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Catching 22

PHOTOGRAPH BY MAXTON CAPLANIDES STORY BY GAGE POORE

→ Twenty-two-year-olds Caroline Lawrence and Zoe Rothberg graduated from Portland, Oregon's Lewis and Clark College in the spring of 2019. Less than a month later, the two embarked on a tour of the TransAmerica Trail without any training and with neither having ridden more than 50 miles.

In November, having finished their TransAm tour, Caroline recounted a couple of their most memorable moments. After leaving Missoula, Montana, early to tackle their largest climb so far, they encountered a winter weather advisory on Chief Joseph Pass. After an uncomfortable climb and a downright miserable descent, they discovered the single "tiny hut" in their evening's campground was occupied by a large family. They were invited to spend the night on the floor of the hut, keeping warm near the stove. "Coincidentally," she wrote, "one of the dads of the family had done a similar trip when he was younger and was excited to see our maps and hear about our adventures."

In Kentucky, prepared to encounter the state's infamous hills and dogs, the two were blindsided by an immense thunderstorm. Passing through miles of farmland, it began to rain. "And then it rained harder, and harder, until we couldn't see the road or anything else around us," Caroline wrote. "We began to hear thunder, and suddenly we felt the air crackle and heard a massive boom as lightning struck the road in the lane directly next to us, less than 10 feet away. We both stopped to look at each other in shock." Just then a van passed them, quickly turned around, and the driver offered them a ride. They refused as a point of pride but assured him they would find shelter, which they did in a small farmhouse where the owner gave them towels, food, and water as they waited out the storm. When they continued to their destination for the day, the same man in the van found them and gave them dehydrated meals and plastic bags. "That night," she wrote, "a mouse stole all of our food and even our utensils."

They rode with many other cyclists during their trip but found themselves to be one of the few pairs of women and probably younger than all they encountered. "We were constantly amazed by the kindness of strangers and camaraderie of other cyclists, especially other women. We felt really lucky to have been able to have such a powerful and exciting experience."

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