Adventure CYCLIST

a publication of ADVENTURE CYCLING ASSOCIATION

GRAVEL ROAD TO DAMASCUS

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EDGE® EXPLORE
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PLANNING MODE
Trips, stories, and a little luck

I emailed Jess Daddio, the author of this month’s cover story, a year and a half ago after seeing on a Facebook group that she was writing a story about the Tour Divide race. I wanted to connect her to more information about the Great Divide Mountain Bike Route and its designer, Mac McCoy. A few months later, she pitched on me on the story you’ll see on page 10. Colin Arisman and Elsa Sebastian (page 18) pitched us a Golden Circle story almost 12 months to the day from this issue’s press deadline, and I sat drinking coffee and talking about Nebraska with Chuck Haney (page 26) long enough ago that you could still sit and drink coffee and talk.

Sure, some stories fall into our laps at the perfect time to slot into an issue already in the making (see: anything COVID-related over the last couple of months), but the vast, vast majority of the 30-some features that appear in a year of Adventure Cyclist magazines are the result of at least 12 months of planning.

With that in mind, 2021 is looking a little … weird. Nearly every correspondent who was scheduled to report for us this year had to postpone, cancel, or considerably alter their trip. The 80 submissions we have as of this writing are mostly based on trips that took place in years past, and some of the ones that did happen in 2020 probably shouldn’t have (your clandestine journey might make a good story, but we don’t condone it!).

So what are we doing? Same as everyone else in this unforgettable and unwelcome year: we’re in planning mode. Like looking at a map and laying out the daily itinerary for a big journey, we’re piecing together what sometimes appear to be completely disparate parts in hopes that, with a little skill and a little luck, they come together in a way that makes something more. We’ve got some tough climbs identified, more than a couple points of interest marked, and something like a route is starting to slowly reveal itself.

Alex Strickland
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DÉJÀ VU ALL OVER AGAIN
Sometimes a destination is worth visiting once (or twice) more. So it goes with two stories in this issue: Elsa Sebastian’s ride on the Golden Circle Route (page 18) and Chuck Haney’s tour in Nebraska (page 26) are both spots we’ve taken readers in recent years. We’ll be linking to those stories in upcoming editions of eDigest (adventurecycling.org/subscribe), but you can revisit any destination from the pages of Adventure Cyclist in our extensive archives always available at adventurecycling.org/archive.

BE SMART, GET THE SHIRT
After dozens of requests, we had stickers and T-shirts made featuring the logo above (created by staff Designer Levi Boughn). Get yours at adventurecycling.org/store.

COVID-19 UPDATES
For the latest impacts of the coronavirus pandemic on bike travel and Adventure Cycling, visit adventurecycling.org/covid-19.
Closing the Loop
Connecting on the Golden Circle.
by Elsa Sebastian

Gravel Road to Damascus
Climbing (and climbing) along the TransVirginia route.
by Jess Daddio

Going Solo in the Sandhills
The Great Plains are exactly that: great. And Nebraska’s beautiful Sandhill country is no exception.
by Chuck Haney

The Time is Now in Tacoma
This Pacific Northwest club has reinvented itself before, and is positioned to do so once more.
by Dan D’Ambrosio

Departments
08 Waypoints
38 Geared Up
42 Life Member Profile
44 Marketplace/Classifieds
50 Companions Wanted
51 Open Road Gallery

Letters
03 LETTER from the Editor
05 LETTERS from our Readers
06 LETTER from the Director

Columns
34 Road Test
Josh Tack
Bulls Lacuba Evo Lite

Bulls Lacuba Evo Lite
Throw out what you know about eBike range.
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Our Cover:
The TransVirginia traverses 550 miles of gravel roads from Washington, DC, to Damascus, Virginia.

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Adventure Cyclist accepts stories, articles, and photographs for publication. Learn more at adventurecycling.org/submit.
FEEDBACK FESTIVAL

NO ISSUES WITH THESE ISSUES
As a veteran of four cross-country rides, I wanted to say thank you for the July edition! It brought so many memories flooding back from my trips: giant sequoia trees, wild pigs pacing me along a country road, deer crossing the road just in front of me, the wolf that bolted back into the woods when he turned and saw me. And the list goes on and on. Only one bad one: the pickup truck whose rearview mirror hit me in my back — I will spend the rest of my life trying to forget that one. Please continue to include stories like these in future editions.

John Duning | Chula Vista, California

Thanks so much for your wonderful Final Mile Anthology (Aug./Sept. 2020). I am so tired of most magazines that are focusing on young adults who can't seem to read more than a few lines at a time. These stories were such a joy. “Basketcase” was cute and funny. “Shape Shifter” was fantastical. “Descending Petrifica” was unbelievable — wow, I've been in some pretty hairy places, but that was really quite the story.

I actually shared the funny “A Bike's Tour” with some of my cycling friends. Funny things are happening because of COVID, and it's nice to laugh a bit at the dilemmas. I could identify with the “Time Traveler” You just can't see it all, and sometimes you just have to move on. My favorite was “Strong as an Oaks.” So well written and truly from the heart.

This was one of the best issues ever.

Mary Naber | Spokane, Washington

BIRDS OF A FEATHER
I wanted to start off by saying that I enjoy reading your magazine. I am a mid-30s mother of two very active children. Riding our bikes is my favorite activity to do as a family. I got into cycling six years ago when my in-laws bought me a Specialized step-through. After that, I was hooked and have tried to ride my way along as many bike trails in Michigan as I can. I have recently purchased a gently used Bianchi Dama road bike, and your articles have inspired me to train for longer, multiday rides. I often receive inquisitive gazes from friends and acquaintances who catch me riding the 30-mile trail near my home alone. They always say, “You’re riding by yourself?!”

That is why I especially enjoyed the “Bird Will Fly” piece by Gage Poore (Open Road Gallery, July 2020) featuring Alivia Michalski's solo TransAmerica tour. I do not always feel confident riding alone as a very petite young woman, but a girl's gotta do what a girl's gotta do. I love riding my bike and often find it hard to ride in a group as my hectic schedule doesn't always align with group rides. Alivia's story gives me courage and reminds me that adventure awaits those who are brave enough to pursue their passions. It is a fresh reminder that there are awesome women out there freely riding their bicycles into the unknown and I can do it too.

Monica Rezzo | Traverse City, Michigan

DOING A DAN FINE JOB
I enjoy Dan D'Ambrosio's writing and think he deserves recognition for the contributions he makes to every issue. In every issue of Adventure Cyclist, Dan writes about the most interesting topics related to cycling and the cycling industry. “The Surprise Boom” in the Aug./Sept. issue was fascinating. Other months he has written about topics such as charity rides in the COVID era, special bike shops, a pannier company, and so many other interesting and relevant topics. We all take pleasure in cycling and bike touring, but much of what we do would not be possible without the bicycle industry and its related industries. I enjoy the window into this realm that his articles provide.

Armand Saccomanno | North Windham, Connecticut

Ed. Note: Some readers will remember that Dan was the editor of this publication from 1982 to 2003, so he knows us well!

GOING IT ALONE
Catching up on recent back issues of my favorite magazine, I found Molly Brewer Poore's article on adjusting to self-guided touring (“Self Sufficient-ish,” April 2020). As a newly retired couple back in 2016, we made the same transition.

The joy of leaving our luggage behind in the morning and it magically appearing at our next hotel was only eclipsed by the quality of the accommodation (far above our usual one- or two-star picks) and the pre-booked dinners — no need to wander the streets looking at menus when tired out from the day's ride.

A couple of tips that served us well: do some research on the towns where you'll be staying. We avoided the disappointment of having to leave a beautiful destination the morning after arriving by asking for an extra night in some places. Also, take a good look at the bikes that you'll be riding! Make your

CONTINUED ON PAGE 49
The challenges of 2020 have not been comfortable, but our unwavering cycling community has moved forward with courage and clarity. My inspiration comes from members like Scott Edwards, who stopped by Adventure Cycling headquarters on his way from Boston to Oregon. His smile and warm affect were magnetic. Scott reminded me that joy and empathy are the heart and soul of a bike adventure. Another visiting cyclist, Ruben, rolled up on the way to Maine wearing a backpack and a water bottle bungee’d onto his rear rack. Ruben reminded me that adventure is the journey and attitude is reality.

Through the dips, dives, and detours, a lodestar shines bright: connecting through our cycling community and creating a strong future for bicycling so that your attitude orients toward doing with joy and empathy in every experience. Adventure Cycling will lean into these values with three high-level initiatives that align us to our True North. These initiatives will strengthen and support our community during and beyond the time of coronavirus:

### Curation and Deployment of Short Trips

Weekend trips keep you sane, connected, and healthy, and there’s no better way to introduce your kids and friends to the transformational power of bike travel than with a weekend trip. Most folks aren’t looking to travel far away in airplanes with strangers right now, and even so, who’s got two months of vacation for an epic? (I’m so jealous of all 65 TransAm riders who have been through our office so far this year!)

Between our resources and your knowledge, We: the Adventure Cycling community) have plenty of options to ride closer to home — and starting in 2021, we’re going to help you access the best options near you for a two- to five-day trip. Got a family? Just you and some buddies? Maybe a couple of friends new to bike travel? We’ll give you everything you need (sans bike and food) in a ready-to-go package with on- and off-pavement options. We’ll also have community-building through our Ambassador program; educational resources on how to travel and organize a group; and Bike Travel Weekend opportunities to ride with others, log your trip, and participate virtually.

### Digital Navigation

If you’re riding one of our routes, our Bicycle Route Navigator app is indispensable. It kept me on track for six days on the Great Divide Mountain Bike Route this spring. In 2021 we’re going to make it the go-to for all bike travelers. Cycling apps and navigation...
Life imitates art. In the case of the RX8 Limited Edition, shoes imitate nature with its inspiration drawn from the vibrant colors of the Santa Rita prickly pear cactus. The RX8: beautiful, light, rugged, and designed to let you ride further.

THE ULTIMATE GRAVEL SHOE

RX8
**Growing Cycling**

Founded by former World Cup downhill racer Eliot Jackson, Grow Cycling Foundation was established to create new avenues for inclusive community building and career development in the cycling industry as well as to empower existing programs working to tear down the barriers to entry in cycling for marginalized communities. With ears on the ground in these communities, Grow Cycling Foundation serves to provide the education, access, and opportunities that directly address the barriers they face.

Investing in areas that create sustainable paths for cycling as a lifelong passion, Grow Cycling Foundation leverages four overlapping pillars: Education, Opportunity, Community, and Access to create solutions that provide entry points at various steps of a cyclist’s journey.

