

THE DIRECTOR

From guidebooks to guiding hand, Gary MacFadden led Bikecentennial on new adventures

BY MICHAEL MCCOY

I've known Gary MacFadden for more than 40 years, having worked closely with him for much of that time. Yet when I sat down to interview him for the book *America's Bicycle Route*, Gary — always full of surprises — told me some Bikecentennial-related stories I'd never heard until then.

It was late fall of 1974. Gary, a recent University of Montana School of Journalism grad, saw a job notice posted for a guidebook-writing position in Missoula. He applied and received a call from Bikecentennial's executive director, Dan Burden, in December.

"I remember it clearly," Gary said, "because that same day the sewer backed up in my apartment."

Was that reverse flushing prophetic of what lay ahead in Gary's near future?

"The notion was that all these people Dan and Lys Burden knew were going to send info to Missoula to be compiled," Gary said. "The role I signed on for was that of editor of materials, not researcher."

That quickly changed though, which was a common theme at Bikecentennial — Dan would hire someone for one thing and then assign them to do something entirely different.

Gary had no real cycling experience other than what he'd done to earn his cycling merit badge in the Boy Scouts. But as winter eased into spring, it was decided that, because he had been tapped to write the guidebook series for a major cross-country cycling route, Gary should get some road miles under his belt. A short bike adventure in June 1975 set him off on a multimodal road trip that would last the next five months.

"We were still in the shakedown mode of the research," Gary recalled. "John Briggs, Don Lovett, and I drove the Coachmen Industries motorhome to Astoria, Oregon, and parked it near the docks. There we started cycling."

John Briggs was Bikecentennial's original media director (see "When Donna Met John," July 2016), and Don Lovett was an artist hired to prepare the pen-and-ink plant drawings for the guidebooks. John and Don were riding the TransAmerica Bicycle Trail not only for guidebook purposes but



also to take photos for a slide show and printed marketing materials. Gary joined them on just the first few days of their ride and in the process broke in more than just his research skills.

"I didn't own a decent bike at the time, so Dan lent me his expensive Raleigh," Gary said. "It was the right size for me, but it had a brand-spanking new Brooks Pro leather saddle. He wanted me to break it in for him, but the saddle did the breaking. I learned what perch points are the hard way.

"People do this for fun?" I wondered. "They must be crazy."

However, about the time the trio hit McKenzie Pass, Gary finally started getting it. "This really is fun," he said. "I just need to get in the right gear. From there to Prineville — or was it John Day? — it really clicked."

From central Oregon, Gary caught the bus back to Astoria to reclaim the motorhome while the other two pedaled on.

"I then slowly started working my way along the route," Gary said, "gathering information and images for the guidebook text and the illustrated maps that Bruce Burgess was preparing. I caught up with John and Don near Lolo Pass, and they accepted a ride on into Missoula.

"For some reason, the powers that be decided that the best plan from there would be for me to drive from Missoula directly to the eastern terminus of the route in Yorktown, Virginia," he said. He headed out with Don and John aboard, dropping them off in Illinois so they could cycle and photograph the eastern portions of the trail.

WISHING TO BE A "REAL

JOURNALIST," Gary had visions of taking notes on note cards and tape recording thoughts and interviews as he proceeded, which he would then transcribe every night at a campground with power service on the electric typewriter he'd packed.

It didn't happen.

"It was much better just picking

up brochures and other printed materials and taking photos of historic markers and other road signs," Gary said. He would then call on those materials once back in Missoula, where he found another invaluable tool at the city library — the series of state guides created by the WPA Federal Writers' Project during the Great Depression.

What did happen often at the campgrounds was this: "Here's this young, long-haired guy in a pretty fancy motorhome. It usually didn't take five minutes for some old fellow to wander over and start kicking the tires and asking something like, 'How'd you get that?'"

Gary said he came up with some good tall tales about how he got the motor home, but, in fact, Dan Burden had talked Coachmen Industries into lending it to the Bikecentennial effort.

