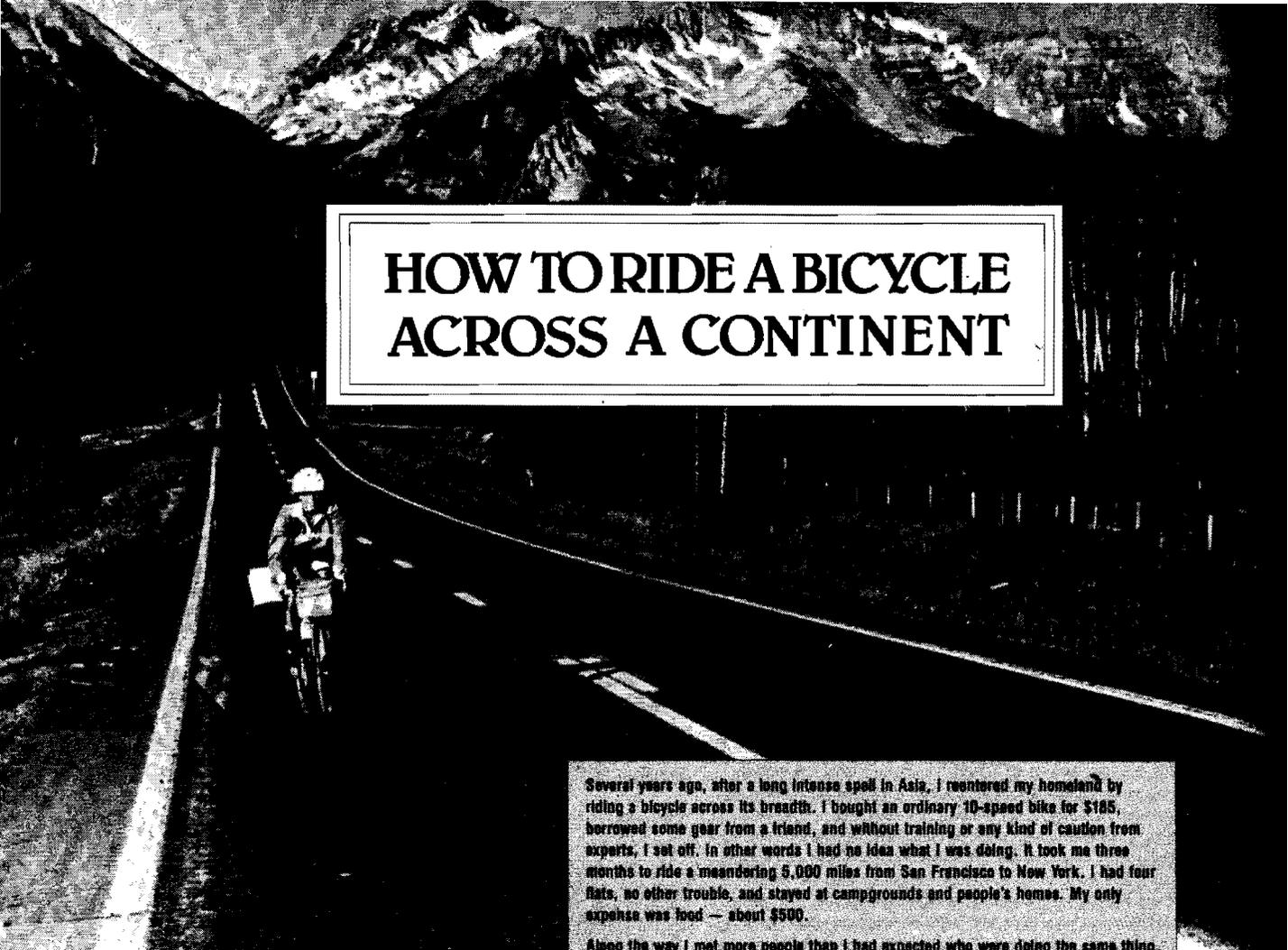


# HOW TO RIDE A BICYCLE ACROSS A CONTINENT



## WHAT DID YOU EAT THE MOST OF?

Candy bars and salad. —George Novak

• From my journal, a typical day's diet: two orders hotcakes, 1 bowl hot cereal, 8 oz. candied orange slices, 3 bags M&M's, 2 cans Spagettios, 1 Quarter Pounder, 1 vanilla shake, 1 dozen Bavarian creme doughnuts, 1 can Raviolis. —Jay Aldous

• A good rule of thumb is: never eat macaroni and cheese more than three days in a row. I never ate anything out of a can. To satisfy my after-dinner sweet tooth, I needed something that would fill me up so I couldn't eat more. Marshmallows is one choice. 15 cents worth would fill me up completely. —Tod Berthiger

• I experimented with a vegetarian/all-natural diet on this trip; it worked excellently. I ate lots of fruit (especially bananas, raisins, pears), and bread. —Guy Dahms

• Peanut butter and jelly sandwiches. —Douglas Merrill

• Peanut butter and bananas. —Wanda Parick

• Mountain Dew, bananas, peanut butter. —Judy Stimson

Several years ago, after a long intense spell in Asia, I reentered my homeland by riding a bicycle across its breadth. I bought an ordinary 10-speed bike for \$185, borrowed some gear from a friend, and without training or any kind of caution from experts, I set off. In other words I had no idea what I was doing. It took me three months to ride a meandering 5,000 miles from San Francisco to New York. I had four flats, no other trouble, and stayed at campgrounds and people's homes. My only expense was food — about \$500.

Along the way I met more people than I had expected who were doing the same thing. Our shifting but hobo-wary culture gives a sincere welcome and veneration to someone riding a bicycle long-distances, unlike the cold shoulder given to other travelers, be they hitchhikers, motorcyclists or car drivers. On my own passage I was hugged by hundreds of strangers, and sometimes, while cruising atop a wiry bike on the open road, I felt embraced by the land itself.

Touched by this nirvana, I sought out others. Through notices in this magazine (CQ #37, p. 108) and some bike publications, I was able to contact about 150 people who had also ridden across the American continent. (I estimate there are about 2,000 a year who complete this human-powered transcontinental journey. Keep in mind that the motor — the rider — puts out barely 1/4 horsepower at peak.) Several of my correspondents have pedaled across it more than once, even thrice. I asked each of them the 40 or so usual questions everyone asked me on the road, hoping to find out if they experienced the same golden adventure I did.

They did. Here's how.

—Kevin Kelly

• Bread, peanut butter, yogurt. —Neal Teplitz

• Peanut butter and honey sandwiches on whole-wheat bread. —Stu Sherman

• Massive quantities of fruit and peanut butter sandwiches. —Harold Pederson

• Pancakes, also peanut butter and jelly sandwiches. —E.A. Miller

• Granola and peanut butter and jelly. —Tanya Richter

• Bread, cookies, pasta, fruit and peanut butter. —Margaret Curtin

• Peanut butter, ice cream, oranges. —Eileen Kadash

• Peanut butter and noodles. —Robert Morris

• Peanut butter. —Michael Rawson

• I drank a gallon of vitamin D milk each day. 1 qt. after riding at least 20 miles. 1 qt. at lunch, 1 qt. at the end of the ride and a qt. at dinner time.

