

By Iain Gillott

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## Introduction

Tell people that you are going to ride across America, coast-to-coast, and you get several reactions. The first is usually “**You are going to do WHAT?**” quickly followed by “**You are CRAZY**”. To be honest, when my daughter Lauren first approached me with the idea, I thought it was crazy as well.

**So why did we try it?** The answer is really ‘because it is there’. Both Lauren and I like adventures and bike riding. I have done the MS150 Houston - Austin ten times, plus RAGBRAI (across Iowa) five years ago. And multiple mountain bike rides in Colorado. So half of me liked the idea of the challenge.

The other half of me thought this is nuts! And the closer we got to the start, this voice in my head was getting louder. 😊 The truth is Lauren shamed me into doing this with her. If I had decided not to go, she would have found a group to do it with. And then, for the rest of my life, all I would have heard would have been about “the ride Dad did not go on”. Seriously, I expected that doing the ride was going to be less painful than being reminded I did not go for the next 30-odd years! So, yes, she appealed to my competitiveness to rope me into this.

And just in case you were wondering, our collective ages are 86 years and one of us is 30 years older than the other (work it out)!

Lauren had the idea early on of raising money for **MD Anderson cancer research**. This is an organization that has made a massive difference to our family. Four years ago, my mother was diagnosed with an aggressive form of chronic lymphocytic leukemia. Thanks to research at MD Anderson, she takes one pill every day and continues to live a normal, active life!

I wrote a blog as we went along and we took many, many pictures. This book reprints the blog entries together with numerous photos of the ride. You can see what we were doing, how we were feeling, the people we met and the various challenges at each point on the ride. Enjoy!



## Chapter 1: The Prep

Undertaking an adventure like this takes some planning and preparation, as you can imagine. We started in January 2023 by considering the route. Since Lauren had a maximum of eight weeks off school (she is a teacher at a high school in London), we needed to do the ride as quickly as possible and/or take the shortest route.

The final plan was to fly to Seattle from Austin, dip our wheels in the Puget Sound and take the Amtrak up to Mount Vernon. We would then start riding along Route 2, heading east through Washington, Idaho and into Montana. The plan is to ride through Glacier National Park up Going to the Sun Road (look it up...), weather permitting. After Glacier NP, we hit the plains of eastern Montana, North Dakota and into Minnesota. Then we go through Wisconsin, take a ferry across Lake Michigan, then through Michigan to Ohio, Pennsylvania and drop into Washington, D.C. The plan is to end in Annapolis, MD and dip our wheels in the Chesapeake Bay. Sounds easy when I describe it like that....

We both had fairly new bikes (Trek Domane with luggage racks) and planned to ride an average of 70 miles a day. That would mean we were done in 50 days, giving us a margin of error for mechanical issues, weather and other foreseen issues before Lauren had to fly back to the UK. Averaging 70 miles a day means some days need to be much further that, possibly hitting the magic 100 mile century mark.



Rather than have someone drive a van or truck behind us, we decided to carry all of our gear on the bikes - tent, sleeping bag, stove, clothes, food, etc. We read a lot about people who have done the journey self-supported and the trick is not to take too much. So we packed minimal clothes and only carried enough food for a couple of meals; the plan was to eat along the way as much as possible. Once we cleared the mountains, we planned to mail our cold weather gear home.

In February, I started going on regular rides with a 25 pound weight strapped to the back of my bike to get used to the added ballast. Before we left for Seattle, I was regularly riding 45 miles or so. We basically decided that the only way to train to ride through the Rockies and Cascades carrying all the gear was to actually do it. Lauren took this heart – the most she ‘trained’ was one 20 mile ride with a small hill.

As we got closer to the start date, I was starting to agree with those people who said we were crazy to try this! Every time I got into bed at night, I was reminded that I only had a few weeks left before we left and I was going to spend six to seven weeks in a tent....on a thin camping pad....in a sleeping bag....

I thought that the inability to plan ahead would be the hardest part of the trip for me. I am a planner, for both business and personal stuff. For iGR, I usually know what we are going to be doing in detail a few months ahead. But for this trip, I really cannot plan each day beyond saying ‘ride that way’. We can have a goal of reaching a specific town or location, but any number of things could result in changing those plans - weather, mechanical issues, poor road conditions. Heck, if we had been riding on the east coast in June, the smoke from the Canadian wild fires would have severely impacted us. So this trip is going to force me to take each day as it comes, which is probably a good thing!



## Chapter 2: We have started!

*Day 0: July 6th - 11 miles*

*Day 1: July 7th - 50 miles*

*Total: 61 miles*

**July 8, 2023** | We got to Seattle Thursday morning, unpacked the bikes and went to see some family in Seattle for lunch. Then we headed for the Sculpture Garden on the Puget Sound so we could do the obligatory 'dip the tyres' in the water. If you are riding coast-to-coast, you have to actually touch some water 😊 Then we took the train from Seattle Thursday night up to Mount Vernon, WA, our 'official' start. It was late when we got there and we were both tired.

Our shirts have a very cool design on them that announces to the world what we are doing. In Seattle, we had several people ask if we were just finishing. No, sorry, we have just ridden five miles!

We decided to have a relatively relaxed first day and it could not have worked out better. Tail wind, flat road with a great shoulder and beautiful scenery. We had lunch in Concrete, WA at the 5b's Bakery. They took our photo, said they would promote the ride and MD Anderson fund raising for us and gave us free drinks and cookies! Great lunch - we were hungry.

Then we rode into Marblemount, WA to stay with our 'Warm Showers' hosts, Rob and John Scott. They have an amazing house in the woods right by the Skagit River. I get to sleep in the Solarium tonight while Lauren gets the two-room tent with queen bed. Amazing place and fabulous hosts. WarmShowers.org is an organization for long distance bikers that works on a pay-it-forward system - basically AirBnB for bikers with no money involved.

Tomorrow we are going to try and get an early start to get over Washington Pass - time to warm up the climbing legs! 😊



## Chapter 3: Type 2 fun and the kindness of strangers

*Day 2: July 8th - 76 miles*

*Day 3: July 9th - 56 miles*

*Total: 188 miles*

**July 10, 2023** | Before I update you on our progress, a word of thanks to all of you who have sent good wishes to me or Jenny.

OK, so there are four types of fun:

- Type 1: fun to do and fun to talk about
- Type 2: not fun to do but will talk about it later and look on it with good memories
- Type 3: fun to do but never going to tell anyone about it 😊
- Type 4: not fun to do and shall never be discussed again....ever!

The last two days have been Type 2 fun – hard work, long days and not fun, but we feel accomplished.

We left Marblemount on Saturday morning and starting climbing into Cascades National Park...and kept climbing. It was a good road, but it went up...and up....and up. We made it over Washington Pass....eventually. The park is stunning – highly recommended. The photo above is us at Diablo Lake.



We got to our destination (Mazama) late in the afternoon with no place to stay, no available campgrounds and very hungry. First stop was to the local Public House. Lauren went to the bar to order food and beer and I headed for the bathroom. By the time I got back, she had found us lodging for the night! The guy in front of her in the line asked what we were doing. He was a cyclist who had ridden coast to coast and offered us his spare room. We stayed a few miles from town with his family and were very comfortable. They were great hosts who were not planning our stay.

We left this morning (Sunday) and started down to Twisp and then over (another) pass (Loup Loup Pass) and into Omak. It was hot and sunny with no clouds and no trees. It was tough climbing (remember we are each carrying about 25 pounds of gear). Halfway up the climb, we were out of water, so we knocked on a door to get refills. The elderly couple, who had lost their home in one of the local forest fires and were trying to rebuild, gave us ice, water and a Gatorade each and then he (a car guy, by the way, with a 1973 Corvette 457 4-speed in the garage!) turned on the garden sprinkler so we could cool off. We got soaked!

We are now at a motel in Omak. We needed AC and showers and we are about to turn in at 7pm. I am shattered. Climbing 10,000 feet over two days with a loaded bike in the heat will do that to you. We have two more big climbs over the next few days and then it should get easier.





## Chapter 4: The Northern Cascades: a beautiful series of never-ending blind summits

*Day 4: July 10th - 65 miles*

*Day 5: July 11th - 43 miles*

*Total: 296 miles*

**July 12, 2023** | The Northern Cascades are truly beautiful but they do seem to go on forever, especially when you are climbing on a bike. We completed our fourth straight day of mountain passes today (in order: Washington; Loup Loup; Wauconda, Sherman) and feel like we have finished a major section. Over the last four days we have climbed over 18,000 feet. We crossed the Columbia River today and the next few days will be much easier on the climbing legs.

