the chance to “level up”

BY ALEX CREVAR
JaBig
JaBig, born Jean-Aimé Bigirimana, is a Canadian DJ based in Montréal and Vancouver who tours the world performing by night and who by day is an avid bicycle adventurer. In 2016, the Rwandan-born artist took a sabbatical to be the first known person to cycle across Canada on a fixed-gear bike in winter from the Atlantic Ocean to the Arctic Coast, documented in the film Escape. He can be reached by email at jatabig@jabig.com or @JaBig on Instagram.

Kurt Gensheimer
Storytelling through exploration is what Kurt Gensheimer loves most as a writer, enhanced by profiling interesting people and places rich with history. Kurt was drawn to the northern Sierra Nevada in 2013, lives in Verdi, Nevada, and is an avid “Trail Whisperer” of the historic Gold Rush-era trails of the Lost Sierra.

Charles Miller
Charles Miller is an outdoorsman and writer who enjoys cycling, climbing, fly fishing, and whatever else gets him outdoors. He has been published in People for Bikes, Cycling Weekly, various blogs, and Outdoor Prolink. He can usually be found being an emotional support for his hound dog, Walter.

Alex Crevar
Alex Crevar is a travel journalist. His work regularly appears in Adventure Cyclist, The New York Times, National Geographic, and Lonely Planet. He is also a tourism specialist who helps communities around the world develop better and more responsible strategies. You can find some of Alex’s stories on his website: alexcrevar.com.
The Eastern Divide Trail is the most recent cross-country bikepacking route, running nearly 6,000 miles from Newfoundland to Florida and with many thousands of feet of climbing (see more about the route on page 46). As with other bike routes, someone was going to tackle the whole thing in one go sooner or later, and that someone is Eddie O’Dea.

In October last year, O’Dea, 46, arrived at the southernmost point of the U.S. in Key West, Florida, after 78 days in the saddle. According to bikepacking.com, he went through 10 pairs of brake pads, seven tires, and six tins of Chamois Butt’r. But he didn’t do it just for fun: O’Dea also rode to raise funds for the Georgia Cycling Association, which works to get more youths in Georgia on mountain bikes.

O’Dea is no stranger to tough rides: he’s completed the Tour Divide and holds course records for several other bikepacking races. There is no Eastern Divide Trail race (yet), but O’Dea currently holds the FKT (fastest known time). Maybe in this case it should be called the OKT (only known time).

Fear of a Fake Planet

While internet shopping has ramped up over the years generally, it skyrocketed over the past few years since COVID first kept us out of stores and kept products from reaching them in the first place — some bike shops had even resorted to scouring Amazon and eBay for components on behalf of customers (see Adventure Cyclist March 2021 for more). And like anything on the internet, not all that glitters is Dura-Ace. Scams have existed since the dawn of the internet, but counterfeit components have run rampant since the pandemic, taking advantage of people’s use of online shopping and desire to acquire those hard-to-find parts, even when it really did seem too good to be true. Shimano has been battling against stolen componentry for years, especially their high-end chains that look remarkably real until they fail upon installment. Just this past November alone, SRAM, Chris King, and FSA all reported fake websites popping up in their names, selling counterfeit products. Even larger bike brands like Trek and Specialized have been announcing reports of counterfeit bikes being sent to them with warranty issues after catastrophic structural failures. Many of these companies now have pages on their own sites dedicated to identifying counterfeit products. While it may not be breaking news, it’s a reminder of the importance of supporting local shops who have direct communication with the brands and distributors themselves while serving our communities.

In-house repair programs at outdoor apparel and equipment brands have become commonplace, but the new trend is for brands to resell used, repaired, and refurbished gear themselves. Why buy a used jacket in a shady back-alley Craigslist deal when you can spend a little more and have the backing of the brand itself?

The following is a short list of brands’ used gear programs that we found on the internet between coffee breaks. Check them out, and maybe get yourself something nice for less coin! But most importantly, revel in the many and varied synonyms of the word “used.”

- Kitsbow Experienced: kitsbow.treet.co
- Velocio Renewed: renewed.velocio.cc
- Patagonia Worn Wear: wornwear.patagonia.com
- Apidura Revive: revive.apidura.com
- REI Re/Supply: rei.com/used
- The North Face Renewed: thenorthfacerenewed.com
- Arc’teryx ReGEAR: regear.arcteryx.com
- PNW Cycled: cycled.pnwcycles.com
- Stio Second Turn: stio.com
- Peloton Certified Refurbished: onepeloton.com/refurbished
We don’t usually cover “Everesting” in the pages of this magazine. Everesting is the act of cycling the same elevation gain as the height of Mount Everest (29,029 feet or 8,848 meters) in a single effort. In other words, you do a bunch of hill repeats over and over again, on the same hill, until you’ve climbed the equivalent of the tallest mountain on the planet. Who does that kind of thing for fun? But Australian cyclist Jack “UltraCyclist” Thompson didn’t just complete an Everest; he Everested once a week, every week, in 2022, and then some. For those of you keeping score at home, that’s 52 Everests back-to-back. Guess he’s earned that nickname.

Thompson is the first to ride a million meters of vertical elevation in a single calendar year — that’s enough to get into space! Not only did he break the world record for most elevation ridden in a year, but he also now holds the record for most Everests completed in a year. To do this, Thompson rode his bike 261 days out of the year, with only 52 rest days. That’s a lot of gel packets.

Why on this green earth would Jack Thompson do such a thing? For a good cause, of course. Thompson rode to bring awareness and raise funds for mental health. Specifically, he rode to support three charities: Kid’s Helpline is Australia’s only free, confidential, 24/7 online and phone counseling service for young people aged five to 25 (kidshelpline.com.au); Outride is an anti-racist cycling organization that works with schools, community partners, coaches, teams, and cyclists to advance more equitable, inclusive, and healthy futures for youth (outridebike.org); StrongMinds is a social enterprise that treats depression in women and adolescents in low-income communities in sub-Saharan Africa (strongminds.org).

For more about Jack Thompson’s ride and to donate to the cause, visit jackultracyclist.com.

Salsa is recalling all their Cowchipper Carbon and Cowbell Carbon handlebars sent to retailers between January 2018 and August 2022, including those that were on stock builds of the Cutthroat, Warroad, and Warbird bikes delivered to retailers between August 2018 and June 2022. These carbon bars have been cracking or fracturing at the bends where the shifters are installed. If you’ve purchased one of these handlebars or higher-model bike builds (or received one as a lovely gift in the past few years), stop by your local Salsa dealer to see if you have an affected handlebar and replace and install a new carbon or (or aluminum if you prefer) handlebar. Any faulty bike part breaks our hearts, but we think they’re handling it well, barring any additional crack-ups. Visit salsacycles.com/support/recalls for more information.

