MISTAKES WERE MADE
Or, why I always check the forecast

With not much else but a bug in my ear telling me to go, I filled my panniers with candy and peanut butter, strapped a yoga mat to my rear rack, and hit the road. I mapped out a route from Boston to Pittsburgh, woke up at dawn, and left a note for my housemates. The next thing I remember is rigging up a fix for my loose rack about 25 miles out of town. Then, sometime later, the heat lines quivering up from the sizzling, newly paved tarmac. It was July 27.

Around Mile 50, my mom called to ask whether I was coming over for my sister's birthday. I hadn't checked the calendar, just like I hadn't checked the weather. “You know it's going to reach 100 degrees today, right?” she asked. “Also, a thunderstorm is about to hit. Didn't you check the forecast?” I never checked the forecast, in a very general sense: weather, future plans, finances. As if summoned, the first drops hit shortly after I snapped shut my flip phone. Those big, juicy drops felt so nice on my now-sunburnt skin. The waves on the street dissipated, replaced by steam. By Mile 75, I had to acknowledge that I wasn't going to make it to the state park I'd planned to camp. I was soaked, hungry, and could barely see from the storm. With no one around to tell a bad idea when they hear it, I decided to ride the 75 miles back home. It grew darker, the wind picked up, and by now there were branches on the previously clean shoulder. I eventually returned to a city in darkness. The power had gone out. Rather than going home to the house I shared with 12 people who would all for sure laugh at my failures, I went straight to a friend's record shop. The power was out there too, but at least they didn't know I was an idiot. When I walked through the doors, my friends looked at my loaded bike and soaked T-shirt and said, “Why don't you ever check the forecast?” and handed me a burrito.

Now I always check the forecast, consult the calendar. The weather can change and I still make mistakes, still miss things. Still learn, still try to move forward. Errors help us grow as people, and hopefully we live long enough to laugh at ourselves. In this issue, people share gaffs, misjudgments, and low points. The profound lack of glamor is a truism in bicycle touring, and for some of us it's a truism in life, but in sharing our stories, we become part of a sequenced cape of communal experience. I hope these stories help you see the humanity in your fellow travelers and in yourselves, and encourage you to share your own stories. Even if, as one writer laments, non-tourers never really understand.

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