As you are climbing one of the passes, you can see a bend ahead and it looks like the road starts to level out. But then you make the turn and the road goes up again...and again...and again. Today was 18 miles of climbing five to seven percent grades with no break. But the good news was that a) it was cool and cloudy and b) we had an epic 25 miles of downhill on a well paved, quiet road. 😊

Last night we stayed in Republic, WA with a Warm Showers host - beautiful house and very nice couple who fed us dinner and breakfast. Tonight we are in a 'resort' (that is a stretch....) so we can do some laundry. All our clothes (seen below) were getting pretty smelly.

Oh, and it rained! Coming to the top of Wauconda Pass on the way to Republic, it started raining and then on the descent into town, it got much colder. We actually had to break out the cold weather gear to stop shivering.





## Chapter 5: Pedaling, eating and sleeping does not leave much time for blogging

*Day 4 - 10: July 10th - 16th*

*WA: Omak, Republic, Kettle Falls, Cusik*

*ID: Sandpoint, Hope*

*MT: Libby, Macgregor Lake, Kalispell*

*Total: 600 miles*

**July 17, 2023** | Well, I did not have as much time for blogging as I thought I would. By the time we have ridden ~60 miles, found food, eaten, found somewhere to sleep and actually done the sleeping, there is not much time left. Riding five or six hours a day with a few thousand feet of climbing means we are exhausted. I have been sleeping nine to ten hours a night. The trip is going well and we are ahead of our expected schedule. We are now over 600 miles along. A couple more days and we will be through the Rockies and into the plains of eastern Montana.



Rather than just tell you we-did-this and we-did-that, I thought it better to talk about what we have learned. Let's talk about Covid and the impact on the economies we have been through. We have spoken to people who have purchased second homes, people who moved during the pandemic and people who have been in the area forever and are seeing the changes. Everyone - and I mean everyone - agrees that the pandemic has permanently changed the structure of society and the economies in the northwest. There is no going back.

During the pandemic, people wanted to escape Seattle, Spokane and the other cities in the area (remember everything was closed). The Cascades, Cabinets, Lewis Mountains and Rockies offered a way for people to get out. And they did. We heard many stories of increased traffic on the rural highways, campsites filling up, more people in rural areas and more demand for lodging.

Some people took the opportunity to leave the cities completely and work remotely (we have all heard the stories). A realtor we stayed with had first-hand knowledge of increased demand for homes, rapidly increasing prices and all-cash purchases. The downside is that locals were unable to afford homes in their own communities. One couple we stayed with acknowledged they contributed to the problem in the local town when they purchased their second home at the top of the market, but they also described their plans for the house and the work they wanted to have done, money that will go back into that local economy.

The upside is that just about every business we have been to - restaurant, coffee shop, bakery, gas station, RV park, motel - has a Help Wanted sign on the door. We spoke to a family who moved to Montana from Kentucky ten plus years ago who told us there are plenty of jobs in the area; the hard part is finding people to fill them. And the old family home, instead of falling into disrepair and disuse when the last generation dies, now has value and can be cashed in.

Construction businesses seem to be booming; there was a lot of residential and commercial construction in Sandpoint, ID, for example. There was a company we passed today in Montana that made trusses for homes and buildings, and their lot was piled high with wood and trusses waiting to be shipped out. And local ski resorts have been sold as the number of skiers has increased.



Everyone had stories of a family member who was working part time or full time from home and their company was now trying to get them to go back to the office. And all agreed this was a non-starter. Not a single person we have met or spoken to thought that the economy in the northwest would return to a city-only focus with everyone in an office all the time. Employers may try to fight this and demand people come back to the office, but I think it is a losing battle. People have seen that they can work remotely and be effective and can improve their quality of life. The genie is not going back in the bottle.

That said, it is clear that many businesses did not survive the pandemic, especially in the very small communities. We have seen lots of evidence that businesses closed a couple of years ago and now there is a vacant lot.

Today we took a half day rest. It is Sunday, July 16th, and I am sitting in a hotel in Kalispell, MT as I write this. There was a country music festival in town this weekend, plus it is the height of the summer tourist season for the local lakes, mountains, woods and Glacier National Park. The area is stunningly beautiful, as all of the northwest is, but finding a hotel room was hard. We only had one or two choices and the prices are what I would expect to pay in New York City, Boston or downtown L.A., not rural Montana.

These changes have certainly caused problems but there are also benefits. The challenge for the next few decades will be how to meet the needs of the local established communities for housing and jobs, while benefiting from the influx of investment and capital from the 'newbies'. Not a challenge for the faint hearted.





## Chapter 6: Goodbye mountains, hello Great Plains and great winds

*Day 11, July 17th: 57 miles*

*Day 12, July 18th: 76 miles*

*Day 13, July 19th: 87 miles*

*Total: 827 miles*

**July 20, 2023** | Well, we have crossed a threshold. We are out of the Rockies and into the Great Plains. It looks like *Dances with Wolves* out here!

As we left St. Mary (by Glacier National Park - more on that in a minute) we climbed one last big pass by Divide Mountain, the name the Blackfeet give it since it divides between the plains and the mountains.

Glacier NP was fun - and unexpected. We did not have a reservation to enter the park (needed these days after Covid and even a bicycle counts as a vehicle) but we decided to see if we could sneak in. The park rangers let us, in no questions asked. And since we have a family National Park pass, it was free! The plan was to just go and see Lake MacDonald but then we decided to try and get up Going to the Sun Road (look it up). Problem was, the road is under major construction and is not rideable; they have literally turned it into a dirt road. So we took the park shuttle up to Logan Pass (there are bike racks on the front of the buses) and then rode the 18 miles down to St. Mary on the east side of the park.

Epic ride! We had a huge tailwind such that at one point, where there is a short climb, we were being blown UPHILL at about 18 mph. Needless to say, we went down that mountain pretty fast. 😊 One of my best rides ever.

We camped in St. Mary and then yesterday enjoyed huge tailwinds into Valier where we camped again.



Today we made it to Great Falls and are in a hotel doing laundry and getting ourselves clean. You will note from the mileage at the top of the page that today was our record - 87 miles. The last part was tough, with a strong headwind. But we made it. Our average in the mountains has been over 60 miles. Hopefully, that will start increasing now that we are in the plains.

One final story: yesterday, as we were descending from Divide Mountain, we saw a herd of wild stallions at the side of the road. Much of the land around here is open range, so it is not unusual to see a few cows grazing at the side of the highway. But this was a herd of 20 - 30 horses. They were very skittish as the bikes went past but did not come into the road. Unfortunately, I was doing about 25 mph downhill at the time and so did not get a photo.

The next few days are more of the same - rolling plains, big skies, sunshine and ever changing winds. Now all we need to see is a tatanka. 😊





## Chapter 7: The Machines: Part 1

*Day 14, July 20th: 62 miles*

*Day 15, July 21st: 77 miles*

*Day 16, July 22nd: 68 miles*

*Day 17, July 23rd: 81 miles*

*Day 18, July 24th: 67 miles*

*Total: 1182 miles*

**July 25, 2023** | Today was a big day. We finally left Montana and entered North Dakota, and tonight we are staying in Medora. Montana is a big state, just slightly smaller in area than Germany but long and thin, whereas Germany is more of a square. We rode the width of Montana, so it feels like we have been in the state forever. Very pretty and with much varied scenery.

By the way, if you ever wondered where the grass in 'grass fed beef' came from, I can tell you – Montana! We have been riding through hay fields for days and they have been combining a lot of hay. Beef is big up here. 😊

I could tell you that it has been hot and sunny and that we have been riding good roads and have met some fun people. All that is true. But today I thought I would tell you more about the bikes we are riding and the gear we have. You will notice that the title of this blog says 'Part 1'. 'Part 2' will talk about the power plants on the bikes – us!



We are each riding a Trek Domane. I pronounce it 'domain' but Trek is a little more pretentious and likes you to day 'domarn-ee'. Either way, they are alloy bikes with carbon front forks. The advantage for us is that they are strong and have mounting points in the frame for the luggage racks, etc. I bought my bike for this trip back in December and Lauren got hers a couple of years ago. They differ only in the components, and we are both using Shimano gear sets. This was a purposeful decision. Most bike shops in small towns can deal with Shimano and have parts in stock, so if we have problems, we can get help pretty easily. Just today I bought new brake pads and a brake cable for Lauren's bike in Medora, ND.

We have luggage racks on the back of the bikes and each have two Ortleib paniers and one dry bag on top. I also have a frame bag. My water bottles are mounted on the front fork whereas Lauren's are in the usual position on the frame. Lauren has a Garmin navigation computer and I have an Akaso camera taking a photo once every minute during the ride. (I plan to make a time lapse video at the end.)