Additionally, Rad Power Bikes is recalling their RadWagon 4 electric cargo bike, reviewed in the June 2021 issue of Adventure Cyclist. This time, it’s due to riders being tired of sidewall SNAFU rim strips. The bikes affected are those sold between September 2020 and August 2022 and any spare 22in. tire sold during that same timeframe. The tires affected have ribbed sidewalls. While not many bikes have been affected to their knowledge, due to the weight of the bikes, a sudden blowout could cause injury to some cyclists. Check out radpowerbikes.com/pages/recall-radwagon4-tires for information on how to repair and replace your tire and rim strip.
Missoula, Montana

Located in a valley that was once a glacial lake, Missoula is built upon the ancestral lands of Sélíš (Salish or “Flathead”) and Qlispé (upper Kalispel or Pend d’Oreille) peoples of central western Montana, along the Clark Fork River near its confluence of the Blackfoot and Bitterroot Rivers, and nestled in the grassy convergence of multiple mountain ranges: Bitterroot, Sapphire, Garnet, and Rattlesnake. It’s also home to Adventure Cycling. Just 45 miles from Idaho and just a spur away from the Great Divide Mountain Bike Route, with plenty of protected bike lanes and dirt roads to explore, Missoula is a fantastic home for cycling adventures big and small. And once you’re here, there’s so much to enjoy (just be sure to stop and say hi at some point).

What draws transplants and visitors to Missoula is by far the stunning natural world in which it’s planted. Even with all those mountain ranges, it’s still Big Sky Country, and the vast expanse can envelope a mind in possibility that lasts well into the woods where the sky is shielded with a diversity of ponderosa, larch, aspen, and many other trees. Hiking and cycling trails can be reached within walking or biking distance. Lucky for you, Adventure Cycling has plenty of local maps available for free in our cyclists’ lounge to help you navigate the area.

With so many options and seemingly endless summer days (up to almost 16 hours at summer solstice), we suggest purchasing one of the Adventure Cycling maps that pass through the area (Great Parks North Section 2, Great Divide Mountain Bike Route Section 1, TransAmerica Trail Section 3, or Lewis and Clark Trail Section 5), and maybe even a Cairn Cartographics map designed by former Adventure Cycling cartographer Jamie Robertson, and setting out to explore all the area has to offer. To get started, though, here are two routes to get you out your tent or Warmshowers door.

Even with all those mountain ranges, it’s still Big Sky Country.
BEGINNER-FRIENDLY/DAY TRIP
The Bitterroot Trail is a flat, paved, protected trail that will take you through the length of Missoula, starting from the Milwaukee Trail, and into the Bitterroot Valley. Outside Missoula, you will pass a herd of bison before reaching the town of Lolo, which has amenities including a popular brewery. From Lolo, there are a variety of options to camp or find lodging, but a fine option is to head right back to Missoula for a roughly 22-mile round-trip adventure.

INTERMEDIATE/THREE-DAY
For those who have a bit more time to explore and want to get away from the hustle and bustle of Missoula (hey, it’s all relative), here’s a map for you to follow. This mixed-surface route will take you on five miles of I-90, but it returns along the same Bitterroot Trail as the beginner route. Bring a water filter (you’ll pass plenty of surface water, plus a waterfall on Skalkaho Pass), and the safety and maintenance gear to get out of an unexpected jam (you will lose cell coverage), but you will have the opportunity to spend the night in one of Montana’s many historic homestead cabins marked on the RideWithGPS page — be sure to book them well in advance if you are interested in this option (you’ll still need your sleeping bag). The Morgan-Case Homestead, for example, was an active worksite for homesteading and ranching from 1890–1951, and is an important reason Rock Creek Road exists at all. Skalkaho Pass (Salish: Sq̓x̣q̓ox̣, “many trails”) was originally a route for the Indigenous communities that connected the Flint Creek Range and the Bitterroot Valley, and was turned into State Highway 38 to link mining areas in the mountain with agricultural settlements in the valleys. If the cabins are booked, there are plenty of campgrounds along the route.

The 6,354-feet elevation gain is well worth it for the mind-melting descent alone, never mind the sights along the way as you grind slowly uphill with plenty of things to distract you. Elk, bighorn sheep, mountain goats, bears (remember your bear spray!), and moose all hide in the shaded corners of these mountains, behind the lodgepole pine and Douglas fir. Also, be sure to stop at the interpretive sign on Rock Creek to learn all about the Rock Creek microburst, a blast of wind that downed every tree on the entire hillside in a weather phenomenon.

GROCERIES AND FOOD
Around the corner from the Adventure Cycling office is Worden’s, Missoula’s first grocery store. Established in 1883, Worden’s has a deli of prepared foods, $2 coffee from Black Coffee, groceries, and an impressive selection of wine and beer. Orange Street Food Farm is a slightly larger local grocery that has a small but mighty selection of groceries, with plenty of fresh vegetables, ethnic foods, local baked goods, and more, and they’re open late. Rosauer’s is bigger yet, with all the benefits of a large grocery store, including a sizeable organic and holistic section and a pharmacy. For being a small-ish town, there’s a lot of food options in Missoula. Masala is a no-frills cafeteria-style Indian restaurant and community staple in downtown Missoula. Five on Black is a delicious and healthy fast casual Brazilian restaurant around the corner from the Adventure Cycling office. Just across the bridge in the Hip Strip, find some fantastic food options: Bridge Pizza, Veera Donuts (they’re vegan, but don’t let that sway you away if that’s not your thing – they are local favorites for vegans and nonvegans alike), Gild burritos and beer, Big Dipper ice cream, and more.

GO AND STAY
While Amtrak doesn’t stop here (yet!), we do have an airport so close to town you could hop off the plane and ride your folding bike to the Adventure Cycling office, and a Greyhound stop. And of course, the bike ride into town from any direction is spectacular and our maps will help you get here. Around town, there are plenty of bike lanes to get just about anywhere you’d like to go, and our shining star is our free, electric, zero-emissions Mountain Line public transit. Yes, you can take your bike on the bus with you. Missoula has a very active Warmshowers community, which is a fantastic way to meet people in town and stay for free, especially if you are stopping here on tour. Otherwise, the Shady Spruce Hostel is around the corner from Adventure Cycling’s office. Other options range from affordable (FairBridge Inn, $58 as of this writing) to luxurious.
A DJ TRADES IN TURNTABLES FOR SPINNING BICYCLE WHEELS
My name is JaBig, born Jean-Aimé Bigirimana in Kigali, Rwanda, in 1979, a few weeks after my parents returned from Switzerland as international students. When I was eight years old, my family moved to Nairobi, Kenya, where I would spend almost 10 years (albeit a six-month stint in Rwanda between summer 1993 and spring 1994). We then moved to Johannesburg and Pretoria in South Africa before settling in Montréal, Canada, in 2002, which has been home ever since except for the pandemic years where I spent my time in Vancouver, also in the Great White North.

Most readers are aware of what happened in Rwanda in 1994 (editor’s note: a civil war broke out between the Hutu ethnic majority and Tutsi ethnic minority, killing 800,000 people and causing two million people to flee as refugees, including the author’s family; see sidebar for more historical context). It obviously affected my formative years by turning me into a refugee fleeing physical insecurity, which is how our family ended up in different countries learning a few languages along the way. After an education in a variety of international and private schools, we flew to Canada as refugees but crossed the border as permanent residents. Speaking French (the language I think in) and English fluently, as well as having had a great education, played such a big role in passing the very strict Canadian immigration program. My parents’ focus on education paid off.