In Pittsburg, Kansas, Gary picked up a companion that would stay with him for many years to come — "Charlie," the blind collie.

"Dan and Lys had talked to people along the route to help with trail development, like these folks in

Pittsburg who owned a bike shop," Gary said. "This puppy wandering around their house suffered from an eye ailment that's fairly common in collies, where the retina doesn't attach."

When the owners contacted the dog breeder about the dog's condition, they were told to come out and get another puppy, and that the first one would be destroyed. "They were broken up about that," Gary said, "so we came up with the story that the dog had escaped from the house and gotten run over."

In fact Charlie set off on a cross-country trip with Gary, who said the puppy was bouncing off the walls of the motor home for two or three days until they saw a vet and acquired some medication that calmed him down. (This soft-hearted animal lover kept raccoons and skunks as pets when he was a kid.)

Gary recalled having just two bad experiences with the motor home, one while going downhill and the other up.

"Descending Vesuvius Hill in Virginia, the brakes were failing, smoking," he said. "It was this big truck careening down the mountainside, like in a movie. I was ready to open the door and jump out. But I got to the bottom okay and counted myself lucky for it."

Later, in Colorado, while ascending the TransAm Trail's apex of Hoosier Pass, something was apparently going wrong with the carburetor. "The rig was just choking along," Gary said. "The engine was accessible from between the driver's seat and passenger seat. So I took the cover off and, thinking it might help, held my finger on the carb's butterfly choke valve. It worked! It just needed more air at that high elevation."

UPON HIS RETURN TO MISSOULA in the fall of 1975, Gary said he felt bizarre, disoriented. "The research trip was the first time being on my own," he said. "Day after day, traveling by myself for weeks on end. I might be in two or three libraries in one day." Moreover, the Bikecentennial office above Eddy's Club was now a maelstrom

During Gary's 18 years as executive director, he and his staff accomplished a great deal, including:

- Taking *BikeReport* from tabloid to magazine format to *Adventure Cyclist* magazine
- Shepherding the organization into the computer age
- Raising funds and purchasing the current headquarters building
- Changing the organization's name from Bikecentennial to Adventure Cycling Association
- Entering the world of mountain biking
- Forging partnerships with several national forests
- Growing the membership from around 15,000 to 35,000
- Establishing many new routes, including the Great Divide Mountain Bike Route
- Launching the organization's first "event tour," Cycle Montana, and its first "light tour," the Northwest Islander

"I see my greatest success as setting things up so we could quickly take advantage of opportunities that came along," Gary said. "And the thing I feel I did right was trying to get people who would stay. For all the assets the organization has, the most important ones walk out the door each day at 5:00 PM."

of activity full of busy bees Gary had never met.

“But I had file folders from traveling across the country, materials thrown into boxes: museum brochures, chamber of commerce fliers, a mass of everything. So I carved a niche up front away from the hustle and bustle and started organizing stuff. Into the spring, people would say they didn’t see me much. I just stayed in the office and cranked out copy.”

The big question, Gary said, was how to take people across the TransAm Trail chapter by chapter. He needed a format so he started looking at other guidebooks, like the ones the Sierra Club was putting out.

“Dan had gotten Bruce Burgess working on ‘cartoon’ maps,” Gary said, “and we started working together. I had met Bruce in Richmond and stayed with him a couple days. He was an architect. I knew how fastidious he was

about detail. This was good; because Bruce was involved, it gave a real structure to the guidebook process.”

And it wasn’t all Gary’s show at the office. Other people were keyboarding. Don Lovett was working on the plant drawings.

“Later, after the ’76 ride, Dan asked for summaries from staffers,” Gary said. “In mine I said the guidebooks were not a successful project because we didn’t get them all done on time. There were people out on the trail without them. It was touch and go. I remember driving down to Darby [Montana] to deliver books to one group.