Traffic has not been a problem; we find most people give us a wide berth. This could be because we both have white flashing strobe lights on the backs of the bikes. You can literally see them half a mile down the road. I know you are technically supposed to have a red light on the back but they do not show up as well.

The only real issue we have had so far is a bolt that fractured on my luggage frame after a few days, but I fixed it with zip ties and duct tape. Then the same bolt broke on Lauren's frame in exactly the same place a few days ago – same fix! And we have had five flats so far, more than I expected, even though we got new tyres. I expect we will change tyres in Minneapolis and also get new chains.

We are carrying a full set of tools, spare tubes, pump, camping gear, clothes, wet weather gear, small pillows that Jenny made us (one of the best ideas), first aid kit, and some emergency food. We also have an emergency satellite beacon in case we have trouble out of cell service.



All in, I weighed the packs at about 25 pounds each, but I think with some food and water we are close to 30 pounds. While I have been told this is light, it does make the bikes heavy; cross winds can be an issue and you have to be careful. Plus it means we have been crawling up the hills, of course.

OK, a little history to finish this out. As I mentioned, we are staying in Medora, ND, which is the town right by the entrance to Theodore Roosevelt National Park. Jenny and I have been here before and the park is spectacular. The park is actually comprised of Teddy Roosevelt's old ranch. Roosevelt first came to (what was then) the Dakota Territory in 1883 to hunt bison. He was already a New York state assemblyman by this point.

On February 12th, 1884, his mother and wife died on the same day, 11 hours apart. His wife died after giving birth to their daughter Alice. Distraught, Teddy focused on his work but then moved that summer to North Dakota to his ranch. (He left Alice with his sister.) He raised cattle for two years just north of Medora (some remains of his original ranch are still there) but then in 1886 a harsh winter wiped out most of his herd and his original investment. He moved back to New York.

Much of Roosevelt's image as a tough, western, independent man's man started on the ranch in North Dakota. His subsequent political career and further adventures in Cuba and Manila, etc., all originated in Medora. He held multiple positions in New York, including governor, and of course was Vice President and President of the U.S. Of all the things he did, he said he was most proud of his conservation work, including five National Parks and 18 National Monuments.

We rode through a valley into Medora today and commented that the only thing really different from when Roosevelt was here was the road we were on and a few power lines. The railroad was built in 1884 and led to the creation of the town. Not much has changed in 140 years. 😊





## Chapter 8: The Machines: Part II

*Day 19, July 25th: 61 miles  
Day 20, July 26th: 85 miles  
Day 21, July 27th: 72 miles  
Total: 1390 miles*

**July 28, 2023** | Three weeks in! We are now past Bismarck (we crossed the Missouri) and on our way toward Fargo, ND. Tonight we are camping in the city park in Napoleon, ND. The last few days have been very hot and sunny, and we have had a mix of winds, some favourable and some not. We just keep pushing forward.

So, let's talk about the other part of the machines – us. Unlike the motorcycles we see all over the western U.S., our bikes need an engine and that is Lauren and I. I have to say, I look enviously at the Harley Davidsons, Indians, and occasional Can-Am and BMW as they whizz by and fly up the hills. What I would give for a V-Twin some days. 😊

I did train for this ride and it appears to have paid off; my legs feel good and nothing has really given me too much trouble. My biggest concern was my lower back but the very detailed bike fitting I had in Austin a couple of months ago really seems to have worked; I've had no issues. Lauren was already in good shape from running marathons, swimming, basketball, etc., and she has had few problems.

Let's clear up one question we get all the time before we go any further: how long does it take before your butt stops hurting in the saddle? Answer: 12 days! On the twelfth morning, I got on the bike and realized my rear end was not burning. 😊 For reference, day five was hell...



You do have to take care of the toosh – amazing how much Desitin and Shammy Buttr we go through! Anyone following us must think we smell like new born babies!

The other issue is the sun. We have had just a few hours of rain in the last 1,400 miles, with most days offering blazing sun from dawn to dusk. Lots of sunscreen is getting applied.

Of course, Lauren manages to look like some bronzed goddess with her bit of Choctaw blood (courtesy of one of her grandmothers). She tans quickly and evenly.

Me? I look like I got attacked by Andrea Bocelli and Stevie Wonder each with a can of brown paint! Since I wear fingerless gloves when riding, my hands are white but my fingers are brown; it looks like I have been smoking 20-a-day for a few decades and have nicotine stains. My knees and outer calves are brown but my inner calves are white since they are shielded from the sun by the frame bag...but only half way down my calf since I like to wear longer socks. The bottom half of my calves are stark white.

On the subject of socks, someone has asked about my 'cloud' orange and white socks. I got them free at a trade show and have two pairs (I cannot remember the company - CloudFlare?). They are really supportive and seem to help my ankles. Problem is, the bugs seem to think the orange is some type of flower and keep attacking them!

So yes, we look like a complete pair riding down the road: me with my patchwork quilt of white and brown, gloves, long socks, sun sleeves and bike jersey; and Lauren looking like she is headed for a modelling contest! No prizes for guessing who we send when we need water at a house on the highway...

The other thing is food. We eat and drink constantly. No idea how many calories we are burning each day but I am guessing it is north of 5,000. We eat a big breakfast, big lunch and then are starving by dinner time, even though we snack during the day. Apples taste particularly good to me. We also buy fruit snacks and anything loaded with sugar; Swedish Fish and Jolly Ranchers are favourites. 😊



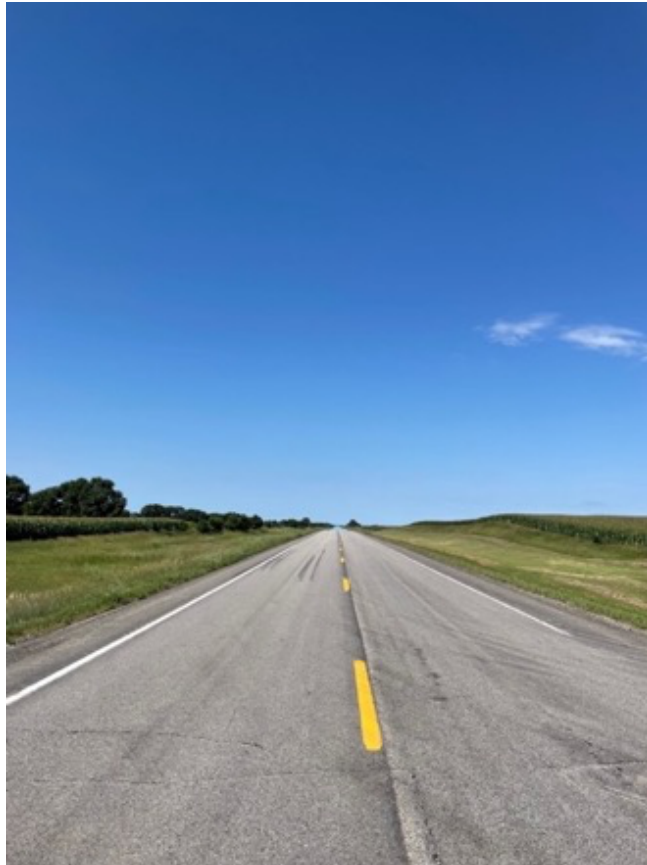
On the ride, we drink water (about a gallon each a day), Vitamin Water, Gatorade, lemonade, and, in my case, Dr. Pepper. Don't worry, I am averaging way less than one DP a day, but it certainly tastes really good at the end of a hot day.

The strangest thing is my craving for salads. I eat a lot of fruit but have never been a big salad fan. But on this ride, I am craving salads, especially with ranch dressing. It will be interesting to see if this sticks after the ride.

And yes, I am losing weight. Lauren has commented that my face and torso are thinner. I can see my ribs! My hands and arms look thinner to me as well. I did weigh myself before I left (not going to tell you what it said) so we can see just how much I lose on the whole ride.

So let's end with a quote from that famous cycling philosopher, Lauren K. Gillott:

*"There are no tail winds. There is only being in great shape and head winds!"*



## Chapter 9: Highway 46, half way and a tractor pull

*Day 22, July 28th: 39 miles*

*Day 23, July 29th: 78 miles*

*Day 24, July 30th: 76 miles*

*Total: 1597 miles*

**July 31, 2023** | Chris Rea, the Geordie singer-song writer and well-known Ferrari enthusiast, had a hit with the song *The Road to Hell*. He was writing about the M25 around London but I have been thinking a lot about this song as we were riding along North Dakota Highway 46 (and have played the album more than a few times as I rode). If there is an award for the most boring, straightest road in America, Hwy 46 has a good chance of winning the prize. Or at least a podium.