—Walter Schlobohm

• We would go crazy if we found a smorgasbord or a pizza shop. One night, after a hard day's ride, we were so hungry that we actually ate and drank the leftovers from the table beside us. Of course we waited for the people to leave before snatching up their scraps!

—Karen Sandy

## WHERE DID YOU BICYCLE FROM AND TO?

Baths. —Michael Rawson

• Each day we would ride from sunup to sundown. We preferred to end our days in towns where we could slip into a U-Haul van for shelter. —Jay Aldous

• Both times my ultimate objective was to get from where I was to the East Coast. Along the way I circled places I had always wanted to see or ride through (north shore of Lake Superior, Black Hills of South Dakota, etc.), and mapped the route accordingly. —Bill Nelson

## WAS IT BETTER RIDING ALONE OR WITH A COMPANION?

Riding alone or with a companion is a case of apples and oranges. With a companion, my main problems were accommodating different riding styles — speed and when to rest — and alone my main problem was occasional loneliness. It depends whether you get lonely much or not. I will say that when you travel with someone, whether you realize it or not you tend to form a unit — depending on each other for conversation, moral support, sharing happiness — and so interact differently with people you meet along the way. I got the feeling that people were a lot friendlier after riding across alone than I did when I rode with someone, but on reflection I think that was because I reached out a bit more when I was by myself. —Bill Nelson

## DID YOU RIDE ON THE INTERSTATE? WAS IT GOOD OR BAD?

Yes. In Arizona — where it's allowed. In California — where it's not, but we did it to have a town in a good distance. If we didn't, it would have been 50 miles to the next town and through desert-like area. We also rode across the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers on Interstate bridges, which was bad. —Michael Neupauer

• Near Seattle, I rode on what I thought wasn't an interstate. It was and I promptly got a summons. I appeared in court the next day in the true tradition of Alice's Restaurant, fully outfitted in bicycle gear and rear-view mirror on my glasses. The judge asked me to pay court costs (about \$3) after I gave him my song and dance. It was quite a highlight. —David Strom

• Traffic doesn't bother me; in fact, there is a certain freedom on the interstate not encountered on back roads, an open feeling of mood and place — moving with the fast non-stop traffic, in my own lane. Occasionally we saw other bikers on the interstates (where there were no

alternate roads) and it gave me a smug and elevating feeling to wave across six lanes of traffic to them. Drivers seemed to get a kick out of us also. —Margaret Curtin

• The Interstates are the safest places to ride. —Bruce Olsson

• I have nothing good to say about the Interstates, they were miserable. They were long, hot, boring, usually with gravel covered shoulders. On top of all that exhaust fumes could be overwhelming. —DR

## WHEN IT RAINED DID YOU RIDE ANYWAY?

Many times — either ride or stand in it. —Mary Elliot

• With fenders, rain is absolutely no problem. I'll never tour without them again. —Don Harvey

• We both had excellent rainwear. Or at least thought we did. I bought this second-hand Gore-Tex suit complete with the little booties. Stupid things were faulty and didn't keep out any rain. The thing about rain is that unless it's cold (if you're in areas of high elevation) it is not much of a problem . . . so you get wet. You dry out within a couple hours. —Robert Schwarz

• I really enjoy riding in a light drizzle. —Harold Pederson

• I never allowed just rain to stop me. I always seek shelter if there is lightning close enough to be dangerous. —Fr. Jerome Schaad

• Yes-Yes-Yes, we didn't melt. We rode in thunder/lightning storms, too. —Farnsworth

## HOW DID YOU KEEP THE DOGS AWAY?

Shouting, sprays and a Zetal pump — which was unfortunately destroyed around a dog's snout. —Tanya Ritcher

• At first, I used Halt!, but after my first direct hit I couldn't bring myself to use it again. Conditions vary, but if I can't outride it, scare it, or make friends with it, I'll simply get off my bike until it is safe to go on. —Brent Garrett

• Started with ax handles; didn't need them so threw them away. Mostly outrode their interest or dismounted and kept bike between us and dog(s), usually until owner intervened. The latter was pretty reliable and we'd do that again. Once a dog caught us unawares doing a slow pace and charged at warp speed down a hill — it was surprising that his head didn't come off when his chain brought him up short. —Peter VanderVen

• When confronted by a dog intent on running alongside you, snapping at your

ankles, try spraying him with your water bottle, and yelling "NO, NO," etc. There is much too much made of this in bicycling mags, and books, though. Dogs should be viewed more as challenges, not hazards, sort of like 9,000-foot mountain passes. —Robert Schwarz

• After attending a Fourth-of-July rodeo, we became enthralled with the idea of "team roping" and turned it into a bicycle event we called "team dogging." When we'd spot a dog ahead of us that looked like it would give chase, one biker would sprint ahead to attract the dog's attention and act as the bait. The dog would be so intent on his prey he wouldn't notice other bikers descending from the rear until we'd whoop and squirt water bottles at him. There wasn't one dog who didn't yelp and run for cover. It was quite a humorous diversion for us and we often wondered how soon they'd chase a bike again, but didn't backtrack to find out. —Judy Farout

Photos courtesy of Bikelcentennial.



## HOW MANY FLATS DID YOU HAVE?

None: solid wire inner tubes.

—Michael Rawson

• We had 136 flats between the two of us. A large portion of these flats occurred in the desert where temperatures of over 110 degrees were melting our patch glue. Another reason for our high number of flats was that we were both on one-inch tires. Most of our flats were pinches and not punctures. —Jay Aldous

• Two. One was an old patch that blew out. I attribute my low number of flats to "Mr. Tuffy," which is a strip of tough

plastic that goes between the tire and the tube. It is cheaper and lighter than thornproof tubes and is probably just as effective. There were many times when I pulled thorns out of my tires, but they had not penetrated Mr. Tuffy.