The organization’s first initiative is to build a pumptrack in Los Angeles, California, with a goal to inspire career paths and involve the local community by using this space for world-class events, community building, and programs that teach various cycling industry skills.

To learn more, go to growcyclingfoundation.org.

**CYCLING DIRECTIONS? LET ME GOOGLE THAT FOR YOU**

If there’s any upside to this global pandemic in which we (still) find ourselves, it’s that so many more people have discovered—or rediscovered—the bicycle. Whether it’s to get outside safely and get some exercise, or going to work and running errands without having to drive a car or use public transportation, the fact is more people are riding bikes. Don’t believe me? Just ask Google.

In a blog post from July, Google Maps Product Manager Vishal Dutta claimed that, since February, requests for cycling directions in Google Maps had jumped by 69 percent. To meet this increase in demand, Google has made updates to Maps to create better, safer routes, avoiding things like stairs and bad road surfaces and including many of the new pop-up bike lanes that have, well, popped up in cities across the U.S. What’s more, Google is now including bike share in its cycling directions, showing users where docking stations are located and, in many cases, how many bikes are available. In some cities across the U.S. and the world—including New York City, San Francisco, and Chicago—Google has partnered with the local bike share programs to provide users walking directions to docking stations, live availability, turn-by-turn directions to the docking station closest to the user’s destination, and even links to the bike share apps to sign up and unlock a bike.

Here’s hoping that, when this is all over, people around the world keep rolling along.
After 263 days on the road, Cat Dixon, 54, and Raz Marsden, 55, returned home to the UK having broken not just the women’s record for fastest circumnavigation of the world on a tandem bicycle, but the men’s record as well, and by nearly 20 days.

Cat and Raz pedaled more than 18,000 miles through 25 countries and just barely made it back to their home country before the coronavirus lockdown. More than just an attempt at the world record, the two also rode to raise money for Oxfam and the Motor Neuron Disease Association. Their goal was £18,000, matching their mileage. In the end, they raised more than £34,000. You can see their route, read the blog they maintained during the trip, and donate to the cause at tandemwow.com.

Great American Outdoors Act
Now Law of the Land
AUGUST 4 NAMED ‘GREAT AMERICAN OUTDOORS DAY’

In the Aug./Sept. issue, we reported that the Senate had passed their version of the Great American Outdoors Act, a bill that would fund the backlog of maintenance at national parks across the country as well as permanently allocate money to the Land and Water Conservation Fund. In July, the House passed their bill, and on August 4, President Trump signed the bill into law. It was a welcome (and rare) moment of bipartisanship in Congress and a great moment for public lands.

The next day, Secretary of the Interior David Bernhardt designated August 4 as the “Great American Outdoors Day,” which in the future will be a free entrance day to U.S. national parks and public lands. You don’t have to ride your bike in a national park next August 4, but you could. Just saying.

AROUND THE WORLD ON A TANDEM, QUICKLY
TWO BRITISH WOMEN BREAK THE OVERALL WORLD RECORD

After 263 days on the road, Cat Dixon, 54, and Raz Marsden, 55, returned home to the UK having broken not just the women’s record for fastest circumnavigation of the world on a tandem bicycle, but the men’s record as well, and by nearly 20 days.

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gravel road to Damascus
CLIMBING ACROSS THE TRANSVIRGINIA ROUTE

At 4,397 feet, Reddish Knob near the Virginia-West Virginia border is well worth the hard climb to reach it.
“DUDE, YOUR LIPS ARE BLUE.”

Lindsey eyed me with motherly concern. Behind her, the fluorescent yellow Dollar General sign beamed brightly against the cloudy sky. The morning’s rain had stopped, but the air hung heavy with the cool dampness of fall. We were seven days into our journey along the TransVirginia Bike Route, a 550-mile mostly gravel route that begins in Washington, DC, and ends in Damascus, Virginia.

“I wish Dollar General served coffee,” I said, my teeth chattering. I sized up Lindsey’s grocery bag. She pulled out a pack of fruit cups. “Is that all you got?” I asked.

“Yeah, it’s fine, fruit cups are great,” she said. Whether she was feigning enthusiasm, I couldn’t be sure. Lindsey doesn’t eat gluten, soy, corn, nuts, or dairy, the five main food groups of bikepacking. Having climbed over 37,000 feet so far, how she kept pedaling without a steady drip of candy bars was a mystery to me.

The Dollar General in Pulaski was 30 miles into what we had dubbed “the Big Day,” a 97-mile push from our previous night’s camp along the New River to the campground at Comers Rock high up on Iron Mountain. In reality, it was just a slightly bigger day in a string of big days. The day before, we’d climbed a punishing 9,000 feet in just 75 miles. Fatigue pulled heavy on my legs, but if we reached Comers Rock that night, we could finish the route the next day.

HOT, HOT HEAT

A week ago, I dreamed of being cold enough to warrant blue lips. Day One of TransVirginia dawned hot and humid. It was a late September morning, and though we were officially on the precipice of autumn, summer was still holding its ruthless grasp.

Lindsey and I rolled early from my brother’s house near downtown Washington, DC, in search of coffee. Outside a café, we sipped our overpriced cups of piping hot pour-over, sweating in the fading shade of an umbrella. By 8:00 am, the temperature had already spiked above 80°F. Throngs of suit-clad businessmen and women swarmed the sidewalks, marching purposefully to their nine-to-fives. Eventually we peeled our sticky legs from the metal chairs and pedaled to the Lincoln Memorial, the TransVirginia’s official starting point. Weaving our loaded bikes through the morning commute felt a little like skipping school. Handlebars pointed west, we left the weekday hustle behind, giddy with anticipation.

The first 36 miles of the route steered us away from the capital’s busy streets to the Chesapeake & Ohio Canal Trail. Within minutes of leaving the Lincoln Memorial, concrete jungle gave way to verdant forest. The mostly flat, crushed-gravel path should have rolled fast, but in the soaring heat, it felt like a slog. Dense stands of tulip poplar and oak trees wrapped us in a green embrace, shading us from the sun but trapping the soupy air beneath their boughs.

It was afternoon by the time we arrived at White’s Ferry. Inside the White’s Ferry Store & Grill, we settled into a booth. The air conditioning and ice-cold drinks felt indulgent, like we hadn’t yet ridden far enough to justify the luxury, but we splurged all the same.

White’s Ferry is the only operating cable ferry on the Potomac River. Used daily by commuters crossing between Virginia and Maryland, the ferry was mostly empty when Lindsey and I rolled our bikes down the ramp. The novelty of the crossing wore off quickly; as the ferry inched across the stagnant river, we baked under the cloudless sky.

We dodged traffic for the next 10 miles until reaching another rail trail, the Washington & Old Dominion Trail. It’s paved and straight, and we made quick work of the miles. At the trail’s end in Purcellville, a sign in front of the local bank crawled with heat advisories and safety reminders for pets. The temperature reading was 100°F.
With 24 miles to go before we reached the sole campground — at Mile 80 — in a sea of private land, I began to despair. Every stroke of the pedal felt too hard. Every hill was impossibly long. Dry mouth, aching head, cramping legs. No, it wasn’t despair I was feeling — it was dehydration.

“Are we going right or left up here?” Lindsey asked.

I looked down at my phone and zoomed in on the route. We were approaching a lefthand turn onto Yellow Schoolhouse Road.

“Yellow,” I stammered. Lindsey peered back curiously over her shoulder. “I mean left,” I said.

We pulled off beneath the shade of a sprawling oak tree. Lindsey poured electrolyte drink mix into my water bottle, which I promptly chugged. Within minutes, I could feel myself emerge from the red zone, thankful for the second wind.

As we crawled up the final climb of the day, we could hear the din of westbound traffic roaring ahead. The northern Virginia chaos we had left behind in DC was now zooming 60 MPH down the mountain on Route 7, the very road we would have to ride for a few hairy miles. Fortunately, there was a sizable shoulder for us. We merged into single file, taking care to avoid broken shards of glass and hardware that could put holes in our tires or, worse, shred their sidewalls.

When we finally crossed the four-lane highway and were safely back on country roads, our relief was palpable. Pavement turned to gravel. We rolled along the banks of the Shenandoah River through familiar-to-me territory; this river was literally my childhood backyard. At camp, my parents — who still live in the area — treated us to burritos and cold sparkling water. Neither of us slept much that night. The stifling heat had hardly dissipated, but no matter: at long last, the adventure had begun.
Riders can tackle the Trans Virginia almost any time of year, but the route's scenery really shines in autumn.
The TransVirginia traverses the George Washington and Jefferson national forests, a rugged 1.8-million-acre swath of public land that seeps across the Virginia-West Virginia border.
forests are home to over 1.8 million acres of rugged terrain. Steep, rocky climbs awaited us in the days to come, so we made camp early in the shadow of Little Sluice Mountain.

Though the insufferable heat from the day before had abated, the humidity remained relentless. Our chamois and shirts were soaked with sweat. We walked down to the creek behind our campsite to rinse the crusted salt and dust from our legs. To our surprise, the creek was bone dry.

In general, Virginia is blessed with ample surface water and piped springs, even in the heat of summer. But in the past 10 weeks, over half of Virginia had fallen into a moderate drought, or worse. Fortunately, we remembered crossing a trickling tributary about a mile up the road from camp. At the very least, we had water for the night.

On Day Three, we were climbing right away. Doubletrack strewn with large rocks turned to washed-out singletrack. Fallen trees slowed our speed, forcing us to hike-a-bike on sections we might have otherwise been able to ride. Eventually, the trail dumped us out onto well-maintained gravel Forest Service roads. Up and up we climbed, the grade stiffening so much that even spinning in the granny gear felt hard.

As we neared the summit of Devils Hole Mountain, a misty fog shrouded us in obscurity. Pops of red and yellow in the canopy signaled the change of seasons. In three days, it would be autumn. Despite the moisture in the air, the land was still parched. We passed yet another normally reliable spring that was completely dry.

Just when I thought I could climb no more, we started to descend out of the clouds. In five miles, we dropped over 1,400 feet in elevation. Before us, the rolling hills of the Lost River Valley glistened in the golden light. Tucked somewhere beyond those ridges was our next climb of the day: German River Road.

Having climbed some 3,500 feet that morning alone, we steeled ourselves mentally for the remaining 5,000 feet of climbing ahead. The grind up German River Road began innocently enough, first on pavement, chunky, so if you run a skinner tire, come prepared with a solid repair kit.