The photo shows only a few miles of this road. We literally rode two days and saw three stop signs, a couple of bends and one valley. The scenery has changed, though, from the *Dances with Wolves* of eastern Montana and western North Dakota to *The Little House on the Prairie* of eastern North Dakota and Minnesota. You half expect Melissa Gilbert to come running out of some of the farm houses around here! Corn, alfalfa, and the occasional sunflower field are all we have seen.

And we think we are about half way on our journey in terms of miles. We plan to take a rest day in a few days in Minneapolis (we need it) and the daily mileage should increase a little as we move further east – no big mountain ranges in the way!





The highlight of the last two days has to be the Marion 5th Annual Tractor Pull in Marion, ND. We stopped in town on Saturday for some lunch to find the whole town at the tractor pull with a food truck. We had a couple of burgers and watched the competition. This was the best thing ever! Old tractors (some back to the 1940s and 1950s) basically pull a Freightliner truck down a dirt course; as the truck moves, a steel plate lowers to the ground, increasing the drag. The tractors were all types: John Deere, International, Massey-Harris, Massey-Ferguson, etc. The tractors compete in different weight classes.

It was surprisingly addictive. Everyone was cheering on the small tractors as they pulled the truck 240 feet before their tyres just spun out. Surprisingly, the winner was the tractor that sounded like it was misfiring. It just kept going and going. Looks can be deceiving!

I spent the rest of the afternoon thinking about a) where I can buy an old tractor, b) where I can keep it and c) where I can drive it around Austin. 😊

So let's finish with a little history lesson. John Deere farm equipment, distinctive by their green and yellow paint, are by far the most popular brand in the western U.S. Everyone seems to have a John Deere and if you listen to the conversations in the cafes between the farmers (as we do), they are the only brand anyone considers. John Deere was born in Vermont in 1804 and moved to Grand Detour, Illinois after a bankruptcy. He designed a steel plow that was able to deal with the hard, Midwest soil and sold his first version in 1838. By 1855, his factory (now in Moline, Illinois) had sold more than 10,000 plows. The use of the distinctive green paint started between 1870 and 1880 to distinguish the plows and equipment from the competition. John Deere did not start making motorized tractors until 1918. Today, Deere & Company is listed on the NYSE and has a market capitalization of \$125 billion.



## Chapter 10: We the people

*Day 25, July 31st: 74 miles*

*Day 26, August 1st: 74 miles*

*Day 27, August 2nd: 76 miles*

*Total: 1,811 miles*

**August 4, 2023** | We are taking a rest day at a hotel in downtown Minneapolis after a few warm and windy days riding through Minnesota, land of 10,000 lakes, two billion potholes, 10 billion frost heaves and about two trillion mosquitos, plus the 50 or so I have swallowed over the last few days. Just added protein as we ride.... We followed the Mississippi River Trail yesterday that was part trail and part road but also has the distinction of providing very few glimpses of the actual river. In 76 miles, I think we saw the Mississippi for a total of two hundred yards!

I was expecting the roads in Minnesota to be better than in North Dakota but they got noticeably worse. Lauren's theory is that we are on more minor roads in MN whereas we were on the major (only) roads in ND. But it just seems to be lack of maintenance. And you cannot blame it on the cold and weather. All of the states we have been through have cold weather and they seem to be able to provide relatively smooth black top. The upside is that Wisconsin roads, where we are headed tomorrow, are supposed to be worse.



Anyway, we are chilling today, doing laundry, cleaning water bottles (there is something black growing in the bottom of one of mine...), doing some bike maintenance and eating at restaurants that do not have burgers on the menu or 'grill' in the name. Last night we had Vietnamese (VERY good) and tonight it may be Mexican or Italian.

I mentioned in other blogs that I would tell you about the people that we have met along the way and helped us. We have met some great people, usually by chance. The logo on our shirts usually starts a conversation in a restaurant, gas station, truck stop or grocery store.

- A funny story is when we were coming down the pass into Tiger, WA. There was construction on the road and the crew would not let us ride our bikes through (something to do with liability). Larry the Crew Chief put the bikes in the back of his truck and I rode in the front with him, while Lauren went in the pilot van with Cheryl. They drove us through a couple of miles of construction and Lauren emerged from the van with enough sugar to last a week. Cheryl had all the snacks for the entire crew!
- When my luggage rack broke the first time (in the middle of Montana), Lauren was ahead on the road and had all the tools. So, I flagged down a truck to ask her to come back. The first truck went past, slowed and then turned around, then gave me a ride to catch her up. Two guys, both called Jake, took me a mile down the road and flagged Lauren down. Easy to do and saved us a ton of aggravation.
- We also met several riders going west. All ask the same questions: where did you start? where did you stay last night? where are you going? We have met riders who started in Bangor, Maine; Queens, NY; Philadelphia, PA; and Baltimore, MD. After a while, these conversations start to seem as normal as commenting that you have just been to the grocery store.



- Between Jordan and Circle, MT, the road had literally been torn up for the last three years; about 14 miles was dirt and another 20 miles was corrugated. Adventure Cycling (who provide the routes) advised riders to hitch a ride. After about 15 minutes at a gas station in Jordan on a Sunday morning, we got a ride from Dave who was on his way to Williston, ND (he works in the oil fields) and had just come back from a rodeo. He was a professional rodeo rider for about 15 years and told us all about his injuries; it was faster to name the bones he had *not* broken!
- We also met eight-year-old Cooper and his mom when we stopped at their house for water on the road. (We have done this a few times; there are some long stretches between towns out west). We got iced water and he was very excited to show us his buckle he had won at a rodeo (they start 'em young out here) roping dummy calves. In their living room, there were four championship saddles his father had won. Cooper wanted to see the bikes and I think if his mom had let him, he would have started riding with us.
- We also met 21-month-old Oakley and her parents when we knocked on their door for water. Her dad insisted we come in the house to cool off and then filled our bottles with ice and water using the filtered water from the fridge. "Oh, you are getting the good stuff!" Oakley's mom told us with a smile – no mere tap water for us! If this sounds like we are always short of water, not true. But when it is hot, it is Sunday afternoon (and *everything* is closed and the towns are 30+ miles apart), we like to fill up before we get too low.
- At a campsite in Nelson, MN, Jeff, one of the RV residents came over to introduce himself and see what we were doing. He asked if we drank coffee and said he was an early riser and always had a pot on. The next morning, he left a large Thermos of coffee on our camp table before we even got up. I had the whole pot to myself. 😊
- We had a long, hot ride one day from Grass Range to Sand Springs, MT. There was one small town between the two, rolling hills and continual sun. I was wiped out. There is a small convenience store and post office in Sand Spring (where we could camp) managed by Kimberley. She had traveled the world but came back to help her aging parents who still lived on the family ranch across the road from the store (the family originally settled the land in the late 1890s). It was so hot outside that Kimberley let us sleep in the store overnight with the AC on; we literally slept in a post office!



- We have also had three people buy us lunch after they hear what we are doing and the fact we are raising money for charity. And one elderly couple said a prayer for our ride, hoping for us to be safe, for cool weather and favourable winds.
- But the prize for most helpful and going beyond has to go to Lisa, the manager of *The Knickerbocker Liquor Locker* in Hickson, ND, just about the only place open for lunch on a Sunday afternoon. One of our party (not me...) managed to take her iPhone but leave the charger in the wall when we left; this was our main charger for iPhones and MacBook. Five miles down the road, we realized she had left it, and we called the bar. Lisa had the owner of the bar drive it out to us to save us having to bike back. Granted, five miles in a truck at 60 miles an hour is a bit different from five miles on a loaded bike in the wind. But this really was above and beyond.

At the end of the day, a ride like this shows you that people are fundamentally nice and kind and helpful and it really does not matter who you vote for, where you live, how much money you have, or if you think Ford or Chevy builds a better truck. Going into a trip like this you have to have the attitude that people are good and will provide help if needed – and they are and they will.



## Chapter 11: Finally, a change in the winds

*Day 28, August 3rd: Rest day in Minneapolis*

*Day 29, August 4th: 76 miles*

*Day 30, August 5th: 87 miles*

*Day 31: August 6th: 69 miles*

*Day 32: August 7th: 78 miles*

*Day 33: August 8th: 72 miles*

*Total: 2,193 miles*

**August 9, 2023** | Up until yesterday (Monday, Day 32), we had 11 days straight of head winds. We went through half of North Dakota, all of Minnesota and about half of Wisconsin while fighting winds in our faces. As Lauren put it, it was soul destroying. I was starting to wonder if I was on Santa's naughty list or had done something wrong in a previous life!