—Susan Brown

• NONE! I used thornproof tubes with Schwinn Le Tour tires. —Ann Medairy

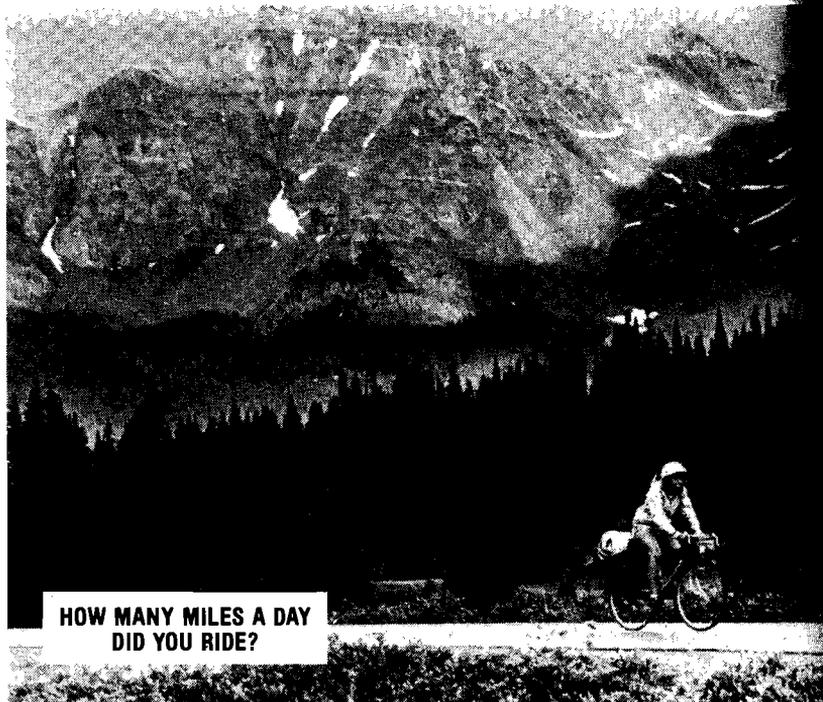
• Use 27 x 1 1/4-inch tires. They are available everywhere. Use Schraeder valves. No gas station can fill a Presta tube, nor have I met a farmer who carries a Presta pump in his pickup. —Dave Boston

• I had 2-3 flats. All were blowouts during the heat of the day on long stretches or sun-scorched asphalt. Overexpansion and a heavy load combination.

—Guy Dahms

• I lost count after 100. I got stuck 15 miles from any town as the sun was setting, on a cold night, with no water, on a lonely road, with two flats and one patch. First I patched the bigger leak, pumped the tires up and rode till the one would go flat. Pump-ride-flat, pump-ride-flat. This went on until the tire began to stay flat. I then started to walk. About two miles down the road I got the idea to wrap the puncture with surgical tape from the first aid kit. This worked in keeping the tube inflated long enough to ride to the next town to buy new tubes and patches. I learned later that duct tape can be used in the same way.

—Paul Pettit



**HOW MANY MILES A DAY DID YOU RIDE?**

Forty to sixty-five miles. I took lots of days off to hide and waste away swimming or just being lazy. I'm not your "Breaking Away" type of person.

—David Strom

• We rode anywhere from 5 to 91 miles a day. We never missed stopping in a town. —Patty Lorick

• Ride fewer miles at first, ride as many as you feel like. Don't listen to what is average. A good rule of thumb, I believe, that is useful for beginners, is that if you are in reasonable shape, and the country you're going to tour through is not killer mountains, 70 miles per day is a nice day's ride that will exercise you but not wear you out for the next day. Eighty to ninety means no swimming at lunch and no long stop to read a book.

—Bill Nelson

**WHAT WAS ONE TOWN WORTH RIDING 10 MILES OUT OF YOUR WAY TO VISIT?**

Silver Plume, Colorado. A not-quite ghost town. —Neal Tepplitz

• Any New England village. Toomsboro, Georgia on Saturday nite. —Phil Norton

• Wall, South Dakota. Partly because it's one of perhaps three things to see in the entire state of South Dakota, and mostly because you cannot go through the West without seeing advertisements for Wall Drug. Seeing them all the time drives you crazy. Wall Drug is Wall, South Dakota, and it's honkey tonk and ripoff city. But it's one of those things that you have to see for yourself. Then you can

ignore the signs for the rest of your life, say "I've been there," and smile smugly.

—Bill Nelson

• Ambia, Indiana (if you can find it!), home of the superlative, if somewhat marginal, "Hi Neighbor Cafe."

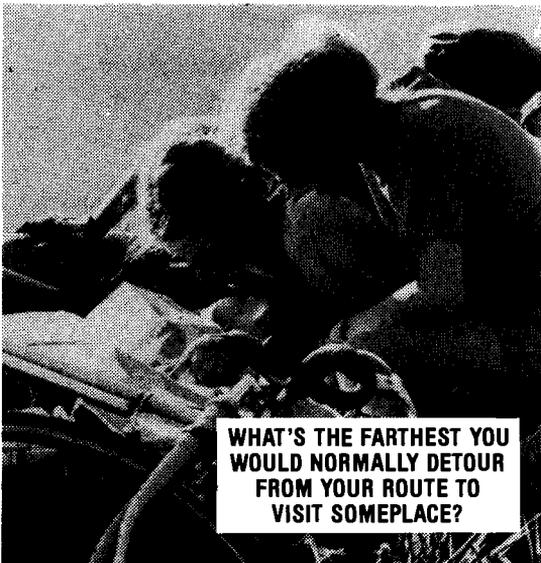
—Margaret Curtin

• Jackson, Mont., has only hot water and even the toilets steam! —Dave Lefkowitz

**WHAT WAS YOUR FIRST CHOICE IN LOOKING FOR A PLACE TO SLEEP? WHERE DID YOU USUALLY WIND UP? WHERE WOULDN'T YOU WANT TO SLEEP AGAIN?**

We often slept in people's houses. That's what we looked for. We slept in jails, a zoo, golf courses and a U-Haul. A 10-foot U-Haul is ideal because they carry heavy moving blankets. —David Blum

• For sleeping, I'm very careful. I've been raided twice in the middle of the night by the town drunks who resented bikers moving in on their territory. With my system, I go sit in front of the store after I've got my groceries and talk to people, answering those same questions that I never tire of. Then I ask them about a camping place. Then I take the best suggestion and ask the police about it. I always make sure somebody knows where I am and I always have permission. I've stayed in churches, fire stations, police stations, even a convent. I was once offered a chance to stay in jail until the police remembered it was Saturday. They have lots of drunks in



**WHAT'S THE FARTHEST YOU WOULD NORMALLY DETOUR FROM YOUR ROUTE TO VISIT SOMEPLACE?**

The entire trip was a detour. Very little was planned. We back-tracked once, 40 miles, to do some day-hiking in the Tetons. —BMA

• I never "detour" from my route; if I wanted to go someplace, that was my route! When I say I zig-zagged across the country, I mean it! —Guy Dahms

"dry" Kentucky towns on Saturday night.  
—Tod Berlinger

Unseen is unhassled. I usually get a good low-profile site. —Bruce Olsson

It went like this: we'd politely ask if we could pitch tent in the backyard of a stranger, or better yet, of someone we'd met along the way, or someone we vaguely knew of (e.g. someone in one's college class whom we didn't actually know). With luck, any of the following would happen: offers of dinner/breakfast, shower/laundry, even a bed for the night (but no farmer's daughters). This worked out about half the time. We spent four nights in motels. Many nights we actually slept in the tent, on which we fortunately had mosquito netting (essential). The following are the worst places to camp: 1 — KOA campground (twice and never again). 2 — Medicine Hat, Alberta Youth Hostel. 3 — right next to a big highway or parking lot. 4 — saloon-hotel in Bassano, Alberta. 5 — cab of a pickup truck. —Peter VanderVen