“A major reason we got backed up is because we were trying so much stuff with production that was cutting edge at the time. The industry was moving to cold type while our guy Frank at Artcraft Printers had been a hot-type operator. We had to have a thing in the office that punched holes

in paper tape. They would run the paper strips through their machine at Artcraft. We spent immense amounts of time creating these, and then Frank Winkler would read through them. There were maybe 23 rolls of punched paper tape for one chapter. Strips were thumbtacked to the walls. You could write on the tape. ‘Where’s Chapter 6?’ someone would ask. ‘Oh, over there on the east wall.’”

The guidebooks came in a series of five, each corresponding to one of the map-booklet sections. Gary recalled that they finished the Coast-Cascades volume first, and then the Appalachians. Because riders were starting on the two coasts, those books would be the first ones needed. And then came, in succession, Bluegrass, Rocky Mountains, and Plains-Ozarks.

“I would get a book done, Artcraft would take it to the blueslines stage, and I would take those to San Francisco

THE PEOPLE WHO MADE IT POSSIBLE



By Gary MacFadden

It is axiomatic that an organization with the longevity of Bikecentennial/Adventure Cycling Association will have numerous staff members helping to start, nurture, and grow the business. But it seems like the same names always keep popping up.

Of course, the names June and Greg Siple, who rode their bicycles on Hemistour from Alaska to Tierra del Fuego, South America, and Dan and Lys Burden, who rode until they were turned back by illness in Mexico, are familiar to most.

In recent issues of *Adventure Cyclist*, you’ve heard from people such as John Briggs (July 2016) — who played an important role in creating visual marketing materials to gain national attention for the fledgling organization — and Dave Prouty (May 2016), who took the reins in early 1977, when the organization faced bankruptcy, and transitioned it from an event to an ongoing membership organization.

But there were so many others, and I won’t have the space (or the surviving memory cells) to name them all. When Bikecentennial all but disbanded in early 1977, something like 35 talented, committed people found themselves without jobs. Remaining with Dave were Carla Melvin and Bill Harlan, who handled the tours program, leadership training courses, and more during the 1977 tours season. Meanwhile, Ernie Franceschi, who had served as a field team for the ’76 event, was selling vehicles, typewriters, and desks just to pay the electric bill, the printers, and other suppliers.

One name you will rarely hear is Marlene Wiles, who as far as I know has never thrown a leg across a top tube. She was on the book-keeping staff during the ’76 event, and Dave lured her back as the memberships director before his own departure in 1980. Over time, Marlene

moved into the chief finance officer position, and I’ll tell anyone that her attention to detail and wealth of ideas made my job much, much easier.

Later, Marlene’s husband, Bill, joined the staff. Bill took on reorganizing the sales and trips departments, and eventually served as chief of staff. Sadly, Bill recently passed away.

There are so many, many other people who could and should be recognized for their contributions. The late John Williams, a national bicycle safety powerhouse, introduced our first education programs. Stuart Crook, along with Tim and Bonnie Leifer, created the initial Tours and the Tour Leadership programs. Dave had Robert Logan reorganize the sales department as the organization was put back on the road in 1978–79. Dan D’Ambrosio arrived to take over the publications department when Dave departed and I became the acting executive director.

Carla Majernik rode the 1976 Bikecentennial ride, then moved on to cartography to work with Greg to design and constantly improve the cycling maps we’re well known for — and she continues to do so today. Two staffers who joined the organization as receptionists — Julie Huck and Teri Maloughney — have served the organization for many years as very capable directors of the memberships and sales departments, respectively.

And not only staff should be recognized: many individuals have contributed their knowledge and talents as board members. Just a few names: Matthew Cohn, who served many terms as board president and remains an enthusiastic supporter (watch for an upcoming profile); Nancy Moe and Van Dye, David Marshall, and Helena McClay, who contributed valuable legal advice; Angel Rodriguez, Ellis Robinson, Charlie Pace, and many more — they all helped the organization survive and thrive.