Head winds are something of a family joke. Whenever I used to come back from a long ride, the kids would always ask about the winds and how bad 'those head winds' were. Seems I used to complain about them a lot. At least Lauren now has a better appreciation. 😊

But having a head wind or tail wind makes a huge difference. For example, on Day 31 we did 69 miles into the wind and it took us over six hours; we were averaging just over 11 miles per hour. But in Day 32, with a tail wind, we did 78 miles with more hills in an hour less. Having a tail wind reduced the effort needed by about 25 percent. Not only that, but with a head wind you find yourself tensing up more on the bike and gripping the handle bars harder – you are straining against the wind.



So yesterday, our moods were lifted by the tail wind and the cloudy conditions. Cooler temps and a tail wind. Yahoo!

Let me tell you about Wisconsin. We like this state. We basically rode down the east side of the Mississippi river and then cut east to Milwaukee (I am sitting at a hotel bar by the Harley-Davidson museum as I write this). Tonight we are going to a Brewers (baseball) game and then tomorrow at 6 a.m. we catch the ferry to Michigan.

Wisconsin is very agricultural and rural and very pretty. There must be a rule that all barns have to be painted red; a lot of the scenes look like they came from a post card. And the roads are good – generally smooth and well-kept and great for cycling.

This is 'America's Dairyland' as the license plates say. But what we did not see for the first few days were any cows. We could smell them and see the milk tankers on the highway, so we knew they were there. We have seen corn, alfalfa, cherries, blueberries, apples, pears, peaches, vineyards, wineries....but no cows! I was expecting herds of cows munching green grass in large, postcard-ready fields. Nope. We have seen maybe a dozen in a few fields; the rest must be in barns somewhere. Maybe they are staying away from me since I am lactose-intolerant? 😊

We even stayed on a dairy farm one night. They said they had 28 cows but we did not see any. We did see their chickens, including the one we subsequently ate for dinner.

OK, time for today's history lesson. As we rode by the Mississippi, we saw lots of French names – La Crosse, Trempealeau, Perrot – and evidence of European settlers – Stockholm, Sparta, Bangor, Nelson, Czechville, New Amsterdam. The first Europeans to settle this area were French fur trappers who traveled up the Mississippi from New Orleans in the late 1600s. France at that time controlled what was known as the Louisiana Territory, consisting of what we know today as Louisiana, Arkansas, Oklahoma, Missouri, Kansas, Iowa, Nebraska, South Dakota and about half of Colorado, North Dakota, Minnesota, Wyoming and Montana. The total area was about 828,000 square miles.



France ceded control to Spain in 1762, and then in 1800 Napoleon traded Tuscany for Louisiana; he wanted to get France back in North America and re-establish a presence.

But Thomas Jefferson saw the need to acquire Louisiana and the need to expand west; remember he also funded the Lewis & Clark expedition. France was under threat of war with the UK and so sold the Louisiana Territory to the U.S. in 1803 for \$15 million. Just think – that was only 220 years ago. Without this deal, it is hard to imagine the U.S. as it is today. Or us doing this bike ride!







## Chapter 12: Michigan: Past, present and future

*Day 34, August 9th: 36 miles*

*Day 35, August 10th: 80 miles*

*Day 36, August 11th: 54 miles*

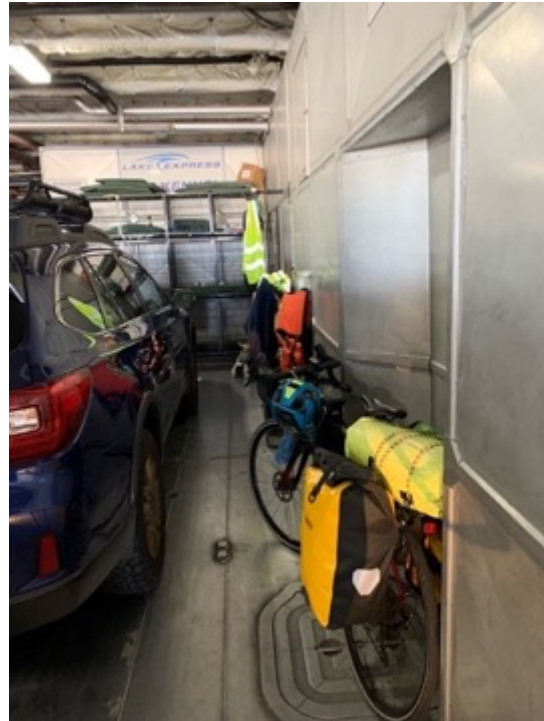
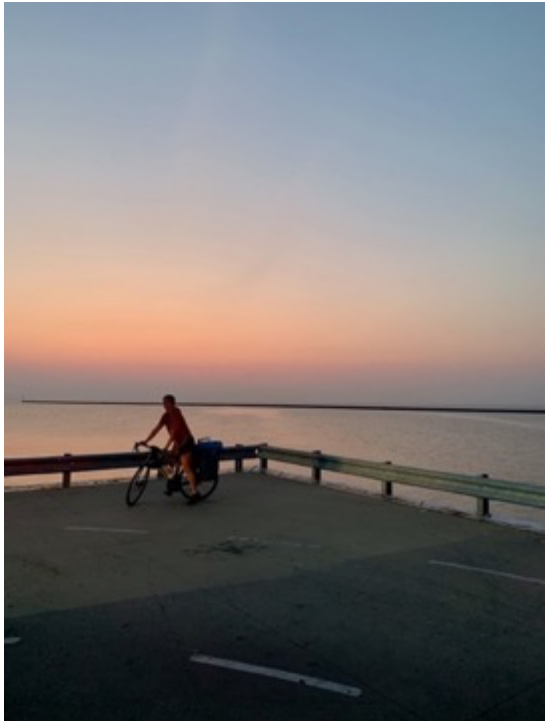
*Total: 2,364 miles*

**August 12, 2023** | We have had an eventful past few days. From Milwaukee, we got up at 5am to catch the high-speed ferry over to Muskegon, MI. We saw the sun coming up just as we left – easy crossing on a smooth Lake Michigan. Lauren slept during the entire crossing.

From there, we have made our way southeast through a very humid and sticky Michigan. We have camped a couple of nights in some good campgrounds, but you have to be in your tent by sundown or the mosquitos will eat you alive. We have mosquitos in Texas, of course, but they usually operate alone. In Michigan, they attack in packs and are relentless. A good excuse to go to bed early!

Michigan is very pretty with many small, family farms that are all immaculately kept. We have seen corn (of course), strawberries, blackberries, cherries, onions, sunflowers, multiple orchards and many large green house operations. Yesterday, we stopped at a family farm and shared a pint of fresh strawberries - very tasty.

Another fun experience today: I was riding on a highway when a bee or wasp stung my lip and then got inside my mouth and stung my tongue. Yeah, it hurt. No permanent damage but for the next hour or so my lip and tongue were numb; I was literally riding with my tongue out to ease the pain. Lauren thought it was hilarious and gave me no sympathy, mainly because I gave her none when a bee or wasp stung her toe in North Dakota. The wildlife is dangerous out here!



Today started with problems but ended very well. Lauren's gear shift cable broke last night riding into the campsite. We did not have a replacement so I rigged her derailleur so she had a lower gear, and we rode into Battle Creek to the only bike shop, getting there just as it opened at 10am. Problem was they were backed up with repairs, but the owner, Mike, gave us a bike stand and let me work on the bike in the store. Turns out the shifter was broken (a common Shimano problem) and they did not have a new one. But Mike found a used shifter and gave it to us free. I put it on the bike and Bingo! All fixed.

Mike then asked how far we were planning to ride that day. 50 or 60 miles, I replied. Great, he said, do you want to stay in Jackson with my mother? He called her and told her he was sending two cyclists to her house (not an uncommon occurrence it seems). So tonight we are staying with Grandma Angela in Jackson, MI.

Battle Creek is interesting and forms part of today's history lesson. Kellogg's was founded in the town and the world headquarters is still here. The Kellogg's we know today was founded by W.K. Kellogg in 1906. W.K. worked with his older brother, John Henry Kellogg, who managed a 'holistic sanitarium' in Battle Creek following principles defined by the seventh Day Adventist Churn (both brothers were members). John Henry developed cereals as a healthy food for use with patients. The Kellogg family originated in Essex, England and moved to the first Connecticut colony in the 1600s.