I hit the ground running in Canada as I was plugged into the music scene right away and was able to restart my DJ career, obtain bookings, and make a name for myself in the local Montréal scene and eventually worldwide thanks to my YouTube channel.

One day on my way home in 2015, I walked past a bicycle store and one bike caught my attention, resulting in an impulsive purchase. It was the very first time in my life I ever owned a bike of my own. The shopkeeper advised me that the bike I was interested in was a fixed-gear. I had no idea what he was talking about even after explaining the concept to me for the fifth time. He then told me to take it around the block to test it out, which I did and promptly fell over when I tried to stop as the pedal kept turning and I went head over handlebars. Even so, I had grasped the principle of the matter and enjoyed feeling one with the bike. I put a deposit down for a build that I fetched two days later.

In my young days, street kids taught me how to ride a bicycle that my parents had purchased for my siblings and me, but it got a puncture and that was the end of it. From there, I would ride friends’ bikes, rent, or participate in Montréal’s bike share program, BIXI. Now that I had my own bike, I was so excited that I shared the news on social media when I rode 15 kilometers to my parents’ house. Within weeks, I had ridden 100 kilometers, then 100 miles. Eventually, I rode all around the perimeter of the island of Montréal, 266 kilometers (165 miles). The interesting part is that I was not really riding for the distances or to be outside. I had figured out that whenever I was on a bicycle, it gave me a sort of mental high that put me in an even greater mood. I was also able to feel and sleep better overall. Thank goodness for my DJ schedule that allowed me to spend long days (and some nights) in the saddle.

By the time late October hit and it started to get a little bit chilly, I checked out Strava and I was taken aback to realize that I had covered close to 5,000 kilometers (3,107 miles). At that time, I was riding less and driving more because as soon as September hits and temperatures dip below 20°C (68°F), in my book it’s winter because I feel cold! However, I observed that the less I rode, the more down I felt, so I searched online how to stay warm while cycling and made some simple changes to stay comfortable.

In parallel with my newfound love for cycling, I felt more and more disconnected from my DJ career. I had gotten to the top in Montréal but did not feel fulfilled. I was burning out from those 13 years of working hard, fed up from the societal expectations to settle down and start a family (or so I felt), and my unresolved issues from having lived through a genocide and moving from country to country as a refugee were catching up with me now that my body was in a safe place and was able to let loose. I just wanted to run away and escape everything. To put it in a way that would not label me as crazy: to take a sabbatical.

By November, I could not take it anymore so I announced on social media that I was ready to embark on a ride across Canada all the way to the Arctic Ocean and kick off would be in January of the upcoming year. Whatever possessed me to put it out there in the open was truly trying to end my life or save it because it did not make sense at all. To top it off, I turned this ride into a Guinness World Record attempt for the longest continuous journey by bicycle in a single country.

First, I had no experience in bicycle touring. Second, I had never camped in my life. Third, I hated the cold so doing this in winter was stupid, especially as I had never ridden in snow. Fourth, I did not even know how to do any bicycle repairs. Fifth, two months were not enough to prepare myself logistically and financially.

But it injected new life in me. Having something to look forward to, despite how infeasible it seemed, gave me purpose hence a reason to shine bright again like in my early days as a DJ when I looked forward to taking over the world.

By January, I had figured out my challenges. I had combed the internet for information on how to tour and decided that credit-card touring would be my style; I wanted to travel light and didn’t want to learn how to camp on a winter trek. I utilized Couchsurfing, Warmshowers, and my network and performed so many gigs in December, sold a bunch of merchandise, and ran a GoFundMe at the suggestions of my friend. I took a quick bike maintenance workshop, which did not serve me well because all that information in one afternoon did nothing but confuse my brain. Somehow, some of it stuck.

On January 31, 2016, I left Montréal to start my cross-Canada trip and until this day that will forever remain the pinnacle of any bicycle adventure that I will ever embark on because I had pulled off the hardest part: getting started. I will never forget the sense of absolute joy and freedom I felt on that cold Sunday morning as I first headed toward the Atlantic Ocean.

My biggest fear was whether I would be able to cycle in that infamous Canadian winter and not freeze to death. However, I actually removed layers quite often as I would overheat, which would increase the odds...
I prefer to ride on freeways when it’s legal for the simple reason that I have a whole lane to myself (the shoulder) and don’t have to panic whenever I hear a vehicle behind me.

of getting cold. Even when it got to -40°C (-40°F) in northern British Columbia and in the Arctic Circle, there were no moments when the death-defying temperatures put my life at risk.

Amazing strangers quickly become friends while bike traveling, a facet of the hobby I love. Cycling across Canada proved that the world-famous stereotype of Canadians being nice and polite was nothing but net. On that trip, I stayed in almost 110 households. Most of the time, I would get to my hosts’ homes completely cold, hungry, tired, and grumpy, and within minutes all that went away as I was given food, an opportunity to take a shower, and the very best: excellent company that made me escape my sorrows.

I am not naive to the fact that quite a number of people wanted to host me out of sheer curiosity. Not many people ride across Canada in the deepest of winters. Few cyclists who have crossed Canada have done all three coasts in one journey. It’s almost unheard of doing it on a fixed-gear bike.

It also goes without saying that an African immigrant bike touring Canada in winter was a first, so all Canadians no matter their heritage were curious about my story, and one of the most efficient to hear it was to offer me a safe haven for the night. In interview-style conversations, my new friends would inquire about my story and how I ended up at their home. In their polite Canadian ways, they were asking me if I was crazy!

I was also learning a lot. Despite my 13 years in the country, I did not really know many Canadians because living in a cosmopolitan city, I mostly spent time with fellow immigrants. It really was a revelation to discover that a Canadian living on the eastern coast is very different from the one on the western coast or on the Arctic Coast, from accents to viewpoints to traditions around surnames.

While the Guinness Record was an inspiration to get going, it never came to fruition. At the time, I was heading out to beat the record distance of 18,000 kilometers on the same bike and on the same trip. While I did meet that requisite, I had a challenge in recording my trip due to how cold it was (my GPS would freeze) and lack of a team that could help document the journey. While attempting to track down materials, an Australian with a support team to document the ride recorded a 20,000-kilometer bicycle trip.

While I didn’t make it into the Guinness Book of World Records, I achieved something much more important — I found myself. I was able to reconnect with myself Jean-Aimé and not Jazig. I was able to remember what makes me happy, what makes me sad, what I like, and what I don’t. I also recognized that it was not my family, my friends, or my fan base that was putting impossible expectations on me: I was. When I didn’t reach the ridiculous and unachievable goals I had set for myself, I had to recognize that there was no one policing me on the bike, there was no one else setting those expectations. Once I found that the enemy was my inner voice, it opened my eyes and I knew no bike ride was going to solve that big problem. I went to ride a bicycle and found myself in the process. After the trip, it took me almost a year before I went to get professional help.