HOW MUCH FOOD AND WATER TO CARRY
Most riders will only need to carry a maximum of two days’ worth of food. Riders will pass by gas stations or country stores at least every 50 to 60 miles. The longest stretch without stores is 85 miles. Natural surface water is accessible throughout the route, but plan accordingly during the late summer months when droughts are common.

LEVEL OF DIFFICULTY
About 60 percent of the route is unpaved: 35 percent on gravel/dirt roads, 17 percent on rail trails, 5 percent on doubletrack, and 0.5 percent on singletrack. The climbing can be very demanding, especially if you are attempting to ride 60 miles or more per day. Earlier this year, the route developers created an alternate called the Valley TransVirginia, which follows the same north–south trajectory but reduces the overall climbing by 15,000 feet.

MORE INFORMATION
TransVirginia Bike Route: transvirginia.org
then dirt, then grassy doubletrack. But then the more elevation we gained, the more the road devolved.

Our pace slowed from 13 mph to 10, then 8, then 5. We picked our way slowly up the rock-studded jeep trail, crawling alongside a scorched German River. We rationed our remaining water, knowing full well that, if anything, the ridge we were gaining would be drier than the holler.

Just as we crested the ridge, thunder rumbled overhead. Within minutes, the sky opened up and unleashed a heavy curtain of rain. We hastily took cover and huddled beneath a scrawny tree, but no sooner had it started than the storm passed.

Though the day's climbing was mostly behind us, the next 10 miles of overgrown doubletrack hardly came easy. Stinging nettle and thorny briars ripped at our skin. Freshly downed branches littered what little of the track we could see and threatened to rip the derailers from our bikes.

Soaked, scratched, and a little bloodied, we emerged from the woods just as the sun was starting to set. We tucked into a mini-peloton for the final pavement rip down to Switzer Lake where we hoped to find water. We were in luck. Out of the many feeder creeks that dumped into the reservoir, only one remained flowing.

By Day Six, we had fully assimilated to life on tour, our new normal. Riding bikes became our job. There was freedom in the simplicity of only needing to eat, ride, and find water. I'd made peace with the creaking of my bottom bracket and the fact that, although water was seemingly scarce on this route, the climbing was mercilessly plentiful.

This section in particular — from Covington to our planned campsite along the New River — was stacked with 2,000-foot climb after 2,000-foot climb. But there were joys too: the sight of a black bear scrambling down a tree, the rush of flying down mountainside by side with one of your closest friends. Even the ritual morning cup of instant coffee tasted better than that gucci pour-over we had back in DC. We were

CONTINUED ON PAGE 48

Above: Lindsey Carpenter, Ellen Kasiske, and Adam Ritter keep a steady pace up German River Road outside of Crüders.

Left: Riders need only carry two to three days' worth of food thanks to frequent country store resupplies on route.

Right: The TransVirginia packs a punchy 45,000 feet of climbing in 550 miles, but the views are worth the effort.

“Surely, of all the wonders of the world, the horizon is the greatest”
-Freya Stark

co-motion.com
866-282-6336

Closing the Loop

CONNECTING ON THE GOLDEN CIRCLE

The scenery between Carcross and Skagway is exquisite.
As I neared the top of Chilkat Pass, everything vanished—swallowed by a dense fog. When I looked behind me, my partner rode into view like an apparition. The wolf tracks alongside the road appeared very real though, so I slowed my pace to drift closer to my fellow human.

I’d never done anything like this. Before this ride, I could tentatively call myself a bike commuter, but even that had been a while ago. I’d spent the past couple of months working on a fishing boat in western Alaska, pulling sockeye salmon out of a net, and all of my movements had been confined to the 32 feet between the bow and the stern.

Pedaling up a mountain into the Yukon with shaky sea legs, getting totally soaked, and edging toward hypothermia definitely felt adventurous. Also a little dumb. I regretted not putting on my rain gear when we first started riding into this chilling mist, but I took some abstract comfort in the fact that this particular intersection of Alaska and Canada has a rich history of luring in foolhardy adventurers.

The 350-mile route we rode is called the Golden Circle, named for the historic Klondike Gold Rush that exploded in this region in the late nineteenth century. This frantic migration of 100,000 would-be miners to the north was so epic in proportion and fatal in consequence that it was called a stampede. The stories of hardship and heartbreak experienced by the stampeders as they attempted to strike it rich in a hostile environment were made legendary by authors like Jack London and Robert Service. The Golden Circle travels the very routes used by those fortune-seeking prospectors.
We began riding in Haines, Alaska, a tiny town at the end of the longest, deepest fjord in North America. We then followed the Chilkat River through Klukwan, a Tlingit village that has been on the river’s banks for hundreds of years. From there, we climbed through the Chilkat Pass, traveling along a traditional trade route of the Tlingit and Athabascan peoples. Most of our ride was on rolling plateau on a route that wound through Whitehorse, the capital of the Yukon, and then back through another mountain pass to Alaska and the iconic gold rush town of Skagway. To close the circle, it’s necessary to hop on a ferry and sail back to Haines or down to Juneau.

Ferries are what make this ride possible as a loop, and in the summer they run regularly between Haines and Skagway. Arguably, the Golden Circle can be started in either town. A sound reason to start in Haines is the mellow grade of the climb into the Yukon, but we also had personal reasons for beginning there.

I moved to Haines in the dead of winter a few years ago. I’d come to fight against a modern-day gold rush, one that bore little resemblance to the romanticized individualism of 1898. Today, multinational mining companies are scrambling for investors and permits to dig for copper and gold in the mountains above the Chilkat River, one of the most important salmon-producing rivers in the region. These fish have been sustaining the Tlingit people for thousands of years, and within the last century the salmon have become essential to commercial fisheries as well. Mines and fish don’t mix: the pollutants unearthed by mining can have a negative impact on salmon in perpetuity.

Even though I moved to Haines from a nearby community and my family has long been harvesting salmon spawned in the Chilkat River, when I first showed up in town I was immediately labeled by some of the residents as an “outside environmentalist.” I had moved to Haines to serve as executive director of a local conservation organization, and as I navigated this job — a heady mix of heated public meetings and long hours alone in a dark office at the end of a dirt road — a few major things happened totally by accident.

First off, I fell in love with Haines and its endearing assortment of contrarians, fishermen, artists, and ski bums. Second, I met my boyfriend, who was working on a documentary film about the threat of mining in the Chilkat Watershed. Finally, I crashed my trusty garage-sale bike on a patch of ice and replaced it with the sleekest ride I’d ever owned: a Surly Disc Trucker from the local bike shop.

When I left that job, I still had the bike, boyfriend, and love for the town. Less cheerfully, I still saw the local...
rivers, mountains, and forests through the lens of political controversy and potential loss. We had many reasons for wanting to ride the Golden Circle — my first bikepacking adventure — but, deep down, I was hoping that I could pedal my way into a richer, less fraught relationship with this place.

After we made it over Chilkat Pass and began our descent into the valley beyond, the fog turned to rain. It felt like riding into a cresting wave, but even as my hands cramped with cold I was still awed by the scenery that rose into view as we lost elevation. A lake wrapped sinuously around the base of the mountains, and even under gray skies it sparkled a bright turquoise.

Our destination on that first night was known simply as the Green Shack. It's a refuge for cold and wet folks like us, and it's regularly stocked with firewood by the Canadian Park Service. In the summer, the Green Shack is visited by motorcyclists and bikepackers; in the winter, it's skiers and snowmobilers. Once we arrived, I shucked my wet layers, crawled into my sleeping bag, and gratefully drank some of the bottle of wine that we'd cached days before. As I warmed up, I flipped through the visitor log and studied the quotations and crayon graffiti scrawled across the wall.

From the stories they told, I started to understand that the Green Shack was much more than a shelter — it's a gentle reprimand to those entering this mighty land without proper caution. Without this little cabin, I would've been dangerously cold, struggling to set up a tent with numb fingers.

The following morning, we slept until the rain stopped tapping the roof, and we emerged from the Green Shack to a gleaming valley. As we filled up our water bottles from swollen creeks, I could see that the tiny plants of the tundra were starting to burn red and gold with the changing season. Seed pods spiraled elegantly across the road's shoulders.

Besides the occasional lumbering RV, the roads here seemed to be the nearly exclusive domain of motorcyclists and bicycles. While the RVs seemed as foreign as spaceships in this wild country, the motorcyclists felt like our compatriots in adventure. As we were pushing up a particularly arduous hill, legs burning, a solo biker came roaring down from above with the speakers on his handlebars blasting Brazilian jazz. The funky horns seemed to be a jubilant tribute to the beauty that was all around us.

After a day of pedaling through majestic mountain valleys, we spent our second night in a campground by Dezaadash Lake. We dried our clothes over a fire in the cooking shelter, and by the time the rain started to fall again, we had stretched out in our sleeping bags.

In Haines Junction, we made a much anticipated stop at the famous Village Bakery, one of the few businesses in this tiny crossroads town. After eating a wide selection of baked goods and savory treats, I started to work my way through coffee refills as I listened to locals discussing the upcoming salmon bake, hosted every...
Clockwise from top left:
This passenger train makes daily runs on the scenic railway between Skagway and Whitehorse.
Carcross Commons: the Carcross/Tagish First Nations people have invested in tourism with the goal of empowering their culture through a sustainable local economy.
Turning the lens on the photographer as he cooks up a classic dinner at our camp by Tutshi Lake.
We were struck by how each valley seemed like its own microclimate; in late August, some places were still green while others were chilly with colors turning toward fall.
began looking for a place to camp. Roadside camping options were less than ideal, and as it grew dark we were coming to terms with what looked to be an uncomfortable night.

When we saw the handmade highway sign for Irene’s Restaurant and Bar, we were skeptical that a business could even exist in a place this remote. But Irene’s is an oasis in the Yukon, a one-woman show with local beer served in frosty glasses and seriously tasty home-cooked lasagna. When I shyly asked about camping options, Bella, our host, happily waved us to the grove of trees behind her restaurant. We slept soundly despite the frequent howling of nearby wolves with accompanying vocals from neighborhood dogs.

We reached Whitehorse the following day and enjoyed a night out on the town in what felt like a surprisingly cosmopolitan little city (Whitehorse’s 25,000 residents represent 70 percent of the population of the Yukon Territory). We ambled down the clean streets in our bike shorts and found a hip bar that served us cocktails and wood-fired pizza.

We got a late start out of Whitehorse, and we were still 15 miles from our campground when the sun started making long shadows through the black spruce. We tried to be extra cautious of vehicles as the darkness closed in, and when a car pulled over we expected a reprimand for riding in low light. Instead we received a warning about a bear family ahead of us. A mama brown bear on one side of the road, her two playful cubs on the other.