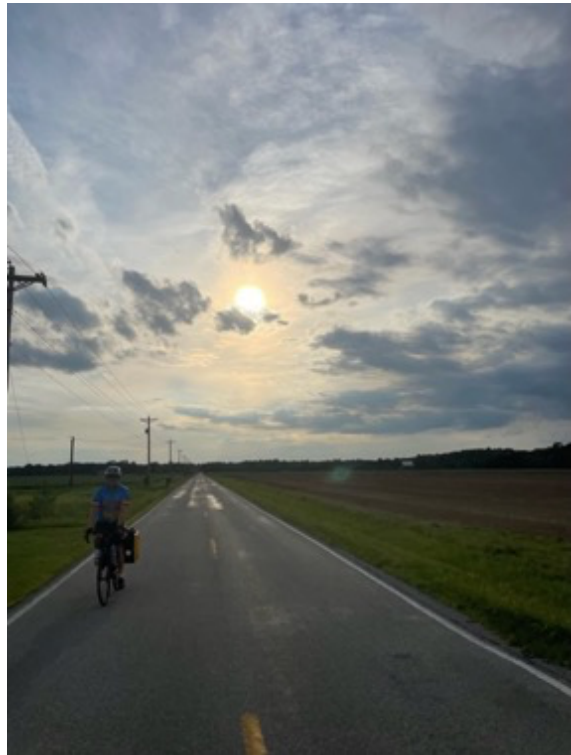
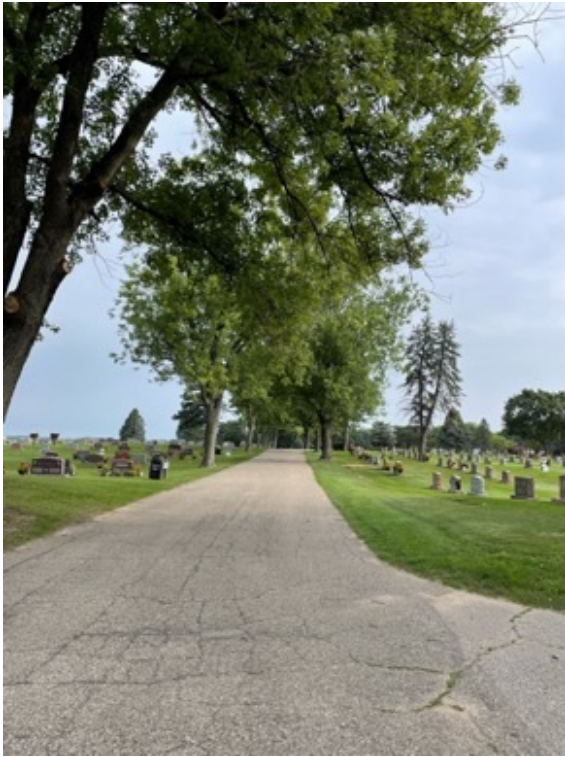
There are multiple stories and much debate about how it happened, but basically in 1897, some corn maize was left out and the next day run through the rollers they used to make cereal. The result was Corn Flakes. Several disagreements, arguments and law suits resulted in W.K. founding the company we know today. At one point, W.K. wanted to add sugar to Corn Flakes, but John Henry refused; the result is Frosted Flakes or Frosties. For this, I am eternally grateful to W.K. Frosties are the best!



But there is more. C.W. Post lived in Battle Creek and had been a patient at the sanitarium. He saw how Kellogg was making cereal and in 1895 founded Postum Cereal Co to make a cereal-based drink called Postum (it was marketed as an alternative to coffee). In 1897, Post introduced their first dry cereal, Grape Nuts. Post Consumer Brands (part of General Foods), as it is known today, is now based in Minnesota but still has a huge plant in Battle Creek (we rode past it).

So, Battle Creek was responsible for Kellogg's and Post Cereals!

Finally, we rode through Marshall, MI today, which is to be the site of a new \$3.5 billion Ford EV battery factory, due to open in 2026. The irony here is that we have been riding past corn fields since eastern Montana and have seen several ethanol production plants. You can usually smell them before you see them; they have a wheaty, sweet smell around them. The irony is that the U.S. government gives various tax incentives and grants to support the production of ethanol (it is added to gasoline as a dilutive), which of course is supporting the massive agriculture operations we have seen. But as EVs grow in number, there will be less need for ethanol and hence less need for the corn. The move to EVs will therefore impact the economy of an entire agricultural region.





## Chapter 13: The U.S. really is a nation of immigrants

*Day 37, August 12th: 85 miles*

*Day 38, August 13th: 90 miles*

*Day 39, August 14th: 60 miles*

*Day 40, August 15th: 74 miles*

*Total: 2,672 miles*

**August 16, 2023** | We are now in Pennsylvania, about 30 miles north of Pittsburgh, having taken only three days to cross Ohio. Roads in the Buckeye state were great and it was very flat right until the southeastern end. We had a day of rain but also stayed with some friends and a great couple we met through Warm Showers. We have good memories of Ohio.

The plan tomorrow is to ride to Pittsburgh and then join the GAP – the Great Allegheny Passage – which is an old rail line that in theory will take us to the C&O towpath right into D.C. We will see what the condition of the trail is like; some parts are not paved and it may be too muddy. Either way, we are getting closer to D.C. every day.



On a ride like this, you get to see a lot of places and talk to a lot of people. You see more from a bike than you do from a car and certainly far more than from a plane. All those ‘fly over’ states the people who live on the coasts talk about? We have seen many of them up close and in person! It is often said that the U.S. is a nation of immigrants (me included). Certainly the modern U.S. was formed by immigration from the late 1700s until the present day.

On the ride, you can see that immigration in the names of towns, farms, local businesses, roads, and highways: Polish, Czech, German, Dutch, Italian, French, Irish, Scottish, English and more. It is easy to forget that this migration is in fact very recent, mainly in the last two hundred years.

Prior to the Erie Canal opening in 1825, connecting the Hudson River to Lake Erie, it was difficult and expensive to move goods and people to western Pennsylvania and Ohio, never mind Michigan. At this time, the main form of transportation was by waterways; no railroads went to the west at this time and of course there were no roads. Plus the Appalachian Mountains split Ohio from the eastern states.

I have mentioned Lewis & Clark before in these blogs. In fact, one of the main goals of the Lewis & Clark expedition in 1804 was to find a navigable route along the Missouri River to the west coast to open up the western half of the U.S.

Once the Erie Canal opened, people quickly moved west and started settling in the new mid-western states. In fact, the construction costs of the canal were covered by the tolls generated in the first year. Construction was mainly by Irish immigrants and many stayed in the communities as they built the canal. Genealogists have traced families along the canal route.

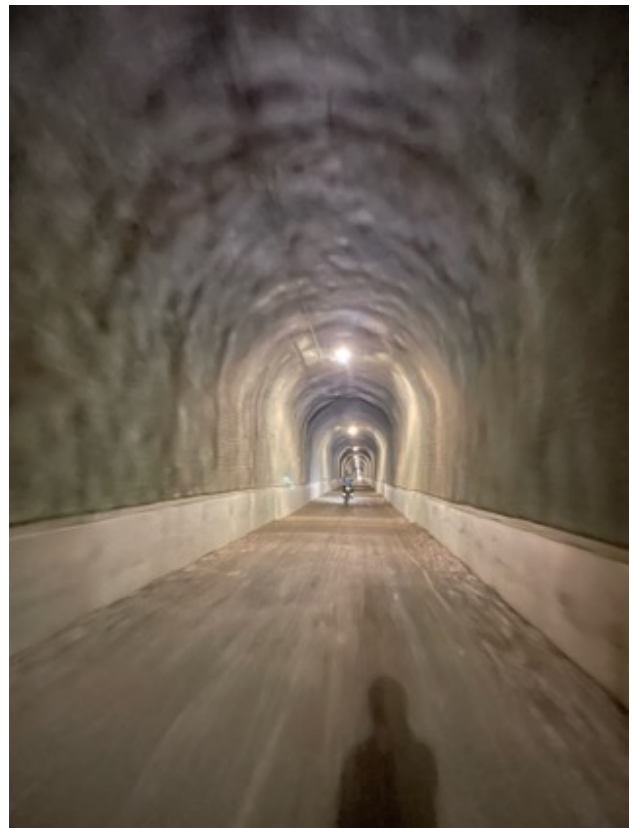
Railways started to be built about 1830 but were limited to the east. The Baltimore & Ohio Railroad (which the GAP follows) did not reach Ohio until after the Civil War. And the Northern Pacific Railroad did not expand past Bismarck, ND until after 1880. So rivers and canals were the main form of transportation through the middle of the 19th century.