Seeing a therapist first and saving myself money, time, and energy cycling Canada to figure out what my issues were would have definitely been cheaper on the wallet, body, and mental health; however, without the trip I would have never gotten the distance to figure out that I had a very big problem and that it was in my best interests to solve it before it consumed me.

I also found a greater meaning to cycling for me, both as an addictive drug that showed me the world I’d otherwise never get to experience, and as a method of spreading awareness and raising money for something greater than myself. My trip across Canada made me appreciate something important that is loosely paraphrased as, “Help yourself and heaven will help you,” and “The world makes way for a person who knows where they’re going.” On that first tour, people I met on the road or on social media would ask me what cause I was riding for. I eventually learned that most people embark on epic challenges for charity. That struck a chord with me at the time, but I was too busy fighting for my mental health and trying to break that Guinness World Record to add fundraising effort to the fixed-gear bike tour.

My initial idea in 2019 was a world tour over five years to raise funds for World Bicycle Relief, a charity that provides bicycles to children in parts of rural Africa so that they may get to school, have an education, and eventually have access to the same opportunities and privileges that I was born into.

On August 25, 2019, my 40th birthday, I hopped on my fixed-gear bike to ride from Montréal to Boston, the introductory leg of my five-year world tour by bicycle to raise funds for World Bicycle Relief.

In the UK, I decided to switch to a drop-bar bicycle with gears because the world was a complex place, and I wanted the freedom to go anywhere without being limited by climbs or terrible terrain. I also wanted to preserve my knees because five years of mashing on pedals was a surefire way to end up riding a wheelchair instead!

That European stage took me across the UK, Netherlands, Belgium, France, and Switzerland within six months, and I raised $6,000 for World Bicycle Relief.

In early 2020, the world tour came to a hard brake as the pandemic paralyzed the planet. The Canadian embassy called me and strongly advised me to go home. If I were caught in an extreme emergency with the world’s borders closing, consular support would be difficult. But by July, Canada had loosened its travel restrictions. Those in the know told me one of the reasons was that come autumn, there would be a second...
It was shut down permanently.

Tuktoyaktuk, Northwest Territories, Canada. I was the last cyclist to ride on the ice road before it was shut down permanently.

I ended up reconnecting with 80 percent of my new friends.

I decided on a shorter version of my initial ride, riding coast to coast. This time, unlike my previous expeditions, this charity challenge was time sensitive because I had to complete the whole loop within six months due to the limitations of a tourism visa. I had to cover 16,000 kilometers (10,000 miles) in 180 days, which meant that I had to ride faster and farther daily while minimizing my recovery days. Since I was starting in February, I decided to cycle counterclockwise to follow summer and avoid the southern states in their hottest months while waiting for the northern ones to have thawed by the time I reached them. On a grey Vancouver morning, I hopped on my bike set up in light-touring mode and headed to the U.S. border on my way to Seattle, my official starting point.

Books of note: Rwanda and Genocide in the Twentieth Century by Alain Destexhe; Season of Blood by Fergal Keane

On April 6, 1994, a plane carrying Rwandan president Habyarimana and Burundi president Ntaryamira was shot down over the Rwandan capital city of Kigali. The culprits are still undetermined, but within hours, Hutu militia groups set up roadblocks and barricades and began slaughtering Tutsis and moderate Hutus with impunity.

One of the first victims was Prime Minister Uwilingiyimana, a moderate Hutu, which, combined with the death of the president, created a political vacuum into which extremist Hutu Power leaders took command. United Nations peacekeepers from Belgium were also killed and as a result, the UN Security Council pulled out all peacekeepers from the area. Once word of the genocide spread, the UN voted to send in more troops, but by the time they arrived, the genocide was over.

As time went on, resisters to the genocide were killed if they did not acquiesce to the violence and participate themselves. Government-sponsored radio (now also under the control of extremists) began calling for Rwandan civilians to kill their neighbors and by mid-July, 800,000 people had been murdered.

France sent their own intervention and entered Rwanda through the Congo (then Zaire), where (mainly Hutu) refugees were staying. This intervention saved tens of thousands of Tutsis, but also helped some genocide plotters to escape.

The International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR) was formed in October 1994 as an extension of the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia. Fifty years after the Nuremburg Trials (and the first criminal tribunal since), the ICTR began trying a number of higher-ranking officials, continuing for another 15 years.

While the world was outraged at the genocide in Yugoslavia, it was for the most part silent or unknowing of the massacres in Rwanda, but that doesn’t mean Rwanda has always been internationally unnoticed. Rwanda was part of the German East Africa from 1894 to 1918, then became a Belgian trusteeship until 1962. Belgians gave preference to the Tutsis, giving them privileges and western-style education and introducing ethnic identity cards, exasperating already-present tensions. A Hutu revolution in 1959 forced the Tutsi monarch into exile and when Belgium pulled away shortly after, Hutus took over political power.

Track standing on the frozen-river-turned-ice-road, on the Mackenzie River between Inuvik and Tuktoyaktuk, Northwest Territories, Canada. I was the last cyclist to ride on the ice road before it was shut down permanently.
The six-month journey around the U.S. to raise funds for World Bicycle Relief would be one of my favorite rides ever. The country itself is magnificent. Canada has more or less the same look while south of the border varies constantly: sandy deserts in Arizona, tropic-like regions such as Louisiana that reminded me of my African upbringing, all the way to gorgeous beaches in California and Florida where I would sometimes take a break to jump in the water to cool myself down.

Traffic was a minor nuisance for the most part. For safety reasons (and because I was pressed for time and couldn’t afford the luxury of scenic backroads), I stuck to interstates wherever legal because I feel more comfortable on roadways where I have a whole lane to myself (the shoulder) versus relying on motorists to be patient before overtaking me on secondary highways that seldom had shoulders. I did run into situations where people tried to drive me off the road, where motorists in big pickups would drive very closely and release their exhaust fumes on me for their amusement. In one state, someone tried to run me down three times in broad daylight until I took a photo of him and I was left alone, but I was pretty shaken at the bold attempt for the simple reason that he had to switch lanes before overtaking me.

All the above situations happened in two neighboring states in a 24-hour timespan, but I found peace again once I was in Florida with their wide shoulders and the most beautiful roads I have had the pleasure of riding my bicycle on after Switzerland!

The single most morale-crushing aspect of the trip were the winds in Texas, the Dakotas, and Montana. For the first time in my life, riding a bicycle affected my mental health negatively and my mind went to dark places as the very strong all-day winds were hard to pedal in and slowed me down big time. Canada obviously has similar winds, but without the time crunch I could wait them out until the situation was more clement. While circumnavigating the U.S., I had to keep moving to make time thus having to endure the frustration.

Americans spoiled me. I felt like the whole country had decided to turn me into their favorite human. Everywhere I went, people were so kind and generous to me. The amount of new friends that I have made as a result is easily the highlight of my trip, even over the fact that I successfully raised $20,000 for WBR!