We fell silent, trying to figure out how we could possibly crest a hill between a protective mama and her cubs. Before we could come up with a plan, another car with two lanky bearded Canadian guys pulled over and offered to shuttle us past the mama bear. We thanked them profusely, and one of them told us his own story of getting a shuttle past an aggressive bear when he was cycling in Alaska. He was happy to do a good turn.

The next morning, we awoke to sunshine and pedaled into the town of Carcross for breakfast. Carcross (pop. 300) is home to the Tagish First Nations people. It’s an incredibly beautiful community with smooth white roads along the banks of a deep blue lake, sweeping mountains, and a newly constructed cultural center showcasing outstanding indigenous art.

Although these lands have been the home of the Tagish and Tlingit indigenous people for thousands of years, Carcross was only permanently established during the Klondike Gold Rush. Since then, the Yukon’s economy has been primarily dependent on resource extraction, and Carcross was no exception.

Twenty years ago, the Tagish people started working toward self-governance. At the beginning of the process, the community identified a primary concern: Tagish youth were losing their connection to the land and leaving the village in droves. When Carcross fully transitioned to self-government in 2006, they had an ambitious plan to establish their community as a tourism destination, but they wanted to do it in a way that would revitalize local connections to the land.

In the last 15 years, Carcross has built a world-class collection of mountain bike trails, shredded annually by an estimated 2,500 riders. At the heart of this effort is the Singletrack to Success program, which employs local First Nations youth to build and repair the trails. Carcross made a decision to shift their economy to tourism without forgetting to incorporate their values into their vision. By many accounts, when they made that decision, it felt risky. It’s a lot easier for rural communities to accept jobs as they come, through boom-and-bust extractive economies, than to make a long-term plan for a sustainable future.

We vowed to return with our mountain bikes to ride these epic trails, but on this journey we didn’t do much more in Carcross than drink a cup of coffee, enjoy the views, and chat with some stoked mountain bikers. I later found out that a Whitehorse-based bike shop has a mini mountain bike rental in Carcross — this might be my one regret from this ride.

On our final day, we woke before the frost had melted from our tent and set out early so as to catch our ferry from Skagway. We stopped at the top of the
mountain pass and leaned our bikes against the Welcome to Alaska sign. As we dug through our seatbags for dried fruit, two huge buses trundled up the mountain and ground to a halt next to us. We watched in bemusement as the quiet landscape turned rowdy with tourists fresh off one of the massive cruise ships docked in Skagway. Some of the cruise ship’s passengers expressed joyous wonderment, others seemed bored. Everyone took pictures. As the tourists lined up to pose for photos by the Alaska sign, one of their guides requested that we find somewhere else to lean our bikes. Finishing our last mouthful of crackers suddenly felt like a small act of protest.

Our time in Skagway was brief, just long enough for an ice cream cone and some people-watching before we boarded our ferry, which looked like a toy docked next to the massive cruise ship. I’m told that our ferry ride back to Haines was nice, but I missed it. I was sleeping on the sundeck.

I found what I had been looking for on this ride: a deeper connection to the land separate from the political battles over its future. But I also received the welcome I didn’t know I was looking for. People are an extension of the places they live, and small-town politics has a way of obscuring this bigger truth. Throughout this ride, there was something special about how kind locals were to us. It felt like people appreciated not only the fact that we were visiting, but the way we were doing it. In turn, we were impressed by the spirit of these communities and for the way that some rural communities are reclaiming their future by resisting cycles of boom and bust and developing businesses and an economy in a way that benefits both people and the land.

Back in Haines, our first stop was for a celebratory drink at the Port Chilkoot Distillery, but we also dropped by Sockeye Cycle, where I had purchased my Surly a few years ago. The business had just changed hands, and the new owners were wrapping up their first tourist season, exhausted and happy after showing so many people this wild land. We shared a report of our ride and chatted about the bike tourism we’d seen in Carcross, and how tourism can bring stability to rural towns.

That was back in the fall of 2019,
and as I wrote this article in the spring of 2020, it was hard not to think about how COVID-19, and the dramatic decrease in visitors, will make it hard for many small tourism businesses to hang on. Without locally owned businesses, the economies of rural communities in Alaska and the Yukon are defined by what big multinational companies bring to the table: mining, resource extraction, short-term profit, and long-term social and environmental consequences.

Tourism has been mostly a good thing for rural towns in the north, and everywhere we went on the Golden Circle we found businesses committed to doing tourism the right way. As we look forward to our next adventures, we should remember that COVID-19 has hit rural economies especially hard. Hopefully we can soon re-enter rural communities like those we explored on the Golden Circle, but for now we can think ahead about how to show these rural places the generosity of spirit that they are so quick to show us.

The outdoor community has hit a moment of reckoning with COVID-19. For many of us, it’s meant exploring closer to home and tabling our larger travel plans. But it should also make us more aware of our impact on places wherever we go. As bike travelers, we’re more than self-powered specks on the landscape. We’re part of the picture.

Elsa Sebastian is a commercial salmon fisherman and conservationist from Southeast Alaska.
As a longtime professional photographer, I’m often asked what is my favorite environment to shoot. Majestic mountains, giant forests, unspoiled coastlines? To the surprise of many, my response is: the Great Plains. I’ve always been attracted to the vast skies, the sudden and dramatic storms, and the abundant wildlife and birds. But most of all, I love the sense of buoyancy I feel while exploring the immense grasslands.

It came as no surprise when hatching my latest bicycling adventure that I chose to return to one of my favorite states, Nebraska. This wouldn’t be my first rodeo in the Cornhusker State — I had previously documented, in this fine publication, perhaps the only bike/barbershop in existence while sampling the singletrack trails around Chadron 20 years ago (“The Nebraska Outback,” Sept./Oct. 2000). A couple of years later, I embarked on a mountain bike tour of the remote badlands of the Nebraska panhandle pulling a BOB trailer. I saved my new road riding escapade for one of the more unique places to roam on the Great Plains, a region of grass-
stabilized sand dunes in north-central Nebraska that was designated a National Natural Landmark in 1984.

While planning this bike tour during the winter months, I realized that I would have to retire my antiquated Bruce Gordon touring bike that I had purchased in 1988 for a lengthy tour of the Northern Tier Route. I needed a modern touring steed, one that I could retrofit with my sturdy and lightweight Bruce Gordon racks and custom Bob Beckman hand-stitched panniers. Lucky for me, I have a good friend in my hometown of Whitefish, Montana, who builds custom bikes. Chris Boedeker, of the one-man Boedie Cycles, was eager to build the exact bike I needed for both cruising the plethora of local gravel roads and handling the loads of pannier-laden touring. I told Chris of my Nebraska trip in June, and when it came time for a paint, I selected the school colors from one of my favorite college football teams growing up, the University of Nebraska. My new bike suddenly had its own moniker, Cornhusker Red.

As the tumultuous spring of 2020 transpired, I was concerned that my scheduled bike tour might have to be canceled like so many other events due to the spread of COVID-19. By the time June rolled around, however, I was more confident due to the extremely low occurrence in both Montana and the region of Nebraska that I would visit. I felt that I could safely pull off a spartan trip. Riding a solo self-supported bicycle trip in a really remote region sounded like the perfect recipe for both adventure and community safety. Social distancing in the Nebraska Sandhills can be measured by the mile.

I began my trip with an exploration in the small town of Valentine. This town owes its charm to a multitude of heart-emblazoned red street signs. Taking advantage of its name, each year around 5,000 romantics from all over the country send their Valentine’s Day letters to the Valentine post office in order to have them stamped with that year’s Valentine postmark. There’s also...
affection for the nearby Niobrara, a designated National Scenic River. The 76-mile scenic section is extremely popular with canoeists and floaters. Gaining traction are the number of cyclists coming to ride the Cowboy Trail, a rail trail that follows the old Chicago and Northwestern rail line and whose western terminus lies in the city park right along Valentine’s Main Street.

The historic rail line spans 321 miles from Norfolk in the east to Chadron in the west. Currently, there are 195 continuous miles with a crushed limestone or granite surface suitable for riding from Norfolk to Valentine while loosely adjoining highways 275 and 20. Farther west of Valentine, there are several shorter sections that have been converted, but you can’t ride all the way to Chadron yet. When completed, the Cowboy Trail will be the country’s longest rail trail.

Instead of just touring on the Cowboy Trail, I was more interested in doing a loop where I could check out the countryside north of one of my favorite prairie rivers, the Niobrara. I headed out of town on Highway 12 in the early morning, paralleling the gently flowing river. I was soon reintroduced to the masochistic joy of lugging my fully loaded bike up the steep wooded incline out of Minnechaduza Canyon and chugging onto the outback of America, the rolling expanse of my beloved Great Plains.

From top: Long Pine Creek gorge in Long Pine.
Riding the Niobrara River Trestle on the Cowboy Trail in Valentine.
The author’s gravel bike, Cornhusker Red, at the trailhead of the Cowboy Trail.
I proceeded east on Highway 12, which is known as the Outlaw Trail Scenic Byway. This lonely road stretches for 231 miles east all the way to the Iowa border in Sioux City. I was impressed by the friendly waves from the few passing cars and trucks, whose cabs mostly contained the silhouetted outlines of cowboy hats. Nebraska is nicknamed the Cornhusker State, but in the Sandhills there are far more cattle ranches and open grassland than cornfields. I'm not sure this highway had seen many cyclists before as I was even getting stare-downs from inquisitive cows taking a break from their constant foraging.

I could see where the Outlaw Trail got its moniker as the steep bluffs and deep, forested canyons of the Niobrara River valley would have been choice hiding places in the late 1800s for notorious horse thieves like Doc Middleton and his “Pony Boys.” Even famous bank robbers such as Jesse James were rumored to have holed up in this region.

One hidden gem, just a short detour south of Highway 12, contains the highest waterfall in Nebraska. Smith Falls is Nebraska's newest state park. A short footbridge and nature trail lead to a viewing platform where you can watch the water gently descend over a 63-foot cliff. The park is also a popular stop for folks canoeing the Niobrara River. Tent camping, showers, and a picnic area are available at the site. Although it was a tempting camp spot, I had more miles to cover as I intended to reach Cub Creek Recreation Area near the small town of Springview, a ride of about 50 miles.