The expansion west was driven by, and enabled, immigration from across Europe. People left for many reasons: famine, poverty, war, religious persecution, economic opportunity, and simply for the adventure. But it is the personal stories we have heard on this trip, more than anything, that illustrate how the U.S. was built.



- Remember Grandma Angela in Jackson, MI? She is 84 and her father was originally from Italy. He came over to the U.S. just after World War I, passed through Ellis Island and then headed up to work at the Alcoa plant in Massena, NY (up on the St. Lawrence seaway). He had heard from other Italian immigrants that he was guaranteed a job at the plant, plus there was a large Italian community there. Angela met her husband in Massena and then moved to Jackson, MI, in 1966.
- Remember I mentioned the Assumption Abbey in Richardton, ND, where we stayed one night? Father Odo gave us a tour of the abbey and church and told us the history. The church was built in 1896 by the Volga-German immigrants who had immigrated from what is now Ukraine. Back in the 1760s, Catherine the Great ruled Russia (she was German by birth) and wanted more German influence in the region. So they encouraged Germans to move to Russia, allowing them to keep their language and culture, giving them free land and making them free of conscription. But by the late 1800s, Russia needed more army recruits, so the Tsar removed the conscription immunity. Entire families and villages therefore picked up and emigrated to the U.S. They moved west along the new railroads looking for farming land. As the railroad expanded west from Bismarck, they founded new towns and villages and, of course, built churches and abbeys. Assumption Abbey was founded by Germans in this way.
- The final story shows how small the world really is. Remember we stayed in Medora, ND (by Theodore Roosevelt National Park)? Well, at the hotel I was swimming and sitting in the hot tub, loosening up my tired legs, and got talking to a doctor from Georgia. He had grown up on a ranch near Medora and was back to see family. He asked where I was from in the U.K. and I said 'Nottingham'. He started laughing. Turns out his step-grandfather was from Nottingham. The grandfather's father was a miner and a drunk. One night, the father came home from the pub and started fighting with his wife, and the 14-year-old son picked up a chair and hit him. The mother said 'you better leave. Now!'. So the son went to Liverpool (somehow), got passage on a boat to the U.S., rode freight cars out west and ended up in Medora, ND. This was all in the early 1900s. There, he found work as a ranch hand and eventually married the doctor's grandmother and went on to have a family of his own. The step grandfather did not see any of his original Nottingham family until he was 84, 70 years later.











## Chapter 14: We made it to DC!

*Day 41, August 16th: 67 miles*

*Day 42, August 17th: 81 miles*

*Day 43, August 18th: 77 miles*

*Day 44, August 19th: 81 miles*

*Day 45, August 20th: 71 miles*

*Total: 3,047 miles*

**August 20, 2023** | Just a quick update: we have had a busy few days (with really poor cell coverage), but made it into Washington, D.C. today. We were met by Tom S who showed us the way to the Lincoln Memorial and provided goodies (apples, bars, etc.) to welcome us to the city. Thanks, Tom. 😊

The last five days saw us get to Pittsburgh (on pretty terrible roads) then follow the Great Allegheny Passage (GAP) trail to Cumberland, MD, then the C&O (Chesapeake & Ohio) Canal Towpath right into DC, the latter of which followed the Potomac Rover (which we swam in twice). The GAP was pretty good – easy to ride, good services and fast. The C&O was less enjoyable but provided camping, was flat and was shaded. We camped out all four nights on the trails.

Tomorrow we head out to Annapolis, MD, to put the tyres in the water and finish the coast-to-coast adventure. Then we fly home on Tuesday. I cannot wait! To be honest, we cannot believe we are nearly done; we have become so used to getting up, riding 60 - 90 miles, eating and then finding somewhere to sleep, it feels unreal to actually be going home.





## Chapter 15: The final blog and the questions you **REALLY** want answered

**August 22, 2023** | As I write this, we are waiting for our flight home. The bags are packed; the bikes are in boxes and are somewhere in Southwest's luggage process; and we are tired. It was a great trip and we obviously feel accomplished. But our bodies are physically tired; no amount of sleep or rest these days seems to dull the ache. We need some downtime.

We have had several donations to MD Anderson come in the last few days (Thank you!) and have made our goal. If you still want to donate to a good cause, it is not too late. One common theme on this trip has been the number of people we have met who have had cancer, have friends or family with cancer or lost family members. It is more common than it should be.

It has been a great trip and it will take us a while to digest it all. I have thousands of photos (I am planning a time lapse video), and looking through them brings back some good memories. Lauren was a great riding partner and we had no major mechanical, weather or health/fitness issues that seriously delayed the trip. The bikes are filthy, need some mechanical love and attention, and Lauren's seat is falling part. I threw away my bike shoes in the last hotel. We survived the climbs of the Cascades and Rockies, the heat of the Great Plains, the humidity of the Midwest and east, potholes in Minnesota, killer bees and hordes of unionized mosquitos, and some questionable bike trails.



But we also saw all that the U.S. has to offer: great scenery, some epic climbs (and descents), hospitality and kindness of strangers, wide open spaces, good weather and some nice small towns. Many things could have gone wrong, but they didn't. I was concerned about the smoke from the Canadian wildfires but we missed that. We only had a couple of days of rain and no other issues. In the end, it was pretty simple; we just had to keep pedaling.

So the big questions and answers:

### **Would I do it again?**

Yes, in a heartbeat. And I would do it with Lauren (I think she would agree, despite my snoring!). And I would encourage anyone who is thinking about something like this to just get out and do it. There are many shorter rides that do not require 46 days. If you want to go and see the country, just do it. 😊 It was good to have a goal and a destination; we had to get done by the end of August so Lauren could get back to school and we had a set goal of the Atlantic Coast. Goals are good.

That said, I can cross the coast-to-coast off my to-do list now. There are other rides and treks to do (the West Coast; the Colorado Trail) that would not require nearly seven weeks but would still be epic.

### **What was the best part?**

I think Lauren and I both enjoyed the western states the most and the mountains. Yes, we had some big climbs but also some great descents and fabulous scenery. Plus camping at altitude in the dry and cool air is the best. The mountains at night are truly epic as well. While camping at Macgregor Lake in Montana, I got up at 2am to go to the bathroom. It was a perfectly clear night and you could see the Milky Way across the entire sky. That was worth the trip.

The U.S. is a big country but also seems slightly smaller now. After all, we just biked across it using nothing but our own legs, so how big can it be? And there are more similarities than differences across the country than is apparent from a plane or even a car.



### **Which part was the hardest?**

Eleven days of headwinds from the middle of North Dakota to the middle of Wisconsin. That was demoralizing. The other thing is just how hard it was to get good food that was not burger and fries in some places. Small towns are declining (including in the east - this is not a problem confined to the western states) and many did not have a decent grocery store. Getting fresh fruit was harder in many places than we expected.

### **What is next?**

Lauren and I both have to go back to work! Plus some serious downtime and home-cooked food. Really, I need a vacation. 😊

### **How much weight did I lose?**

I weighed myself before I left and after I got back on the same scales. I lost about 30 pounds (nearly 14 Kg); you can see it in my face, shoulders and around the middle. And I feel skinny. But I am not sure I can do more than five push-ups or a single pull-up. 😊

### **How much did we raise?**

One of the best decisions we made in planning the trip was to raise money for MD Anderson cancer research. They provided a lot of support for the fundraising and have been great to deal with. But the main thing was motivation; knowing we were raising money for charity kept us going through the headwinds and those days when you really did not want to get on a bike or climb that next mountain pass. We could not stop, knowing we had set the fundraising goal.