The bottom line is that, as the Adventure Cycling Association celebrates its 40th anniversary, there are many people who deserve a nod of the helmet and a smile of thanks.

for printing. For some reason, it was determined that the most efficient route was for me to go there, mark up the bluelines, and sign something saying they'd been checked. A guy would pick me up and take me to the printing plant near the airport. Then I'd get back on the plane. I did that twice, same day, Missoula–San Francisco–Missoula. After that, I decided to take more time on subsequent trips to look around the city. Five trips, one for each guidebook. Why it was cheaper to send me to San Francisco than to ship the bluelines, I can't remember."

Even amid the mad rush it took to create them, Gary recalled, "the guidebooks got out without too many mistakes, although there were some classics. I was always happy to see riders on down time sitting around reading them."

After the guidebooks were all printed and the summer of cycling wore on, Gary worked on the fledgling *BikeReport* and "lots of other little publications" the organization was disseminating.

"Then, in late 1976 or early '77," he said, "we started the date book," which was again inspired by the Sierra Club. It turned into something of an expensive fiasco. "We learned too late in the game that bookstores order calendars for the following year in June, July, August at the latest," Gary said. "We got ours out in the fall so bike shops turned out to be a better point of distribution than bookstores."

Then, suddenly, one day Dan Burden called Gary and his supervisor,

Publications Director Charlie Seastone, into his office. "I thought I was going to be named the new editorial director, but instead Dan said to Charlie, more or less, 'You're out!' This was news to both Charlie and me. But Charlie stomped out, thinking I knew about it all along."

It was a low moment, one in which Gary lost any confidence he'd had in Bikecentennial's leadership. And more surprises were in store.

"Everyone, myself included, now assumed that I would be the new publications director," Gary said. Instead, Matthew Cohn, formerly of Shimano, showed up to fill the post. But, fortunately, he and Gary hit it off immediately.

"Matthew and I were sitting in a room by ourselves one day," Gary recalled. "He looks at me and says, 'I don't know @&\$% about publications. So I want you to go to the management team meetings with me. Whenever Dan comes up with an idea, you nod yes a little bit for a good idea, no for a bad idea.'"

Confusion reigned. Different teams were unwittingly working on the same project, getting wires crossed. "Dan would say get together and hash it out," Gary recalled. "But what we needed to be doing was paying more attention to dollars and cents. What were we, a trips organization? A routes organization? To me we were an event organization with no clear plan on moving it from that to a memberships organization.

"I'll never forget that meeting in the trips department, the biggest space we had," he said. "The meeting was called

by the new assistant director, Dave Prouty, who basically told us all that the gig was up. Everybody in the room, with a couple of exceptions, was gone. Just the fact that it was the assistant director and not one of the principals was telling. I knew there were financial problems — but one day you're working here and the next you're not."

As Greg Siple explained in "Return from the End of the World" in the May 2016 *Adventure Cyclist*, he was as surprised as anyone to learn that the organization was disbanding.

After being let go, Greg went to work for an ad agency, and Gary started freelancing. "Dave [who became executive director after Dan's departure early in 1977] would give us contracts to do *BikeReport*, the next trips brochure, and so forth. These were lean months; I was doing any freelance work I could find — layout, book covers for the local company Mountain Press Publishing ..."

"Then, late in 1977, Dave came back from Banff with 'the bible' of direct mail. We never looked back after that first campaign. We had hit our low point and were on our way up."

To read more about this dire period and how a direct-mail campaign helped bring the organization back from the brink of extinction, read "A Second Chance" in the May 2016 *Adventure Cyclist*. **AC**

Michael "Mac" McCoy is the godfather of bikepacking, the architect of the Great Divide Mountain Bike Route, and recently retired from Adventure Cycling after 40 years. He served as Gary MacFadden's assistant director from 1993 to 1995.



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