People hosted me, came to meet me on the side of the highway to give me snacks or take me for lunch, cyclists traveled from near and far to keep me company, and total strangers helped me in situations where I had mechanicals or found myself on dangerous roads.

I ran out of time due to the winds and had to forgo southern Florida, and somewhere in the Dakotas I caught a Greyhound bus from Bismarck to Bozeman to escape dangerous winds, a wise decision that would allow me to cross back into Canada with just a few days to spare. I would have never finished my ride in time had I not made such needed changes.

I would wholeheartedly recommend the U.S. ride to every single cyclist. There will be incidents, but that is life. But do it right: follow safer routes than I did, which are usually more scenic and easier to ride, following rivers or old railroad tracks with less steep climbs to contend with, and give yourself enough time to enjoy it.

Most of the time when people donate to a cause, they never get to see how their personal contribution makes a difference. I wanted to return to Kenya, where my World Bicycle Relief bikes would be distributed to pupils as means to get to school — some never get an education due to the sad reason that they simply cannot get to school. Savanna Peloton, a Vancouver-based tour agency that organizes off-road cycling trips in Kenya, invited me for a guided tour in the country of my formative years.

I was quite apprehensive returning to the country that pretty much shaped the person I am today, and while I had some childhood memories there, I was also a refugee in my later years, which made life very difficult, so returning to a happy place that had ended on a negative note created mixed feelings. However, as soon as I landed in Nairobi, all my concerns evaporated in the rain-dust and kerosene-filled breeze that hit my nostrils as soon as I exited Jomo Kenyatta International Airport. I was home.

The next morning, I took a private charter plane (care of Savanna Peloton) to Maasai Mara, probably one of the most popular and
largest game preserves in the world and home to the Great Migration, when millions of animals travel from the southern Serengeti to lush Maasai Mara. This particular park tour was significant because in my childhood days, I had never visited — it’s quite expensive, and I remember my classmates telling me stories about it and showing me photos after they returned from school trips when I had stayed behind. Finally, I was going to see it with my own eyes.

Touring it by bicycle was also quite a unique experience. It goes without saying that we stayed away from predators, elephants with calves, and lone buffaloes abandoned by herds because that would have led to fatal outcomes. Instead, I found myself pedalling in parallel with giraffes that curiously trotted along because they had never seen such a spectacle. It felt like I was the one being the object of attraction, not the other way round. I got to ride very close to zebras, gazelles, antelopes, wildebeests, honey badgers, jackals, hyenas, mongooses, warthogs, and more while raptors flew overhead, probably wondering what new kind of animal we were.

At the end of the day, a very copious meal was offered. Due to jetlag, high altitude, and the physical exertion, all the attendees went to bed early even though we wouldn’t be riding out until the early afternoon — we had to wait for the dangerous animals to retreat into their hiding spots away from areas frequented by humans during the day.

The three-day trip flew by, and we had to return to Nairobi where I caught up with childhood friends who had either never left Kenya or returned because life elsewhere did not make sense. I also got to meet and ride with local cyclists who took me on a ride in the tea farm area in Limuru, a municipality outside Nairobi. Tea grows better in high altitude, cold areas, and steep land, so you can imagine how literally breathtaking the ride was!

The following Monday, I was driven to a school near Kisumu where the ceremony of distributing bicycles to local school children would take place. Four hundred bikes were supplied by World Bicycle Relief (120 or so from my fundraiser), and as they were handed out, I felt like my ride around the U.S. had come to an end at last. The agony from the winds and unkind motorists was worthwhile after seeing the bright smiles and hearing how these bikes change communities in generational ways.

On behalf of all my social media audience and personal friends who donated to World Bicycle Relief, I accepted the thanks from the headmaster, the parents, and local politicians, and reported the event on my various platforms.

After the ceremony, as I sat on my flight back to Nairobi, I felt rather accomplished because I had seen firsthand how riding bicycles for adventure and for empowering communities can coexist, and it gave me additional motivation to pursue my charitable efforts to support World Bicycle Relief’s life-impacting programs.

By then, word had gotten around the Kenyan capital that a Canadian adventurer was in town and I was getting invited on so many rides that I kissed goodbye the idea of using that trip as the recovery from my journey around the U.S.!

Somehow, I found myself having tea and biscuits with a person who owned Spirit of the Masai Mara, a lodge in the Maasai Mara, and I was sharing my travel adventures with her and lamented at how short my trip in the Mara was and how I should have waited to get over the jetlag and to acclimatize before undertaking it as it would have been a much better experience.

Before I knew it, I was being driven back to Maasai Mara because the owner invited me to visit their establishment,
The rest of my second week was spent at Spirit of the Masai Mara and this time, on top of the cycling, I also got guided game reserve tours where I got to see the predators and, most importantly, meet with the Maasai people who even invited me to participate in their traditional ceremonial dance. While I tried my very best to jump as high as I could as part of their dance, some were also trying their best to figure out how to ride my dropbar bike as the electronic shifting was bit of a mystery.

I speak Kiswahili very lightly as I had not practised it in over 30 years, but I was able to interact with the communities that I visited much better than most others who visit the area. In one instance, I had to explain to the elder women that I was not single out of consequence but out of choice, and I did not need a Maasai bride although I was grateful for everyone’s concerns!

The next two weeks back in Nairobi consisted of group rides with locals who were for the most part from affluent circles because, while bicycles are a very common way for a number of people to commute to various places, only a small minority rides them for sport or enjoyment. Most found me to be an odd case because I was a foreigner yet a local. I understood the language and the humor, and we look alike, yet I stood out like a sore thumb as a westerner due to my mannerisms, lifestyle, beliefs, and very Canadian (Montréal to be precise) life outlook. I realized quickly that while Kenya had been home in my teens, it was no longer as I had changed as a person and culturally I resembled an average Canadian more than a Kenyan.

This is not to say that I left my heart there and it will always be a former home. It’s been almost two months since I have left, and I still get all the many riders and non-cycling friends (old and new) sending me messages to come back and not to worry about accommodation because I am more than welcome to stay at theirs, a true sign for everyone’s concerns!

The cycling safari took me on unpaved roads made for tourists on game drives. Western and Asian visitors pointed their cameras toward me and wondered what kind of animal I was. The next two weeks back in Nairobi consisted of group rides with locals who were for the most part from affluent circles because, while bicycles are a very common way for a number of people to commute to various places, only a small minority rides them for sport or enjoyment. Most found me to be an odd case because I was a foreigner yet a local. I understood the language and the humor, and we look alike, yet I stood out like a sore thumb as a westerner due to my mannerisms, lifestyle, beliefs, and very Canadian (Montréal to be precise) life outlook. I realized quickly that while Kenya had been home in my teens, it was no longer as I had changed as a person and culturally I resembled an average Canadian more than a Kenyan.