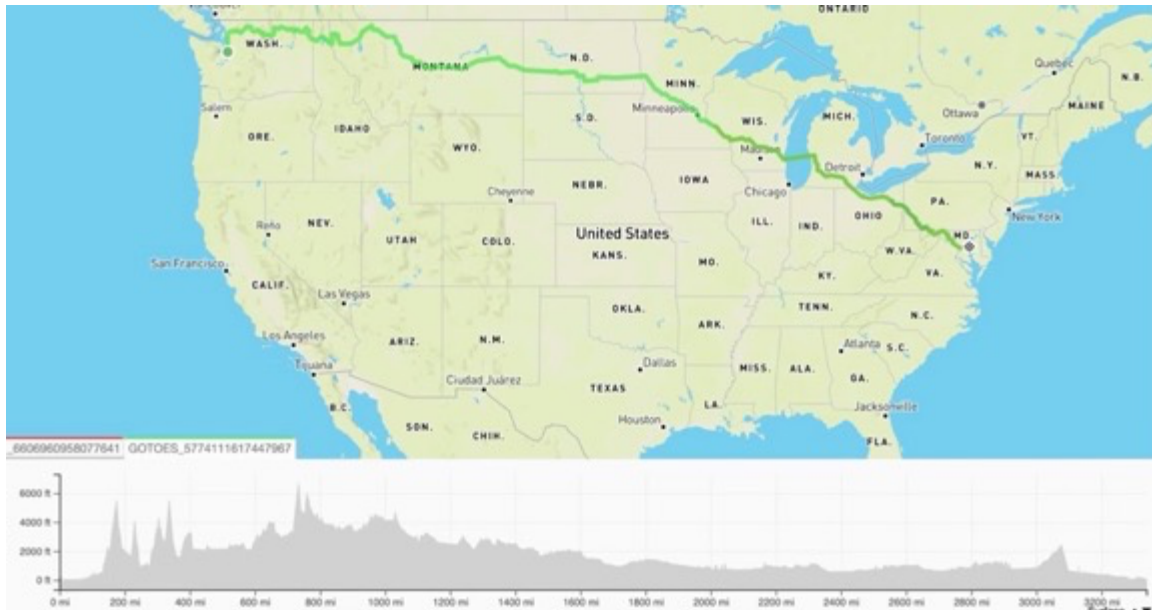
*As of today, we have raised over \$26,000 for MD Anderson. When I say 'we', of course I am really including all of you who have been incredibly generous. Thank you!*

**What were the ending statistics?**

My bike computer said 3,085 miles; Lauren's said 3,111. We will go with 3,085 miles. We took 46 days to complete the trip, so that is 68.5 miles a day (accounting for the one rest day we had in Minneapolis). The longest day we did was 90 miles (into Lagrange, OH). And we camped out 18 of the 46 days. Our sleeping bags need some time in a washing machine!

Actual ride time was 253 hours and 15 minutes (this is actual time pedaling and moving), so that equates to 12.2 miles per hour average. Not bad considering we carried all our own gear for the entire trip. Total feet climbed was 87,363 feet, which is 344 feet per hour. 😊

Yeah, we are tired.



## Epilogue

**November 1, 2023** | It has now been just over two months since we finished the ride and we are both fully 'back to normal'. I think.

After we got home, it took a couple of weeks before I stopped dreaming about riding a bike or having to find somewhere to sleep. And waking up in my own comfortable bed seemed strange for the first few days. But it was really nice not to be in a tent and have to get up and make coffee at a campsite.

I remember all of the ride but get confused about where it happened: was that in Washington or Montana? Or Michigan or Wisconsin? After a while, it all blurred together a little, perhaps because each day was essentially the same: get up; eat; ride; eat; ride; eat; sleep. Repeat.

This is sounding a little like I did not enjoy the ride. Wrong – I did! And so did Lauren. Collecting all the photos we took (over 20,000 in total), going through them and putting this book together helped to put it all in perspective and worked as a reminder of all the details and stories. We really did ride across the entire country – we have proof!

And we raised a lot of money for charity, which was really important to us. Looking back, the charity was a huge motivator to keep going. Without that, it would have been easy to stop in Minneapolis or Milwaukee and say 'we will finish the eastern half next summer'. But we did not – we rode all 3,085 miles in 46 days.

So yes, we are proud of what we did. It was a great adventure and I would recommend to anyone who is considering this type of trip to just go and do it.

When we got back, one of the first things we did was go mountain biking with friends. Believe it or not, after 45 days on the bikes, carrying all that weight up and down mountains and across the plains, we were not sick of biking. Where shall we go next?

# List of Photographs

| Page  | Location  | Date              |
|-------|---|-------------------|
| Cover | Logan's Pass, Glacier National Park, Montana  | July 17           |
| 1     | Mazama, Washington  | July 8            |
| 2     | 5Bs Bakery, Concrete, Washington  | July 7            |
| 3     | Leaving Austin Airport; Seattle, Washington   | July 6            |
| 4     | The Puget Sound, Seattle, Washington  | July 6            |
| 5     | Diablo Lake, North Cascades National Park, Washington   | July 8            |
| 6     | Cooling off in a sprinkler, foot to Loup Loup Pass, Washington  | July 9            |
| 7     | Climbing Sherman Pass, Washington   | July 11           |
| 8     | Crossing the Columbia River, Washington; laundry day!   | July 11           |
| 9     | Lauren at the top of Sherman Pass, Washington   | July 11           |
| 10    | Outside Hope, Idaho; crossing into Idaho  | July 13, 14       |
| 11    | Crossing into Montana; camping at Macgregor Lake, Montana   | July 14, 15       |
| 12    | Lauren in her sleeping bag, Macgregor Lake; Trail into Kalispel, Montana                                    | July 16           |
| 13    | Logan's Pass, Glacier National Park, Montana  | July 17           |
| 14    | Lauren going down the east side of Logan's Pass; Glacier National Park, Montana; the plains of Montana      | July 17, 18       |
| 15    | Crossing into North Dakota  | July 24           |
| 16    | Camping at the fairgrounds, Stanford, Montana; Sign in Sandy Springs, Montana                               | July 20, 22       |
| 17    | Hitching a ride between Jordan and Circle, Montana; Fixing a flat on I-94, North Dakota                     | July 23, 24       |
| 18    | Somewhere in North Dakota; the road to Medora, North Dakota; Theodore Roosevelt National Park, North Dakota | July 21, 24, 25   |
| 19    | Taking a break in the shade, Richardton, North Dakota   | July 25           |
| 20    | Assumption Abbey, Richardton, North Dakota; Suntan lines on Iain's fingers                                  | July 26, 27       |
| 21    | Crossing the Missouri River, Bismarck, North Dakota   | July 26           |
| 22    | Somewhere on Highway 46, North Dakota   | July 29           |
| 23    | Honey Hub, Gackle, North Dakota; Tractor pull, Marion, North Dakota   | July 28, 29       |
| 24    | Moon rise over Smith Lake, Minnesota  | July 31           |
| 25    | Riding by the Mississippi River, Anoka, Minnesota   | August 2          |
| 26    | Campsite at Smith Lake, Minnesota; running out of trail in Saint Cloud, Minnesota                           | July 31, August 2 |
| 27    | Crossing into Wisconsin, the first time   | August 4          |
| 28    | Sunset at Derge County Park, Wisconsin  | August 7          |

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| 29   | Dairy farm somewhere in Wisconsin; Crossing into Wisconsin, the second time  | August 7, 5       |
| 30   | Onalaska, Wisconsin; Sparta, Wisconsin   | August 5, 6       |
| 31   | Taking a break at a Milwaukee Brewers game   | August 8          |
| 32   | Sunrise over Lake Michigan from Milwaukee, Wisconsin   | August 9          |
| 33   | Lauren getting on the ferry over Lake Michigan; bikes on the ferry car deck  | August 9          |
| 34   | Fresh strawberries, Michigan   | August 10         |
| 35   | Google sent us through the graveyard in Battle Creek, Michigan; breakfast in Jackson, Michigan; Sylvania, Ohio; outside Oberlin, Ohio  | August 11, 12, 13 |
| 36   | Crossing into Pennsylvania   | August 15         |
| 37   | Rural Ohio road, Ohio; Sheltering on the bridge over the Ohio River, Pennsylvania  | August 15         |
| 38   | Lauren taking a rest in Ohio; on the trail in Ohio   | August 13, 14     |
| 39   | Trail outside Kent, Ohio; Lauren at the start of the GAP – Great Allegheny Passage, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania; Iain at the start of the GAP; going through Big Savage Tunnel on the GAP | August 15, 18     |
| 40   | Camping on the GAP; Lauren trying to start a fire; crossing the Eastern Continental Divide on the GAP; the top of the GAP; start of the C&O trail; camping on the C&O                  | August 16, 18, 19 |
| 41   | Crossing into West Virginia for drinks; taking a break by the Potomac; C&O trail next to the Potomac; last campsite on the C&O and of the trip   | August 18, 19     |
| 42   | Outside The U.S. Capitol, Washington DC  | August 20         |
| 43   | C&O trail into DC; By the Washington Memorial, Washington DC   | August 20         |
| 44   | Toes in the Chesapeake Bay, Annapolis, Maryland  | August 21         |
| 45   | Lauren crossing the Mason & Dixon Line on the GAP, Pennsylvania  | August 18         |
| 46   | Lauren eating watermelon, Valier, Montana  | July 18           |
| 47   | The final mileage; Back home!  | August 21, 24     |
| 48   | The whole route with elevation   |                   |
| Back | Sunflower in North Dakota  | July 20           |