The most unusual place we stayed was in the flower exhibition booths at the county fairgrounds west of Rickreall, Oregon. Other places we spent the night were hotels, motels, churches, church basements, public and private campgrounds, the 4-H hall in Tribune, Kansas, people's yards and houses, a millionaire's home in Wichita, Kansas, and of course, the "cookie lady's" home in Afton, Virginia. —Randy Rainbolt

This is one place where interstates can come in handy . . . the land taken up by the cloverleaves is often forested, and no one will disturb you if it's a semi-secluded exit. —Bill Nelson

Inside the public toilet in a national park camping area, head under the commode, feet under the urinal. —Michael Martin

I've slept in graveyards, baseball dugouts, behind outdoor movie theaters (great to see a movie before turning in), police station lawns, etc. No regrets on any place I've camped. Woops! Just remembered I got wet from automatic sprinklers while camping in a park once. —Harold Pederson

Once while sleeping in a town park in Wyoming, the water sprinklers came on. What a way to wake up! We learned from that to put a picnic table upside down on top of the nearest sprinkler.

—Marc Lefkowitz

When I took people up on their hospitality I didn't feel it was using them but instead a cheap fee for them to hear stories of America. —Tom Mirole

### HOW MUCH MONEY DID YOU SPEND PER DAY?

I started my journey with \$1,000 in

travelers' checks. I began spending too much money early in my trip and had to cut myself down to approximately \$10 to \$12 a day. Most of this went towards food, of which I ate a great deal more than expected. The remainder was used on camping fees, souvenirs and beer now and then. —Bryan Harrington

\$10 a day, mostly pictures and for a six-pack of beer at night (never on the road). —George Novak

### DID YOU LOSE OR GAIN WEIGHT?

I lost several pounds and so did my wife; however, the weight tightened us up and she dropped three dress sizes.

—Fred Ritcher

I'm short and skinny and always gain on bike trips. In fact, bike trips are the only times I ever gain any weight! —Neal Tepitz

On our tandem ride the front rider lost 10 pounds but the rear rider gained 10 pounds — resulting in no net loss of bicycling weight — just a shift from front to rear! —Judy Farout

### WHAT DID YOU THINK ABOUT WHEN YOU WERE RIDING THE LONG STRETCHES?

On my trips I didn't think too much, which is an achievement in modern society. I believe it was as close as I'll ever get to a blank mind because I wasn't concerned about anything, really, except for surviving that day. I could spend at least an hour deciding my dinner menu, knowing full well that I'd end up with macaroni and cheese. I'd sing Beatles. Sometimes I'd read. I once read a 300 page novel out loud to a friend I was traveling with. I ran over less junk than he did. I would also eat. I could make sandwiches, peel bananas and oranges, and even make a cup of kool-aid all with one hand. —Tod Berlinger

During long stretches I often sang or recited poetry to myself. Kipling's "Ballad of East and West" takes about three miles on the flat, as I recall.

—Don Harvey

I was "thought out" after two weeks.

—David Blum

A lot of the day we would sing songs. The songs varied according to what part of the country we were in — "Oh, What a Beautiful Morning," "This Land Is Your Land," "I'm Looking Over my Dead Dog Rover," "Country Roads," "Climb Every Mountain," and so on. —Karen Sandy

### WHAT WERE YOU GOING TO BRING BUT GLAD YOU DIDN'T?

Biking shoes — no need. —David Marshall

I usually want to bring an extra warm ar-

ticle of clothing, and have been always glad I didn't. Likewise, I usually feel I ought to bring an extra pair of shoes to change into at day's end, because everyone else seems to, but I always elect to go barefoot and am glad for it.

—Bill Nelson

More traveler's checks. —Michael Neupauer

A better tent which would've weighed another 4 lbs. My \$29 special weighed only 3 lbs. and never leaked unless it rained. —Tom Mirole



### WHAT WOULD YOU LEAVE BEHIND NEXT TIME?

Solid wire inner tubes. —Michael Rawson

Trepidation. —David Pressel

Regular-size towel; a hand towel is enough. —David Marshall

My lady's electric shaver. —Eileen Kadesh

If I intended to do a lot of camping I might consider going to a closed-cell pad rather than the air mattress that I had with me on this trip. —Fr. Jerome Schaad

Svea Stove, tent pegs, long pants, extra socks, fuel bottle, cook kit, fenders, spare cables & brake blocks, chess set, harmonica, water bucket (collapsible). —Peter VanderVen

I would have made the rock samples I picked up along the trip smaller.

—Paul Pettit

The next time I do a long trip, I would leave my mother behind! — No, I'm really kidding. She was a great inspiration

the whole time. Believe it or not, she was going on the trip whether I went or not! (Actually I would probably leave my piano music behind.) —Karen Sandy

I sent my cycling shoes home. From now on I'm doing all touring in good, heavy, low-top basketball shoes. I find that cycle touring shoes are good for cycling only. They hurt my feet to walk in them, I could not explore in them and certainly couldn't play basketball in them — I played basketball almost every day on my trip. —Randy Rainbolt



**DID YOU EVER ASK TO CAMP IN SOMEONE'S BACKYARD? DID THEY LET YOU?**

Yes, we had great success here. Often it led to a place in their house. —David Blum

Don't be afraid of people. Ask for directions even if you know how to get where you are going. Almost all are interested in bicycle tourists. A couple of apples and a spot somewhere on a college campus invariably results in conversation and a place to spend the night. Being out in the open to meet people is your big advantage — use it. —Dave Boston

Recommend the Cyclist's Touring Directory by Mosley [a listing of other bikers who offer a bed. You can only get a copy by agreeing to be listed. P. O. Box 8308, Missoula, MT 59807]. But people should try it more often, not be afraid of "imposing" on others. —David Strom

I commonly have success asking people to allow me to set up a tent in their back yard. Somehow I get a feeling based on the looks of the house, the cars, the toys or lack thereof in the yard, and usually get in first time. I've never had to ask at more than three different houses. And the neat thing is, people who are friendly enough to trust you in their back yard will usually offer you a shower, some tea, breakfast, or all three. A good way to meet nice folks. Rules of thumb for asking and staying in people's back yards: do not abuse the concept. Ask only when you can find no other place to stay, when you wish to be in the area in the a.m., such as for a town stop or some amusement you wish to see, if it's getting dark, or if you have a breakdown. I have a feeling that the reason people so often allow one to stay in their back yards is because it is novel and/or because others who have stayed have been polite. Be polite, neat, and courteous. You represent the world of bicyclists to your hosts. People could quickly regret letting you stay in their back yard if it meant also that you needed to get water, use the bathroom, take a shower, use their stove. Try to get water beforehand, try to bathe beforehand. Consider how much you want to impose on these helpful people. If you need to cook dinner, walk to the park down the street; few things put people on edge more than a stranger fooling with a guttering gas stove a few feet from their heavily mortgaged home.