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There is so much to be impressed by, coming into work at Adventure Cycling every day, and so much recognition of what we as an organization have accomplished over the years. It’s hanging on the walls—the photos and the retired bikes and the shadow boxes—but it’s also in the hallways and the kitchen and behind computer screens and phones. Of it all, our own patron saint of cartography, Carla Majernik, humbles me most. Nestled among a jungle of house plants by a window in the open second floor office shared by the Routes and Tours departments, Majernik, our longest-standing staff member at Adventure Cycling, has long flowing hair made (in my mind’s eye, anyway) of roads paved and dirt, of rivers and bike paths. She can be found there most days, studying maps and possible reroutes, and managing her team of cartographers. Majernik is one of the original Bikecentennial riders, a kind and brave adventurer who has been with us since our earliest days. While she was very humble in her storytelling, she was generous in her time; this interview has been edited for length.
HOW AND WHY DID YOU DECIDE TO JOIN BIKECENTENNIAL AND THE TRANSAM TOUR IN 1976? WERE YOU ALREADY A BIKE TRAVELER AND A CARTOGRAPHER?

I was not an overnight bike traveler, but I was a cyclist, a member of the Cincinnati Cycle Club. We did a lot of day rides. There were century rides, and I was in college from ’72 through ’76, and I was graduating that June, and I saw a poster for the bicentennial happening that summer.

I decided it would be a great treat to myself after graduating college. I signed up and was a co-leader on the last trip that was leaving the East Coast headed west, on June 16, 1976. I went through graduation ceremonies on Saturday, moved home on Sunday, and my parents and I drove out to Virginia on Monday. The trip started Wednesday.

DID YOU GO TO SCHOOL FOR CARTOGRAPHY?

I went to school for a bachelor’s of art design. We did a lot of architectural drafting. So I had skills of pencil on paper, the visual skills that one needs. I was focusing on interior design, but by the time I graduated, I didn’t want to do that anymore. Once I moved to Missoula, I worked in an architectural firm for a while. But I knew all the Bikecentennial people and one day they said, “We need more cartographers. Are you interested in maybe becoming a cartographer?” I said, “Yes.” I learned a lot from Greg [Siple].

IS THERE ANYTHING NOTEWORTHY THAT COMES TO MIND AS FAR AS LIKE THINGS THAT HAVE CHANGED IN THE ORGANIZATION OR IN CARTOGRAPHY AND BIKE TRAVEL?

It’s a completely different place. Physically, there have been several different offices. There are a lot more people. I’ve certainly met and worked with a lot of different staff over the years, a lot of great people. But in cartography itself, there have been massive changes, we’ve transitioned from doing everything by hand to doing everything on the computer now.

In the early 1990s, we really started going from hand-drawn maps to cartography on a computer. And in that early time, GIS (Geographic Information Systems) was just starting, but there weren’t any good mapping programs that could do what we wanted. We ended up choosing to use illustration software to draw the maps because we could have the base, but then we could choose how to design these maps with a bicycle user in mind. We’ve always tried to give these maps a lot of information but also a pleasing look to them. And again, that has also changed over the years. But we’re always trying to think about ways to make the printed maps better for the user.

AND YOU STILL USE A LOT OF ILLUSTRATION TECHNOLOGY, DON’T YOU?

We still use Illustrator to draw the maps, and we put all these elements into InDesign. The difference between now and then is that the maps have a GIS background implemented into them now.

CAN YOU TALK ABOUT SCOUTING ROUTES?

We would, for example, get county maps from each state and highlight the route on a map. We would give these maps to the researcher, where they would drive the route by car. They would record, for example, a restaurant, locating it on the map and marking on which side of the road it was located as well.
as a mileage number. When they were done, they would get all the county maps back to us. We used the USGS 250,000-scale maps pretty much exclusively to make a cardboard template of a map panel. We would lay the county maps down and trace the template on each map. That showed us how they were going to fit together going from point to point, and each template overlapped so we knew where we would have a match line. And it was usually me who went into the darkroom and took pictures of the USGS maps with a process camera and doubled the size because that’s how mathematically we figured it out to fit. And then we’d sit down with a piece of Mylar and we’d have a road layer, a water layer, and so on.

I’m thinking of Mac McCoy scouting the Great Divide Mountain Bike route. Did he get out and ride the singletrack and then have a car meet him once that was all figured out? Yes, exactly. As a cartographer, you get this pile of paper and then you work your way through things, and you would have to talk to the researcher to get questions answered. Because there could be an intersection that looks one way on a map, but it’s actually not that way on the ground.

Do you use Google Earth or anything like that now? Oh yeah! In the past 10 or 15 years, there’s just been so much technology advancement, and so many trails are now geo referenced. We can just go find the trail and get information, pull in the data points for a trail.

Do you still have people scout each of the routes, or is that information pretty current enough that you don’t need to? We do. Our routes are still somewhat rural and so there are services along the route that might not even show up in Google Maps or Google Earth. And, you know, that little restaurant at this corner, we want to know about that. So for a new route, we send somebody out to collect all the information.

It seems like currently a lot of the routes department work is focused on updating our routes. Is that all crowdsourced information? We have a great number of people who send in updates on services. We do try and confirm it, and we can do a lot of it just sitting on the computer and making phone calls. But we send people out if it’s a new route or if it’s a longer-distance reroute.

Do you feel about these newer groups dedicated to bike routes, as someone who’s been doing this work for 40 years at the organization that first mapped and published routes designed specifically for bike travel? I think it’s great overall. The more people out there can learn about bicycling and traveling on your bike, the better it is. The one hesitancy I have about people who are making and publishing routes is that over time, things change. We made a commitment so many years ago to keep things updated — as soon as a map is published, it’s out of date. And I don’t know how many other organizations have that commitment to keeping things updated.

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Is there a route that you were part of making or that you saw somebody else make that was like the dream route that you’re happy to see come into the world? You know, I started working on the TransAmerica Trail because in ’76 we had a booklet format and we decided to not do that anymore and changed how the maps looked. It was neat to be working on the route that really started it all. I am [also] really glad the Great Divide came along and is still going so strong and excites so many people.

Have they always been published in a series of sections? The original TransAm was a collection of five maps, which they called five regions. There was Appalachians, the Bluegrass, the Plains-Ozarks, the Rocky Mountains, and the Coast-Cascades. The new sheet format limited how many miles of route could be put onto a sheet with panels, so that determined how many sections of a route there would be. And obviously there are some routes that only need one map section.