After pedaling most of the morning into a stiff headwind with increasing temperatures, I was glad to see the small lake at Cub Creek. The rural park contained several sheltered picnic sites that were large enough to pitch a tent under, first to escape the heat and second for a barrier from incoming thunderstorms that were building on the western horizon. I set up my camp while noting many species of songbirds, dragonflies, and, unfortunately, ticks. There were no other humans at the lake with only the occasional semitruck passing by on the nearby highway. I was
settled in my tent reading a paperback book and escaping the annoyance of the ticks when the first strikes of lightning began to flash and the roll of thunder echoed across the landscape. I was really glad to have the awning over my tent as the rain began to descend.

After napping in my tent, I prepared to boil water for the freeze-dried dinners I had packed in my panniers. The only water at the site came from an antique hand pump that, much to my dismay, produced a bunch of black “floaties.” Things did not improve when I discovered that my unopened cans of fuel had largely evaporated in the year since I’d purchased them for a backpacking trip in the Grand Canyon. I was only able to muster one boil out of two supposedly full cans of fuel! A valuable lesson to learn, for sure, but not much solace when the nearest store could be several hundred miles away.

I devoured my 800-calorie bag of mac and cheese wondering how to cope with a calorie deficit for tomorrow’s impending ride.

I awoke at dawn on Day Two to one of the most amazing sunrises I’d seen in quite some time. I set a record time exiting my tent and scrambled shoeless through the wet grass to a small hill. There I watched the sun’s rays light up the clouds to a fiery red while the fog lifted from the lake. My fears about lack of food were a distant thought as I was truly inspired by what Mother Nature allowed me to witness. The photographer in me was very happy! Now the cyclist in me prepared for the day. I found several energy bars and some dried fruit in my panniers and loaded the bike up as I waited out a passing thunderstorm before hitting the road at 7:00 AM. Heading east on Highway 12, I was grateful for the calm conditions and solitude as I soaked up the beauty of my surroundings greened up by the spring rains.

I had studied the maps the night before and decided to make a dash for the next sizable town with a grocery store, Ainsworth, as finding my next meal was important in such a remote setting. I turned off the pavement onto the smooth gravel of Meadville Road. There was zero traffic as I began descending into the Niobrara River valley, where the open plains were replaced by hilly ravines chock-full of ponderosa pine and deciduous trees. I reached the ghost town of Meadville, where a historic general store and post office were located. I stopped to admire the structures and remove the rain covers from my panniers. I could not quite ascertain whether the general store was still operational, though I did hear later that they do still open occasionally as the nearby river crossing is a popular take-out for canoers.

I crossed the Niobrara at a wide and handsome spot with rolling green hills and rigid bluffs contrasting with the brown sandbars littered across the expanse. A steep climb out of the river valley reduced me to my lowest gear as I chugged up the broken pavement and back up into the open Sandhills again. The road was called Old Highway 7, so I had assumed it would be paved, but instead it was hilly gravel with numerous soft sandy sections, which made the ride south toward the town of Ainsworth a bit of a slog. I had ridden no more than 30 miles when reaching the outskirts of town, and I was definitely close to
bonking with my lack of food intake. My first stop was the local grocery store where I promptly inhaled a couple of Pop-Tarts outside the front door to revive my energy levels.

It was around noon when I settled into the Ainsworth City Park under a large cottonwood tree. One noticeable downside to bicycle touring during a pandemic is the closure of numerous facilities, including public bathrooms and local restaurants. Like many small towns across the region, it was sad to see so many of the shops on Main Street boarded up or going out of business. I was left with the impression that Middle America is withering on the vine. I guess in the future we’ll succumb to long drives to the next Walmart.

I spent the evening visiting with locals, reading a novel, *The Big Sky* by noted Montana author A. B. Guthrie, and watching the local youth baseball team practice under threatening skies. As the city siren blared, a pair of elderly ladies drove by my campsite and let me know that if a tornado landed, I could quickly run over to their basement for shelter. It was a touching moment from strangers in these turbulent times.

Starting Day Three with a revamped itinerary due to my fuel canister blunder, I planned to tour on the Cowboy Trail, ensuring there would be a small town every hour so in which to acquire necessary food. I would ride from Ainsworth east to Bassett and back, enabling me to leave my burdensome panniers behind for the day. I embarked on the eight-foot-wide corridor of the old Chicago and Northwestern Railway that was originally built in the 1870s to haul gold out of the Black Hills. The line was abandoned in 1992 before being converted to the rail trail in 2009. Following old mile markers still in place from the railroad’s heyday, I soon reached the impressive trestle spanning Long Pine Creek Canyon at 595 feet long and 145 feet above the creek. It’s just one of the 221 bridges along the length of the trail that help break up the monotony of long straightaways in open country.

After a detour on the east side of the small town of Long Pine, it took about an hour to arrive in the town
Smith Falls State Park in Cherry County.
of Bassett. I reached the rustic Main Street just as another thunderstorm rolled in. I knew from previous visits that one of my favorite breakfast haunts was at the Bassett Lodge and Range Café. The large cattle drive photo over the counter gives a real historic flavor to the diner where fluffy pancakes refueled me for the ride back to Ainsworth. I chatted with friendly locals while waiting for the rain to subside. The historic lodge has been around since 1951. The lobby is like a time capsule capsule of the era capturing a real retro feel and taking you back a simpler time when cattle buyers from across the country were drawn to the town's sale barn.

On the last morning of my Sandhills journey, I set out for the nearly 50 miles back to Valentine to complete my loop. I was out on the trail for the 6:00 AM sunrise wanting to beat the forecasted 98°F coupled with 30 MPH winds. The hot day gave me flashbacks to exactly one year earlier when I suffered, and could have perished, from a bout of heat stroke while mountain biking with my friends on the Maah Daah Hey Trail in North Dakota (“Maturing of the Maah Daah Hey,” Dec./Jan. 2019). I had also heard from a group of Iowa riders a day ahead of me that the stretch of trail just west of Ainsworth was littered with Texas sandbur seeds that are notorious for causing flat tires. The Iowa group was riding with standard 700c x 38mm tubed tires and had numerous flats. Fortunately, I had experience riding in the Great Plains and had tubeless 700c x 42mm tires and had no flats. One thing that was not stellar on this leg of the trail was the excessive amount of pinkish crushed granite that had been laid down on the surface. The riding was loose compared to the white limestone surface farther east on the trail. In addition, there were hoof tracks from horseback riders making for a bumpy riding experience. It was no wonder that I kept seeing “No Cattle” signs on signposts. I can safely say from many years of riding in the Dakotas and Nebraska that hooves on trails are never a plus for bicyclists. I found myself wandering over to the adjacent six-foot smooth shoulder on the lightly trafficked Highway 20 for stretches before saddling back on the Cowboy.

Here in the heart of the Sandhills, between Ainsworth and Valentine, the landscape is more pronounced, accented by old-fashioned windmills that draw water from the vast Ogallala Aquifer. Numerous shallow lakes and wetlands dot the area as fresh ancient water seeps up from the aquifer, making the area critical for migrating birds.

After several hours, the winds indeed began to pick up, but luckily in my favor, as I quickly approached the grandest sight on the Cowboy Trail, the quarter-mile-long, 148-foot-high trestle spanning the Niobrara River just west of Valentine. It was a fitting way to end another enjoyable two-wheeled journey in the Great Plains. What unique cycling adventures will Nebraska serve up next time? Cornhusker Red awaits.

Chuck Haney is an avid cyclist and photographer who lives in Whitefish, Montana. You can learn more about him at chuckhaney.com.
Road Test

**BULLS LACUBA EVO LITE**

**DIAMOND**

*Price*: $4,799 (factory spec)

*Sizes available*: 48cm, 53cm

*Size tested*: 48cm

*Weight*: 49.2 lbs. (as tested with pedals)

**TEST BIKE MEASUREMENTS**

- **Stack**: 639mm
- **Reach**: 386mm
- **Head tube length**: 140mm
- **Head tube angle**: 70.5°
- **Seat tube length**: 480mm
- **Seat tube angle**: 73.5°
- **Top tube**: 585mm (effective)
- **Chainstays**: 465mm
- **Bottom bracket drop**: 70mm
- **Wheelbase**: 1105mm
- **Standover height**: 810mm

**SPECIFICATIONS**

- **Frame**: 7005 aluminum, internal cable routing, two bottle cage mounts, rack and fender mounts
- **Motor**: Brose Drive S Mag
- **Battery**: Supercore 750Wh
- **Fork**: SR Suntour NCX-E LO Air, 63mm
- **Handlebar**: BULLS aluminum flat bar
- **Grips**: Ergon GP1
- **Stem**: BULLS aluminum, 90mm
- **Derailer**: Shimano Nexus 5 E, internal gear hub
- **Shifter**: Shimano Nexus 5
- **Brakes**: Shimano BR-MT400, hydraulic disc
- **Rotors**: 180mm front, 160mm rear
- **Crankset**: FSA CK-746/IS, 39T Gates Carbon Drive CDX CenterTrack front sprocket

BULLS Bikes may not be a brand that has landed on your radar, but if a new eBike is in your future, it’s a brand to pay attention to. Launched in the mid-1990s out of Germany, BULLS made a name for itself building mountain bikes and jumped into the eBike game by 2010. Their decade of experience in this market has helped them create an impressive selection of eBikes for road and trekking, as well as hardtail and full-suspension mountain eBikes. On tap for this review is the BULLS Lacuba Evo Lite from the trekking category.

Rated as a Class 1 eBike, the Lacuba Evo Lite offers pedal assist up to 20 MPH and does not have a throttle. The Class 1 rating gives you quite a bit of freedom in regards to where you can ride it. Generally, these bikes are allowed on most bike paths and trails (PeopleForBikes has an excellent eBike resource page that tells you all about the different classes of eBikes and where you can ride them: peopleforbikes.org/e-bikes).

Acknowledging the $4,800 price tag out of the gate, you better believe this is a high-end trekking bike with high-end components. Some highlights include a Gates Carbon Belt Drive, Brose S Mag motor, high-capacity Supercore battery, eBike-specific Shimano Nexus 5 internal gear hub, tubeless-ready rims, Schwalbe Marathon tires, and a front suspension fork.
One oddity to point out, which you may have already noticed in the bike specs above, is that there are only two frame size options. The Lacuba Evo Lite is actually available in three different frame styles, each of which offers only a small handful of sizes. The bike tested here is the more traditional Diamond frame, which comes in 48cm and 53cm. The Step-Thru model has a steeper sloping top tube and comes in 45cm, 50cm, and 53cm. There is also a Wave model that has no top tube and is offered in 45cm and 53cm. Despite the limited size options, riders between 5’0” and 6’2” should have no problem fitting on one of these models. No matter which frame model you choose, you’ll be getting the same great selection of components.