Say thanks in the a.m. (though they'll usually wake you up, for coffee and eggs — that's been my experience).

Don't be discouraged if one or two give you the fish eye and turn you down. —Bill Nelson

Yes — often, yes — always. —Phil Norton

Yes — especially in the South.

Responses seemed to be about 50/50. —Guy Dahms

### **DID YOU EVER RIDE AT NIGHT, SAY WHEN THE MOON WAS FULL?**

Riding at night can cause you to miss good scenery and/or hit bad potholes. —Harold Pederson

Yes, we rode for three nights in Kansas when the moon was full mainly to avoid strong headwinds which started every morning around 9:30 and continued until dusk. And Kansas was such a perfect place for night riding — straight, level roads, very little traffic. We were also avoiding the 95-100 degree temperatures during the day. —Susan Brown

I do not recommend riding at night, but if you must, I recommend having a

beacon (amber) that flashes 60 times/minute. —Robert Morris

Yes. I rode one night in New Mexico. This was one of the finest experiences of my trip. Before me: a beautiful sunset; beyond: a distant mountain range, then the gradual fading of the sun's light and the mountains' outlines; beside me: a long train with its lone light and plaintive whistle a few miles off, yet because of the clarity of the air and terrain it seemed a toy that I could reach out and touch. —Paul Elmendorf

### **SOME BICYCLISTS HAVE STAYED IN COUNTY JAILS AT NIGHT FOR FREE. HAVE YOU?**

Yes, in Stacy, Minnesota. —David Blum

None of us did that, but we did camp out by police stations and fire departments — they allowed us to use their restroom and shower facilities. —Robert Morris

Yes, one night in Corbin, Kentucky. And yes, the door was left open. —JB

I tried at least four times to wrangle a space in local jails. In Marengo, Iowa, the good ole boys told me that all I had to do was get myself arrested and they'd be glad to lock me up for the night. Couldn't leave till after the magistrate saw me the next day, of course, at 11 am. —David Abramson

Yes, it was a VERY BAD EXPERIENCE. They booked me as a "sleeper" and put me in with the prisoners. I vow never to repeat the experience. I obey all laws! —Bruce Othson

In Waverly, New York, I was offered (and accepted) a jail cell with bunk, mattress, pillow and sink. —Don Harvey

### **HOW MANY POUNDS OF TOOLS DID YOU BRING? WHICH ONES DIDN'T YOU USE?**

Probably five pounds. I only used my knife and screw driver. Others used my wrenches and files. —Ann Medairy

I carried about five or six pounds in tools — most of which I never used except for a couple of Allen wrenches and a spoke-tightening tool. —Thomas Bradford

We needed a crank puller-tightener and were able to acquire one in Cadillac, Michigan. Otherwise, used small Mafac kit, pump, patch kit (never mastered repairing sew-ups) and never mastered wheel truing, an important skill. Other major repairs: replaced one axle and one gear cable. —Peter VanderVen

Maybe three pounds of tools. Least-used tools are the hub-cone adjusters, the crank remover tool, and the chain-breaker. —Bill Nelson

I took approximately three to four pounds. Invaluable tools: pocket vise, spoke wrench, cone wrenches, 8-9-10 Y-wrench, adjustable wrench, needle-nose pliers, alloy tire irons, 5-6 mm Allen wrench. —Randy Rainbolt

Twelve lbs. Used them all. —Bob Farout

### WHAT PART OF THE TRIP WAS THE EASIEST?

The things that make touring difficult for me are heavily populated areas and bad weather. One of the most pleasant segments of my trip was the desert. Vast distances of nothing; just me, my partner, and Elsie (my bike). —Jay Aldous

From McCall, Idaho to the bottom of Hell's Canyon. It was approximately 70 miles, all downhill.

The best and easiest part of the trip occurred after passing by the "steep downhill grade" warning signs. I loved to speed down off the mountain passes, often with my head low and using little of the brakes. I always checked my quick releases at the top beforehand.

—Bryan Harrington

The Plains was the easiest, even though we had a headwind the whole way. Flat, straight-line riding, little traffic, almost no chance of getting lost. Mountain riding was the most exhilarating, but it was the Coast highway that was the most stupendous — varying topographies, the ocean, the smell, the view, aahhhh. —David Abramson

I'm not sure which part of the trip was easiest, but I think the plains and the last week are the hardest. The end of a trip is as hard as the beginning. It's a letdown. From the early planning stages, that end town is abstract. It's mostly to have an answer to one of those common questions. It's not really a goal. If it were someplace you really wanted to get to, you could have taken a plane.

—Tod Berlinger

### HOW DID YOU CARRY YOUR WATER?

Normally the two bottles were enough water for me. For the three or four places where it was 90 to 100 miles between known water sources, I also filled a folding water sack. I clipped this to the eyelets on the rear of my saddle, and kept it from moving with nylon straps to the sides of the rear rack. I did carry water purification tablets with me in case of an emergency; but I never had to use them. —Fr. Jerome Schaad

One person in our group had extra H<sub>2</sub>O in an I.V. container. —Ann Medairy

Experience taught us that in hard, continuous pedalling we would consume

about one bike water bottle full of water per hour without urinating. As it turned out, we drank even more than that particularly when crossing the desert areas. We carried on board seven bottles for water. Usually, we kept only three of them full till we got to the desert. Occasionally motorists would stop and ask us if we had enough water. They would offer to fill our bottles and even gave us cold water to drink on the spot. Some even offered us cold beer which we refused, not because we were nondrinkers, but because we were afraid of dehydration.

—Thomas Bradford

Carried two 1-quart plastic syrup bottles (with the built-in handles), which I filled for those waterless campsites and extra-long dry stretches. —Guy Dahms

### WHAT WAS THE MOST COMMON DEAD ANIMAL YOU SAW ALONG THE ROAD?

Do snakes count? —Jerad Byrd

In Wyoming the most common road pizzas were jackrabbits. —Susan Brown

Varied with the region: snakes in Texas, armadillos in the South, small rodents in New England and grasshoppers in the Northern plains. —Jay Aldous

One thing that amazed me was how many broken bungee cords I saw, especially in British Columbia and Washington. Most of them were of the flat rubber type; the round fabric covered variety was much more rare. One day I kept count of the broken cords that I saw; they averaged one every 2½ miles. I couldn't help wonder how many items people lost because of broken bungees. And I wondered whether the people making and selling them were making a fortune because so many replacements were needed or whether they were going out of business because so many customers were disillusioned with them.