How has it been working through that transition of technology, particularly the extra brainpower it takes to shift processes to keep up with the tech? It has been challenging at times. I think the most challenging was going from hand-drawn to computer. And along the way we have had some really great people in the organization who were able to envision the next steps and help with the transitions. When I think back on it, it’s like, how did I ever do that? It’s been an amazing ride. I have been so fortunate to be able to take a passion and craft a career out of it. Carolyne Whelan is the Editor-in-Chief of Adventure Cyclist.
Monē Bikes La Roca

**HANDLEBAR**
Oddmonē bar by Oddity Cycles, 75mm rise, 15° sweep, 805mm wide

**STEM**
La Roca Stubby fillet-brazed stem

**SEATPOST**
PNW Rainier

**FORK**
La Roca rigid fork with triple mounts, rack and fender mounts

**PANNIERS**
Buckhorn wax canvas

**FRAME**
Triple-butted 4130 air-hardened steel

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**MONÉ BIKES LA ROCA**

- **BEST USES:** Mountain biking, bikepacking
- **PRICE:** $1,325 for frame, roughly $3,000 as tested
- **WEIGHT:** 29.5 lbs. (without pedals)
- **AVAILABLE SIZES:** S, M, L, XL
- **SIZE TESTED:** S

words by CAROLYNE WHELAN

photo by RUSS ROCA
Cjell Monē started welding frames in a 1990 Wonder Bread truck, the life of a true traveling artist and adventuring spirit, riding and building wherever the wind took him. They are still custom built in that truck, parked in Silver City, New Mexico, as well as production built in Taiwan by a collection of skilled frame-builders. The bike tested here is a production model, with the custom sizes or more artistic designs left for the magic of the bread truck. However, it is also Cjell’s personal ride (work perks), so it was shipped to me dialed the way the creator best envisioned it, complete with rack and panniers (you never know when you want to stop for a snack or end up passing a bookstore).

The La Roca is bling but not gaudy, like a gold incisor with a tiny diamond on the cap. The fillets are clean and textured, highlighted — nay, celebrated — in gold. This is, of course, purely aesthetic, but the sort of attention to detail that goes into aesthetics is, to me, like a clean bathroom in a restaurant. It’s an indicator that attention is being paid everywhere. The matching stem and handlebars are a nice touch, and even the studs of the Odyssey pedals, the valve caps, and the housing ferrules are gold, which really ties the whole look together. The gearing is also pretty fantastic, with a wide range perfect for the sorts of riding I wanted to do on this bike (that's available in the Missoula area), the 11–50T range paired with the 34T chaining allowing for very easy climbing without overly spinning on flats.

On first ride, I took the La Roca on a multisurface ride that included pavement, dirt roads, and singletrack. It was a very wet spring and early summer, by Montana standards, so I got a chance to ride through mud, slush, and dust as the weather shifted to our typical dry season. The La Roca feels like a definitive nod to a klunker, but with all the power of gearing and hydraulic brakes I'd want in a new bike, and a dropper post to allow for better body positioning. The klunker vibe manifested in my desire to ride this bike on singletrack in cutoff shorts and Montana-made Bedrock sandals.

Yes, I am in charge of my decisions, but the La Roca was really influential as I headed out the door, whispering in my ear, “Try having some fun!” I crossed paths with a few full-suspension riders, who all smiled at my fully rigid ride as we pushed up the mountain at a surprisingly not-pained pace. Maybe it wasn’t so much the bike, but the broad smile I had on my own face as I relinquished just about all stress of the day. I was on the clock, technically, but felt like I was playing hookie with a new friend, spending the afternoon playing in the woods rather than painstakingly dissecting a bike’s handling.

On the descent, the Maxxis Rekon tires grabbed hold of every rock I rolled over and I felt very confident picking up some speed, and the short reach of the bike allowed me to feel nimble on switchbacks while still totally in control and not twitchy when maneuvering over various obstacles. The rear brake was a bit soft and squeaky, but it didn’t hinder my ability to cruise down the ribbon of singletrack that traced the edge of the mountain as it cascaded back to the road. After my own adjustments failed me, I took it into Hellgate Cyclery, our local bike shop, where it was confirmed that the brake had a warranty issue. Hey, it happens. Back in action with a replacement caliper, I felt confident enough to take the bike on an overnight. The Old Man Mountain Divide is a lightweight rear rack designed to be compatible with thru-axles and mountain bike geometry, and the Buckhorn panniers are simple waxed canvas panniers that Velcro close and roll tight with plastic buckles. I didn’t have success keeping them tightly rolled on rides when they weren’t filled, but nothing fell out thanks to the Velcro, and the panniers stayed perfectly in place. Once filled, the closures seemed to work a bit better, and while fairly small, with a sleeping pad strapped to the top of the rack, I was able to carry everything I needed for an overnight very easily and plow through the trails on my way to my destination without worry of anything falling off the bike.

The bend of the Oddmonē handlebar doesn’t work well with my wrist for long, straight, in-the-saddle climbs (for example, riding up a forest service road versus a flat bike path, or on terrain that causes me to constantly shift my weight). The pain ended up migrating up my arm and I thought it was possibly due to a break years ago that didn’t heal correctly, but a coworker borrowed the bike and reported it also hurt his wrist. While it’s a beautiful bar, it may be worth considering what sort of bend works best for your body, which is solid advice for any bike you are putting together piecemeal.

It’s easy to love this bike. It feels absurd to describe a bike as charming, but I was charmed. Despite the sore arm, I found myself looking forward to getting to take this bike wherever I was headed, knowing it was able to handle it but not without making me feel like a kid in the process. Really, what else is there in a bike? Oh yeah — artistry, and this bike has it in spades.

Carolyne Whelan is the Editor-in-Chief of Adventure Cyclist.
Seize the Bolt

by NICOLA NEMY

The line between an epic tour and an epic fail is narrower than we ever like to think it is. It’s actually a pretty sketchy ridgeline, a rocky spine with smoothly self-sufficient days on one side and a mountaintop meltdown just over the other. We tour along, one sleepless airport bike assembly, section of dusty washboard, or cross-threaded bolt away from our adventures dissolving into misadventures.

I’ve spent years teetering along that ridge before becoming a mechanic. It turns out that you don’t actually need to know much about your bike to strap some stuff to it and set off on an epic tour. No one at the airport or park entrance checks that you have the first clue what you’re doing. My good fortune exhausted itself somewhere in New Mexico, or maybe it was southern Idaho, or Oregon, but by the time I got lost in Vancouver Island’s old-growth forest, my bike started to disintegrate underneath me, along with my naive certainty that everything would work out fine for the two of us.

Now I wistfully recall that rigid steel plus bike that looked like it had been dredged out of the foggy harbor that stretches out below us every time a rider drags a touring rig into my bike shop. Their bike troubles always seem to arise out of our maritime fog, a cable snapping, frame failing, or bolt shearing as they’re “just riding along.” This column is going to poke some of these “JRA” troubles, and since they never happen as you’re riding past the local bike shop, I’ll approach them as you might from the trail — with some tools you hopefully have with you, likely without cell service, possibly in the rain.

We’ll kick things off with the snapped bolt. Bolts mounting a loaded rack to a frame are the most likely to shear, so I’ll use that as an example, but this generally applies to most frame and fork bolts. 1. You’ll first want to soak the bolt face with a couple of drops of light oil or penetrating fluid. I carry Tri-Flow when I tour, using it as a high-viscosity chain lube that can also perform some trailside alchemy if things seize up elsewhere on your bike.

When the head of a bolt snaps off, there’s no longer any tension on it. This means that removing a snapped bolt is often just a matter of getting a grip on it and threading it back out. You can try a pick if you have one with you, or wedge the flathead on your multitool somewhere on the face of the sheared bolt and gently tap it in a counter-clockwise direction.