The Lacuba has a Brose S Mag motor fitted to its aluminum frame. This offers up to 410 percent pedal assist and 90Nm of torque, and it’s an impressive mid-range motor that is often reserved for performance-level mountain bikes. In other words, it has plenty of torque and available power to handle the weight of light touring gear and to tackle challenging climbs.

Supplying power to the motor is a 37V/20Ah Supercore battery that equates to a massive 750Wh (watt hours) of juice. The battery is claimed to offer up to 150 miles of range under optimal riding conditions. Unfortunately, optimal riding conditions are hard to come by, and this would also take into account riding at the most economical power setting (we’ll get more into the power settings in a bit). Under real-world conditions, it’s completely reasonable to expect 80–90 miles on a full charge.
with the bike loaded with rear panniers and is what I was able to do over rolling hills and into some headwinds.

To charge the battery from empty, expect it to take around 6.5–7 hours. With this in mind, you can decide for yourself whether or not you would be interested in taking this on a long-distance bike tour. Unloaded, the bike weighs a hefty 49.2 pounds, so even a strong rider would have their work cut out for themselves if they were to exhaust the battery in the middle of a ride.

I was surprised to see that the Supercore battery was exposed to the elements on the bottom of the downtube, but after taking a look at the battery specifications, it does appear to have an Ingress Protection rating of IP56. I'll be honest, I didn't immediately know what that indicated, but according to the Ingress Protection chart, it means that the battery is protected from "limited dust ingress and high-pressure water jets from any direction." While that is certainly impressive, I'm happy to see this bike comes with a full set of fenders to keep as much water away from the battery as possible. After all, a replacement battery will run you around $1,100.

Keeping track of how much battery power remains available is made easy through a 3.5in. handlebar-mounted TFT color display. The percent of battery life remaining is always visible on the screen, as is the current speed and assist setting. There's a separate handlebar remote switch that is used to perform various functions such as selecting the assist setting or toggling through the screen to view various ride data such as trip time, distance, odometer, and estimated range on the current battery charge. I found that paying attention to the percent battery life indicator was most useful.

There are four levels of pedal assistance to choose from. As the name would suggest, the Eco setting is the most economical option when it comes to preserving battery life. It doesn't offer a great deal of torque, but it's a great setting to use if you're just cruising casually around town or have a strong tailwind at your back.

The Tour and Sport settings progressively give you more power, and if you really want to zip around, the Turbo setting has some impressive kick. On my first few rides, I wasn't really sure why someone would want to use any setting other than Turbo. Turns out you only get about 30–40 miles of range in the Turbo setting. Upon learning this valuable lesson, I reserved the Turbo assist for only the most challenging terrain.

No matter what setting you choose to spend your time in, one thing is certain: you will have a very quiet ride. I couldn't hear any noise from the motor when it kicked on, and you'll be hard pressed to find a drivetrain that makes less noise than a Gates Carbon Belt Drive. It's a good thing this bike comes with a bell, because you'll need it when you come up on cyclists and pedestrians from behind.

The Gates Carbon Belt Drive is paired to a Shimano Nexus 5-speed internal gear hub. I was a little surprised they didn't opt for the Nexus 8-speed hub to offer a little more gear range, but the Nexus 5 E hub is designed
specifically for eBikes, and still offers a decent gear ratio with an emphasis on the low end of the range. In the end, it works out pretty well, and I never found myself wanting additional gears.

As for ride quality, there are absolutely no complaints from me. Despite the weight of the bike, it handles surprisingly well on congested city streets and rides as smooth as a Cadillac on the open road. The upright position with flat bars offers great control over the bike, and the suspension fork is a great addition if you take this on gravel paths. I also really appreciated the feel of the Ergon grips and Selle Royal saddle.

I never thought this would be something I would draw attention to, but the bike also walks incredibly well. It was really exciting to discover the “walk mode,” which lightly engages the motor when walking the bike around. This makes it a great deal easier to wield the weight of the bike when pushing it around.

Topping this bike off are some nice little touches that could easily go unnoticed. The Hebie kickstand is hugely appreciated when trying to park your bike in town or at camp, and the headlight is smartly mounted to the crown of the front fork so it is always pointing where your handlebars are aimed.

My impression is that most people purchasing this bike will use it predominantly for commuting. However, with a rear rack and the potential to log a lot of miles on a single charge, the Lacuba is well suited for some light touring.

BULLS is still a relatively new brand to the U.S. market so their dealer reach isn’t as extensive as more established brands. Since $4,800 is no doubt a lot to spend on a bike you may not be familiar with, be sure to check out the dealer locator on the BULLS website to see if they are stocked in a bike shop near you.

Josh Tack has been contributing to Adventure Cyclist magazine since 2012 and is a former Adventure Cycling employee in the Membership Department. He is a recipient of Adventure Cycling’s lifetime achievement award for consistently purchasing a new bike each year.
GEARED UP

GSI Ultralight Java Drip, $10
For some coffee drinkers, the first hot beverage of the day is a sacred ritual. For others, a hot cup of joe is a requirement to get out of bed. Whichever camp you fall into, GSI’s Ultralight Java Drip will help you brew a tasty cup anytime, anywhere. This diminutive coffeemaker — it weighs less than half an ounce — consists of an ultrafine fabric mesh filter with three plastic legs that attach to any camp cup and most ceramic mugs. Scoop your grounds into the filter (GSI recommends two tablespoons of medium/fine-ground coffee per six ounces of water), then pour boiling water over the grounds in a circular motion. When your mug is full, the filter easily unclips, the grounds shake out, and a quick rinse cleans your filter. When the caffeine is coursing through your veins and your filter is dry, pack it up. The legs fold in and tuck under the edge of the filter, and the folded filter fits into the bottom of a standard fuel canister. You still need a cup, stove, and pot for heating water, but with the Ultralight Java Drip, you can pass on the Starbucks Via and make yourself a real cup of coffee whether you’re on the road or on the trail. —BB

Wald Basket, $23–$27
The humble bike basket has seen a resurgence in popularity in recent years, and for good reason: it’s a simple, versatile way to carry things on your bike. Wald is the name in bike baskets, with many sizes on offer, but the two most relevant for our purposes are the classic 1372 and 1392. The 1372 is the one most likely to fit your dropbar bike. The 1392 is a bit bigger and sized nicely for a mountain or fat bike. I’ve used both extensively, with bungee nets and with handmade basket bags, and I love how they simplify packing. Just throw stuff in the bag or under the net, and off you go! A basket can also serve as overflow space in addition to your panniers and other bags, for those times when you buy too much food on your way to camp (guilty).

The most common way to attach a basket is with either zip ties or small hose clamps on top of a front or rear rack. Don’t have a rack? No problem! The 1372 and 1392 baskets come with Wald’s own handlebar clamps (not recommended for carbon handlebars) and lower struts to attach to either fork eyelets or a quick-release axle. Both racks are available in silver or black. —DM
NEMO Equipment Tango Duo, $500
While hunting for an ultralight sleeping system so that we could have more room in our bags for luxury items (snacks, mainly) my partner and I found the NEMO Tango Duo, a two-person quilt system.

The Tango Duo is rated for 30°F, and I'd peg that as accurate for a you-won't-freeze-to-death rating. This spring, we found that around 42°F was our comfort limit. The silky soft sleeping pad slipcover combines the two inflatable rectangular sleeping pads we already owned (it would work with mummy pads, but not as snugly) and feels like the most luxurious sheet. Each pad has its own chamber in the slipcover, and the top has two separate sleeves for either camp pillows or to stuff your extra clothes into, which is my preference. The quilt has a short pocket to place the combined pads into and snaps to the top sides of the slipcover to minimize drafts. On really cold nights, we use the extra Blanket Fold attachment to simulate the hood of a sleeping bag, but I often wish it fastened to the slipcover in between the pillows to really keep warmth in. When we bring the whole Tango Duo system, it packs down to about the size of a watermelon — usually I can fit it all in my seatbag. On warmer nights, we leave the Blanket Fold attachment at home to save even more space. Overall, this system is so luxurious that the space we save packing feels too good to be true. —AM

Thule Vital 3L Women’s Pack, $100
When I need to carry more water than my bottle cages can hold, I opt for the Thule Vital 3L. With the 1.75L Hydrapak reservoir full, the pack has enough room for a jacket, a few tools in the zippered inside pocket, and snacks or small electronics in the side pockets, which I can reach without taking the pack off. The bag positions the weight low, which puts less stress on my back than other packs. Both the harness and bag have lash points for clipping a light, hanging the pack, or lashing extra gear low on the outside. For touring, I used this to strap on groceries for the quick trip from the store to camp. The reservoir hose has a magnetic sleeve. Pull it away from the shoulder strap to drink, then release and the hose snaps back to your shoulder strap instead of flopping around as you ride. An adjustable chest strap and weight-distributing waist belt kept it securely in place. My only gripe is that the hose doesn’t detach from the reservoir, which made cleaning awkward. —BB
The Tacoma Washington Bicycle Club (twbc.org) was founded in 1888 for men who rode high wheel bicycles, or penny farthings, as the ungainly predecessors to the modern bicycle were known.

Both concepts — a bicycle club for men only and high wheels — are long outdated, but the Tacoma Washington Bicycle Club is still around (and no longer just for men), albeit after being reborn in 1974 thanks to the oil crisis.

Bob Myrick, director of community and government affairs, said the original club’s demise came with the ascendancy of the automobile, somewhere around 1915. That was typical of bicycle clubs that faded away across the country, according to Myrick.

Still, it was a good run for the nearly 30 years the Tacoma club lasted in its first iteration. One of the most interesting aspects of the original club, Myrick said, is that club members typically learned to ride the high wheeler in an auditorium.

“We have pictures where you can see where the floor has a circle worn into it where they would train,” he said.

Why would club members learn to ride inside?

“It rains here.”

Before its demise not long after the turn of the century, the Tacoma Bicycle Club had some impressive achievements. One was the longest,
highest, and only exclusive bicycle bridge in the world, according to Myrick. The bridge, for high wheelers only, spanned a big gulch just outside of town and was 440 feet long, 127 feet high, and 12 feet wide.

“What you would do is you would go south from the downtown, and then you would go across this big old bridge, then you would get on the ‘Tacoma water ditch path,’ Myrick said.

The high wheelers had an arrangement with the city that allowed them to ride on the path next to the ditch, which brought water into the city.

“That’s how they would get south out of town,” Myrick said.

The destination? Mount Tacoma, more commonly known today as Mount Rainier, the 14,411-foot active volcano that caps the Cascade Range, about 50 miles southeast of Tacoma.