—Fr. Jerome Schaad

Depends on the area . . . probably the grand prize winner is the opossum, which is ubiquitous and stupid when it comes to cars. Out west, I was struck by the number of dead antelope; about one every one-half mile in eastern Montana and South Dakota. —Bill Nelson

Single gloves and license plates.

—Bruce Olsson

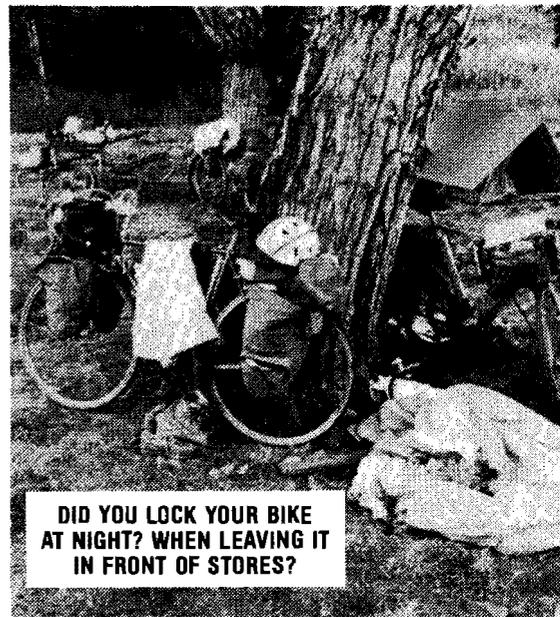
### WHAT TIME OF THE MORNING DID YOU ORDINARILY START OUT?

We began riding anytime after 6:30 am, but we always stopped for breakfast at the first diner and got caught for hours reading the paper. —Margaret Curtin

I generally rose an hour or two after sunrise, prepared breakfast and broke camp. On the average, I would be on the

road by mid-morning, but this fluctuated quite a bit. I made a point not to carry a watch with me, and used an alarm clock only a couple of times in order to get on the road soon after dawn when I was camped in a spot where I shouldn't have been. —Bryan Harrington

I usually awoke as the day started to break. I would usually hit the road as soon as it was light enough to be seen by motorists. Many times I had 10 miles in before the sun rose. —Walter Schlobohm



**DID YOU LOCK YOUR BIKE AT NIGHT? WHEN LEAVING IT IN FRONT OF STORES?**

As part of our equipment we carried six-foot, vinyl-covered cables and a good key lock. Invariably, we locked our bikes together and to a post or tree if we had to be away from them. Also, if we went into a restaurant to eat, we parked near the exit door and sat at a table near that door where we could watch our gear. If we were camping out we pitched our tent near a tree or post and secured them to that. —Thomas Bradford

I seldom bring a lock . . . the Citadels weigh close to two pounds. If I can't bring the bike into the store, or at least into the entrance vestibule, I don't shop there. The only real security is being there to watch your bike — what's the sense of locking a bike that has \$1000 worth of easily removed equipment hanging off of it? Tips to slow a thief down for the two seconds it would take you to run out of the store are put it in highest gear (hard to get moving), lace a bungee cord through the spokes, fasten your helmet straps through the wheel, bring in the front wheel. If I'm off in the woods, I don't lock my bike . . . but

then I'm a light sleeper, and tend to find real secluded places. —Bill Nelson

No, kept it with me, tied to tent and my wrist. —Michael Martin



**WHAT WAS THE FIRST THING THAT NEEDED REPAIR ON YOUR BIKE?**

My bike seat. —Tanya Ritcher

A broken spoke. The only parts I replaced over 12,000 miles were one derailleur cable, two spokes, one free-wheel and a chain. Between the two of us we used 26 tires. —Jay Aldous

Front derailleur was fixed and replaced almost immediately. —Aan Medairy

One tip for cleaning a dirty chain on the road — you can fit the entire chain in a soda (beer) can. Remove the top of the can and fill the can with gasoline. Let it soak, then wipe clean with paper towels. Maybe even buy a cheap toothbrush to scrub it. —Stu Sherman

I am of the Laze-E-Boy school of bicycle repair when touring; I set the bike up tip-top prior to setting out, then let everything go out of adjustment as it wishes unless it impedes forward progress. At trip's end, the bike needs brakes, bearings, and gears adjusted, wheels trued, and everything lubed, but I seldom do anything but spray the chain

while on tour. Dirt roads are an exception.

One of the few things that is really different about cycle touring (as opposed to winter riding, mountains vs. flat, cities vs. boonies, all of which require only subtle adjustments) is long distance dirt riding. There are not too many places in North America where one can go long distances on dirt roads. I made my pilgrimage on the Alaska Highway in 1979; I believe much of what I rode over is now paved. There is still the Cassier Highway in British Columbia, the Dempster Highway in the Yukon and Northwest Territories, and the route above the Alcan up through Dawson, Yukon. Plus a bunch in South America and other countries.

Dirt riding means constant vibration. Long-distance dirt riding means constant vibration for weeks on end. Palms, rear end, feet, neck get sore in a way that one doesn't approach on pavement. Everything comes loose. Everything. Crankset, including the fixed cup, may work itself loose. Bolts holding the panniers on. Brake bolts, cones in the hubs, seat post bolts, etc. The vibration may crack things.

I found myself washing the moving parts three or four times a day; it was a no-win situation, because all the water quickly rusted things. My chain was so badly rusted that after a week of abuse it sounded like a mixmaster, and threw a plate off into the bushes on one particularly steep hill. Numerous times I simply walked into a stream with my bicycle and let the current get the big pieces off.

Why ride dirt? It takes you to some beautiful places. It's a challenge. It's remote. It is, at times, peaceful and satisfying. —Bill Nelson

**DID YOU FIGURE OUT A WAY TO KEEP DRY IN THE RAIN?**

Ziploc bags are invaluable for keeping things in your panniers dry. —Susan Brown

Stay in your tent. Sleep . . . read . . . play checkers. —Jerald Byrd

I have long since given up the idea of actually staying dry through a rain. My theory now is that I wear rain gear to keep warm, not to keep dry. On the Alaska trip I took with me a "Slac Jac" by Gerry. Besides having a hood which rolls up into the collar, it also has a pair of pants which roll up into the hem. (They snap closed along the inseam.) I was very happy with this arrangement both for keeping warm and with respect to the freedom of movement that it allowed. Every 20 minutes or so, however, I would have to stick a finger into each

elastic cuff and let the accumulated water drain out. —Fr. Jerome Schaad

Impossible. —Jay Aldous

In warm rain I just got wet. In cold rain I wore shoe covers, gaiters, Gore-Tex pants, Gore-Tex jacket and wet-but-wool gloves. If a climb was followed by a lengthy descent, the Gore-Tex left me dry at the bottom — good stuff!! —Randy Rainbolt

