My basement office offers a sliced view of a dark gray sky and the rustling tops of ponderosa pines. I, along with the entire Adventure Cycling staff, am working from home and wondering what tomorrow’s coronavirus news will bring. Hopefully it’ll be brighter than today’s sky and our governor’s shelter in place declaration. One week in, and I’ll be brutally honest: I miss you. That feels absurd to write for a magazine column, but it’s true.

My passion and enthusiasm for bicycle travel stem directly from transformative moments with the people I’ve met. Like sharing moose stew in northern British Columbia with grizzly bear hunters, who were so lovely and kind. They saved my bacon, and in that moment I was so grateful to share the inside of a cramped cab-over camper with my new friends Jim, Hal, and Guy as hail pounded on the roof. While my food-barren panniers hung soaked and limp on my bike, I was inside laughing, eating, and (unbeknownst to me at that moment) fundamentally transforming into a better person.

In this moment of isolation and withdrawal, I hold hope that we will also find opportunity to transform into something better.

A bright light for all of us within the bike travel world is the U.S. Bicycle Route System (USBRS). Bicycle travel is an act of connection, and the U.S. Bicycle Routes are the arteries that convey and connect us to all parts of our nation. As we emerge into spring and the full potential of our riding dreams, Adventure Cycling continues to push forward toward the goal of a fully connected USBRS and a bike ride from one side of the country to the other by simply following the green U.S. Bicycle Route signs.

Please help us make this a reality by following and supporting our May USBRS campaign. Your role in our success is critical.

Meanwhile, with fewer cars on the road, bike shops considered an “essential business” (at least here in Montana!), and a surge in
in,” she said. “Every day there’s new interest. We keep growing.”

Garrison expects to go international in the next few years, if not this year. She’s had interest from the U.K. as well as countries in Africa. She wants to set up a youth program to teach minority children about cycling.

“Also I want to concentrate on our Sheroes becoming educators,” Garrison said. “They’re at different levels. Some are novice cyclists, some are more experienced. I would like all of them to be trained ride leaders. I always encourage them to get in positions in the community to become advocates on how cyclists move through the city.”

Celeste Adams is the Shero for the Chicago chapter of Black Girls Do Bike. She lives in Frankfurt, Illinios, a suburb of the city. Cycling is popular in Chicago, Adams said, with lots of clubs to join, including the Major Taylor Cycling Club, named for Marshall “Major” Taylor, the black cyclist who was acknowledged as the fastest rider in the world from 1898 to 1904. During that period, Taylor set seven world records for speed, including a mile from a standing start in one minute and 41 seconds, a record that stood for 28 years.

Adams found that legacy of speed shaped the rides put on by the club when she joined in 2016. It was not unusual for riders to average 22 MPH on Major Taylor club rides, Adams said. “I felt like I didn’t quite belong,” she said. “A girlfriend got me to join. Even though they had some developmental rides, they really weren’t geared toward the developmental riders then. They make more effort now, but it wasn’t their focus then. I was intimidated to ride with them.”

Adams said the parameters for the Major Taylor Club rides were “very clearly posted,” and included a pace that riders would have to maintain, which was often very ambitious from her perspective. She did lots of riding off the back. Then somebody mentioned Black Girls Do Bike, which had a Chicago chapter. The only problem was, the chapter was moribund.

“Nothing was happening,” Adams said. “I would reach out and it would be crickets. No one would respond back.”

Adams quickly figured out that other chapters of Black Girls Do Bike were very active. She traveled to New York City for the Five Boro Bike Tour, the annual 40-mile, car-free ride beginning in lower Manhattan, and saw riders from Black Girls Do Bike chapters in Cleveland, Houston, Los Angeles, and North Carolina.

“So I knew it was a big thing in other places, but I couldn’t figure out what was going on in Chicago,” Adams said.

The Chicago chapter didn’t have a cycling jersey, so Adams decided to reach out to Monica Garrison to ask, what did she need to do to get a Chicago jersey?

“She said, ‘You have to design one,’” Adams said. “So I did that.”

Garrison asked Adams if she would be interested in becoming the Shero for the Chicago chapter. Adams said yes. Step One was to start putting on rides. She had a core group of seven friends who rode. They all led rides for the chapter.

“We had standing rides on our calendar,” Adams said. “We had to wake up the club. We had to wake up everybody. When I took over there were probably 500 or 600 members, but nobody was talking or communicating. When you got on the Facebook page, nothing was happening.”

Adams took over in January 2018. Now the Chicago chapter has 790 people on its Facebook page, and there’s plenty going on, especially rides. Adams took a lesson from her Major Taylor days, and made sure there were rides for novices, whom she wants to get involved in cycling.

“We have nine standing rides with three being true novice rides, five miles and back — if that’s all you can do, that’s what we’ll do,” Adams said. “If we wanted to get people on bikes and excited, we had to have a five-mile ride. That’s where we had to start for some. That’s all they could do. No shame. No guilt. No judgment. We’ll go longer next time.”

The novice rides are the club’s most popular, according to Adams, with as many as 22 people showing up — phenomenal for a club where nothing was going on, she said.

Adams, who turns 58 in May, did her first century last October in Maryland, averaging 15.8 MPH over 103 miles.

“Full disclosure, it was flat,” she said. “But I was very pleased with myself.”

This year, Adams will mark another major achievement when her chapter hosts the national meet-up for Black Girls Do Bike over Memorial Day weekend. One of the rides will include a “peek,” Adams said, of former President Barack Obama’s house, as well as the houses of other prominent African Americans like Louis Armstrong, Nat King Cole, and Harold Washington, the first black mayor of Chicago.

“We were lucky,” Adams said. “I put in a bid. There were other chapters that put in bids. We won the bid. We have taken a big leap. We’re excited and proud and honored.”

Dan D’Ambrosio is a contributing writer for Adventure Cyclist.

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 68

people out riding their bikes, we hold a transformative opportunity. Adventure Cycling will continue to be at the forefront of that movement as the world’s largest bicycle travel nonprofit.

In these times, I have two requests for you: first, support our USBRs campaign. This is the largest, most audacious bike travel advocacy program ever initiated, and we need you with us 100 percent of the way. Second, as our world changes and emerges from this pandemic, I need to hear from you on the opportunities and needs that you have as a member of the bike travel community. We’re here to serve you and to engage millions of people in the joy and transformative power of bicycle travel.

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