Club members would ride the 50 miles to Longmire, a homestead and mineral springs resort established by James Longmire.

When Mount Rainier National Park was established in 1899, Longmire became its headquarters and the launching point for ascents of the peak. After spending the night at the hotel in Longmire, Tacoma Washington Bicycle Club members would ride back the next day.

“They’d do a 100-mile weekend on old primitive bicycles on old primitive roads, like gravel grinders today,” Myrick said.

Around 1925, a decade after the demise of the original club, two women rode a tandem to Longmire, then had a donkey service take them to Paradise, a staging area at just over 5,000 feet for climbing Rainier. Next the women continued on to Camp Muir, a climber’s camp at just over 10,000 feet.

From there, a guide led the women to the summit of Mount Rainier, according to Myrick.

“They came back to Longmire, got on their tandem and rode back to Tacoma,” Myrick said.

Myrick joined the Tacoma Washington Bicycle Club in 1983, nine years after it reemerged during the bicycle boom of 1974, after nearly 60 years of dormancy.

“We used to ride all over the countryside on the county roads,” Myrick said. “I’ve been involved in our trail building for at least 30 years. That goes back to the 1985–1990 time period.”

Myrick is a former employee of Tacoma Water, the public utility that brings water to the city. He said establishing many of the 12 bicycle trails in the network the Tacoma club established took 30 years to bring to fruition, just like building a big water line.

“What happened is the first federal law came out subsidizing bike paths and trails as alternative transportation,” Myrick said. “All of these (bicycle clubs) wanted to leverage that money. I was on a regional committee that met up in Seattle.”

Myrick estimates the Tacoma club leveraged some $60 million of federal money from programs like the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act of 1991 — known by its acronym, ISTEA — to build its network of 12 paved bicycle trails covering about 100 miles.

Myrick said representatives of the state transportation department used to tell him they could build the trails for about $50,000 a mile if not for the government regulations that drove the cost up exponentially to about $1 million a mile.

“I feel so glad because we have these 12 trails,” he said. “Rails to trails is a big deal now. Just in our area we have 12 trails that did not exist 30 years ago. Our club and myself have a big legacy. You have to have a few advocates to keep asking for these kinds of things.”

Most of the trails follow rights of way, according to Myrick, whether for a power line, an old streetcar line, or even that water ditch the original Tacoma Washington Bicycle Club members used to follow south out of town more than 100 years ago.

Myrick said the trails are well used, especially now with the pandemic. The most used of the trails, according to Myrick, is the Foothills Trail to Orting, a town of about 8,500 people with a spectacular view of Mount Rainier, which sits roughly 30 miles distant. The trail is about 20 miles one way, so you get a nice 40-mile ride round trip.

Sadly, the Tacoma Washington Bicycle Club is in the midst of a second demise, according to Myrick, who is 76 years old. For 40 years, from its rebirth in 1974 to 2014, the club would put on a series of event rides, the biggest one called the Daffodil Ride in the Orting Valley, which would draw as many as 2,000 riders.

After 2014, the event rides disappeared because there weren’t enough volunteers to make them happen, Myrick said.

“Event rides in the region have fallen down with small clubs,” he said.

Tacoma Washington Bicycle Club still has about 300 paying members, as well as 4,000 Facebook followers.

“Most of them you don’t see,” he said. “They’re hanging on the edges.”

The Tacoma club’s new strategy to remain relevant is to support five organizations that are doing good things for cycling, including a nonprofit bike shop and a group of cyclists who rebuild bikes for children, called Bikes4Kids.

“Our new game plan is to support all five at the $500 level, $2,500 a year,” Myrick said. “If figure we can do this for at least 10 years. As time goes on, we’ll evaluate if we’ve been able to gain new members by having them support our giving.”

Dan D’Ambrosio is a contributing writer for Adventure Cyclist.
Plenty of cyclists adorn their bikes with stickers, but Jon Williamson's bike stickers tell a story of travel around the world. He's cycled in countries including Burkina Faso, Botswana, Cambodia, China, and Japan. He marks his bike with a sticker for each country on his passport.

It's a diverse cycling career for someone who didn't own a bike until the age of 25, when a young woman asked him to go on a date riding around Lake Tahoe.

"Oh, of course I have a bike,' I said," he recalled. "I promptly went to a bike store after work and bought a bike." The relationship didn't work out, but his love affair with cycling had begun. He got the itch to see Africa after reading travel books including The Masked Rider: Cycling in West Africa, a memoir by the late Neil Peart (better known as the drummer for Rush.)

"I read that book and fell in love with the idea of bicycling in Africa," Williamson said.

For his first trip to Africa, Williamson signed up for a group cycling tour of Botswana in 2010, despite the tour guide's warning that the tour was intended for more experienced travelers. Undaunted, he had a great time. He remembers that local kids would come up and greet him with a friendly sounding phrase in their native language. He responded back with the same phrase, much to their delight. A village elder finally explained to him the phrase meant "white man."

"So I was waving back and saying, ‘White man! White man!’” thinking it meant hello," he said.
life membership

Funds from the Life Membership program are specially reserved to provide long-term support for Adventure Cycling Association. In the past, these funds have helped us purchase our headquarters building. Currently, they’re helping us support our long-term projects and map digitization.

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both experiencing parts of our home state that neither of us had seen before, all on our own power, on our own terms. And that in and of itself made all of the hard moments worth it.

“I’m in a slight food coma right now,” Lindsey said, staring vacantly down the road.

“You’ll have that,” I muttered between mouthfuls of PayDay. The midafternoon sluggishness had slowly been creeping over me too.

Sunlight burned through the canopy in blistering patches. Though it was now officially fall, it didn’t feel like it. We trudged up Potts Mountain on a road that was chunky and punchy and little used. Cobwebs crisscrossed the track and clung to our sweaty skin. We swapped leads off and on to give each other a break from the near-constant onslaught of spiderwebs to the face.

Finally, after 10 hours of mind-numbingly slow pedaling, the New River appeared on the horizon like a mirage. It took every last ounce of energy to set up the tent and cook my packet of Knorr rice. I forgot to brush my teeth entirely. It took every last ounce of energy to set up the tent and cook my packet of Knorr rice. I forgot to brush my teeth entirely.

My knee brushed the overstuffed contour of my framebag as we pedaled away from the Dollar General. Sufficiently stocked with enough snacks to fuel us for the final 130 miles, we picked up the New River Trail outside of town and settled into a steady pace. We had just over 30 miles of rail trail we needed to knock out by lunchtime if we wanted to finish our 97-mile “Big Day” before dark.

Lindsey pulled ahead first and I rode her wheel. We hammered hard for what felt like an eternity. Despite the fact that the trail was flat and hardpacked, the monotonous miles almost felt more challenging than the thousands of feet we had climbed in the days before.

Two hours later, we left the New River for good and climbed up into Mount Rogers National Recreation Area. The route plunged into a vortex of Forest Service roads. Beneath the canopy it was dark and eerily still. We encountered a road closure but decided to take our chances in lieu of rerouting. Two massive bulldozers barricaded the road. We wasted almost an hour bushwhacking through thick tendrils of rhododendron to get around.

We climbed for another three hours without seeing a single person. As we inched higher in elevation, the temperature continued to drop. Fog hung heavy over the road. By now, we had both run completely out of water. Our only hope was the Comers Rock campground.

At long last, we began the descent to Comers Rock. I was hardly off my bike before I collapsed onto the first campsite I saw, delusional from a combination of hunger, thirst, and fatigue. We stumbled over to the water spigot with our bottles. In the fading light, I could barely make out a sign hanging on the spigot: OUT OF ORDER.

I was about to crack. I was too shelled to ride farther in search of water but too thirsty to go without. On the verge of tears, I suddenly heard a voice. A man shouted at us from the only other occupied campsite.

“Hey! Come over here!”

Lindsey was understandably wary about waltzing over to a stranger’s campsite in the dark, but I was desperate and our options were limited. I could barely discern the outlines of three people standing around a campfire. A woman and two men introduced themselves, and at once I was relieved. One of the men was the campground host.

Like a guardian angel, he retrieved a gallon of water from his truck. The woman shoved a $5 bill in my palm to pay for our campsite. Humbled but hungry, we walked back to our site to cook dinner, speechless with gratitude.

Our eighth and final day on the TransVirginia was piercingly cold. We donned every warm piece of clothing we had and set out at first light. Soon, a stiff 15 percent grade rose before us, and our blood was pumping in no time.

I savored every moment of that last day: the weariness in my legs, the brisk wind on my cheeks, the fall foliage rimmed in rose-gold light. When we began the 17-mile descent along the Virginia Creeper Trail, the end felt bittersweet — having finally settled into the rhythm of a bikepacking tour, I wasn’t ready for it to be over. But at the red caboose in Damascus, the official southern terminus of the TransVirginia, I realized that the route itself might have been over, but the next bikepacking adventure was just waiting to begin.

Jess Daddio is a writer, photographer, and videographer based in Harrisonburg, Virginia. When she’s not on her bike, she can usually be found overwatering succulents and maintaining an irregular yoga practice.

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 42

Life Member Jon Williamson

“Want what to do is get on a bike and go across the country,” Williamson said. He awaits the day he can leave the nine-to-five behind and set out on the open road.

He also recommends that anyone debating the Life Membership program should consider it an investment in their cycling future.

“The advantage of Life Membership is knowing you have access to all these resources for the rest of your life, which is very convenient,” he said. “If someone has the income now, they should join and take advantage of it.”

Adventure Cycling staffer Kate Whittle has never been to Africa but will gladly sing the Toto song at karaoke.
are crowded spaces. By incorporating Adventure Cycling’s nearly 50 years of experience, leader notes, and route research — along with you and your 50,000 fellow members’ expertise — we’ve got the best information resource for the bike traveler. Updates will go out daily so the app keeps you informed with the best info from ideation to the final mile. Lindy’s Steakhouse in Seeley Lake? Yeah, I know about that because I live here — and when you ride the Great Divide, you’ll be stoked to see it pop up on the app when you roll into town because everyone is going to tell you that the steak, salad, potatoes, and ice cream are the best one-stop meal you’ll have in weeks.

**Improved Route Conditions**

Adventure Cycling is the only group partnering with the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO) and state departments of transportation to strengthen and improve riding conditions on the USBRS and the Adventure Cycling Route Network. In 2021 we’ll have an adaptable risk assessment tool that synthesizes data and scores riding conditions based primarily on shoulder width, rumble strip placement, and vehicle velocity and volume. We’re using state data and language in a collaborative effort to identify and prioritize high-risk locations for improvement. We’re prototyping with several states in 2021 and look to improve, replicate, and spread adoption across the country in the years to come. This work not only makes for better riding conditions for your next trip but also institutionalizes bicycle travel within our nation’s travel infrastructure. The benefits create their own positive feedback loops, including community building, economic, environmental, health, and well-being, and simply increasing the accessibility of bicycle travel to more people from more places.