Someone could win a Nobel for this, a boon to mankind. —Peter VanderVen

I stopped in a small town to buy lunch. While in the store it rained harder. I looked outside and asked the store owner if he had a plastic garbage bag. I recalled a friend telling me about a backpack trip and cutting arm holes and a head hole and wearing the bag. I did likewise. The bag was light, it blew against my body. My legs got wet, but the upper portion of my body and chest stayed dry. I made a stop in Danville, Kentucky in a bike shop and as I walked in the door the owner said I had his raincoat on. —Walter Schlobohm

**DID YOU EVER STOP RIDING BECAUSE IT WAS TOO WINDY IN THE WRONG DIRECTION?**

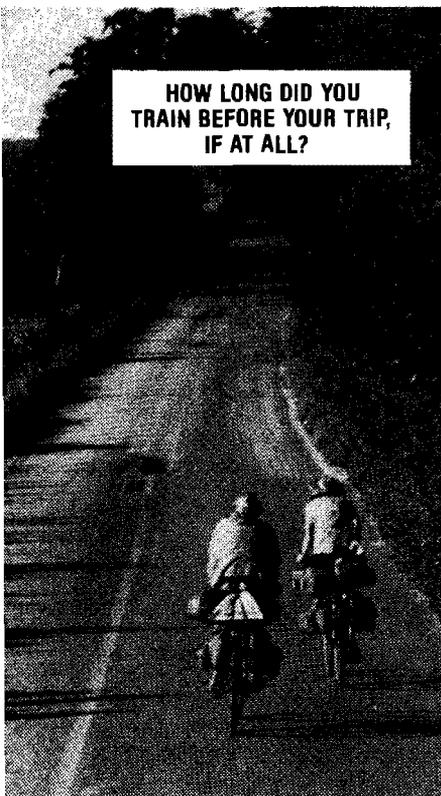
No, I never stopped riding because of the wind, but in this category a companion is indispensable for constant prodding onward. —Margaret Curtin

Going through the Banning Pass on the way to Palm Springs we picked up a 40-mph tailwind and with moderate pedaling we managed to keep up with motorists doing 55 mph. We didn't do that for very long because we soon learned that it took forever to stop the bikes at that speed. We smoked some brakes! —Thomas Bradford

I blew a tire in the middle of nowhere, Idaho, and had to hitch a ride into Twin Falls to find a bike store. From there, I had a wonderful ride along the Snake River until the road ended in Bliss. Once past Bliss, I returned to the interstate. I was just in time to meet winds gusting up to 70 mph. There was nothing to stop the wind, besides some sagebrush, my bike, and me. I rode for as long as I could and then tried to walk my bike for a while. That didn't work either. As luck would have it, a guy driving an empty truck gave me a lift into Boise. The winds were so bad, the local KOA would not allow me to pitch my tent at their campground! I got smart on my next cross-country ride and went from west to east. —Brent Garrett

In Montana a crosswind was so strong that it blew my map off my handlebar bag as well as me off of the road! We stopped and waited for it to let up. —Randy Rainbolt

**HOW LONG DID YOU TRAIN BEFORE YOUR TRIP, IF AT ALL?**



Two years, two months, hard.

—Michael Rawson

• None, we bought bikes on Saturday and left Monday! —David Blum

• In warm weather I ride daily, about 200 miles a week. But the first week of touring is the real training. I have found, on all my tours. Nothing simulates the initial shock of 30 extra pounds. —Margaret Curtin

• One of us did 500 miles, one of us did 50 but it seemed unnecessary once we got started — it all works out. 1st day: general fatigue and confusion counteracted by zeal; 2nd: sore butt and psychotic depression, realizing the magnitude of the task — but it's the 1st real day out; 3rd: more soreness and chafing and fatigue. 4th day we began to hit the groove and find power, confidence. —Peter VanderVen

• My training consisted in everyday commuting in D.C., about 25 miles a day. My skills were sharpened at this time, my survival skills, that is. I worked at night and often on weekends, so I would continually ride through an ocean of drunk and crazy drivers. The only accident I had was in Rock Creek Park, though, when a roller skater forced me off the road! —Brent Garrett

• Train? —Randy Rainbolt

**WAS RIDING ACROSS AMERICA ON A BICYCLE A SAFE THING TO DO?**

I don't think it could be considered safe,

but the tradeoffs make it well worth it. Being with people from the unprotected medium of a bicycle allows them to open up to you in a way that could not be accomplished with a car, motorcycle, plane etc. —Jay Aldous

• Concentration is the key. Be as visible as possible and DO wear a helmet.

—Dave Boston

• We not only obey all traffic laws that apply to bikes and automobiles, but we also ride as if we're invisible.

—Thomas Bradford

• Yes. More people are afraid of me than I am of them. Physical safety is not a problem. It is helpful to look poor but intelligent. You stay out of trouble on tour the same way you stay out of trouble at home: don't do anything stupid. I also try to minimize my contact with drunk/drugged people, as they are unpredictable. —RC

• For two guys in their twenties with a lot of common sense: absolutely. Just watch out for the killer rearview mirrors on the Winnebago trailers in park areas.

—Robert Schwarz

• We never rode at night and we wore a "fanny-bumper," which is a fluorescent orange triangle worn on the rider's back.

—Karen Sandy

• One odd question asked of us was "Don't you carry a gun?" Of course we didn't carry a gun. We didn't have any problems with people on either trip — except two incidents in Kentucky. —Kay S.

• For two women, two small women, it was very safe. We were harassed only a few times. Mostly people respected us or tried to protect us from the world.

—Patty Loric

**I GOT OFF MY BIKE AND WALKED IT SEVERAL TIMES. DID YOU?**

Sometimes if a particularly beautiful sight was before or beside me, I would just walk on the road for a while instead of stopping. —Paul Elmendorf

• Much to my surprise, I never had to walk up a hill. I never even went into my lowest gear until I got within 60 miles of Alaska. —Fr. Jerome Schaad

• We never walked our bikes up any hill because of the grade. I remember clearly the sign in California at the base of the Sierra Nevada Mountains, stating that the next 15 miles had grades of 8 percent to 16 percent, and we rode it all. On the way up we were photographed and handed off the picture further up the hill. It was a great feeling to say we rode up that climb. —Bill Irving

• Yes — I've never met a hill yet I couldn't walk up — it's OK! —Mary Elliot

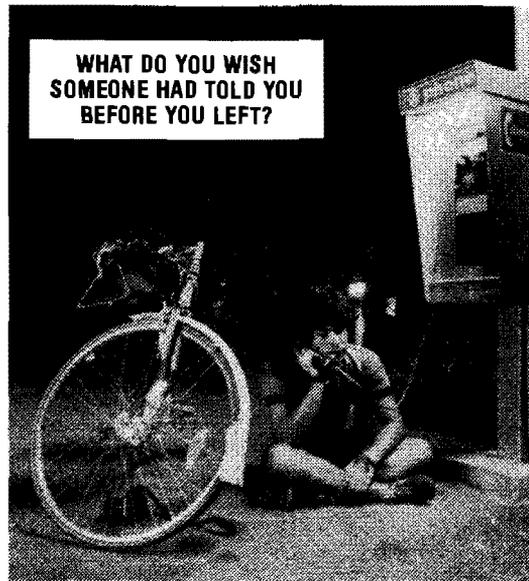
**WHERE WERE YOU MOST SURPRISED TO MEET ANOTHER BIKER?**

One who was a special inspiration to me was a 71-year-old man bicycling from Seattle to Minneapolis. He wasn't going very fast, but he had already made it halfway when I met him. I have no doubt that he completed the trip.

