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JOYFUL ON PURPOSE

Peeling away the irrelevant with adventure



→ I'll come right out and say it: I'm addicted to the internet and social media. Aside from when I'm sleeping, every hour of the day I can find a reason to plug in,

check out, and scroll down. My life's purpose is not to be attached to my phone or computer, but it's where I most often find myself. Luckily, a good adventure peels away the irrelevant.

In April I returned from an 18-day Grand Canyon trip. Dropping my wired connection for two and a half weeks with family and friends felt so good. I was present with purpose.

Meanwhile, as I navigated rapids with my family hanging onto the straps of our rubber raft, back at the shop in Missoula, the staff and board were working through a project to uncover and align on values. It seemed like a terrible time for me to be away; we had just started this organization-wide re-examining of our purpose and how we wanted to interact, and I was bobbing down a river in the middle of nowhere.

This values work was an opportunity to redefine how we want to work together as we re-emerge from the global pandemic. Our community's opportunity is enormous. We know we've got the secret sauce to connect and change lives: the vulnerability and sweet surprises of bicycle travel. And I knew that we needed a culture and approach (i.e. values) in line with our

aspirations. Values are fundamental to our future success because they guide how we *work*.

Before my trip, I found myself tied to specific words and interpretations of what I thought was important and wasn't being said by others. I was enjoying the process, but frankly, I was not a good listener. It can be hard to listen to others when we think we know all the answers.

When I returned from the Grand Canyon, I immersed myself in the work that had been done and reveled in the dialogue and deep consideration that the team brought to this work while I was away. My engagement finally focused on shared meaning, not on being right. We refined and aligned in an open, compassionate, and connected way. The process was joyful and pretty quick.

Now we've got a set of organizational values that were adopted by staff and the board on May 1. If you're interested in reading more, they're posted on our website at adventurecycling.com/about/organization.

These values guide our behavior: how we approach problems and opportunities, and how we respond to challenges and mistakes. I'm proud of the work, the process, and the outcomes.

I'm particularly grateful to reflect upon the role of adventure in this process, and in resetting how I engage work, relationships, and purpose.

I could already make an awesome



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Adventure Cycling Association inspires, empowers, and connects people to travel by bicycle.

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homes, a population of a few dozen. However, with prime access to some of Colorado's most popular 4x4 roads, there are few quiet moments during peak season. We found a snack shack adjacent to the town's lone convenience store and seized the opportunity to order fresh food. As we sat in the sun enjoying veggie burgers and fries, the air hummed with the drone of ATVs, motorbikes, and trucks.

With no menacing clouds in sight, we headed north for Cumberland Pass. Making excellent time and spying a clearing that led to a creek alongside the road, we stopped to splash around and wash the dirt from our skin. Even with the unplanned stop, we reached the summit well before sunset. Smoke from wildfires in the western part of the state obscured even the closest peaks and cast the receding ridges in a hazy gray. We saw none of this smoke while climbing to Cumberland Pass; the high mountains had walled it all on the pass's other side.

Finding a campsite close to the pass so we could ride back up for sunrise proved far harder than anticipated. In addition to the usual criteria — flat tent surface, privacy, shelter from wind — we had to consider private vs. public land. A frenzy of mining turned the mountain into a tangled mess of claims. (I'd later learn that at the boom's outset, some three dozen mines operated in this gulch alone.) Though we were deep in a national forest, at times the only public land around was the road beneath our wheels.

Moving methodically in our search, I grumbled about this special place being divvied up and debased. All across the mountainsides, scars of sunken mines pockmarked the surface, mustard-yellow tailings spilling from their mouths.

Consulting maps and apps, we finally found a suitable spot that appeared to be in a cleft of public land between two claims. There were even good trees for our hammock. We curled up and swayed lazily as the sun set, the sky aflame as rays of light refracted through the smoky air.

In the cold predawn, we were back atop Cumberland Pass sharing a Thermos of coffee. The surrounding peaks gained definition in the

dwindling darkness as color seeped in along the boundary between mountain and sky. Pastels bathed the rocks and clouds as we stood, alone together, greeting the day from atop the world.

With fingers of light still stretching across the hills, we rolled into Tin Cup, a town invariably described in history books as "rough." Tin Cup's first murder was over a horse trade gone sour. The killer, Frank Emerson, went on to become sheriff — only to be shot to death himself, one of three town marshals killed in Tin Cup's first few years of existence.

One legend goes that the town got its name when a miner scooped gold from a stream in his tin camp cup. (A dubious claim, given the settlement's original name was Virginia City; the change came decades later to allay confusion with the postal service about the many other western towns of the same name.) Today, Tin Cup remains sparsely inhabited. We paused just long enough to read a few signs. Only one climb remained, but we knew it would be no cakewalk. Famed for its ruggedness just like the town, Tin Cup Pass challenges even expert off-roaders.

ATVs buzzed past us on the rocky road to Mirror Lake, where a creek pools between two soaring escarpments. Even obscured by wildfire smoke, the view was breathtaking. We sat beneath trees on the far shore for lunch, where a clever bird sprinkled us with twigs. We took this as the equivalent of tapping someone on the shoulder and saying, "You gonna finish that?"

From there to the top, pedaling was futile. Ludicrous grades and boulders the size of beach balls forced some ATV drivers to turn back. We inched our way uphill, pausing often to catch our breath. Perhaps because we'd steeled ourselves for a long walk, or because we knew this was the last big hurdle, the trek seemed to pass quickly, and soon we were at the top. A family snapped selfies in front of their Jeep, one front wheel posed jauntily on a pile of rocks. Satisfied with the results, they piled back into the vehicle and rumbled out of sight.

The Sawatch Range spread out before us, pockets of snow still shining in the summer sun. Basking in the solitude, it dawned on us that the trip was almost done. It was, quite literally, all downhill

from there. Despite the dire beginnings, we were going to complete the route. We even had candy to spare.

Smoother and less steep, this side of the pass was far more navigable by bike than the one we'd walked up. It helped that this time we were heading downhill. Whooping with glee, we tore down the mountain, occasionally launching off washed-out ruts across the road.

The jubilant descent brought us into St. Elmo, where a modern flurry of activity belied the place's reputation as a ghost town. Cars crept in search of parking along a main street flanked by well-preserved buildings. A line for ice cream spilled into the road. Kids screamed, as kids do. With all its activity, St. Elmo felt more like the ghost of a ghost town.

Tempted by the prospect of beers and a nap, we began climbing the final few miles back to the truck. Signs declaring private property warned would-be trespassers against searching for scraps the mining conglomerates left behind. Though the principle of it offended us, we had no problem leaving the land as we found it. We'd gotten what we came for. **AC**

Jonathan Terbush is a writer, photographer, and activist living in Salida, Colorado. He is the communications director for the Boston Cyclists Union, a nonprofit focused on bike safety and access. A former reporter, he has written for publications including GQ, The Week, Business Insider, Talking Points Memo, and more.

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LETTER FROM THE DIRECTOR

backcountry lasagna, but more importantly, I've now got the tools to revisit, refine, and define my life's purpose. That's what we do here: we offer inspiration and tools to peel away the irrelevant and define what's most important. That's crucial work, so don't delay it in your own life. Go out and make it happen. If you didn't get out for Bike Travel Weekend, make plans for Bike Your Park Day in September, and let me know if that — or some other — adventure was enough to help you revisit your purpose.

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