Which brings us back to Scott and Ruben, two exemplars of a community that embraces adventure and connection in times of adversity and anxiety. And since you can’t all get on the road and come through the office, I’m looking forward to advancing work that will increase our connection, communication, and community.

Within our three True North initiatives, you’ll see both momentum from the past and a pivot to the future. You have a role in this work: download the app and add to our knowledge base; take a friend out for their first bike overnight; consider a donation, or become a Life Member. Many of you have done all of these things. Thank you! I look forward to the continued inspiration and impact that we will have together.

**Scott Pankratz**

Executive Director

spankratz@adventurecycling.org

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**CONTINUED FROM PAGE 06**

**LETTER FROM THE DIRECTOR**

preference a condition of the booking to avoid disappointment. As the couple in your article did, we scoped out other riders at dinner the first night and sometimes chose to ride with company, especially when one of us was sick and opted to travel with the luggage.

One more comment: don’t look with disdain at organized, guided cycle tours. We took our first one in the Baltic states having failed to find the information we needed. We joined with trepidation. What if the rest of the group was not to our liking? We needn’t have worried — they were all cyclists, of course! We immediately had a connection and stories to swap and ended up creating WhatsApp groups that we still enjoy years later! The inside knowledge of local guides was well worth the extra cost.

**Veronica Allan | Victoria, British Columbia**

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**CONTINUED FROM PAGE 06**

**LETTERS FROM OUR READERS**

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**Veronica Allan | Victoria, British Columbia**

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**ANOTHER SMALL WORLD STORY**

I enjoyed reading Stephen Saunders’s letter, It’s a Small World (July 2020). He reminded me of my favorite small-world story of my own.

Years ago, my husband and I read the book *Hey Mom, Can I Ride My Bike Across America?* by John Seigel Boettner, written in 1990. It’s about a school teacher who leaves his two toddler-age sons and wife at home and leads a group of middle schoolers on a bike ride across America. My husband said at the time, “I want to ride across America when our kids are old enough.” We had ridden the Pacific Coast Route in 1976, but we had not done any more touring due to school, jobs, babies, and other real-life detours.

So fast forward to 2002, they grew and we did just that. As members of Adventure Cycling for many, many years, we bought the maps and planned our trip. We took the train from our home in Hood River, Oregon, to Washington, DC.

On the very first day of our 3,300-mile trek from Derwood, Maryland, to Ennis, Montana, we stopped alongside the Potomac River for lunch. I saw a teenager with a fully loaded bike and went to say hi. I said it was our first day of a long trip, and he said it was also his first day. He told me he was riding from DC all the way to Santa Barbara, California, with a group and his teacher.

I said, “Ha, that’s just like the book we read years ago.”

He pointed across the field toward a group of riders and replied, “He wrote the book!”

So we visited with them and discovered that John was indeed leading another group of kids, this time including his wife and their own two sons, 13 and 14 years old. We shared that his book had been the inspiration for our bike trip with our 13- and 17-year-old daughters. We invited them to stop and visit us when they passed through Hood River on their way down the coast. They did spend the night at our house and our book is now adorned with nine signatures and a wonderful inscription.

**Julie Byers | Hood River, Oregon**
Companions Wanted

DIAGONAL ACROSS THE U.S. I’m looking to ride diagonally across the U.S. from Bellingham, Washington, to Key West, Florida, starting in June 2021 (flexible on start date), staying in motels/hotels (warmer showers and comfortable beds every night), and eating out (no cooking or camping). Looking to ride 90–120 miles per day depending on motel locations — just looking for some cycling fun. And eBikes are welcome.

m.e.dunn409@gmail.com

UNDERGROUND RAILROAD I’m a 70-year-old retired RN who had hoped to do the Underground Railroad route this year but have postponed it due to the pandemic. I plan to start in Mobile, Alabama, and end in Ontario, Canada. I would like to alternate camping and motels, based on circumstances day to day. My aim is to do 50–75 miles a day, with rest days as needed. I will be riding the new Tern HSD S+ cargo eBike with Burley Nomad trailer.
gisellefontaine@hotmail.com

IRELAND 2021 I’m taking a four-week trip along the rugged western coast and outlying islands of Ireland and Northern Ireland in June and July 2021. I’d like to have another sociable, adventurous cyclist over 35 join me for the most enjoyable bicycle touring in Europe. 40–50 miles per day, B&B overnights. Sporadic daily rain, pleasantly cool temps, and occasional rays of sunshine. Narrow, lightly traveled rural roads lace the countryside, making it easy to pick and choose our routes.
puffins2nest@gmail.com

TRANSAMERICA 2021 I’m looking for companion(s) to join in riding the TransAmerica Trail in spring/early summer of 2021. I am new to bikepacking but am reasonably fit and would be looking to do around 80 miles daily and potentially stopping for multiple days in towns of interest along the way. I would like to do a mixture of camping and motel/hotel sleeping. I’m relatively flexible on timing and route so reach out if this sounds of interest.
mccreagh.lackman@gmail.com

GREAT DIVIDE 2021 I’m planning on riding the GDMBR in 2021 from either Jasper or Banff to Mexico. Start late July/early August 2021 and finish by mid-October. Looking for fellow riders for all or some of the adventure. If we take one day off each week, we would need to average 47 miles per day. I’m not looking to tear it up, but rather survive and enjoy the trip.
m.e.dunn409@gmail.com

SOUTH AMERICA OR CENTRAL ASIA In 2021, I would like to ride for three months in South America (I do not speak Spanish) or Central Asia. I’m seeking a companion with experience and, very importantly, who must be able to tolerate that I’m a slow rider. If that is okay, I’m sure we will find some common ground. I have been touring since 1992. I am 59 and live in Switzerland.
freckles24@gmail.com

HARBOR COUNTRY WEEKEND CYCLING 66-year-old experienced (but not very fast and out of shape) cyclist looking for riding partner(s) in the Three Oaks/New Buffalo, Michigan, area, or in nearby Indiana. Most weekends. Early morning rides, 30 miles early in the season to 60 miles or more in the fall. Centuries. Also interested in a ride around Lake Michigan when I can get the time off.
bengrubser@gmail.com

PACIFIC COAST 2021 I’m a college sophomore taking a gap year for the 2020–21 school year due to online classes, and I’m hoping to ride the Pacific Coast route in its entirety in spring 2021! I spent the summer working in a bike shop and am a pretty experienced cyclist, my longest tour being a cross-country ride of about 3,200 miles from Georgia to California last summer. Most of my touring has been fast-paced, and I’d love this one to be a bit more chill. I’m still hoping to ride at least 60 miles a day but want to take time to explore places as we pass through, maybe stop to hike, etc. Planning on camping, cheap inns, Warmshowers, and staying with friends. I would love to ride with another college student or recent grad taking time off!
c_holan@coloradocollege.edu

MSSACHUSETTS 2021 Lover of comfortable, safe cyclo-tourism and intermodal transportation seeks companions for spring 2021 4- to 5-day half circle of Massachusetts starting in Wachusett and ending in Worcester. Route includes Lake Quabbin area, Pioneer Valley, and Berkshires. We’ll stay at inns and motels. Full trip in April 2021 (or earlier), reconnaissance/training rides of parts of the route this fall. Moderate pace, lots of breaks. Contact if interested or have suggestions! COVID regulations will be observed.
balmaced@fas.harvard.edu

Adventuring Cycling Association assumes, but cannot verify, that the persons above are truthfully representing themselves. Ads are free to Adventure Cycling members. You can see more ads and post them at adventurecycling.org/adventure-cyclist/companions-wanted or send them to Adventure Cyclist, P.O. Box 8308, Missoula, MT 59807.

Benefits of Adventure Cycling Membership

- Your membership supports safer bike travel and new bicycle routes
- 9 issues of Adventure Cyclist magazine
- 25% to 30% off bike maps

Benefit of the month: Free shipping on all purchases from our Cyclosource store shipped in the U.S. Get your holiday shopping done now!

Join or Renew Today
adventurecycling.org/membership
STEPHEN GALAZIN, IN THE CENTER OF THE PORTRAIT, IS THE OWNER AND OPERATOR OF STUDENT HOSTELING PROGRAM (SHP) BICYCLE ADVENTURES, founded in Vermont in 1969 by Ted and Barbara Lefkowitz. Now located in Langhorne Manner, Pennsylvania, SHP Bicycle Adventures offers guided bicycle trips for teens and families and often uses Adventure Cycling Association maps. Stephen was joined on this particular adventure from Cannon Beach, Oregon, across the country to New York City by three 16-year-olds, Joshua Fahey, Julian Churchill, Nicholas Pertz Kelley (pictured left to right), and their leader, Daniel Lipper, a math teacher from New York City. The group reached Adventure Cycling headquarters on July 13, 2019.

It was the trip of a lifetime for the three teens and a joy for Dan and Stephen to witness the young riders become more confident in sharing the group's feats and welcoming their deserved accolades. They noted that Nicholas, also from New York City, was a geography buff who could give a detailed account of their ascent up mountain passes and noted each time zone crossing along the way. He carried a 3/4-sized guitar and was following in his father's tracks, who had also cycled across the country at 16. Josh, from Seattle, Washington, only signed up for the trip four days before it began. “At first I really didn’t want to spend the whole summer away from my friends and family,” he wrote, “but through the first two weeks I have become very close with my fellow riders. Our goal is to get to New York by August 12, which also happens to be my birthday, so hopefully we make it.” Julian, from Elmhurst, Illinois, shared, “The trip taught me a lot about what it was like to travel the roads across this beautiful, vast country of ours. At some points everything seems hectic, and other times peaceful, but never boring. Some days are bad, and some days are better. You really realize how to live day by day, living each one to the fullest. People thought I was crazy for doing it, but they were also impressed. It is definitely an accomplishment I will carry for the rest of my life.”
Adventure Cycling 2021 Tours

Check out the New Tour Webpages!

adventurecycling.org/tours

You asked, we listened. You can find:

- Tour Details all on One Page
- Dates & Availability
- Daily & Weekly Itineraries
- Route Overview Maps
- Additional Details including an Updated Difficulty Rating System

Feel free to call, chat, or email us with questions
adventurecycling.org/tours or call 800.755.2453