—Fr. Jerome Schaad

• I was on the road for 16 days before meeting a fellow bicyclist. I was enjoying the scenery of the Tetons in Wyoming when suddenly he appeared cycling towards me. It took me totally by surprise. He was on a journey to the World's Fair in Nashville to look for a job, and seemed to live on herbs and seeds. —Bryan Harrington

**WHAT DO YOU WISH SOMEONE HAD TOLD YOU BEFORE YOU LEFT?**



That it would end and I'd have to go back to the real world. —Michael Rawson

• Keep an accurate journal (force yourself!). —David Lippman

• I wish someone had told me to spend more time on the saddle, at least the month before leaving. I found that it takes two (2) weeks of solid riding to get one's fanny ready for such a tour!

—Robert Morris

• I wish someone had told me that Desitin Baby Ointment works wonders on saddle sores. —Judy Farout

• Take the time to meet people. They generally enjoy interesting company. You may be an interesting event in a small town. They may call the local newspaper or invite you into their homes or go out of their way to help you. This was one of the greatest lessons of our trip. Make things happen. Keep a daily log and

write down details. Reading it over 12 years later is great and we regret what's left out and lost. Take lots of pictures — don't be shy with strangers. —Peter VanderVen

• When a local resident says it's only a mile or two — plan on 10. —Phil Norton

• That Mt. Rushmore isn't worth the long, tortuous ride you've got to go through to visit it. —Patty Lorick

• Take a netted tent (for mosquitoes). —Dave Lefkowitz

• Don't waste money on \$200,000 life insurance — you'll make it alive. —George Novak

### WHAT DID YOU DO TO HELP WORRY ABOUT THE TRAFFIC LESS?

A rear-view mirror attached to my handlebar was invaluable. I really think it ought to be a law. I was always aware of traffic approaching from the rear, how many there were, how fast they were coming, how close they were coming to me, etc. It was especially helpful on downhills when the wind in your ears hampers your hearing an approaching car, and it is so dangerous to have to turn around and look when you are travelling fast down a hill. —Susan Brown

• I always use a rear-view mirror, wear high-visibility colors and use an orange fanny-bumper for night riding. —Robert Morris

• I have a rear-view mirror (K-Mart, \$3.50) on the handlebar. I use it. If a big truck is going to pass me when a car is in the opposite lane, I get off the road and stop if there is no gutter lane. (If the rear person in a group does this, the trucker expects the whole group to and drives accordingly.) I am much more afraid of motor homes/RVs than I am of trucks. The trucker knows how wide his rig is and can put it half an inch from my shoulder. I'm not sure about the RV driver. —Bruce Olshon

• I always wore a helmet, rode single file, stayed on the extreme right, and constantly used my rear-view mirror. The only time traffic was a problem was while riding through Yellowstone Park. —Randy Rainbolt

• Traffic didn't worry me too much. I'm from NYC. —Stephen DeDaito

### HAVE YOU DONE ANYTHING CRAZY LIKE THIS BEFORE?

Yep. In 1974, during the summer between my freshman and sophomore years in high school, five of my friends and I set the world record for marathon trampoline bouncing. We bounced night and day, taking turns of course, for 52 straight days and landed in the *Guinness Book of World Records*. At the

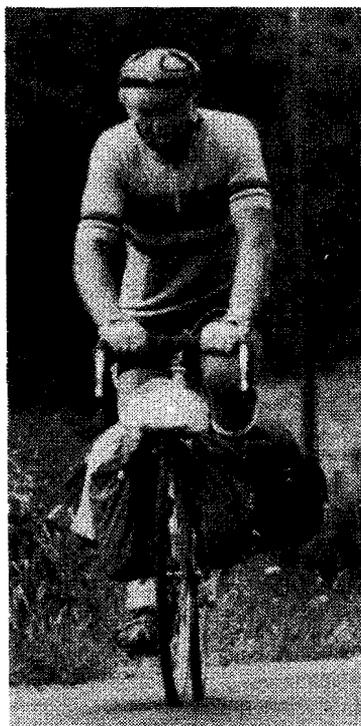
time we were all 15, except one, he was 12! —Randy Rainbolt

• Bicycle touring is less crazy than working 9 to 5 all your life. —Harold Pederson

• My only regret is I hadn't the chance to do the trip until I retired. I am now 71 years of age and still cycling. —Cyril Henry

• No, I had never done anything as crazy as that before. —Karen Sandy

• What's crazy is not doing it. —Bill Nelson



### CAN ANYONE RIDE A BIKE ACROSS AMERICA, OR DOES IT TAKE A SPECIAL PERSON?

It takes a special person, self motivated, stubborn as a mule. —Michael Rawson

• I think anyone can do the physical aspect of riding. I may have been the fattest woman to have biked and got across! —Ann Medairy

• Two legs are a must. I take that back, I rode approximately two miles with only one crank when one fell off. I should say one leg is a must. —Dave Lefkowitz

• Anyone can do it! All you gotta do is want to. I've met people who were terribly overweight (they lost it), people who had no money (they were happy with what they had; all the junk you read on snazzy equipment is sham), a guy with one arm. Somehow there is a mystique about those who travel long distances as being a special race of beings. Hogwash! —Bill Nelson

• My friend was not a model athlete at all. We saw a family of four (young kids) on two tandems. Anyone could do this, regardless of race, creed, religion, sex, weight, or appearance. Only requirement is CASH! —David Blum

• Emphatically yes. It doesn't matter what speed one chooses, it is simply a matter of persistence. Chris and I passed two women from Buffalo, a mother and daughter, who were so obese they probably had to pump extra pressure in their tires to keep them from going flat. They had no concept of bike repair, drafting, gearing, proper clothes; their bikes were technological horrors. Still they were having a great time, managed to ride between 50 and 80 miles a day, and learned about bike repair. I'm sure they lost some weight, too. —David Abramson

• Anyone at least twelve, in good health. —David Marshall

• At one time before the trip, I would have told you it would have taken a special person. However, since the trip I've changed my mind. It does not take a special person. There is one special requirement I feel, it is a trait I found in every cyclist I met and talked with. It made the difference between a successful ride and one that wasn't. The one common denominator was a strong desire to make it happen. That desire coupled with a good attitude will get you across America on a bicycle. —Jerald Byrd

• It takes a good sense of humor. —Ruth Baltus