Too easy? 2. Try hammering the flathead right into the bolt face — the impact will loosen any corrosion and might create enough of a tool fitting that you can spin it out. If you know the threads have factory Loctite on them (the blue stuff), some gentle heat will loosen that up (but only if your frame isn’t plastic; sorry, carbon riders!). 3. We’d do this with a propane torch and a Dremel tool in the shop, but get creative and be careful of the surrounding frame or fork material. Rocks, lighters, and patience are your friends here. Hopefully it’s stopped raining.

The next solutions are neither particularly chic, nor meant for long-term use on something like a rack, but they’ll buy you a few (or, shhh, often a few thousand) miles. 4. Take a heavy-duty zip tie and thread it through the lower rack eyelet, tightening it right around your frame. I know someone who rode across Canada with zip ties supporting his loaded rear rack when a braze-on snapped right off his frame. You can achieve a similar provisional effect with steel plumbing clamps, but try to protect your frame with electrical tape underneath them if you’re able.

5. Plan ahead and carry spare bolts (hint: you’ll find 8.8, 10.9, or 12.9 printed on steel bolt heads, standardized strength measurements that indicate its resistance to shear, load, and traction, so carry some strong spares in case you find those weaker ones breaking), plus a few tools and fallbacks like zip ties and P-clamps. Voilà or Titan straps, or even toe straps, can also save the day by holding up everything from a failed rack to a busted pannier or that one last memento that won’t fit anywhere. I toss a loose handful of chainring, rotor, cleat, seatpost, and rack bolts into the bottom of my framebag before every tour, making a little wish as I do. In my other job as a touring guide, I’ve rummaged around for each at some point. Often, you’re lucky to have a nearby attachment point and can reattach the rack to another eyelet (likely a fender mount), suffer a slight change of the rack’s angle or bend of its aluminum stays, and off you go. If you’re running fenders and the bolt is long enough, go ahead and double them up to get back into town.

Grease your threads. Torque them, but not obsessionally, or they may fail too. Take a moment. Reflect on the long walk you won’t have to take. Maybe have a snack. Then just keep riding along.

Nicola Nemy spends most of her time thinking about dirt she can grow food in or ride bikes on. She’s worked as a bike mechanic and a guide for cycling tours all over Canada’s Maritimes, where she also organizes the Monthly Cycle, a social riding and advocacy group for women, trans, femme, and non-binary riders. She loves biking over pine needles, dogs with soft ears, assembling her bike in an airport at the start of an adventure, and lunch.
My First Bike Camping Adventure

by TANEIKA DUHANEY

Growing up in New York City, I saw the bike as a means to an end. The thing that allowed me to mosey outside the two-block confinement my parents allowed me to travel with little regard. On the bike, I was allowed to ride five blocks in any direction, but I never went very far. In the car-centric borough of Queens, city buses, dollar vans, and taxis were cheap and plentiful, so traveling by bike soon lost its novelty. Then I became an adult, and a culmination of life events led me back to the very thing that had given me my first taste of freedom: the bike. Now that I can explore without boundaries, where would I go, and what would I do?

The idea of riding again was exciting. Shifting from the road to riding off the beaten path was liberating, mesmerizing, and calming. My weekend rides usually started at Fletcher’s Boathouse at mile marker three on the C&O Canal towpath.

One Saturday, after stopping for a break at Great Falls, I decided to see how far I could go. I rode until the towpath changed from bumpy, compact gravel to fine, crushed black limestone. Within a few miles, I encountered the first of many hiker/biker campsites. The campsite offered a porta-john, two picnic benches, and a water pump. This was the perfect place to stop. I greeted a couple sitting on a bench. We chatted as the duo unpacked their bike camping gear and proceeded to pitch a tent. They orchestrated their setup effortlessly, gushed about their bike travel plans, and encouraged me to try bike camping. Riding my bike is one thing; riding and camping is another. “Just do it,” they quipped. “Do some research, start slow, and have fun. We ride and camp along the trail at least once a year,” they said. As I prepared to leave, the lady turned to me and said, “Take the time to notice everything; it changes you.”

Riding back, I was intrigued by our chance meeting. As soon as I got home, I Googled bike camping. After sorting through stories and recommendations about days-long bike camping trips, I found what I needed: bike camping for beginners.

With the camper’s words fresh in my mind, I searched for local parks with campsites, bike-friendly routes from home, and emergency options. I made checklists for everything: food, bike and sleeping equipment, toiletries, and emergency care. This was the easy part — getting camping gear was another situation.

I started with my local Facebook Buy Nothing group. Someone offered a tent and sleeping bag; unfortunately, both were too big and heavy to transport by bike. Next, I scoured Facebook Marketplace and found a pocket stove, coffee press, and a repaired lightweight tent. A seller sold me a once-used camping hammock for half price. I rounded out my search at the REI Garage, which offered several wallet-friendly sleeping systems. With these staples in hand, the remaining items like toiletries, bike repair tools, food, headlamp, and first aid supplies were purchased on sale, taken from my pantry, or pillaged from my garage.

After searching the Old Farmer’s Almanac for the best weather opportunity, I reserved my camping spot at a local park about 10 miles from home. One Friday afternoon after work, dressed in cycling bibs and a T-shirt, I navigated through evening traffic to the park. Riding my bike with camping gear, food, and water was more challenging than I anticipated. After checking in for my campsite, I located the potable water source, restroom, and approved campfire areas. To my surprise, there were no other campers nearby. As the breeze blew across my face, I heard birds chirping and children laughing in the distance. Though the parkway was relatively close, I felt like I’d been transported to another world: no sirens, car horns, nothing. Pitching my tent was quite the feat. I was significantly slower than the campers on the C&O. This was going to take some practice. However, hanging the hammock was relatively easy.

As night fell, I was a mosquito magnet. I ditched the hammock and found refuge inside the tent. After dinner, I gazed at the stars as I shuffled into my sleeping bag. With no other campers around, the solitude was welcomed but also worrying. What if something went “bump” in the night? I awoke the next morning feeling rested and clear-headed. My worries about lions, tigers, and bears were unfounded.

That morning I rode around the lake, stopped to watch birds, and found meandering paths from the trail to parts of the park that I never knew existed. Upon returning to the campsite, I met two campers from the other side of town. I lounged in the hammock, read a book, and drifted in and out of sleep. That evening, the other campers and I shared a fire and many laughs as fireflies flew about. I abandoned the hammock and shuffled into my sleeping bag like the night before.

On Sunday morning, I awoke restless and hungry. Breaking down the tent was an evolution. My camping neighbors saw my struggle and offered some much-needed assistance. After packing the gear on my bike, we bid farewell, and as I rode to exit the park, the 10 percent chance of rain turned into a torrential downpour. Note to self: pack rain gear.

My first bike camping trip was nothing like I’d feared and everything that I hadn’t expected. Staying close to home gave me the confidence to venture beyond my own confines. Now, I have an epic cycling adventure in my sights. Where will I go, and will I make it? Stay tuned.

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