FLYING FORWARD LOOKING SIDEWAYS

by

James W. Hamburg

PEDALING FORWARD/LOOKING SIDEWAYS

We recently received the following letter from James Hamburg, son of the late George and Viola Hamburg, proprietors of the Golden Rule Store (now Browne's) at 902 Broadway in the years 1928-1946, and brother of the late Patricia Hamburg Gumrukcu, whose MHS Class of '41 will be celebrating its 50th reunion next May:

"I plan to attend the MHS reunion of the Class of '38 next May, riding my bicycle, probably all the way from San Diego. I did this in 1983 for our 45th reunion, and again in 1988 for our 50th, but then only from Taos, NM.

"I do this for two basic reasons: I enjoy unfettered bike touring, and I enjoy the MHS reunions...both the Class of '38 gatherings and also the all-alumni affairs. As I remarked to your reporter in 1983, Marysville looked the most prosperous and welcome of all the towns on Highway 36 from where I joined it in Boulder, Colorado, but that opinion is probably somewhat colored by my nostalgia and pride.

"Eighteen hundred miles at 60 to 70 miles per day require 5 to 6 weeks of pedaling, allowing for weather, sight-seeing, layovers, etc. So I will be departing San Diego in mid-April. I thought your readers might enjoy the enclosed vignettes re bike touring philosophy and adventure."

...The Marysville Advocate

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MHS '38
SAN DIEGO
Grand Canyon 516
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RIDING ALL THE WAY
JWH

1. Riding All The Way

All during that two thousand mile ride from San Diego to Kansas City back in 1983 I had this mental picture of slowly climbing through the Rockies and then coasting downhill to Marysville. A gross oversimplification of course, but it warmed my spirits whenever I rolled this mental movie across my inner screen, and it kept me pedaling. That was before I got dunked in Brighton, Colorado.

Up 'til then I'd had some interesting encounters. Twice I slept out in the red desert sand in the Navaho country of northern Arizona where my biggest concern was sufficient water. Then there were four mountain passes above ten thousand feet...the first one being traversed in falling snow. Later on I camped out in Gunnison, Colorado, where the temperature dipped to 19° F. and my nightly laundry was frozen stiff as a board the next morning. I had gone to bed too tired to worry about the cold, and was actually quite comfortable in my good old sleeping bag.

Then during the five days I rested with relatives it snowed lightly off and on, and the May 17 Boulder Camera reported it the worst mid-May weather in eighty years..."a miserable month." But after all that camping I was so snug and warm with a roof overhead that I missed the companion article, "Flood Warning System Reviewed." I wonder if reading that would have made any difference later on; I already knew that snow eventually produces run-off.

Probably my problem was that I was (am) goal oriented... at least mildly so. How can that get you into trouble if you set a challenging but reachable, reasonable goal? I have this thing

about riding every foot of the way, i.e., on my own power with no hitchhiking or other means of travel if the original plan was to ride...pedaling through whatever one encounters although occasionally confronting and following a mandated or suggested detour. However, walking and pushing your bike (in Great Britain bicycles are called "push bikes" and for good reason) is OK; at least you're moving under your own power, and it gives your butt and limbs a change of pace.

So I was more puzzled than upset when I ran into a normally quiet creek about five miles east of Brighton on my first morning out of Boulder. The water was now overflowing the bridge and county road by about half a foot. This didn't seem bad but in retrospect I underestimated the power of rushing water, no matter how shallow. My great Stream-Crossing Theory was to maintain a slow but steady pace, with enough momentum to keep my wheels straight ahead, and with water harmlessly swooshing through the spokes. So much for theory.

The farmers looking on said there were no hidden chuckholes and it looked like only a hundred yards across, so I decided to go for it. I carefully pedaled about half of the way when suddenly my front wheel turned downstream and I quickly found myself dumped into the creek water, dragged to the edge of the culvert, and left sitting navel-high in the surprisingly strong stream. The four pannier bags on my overturned bike acted like sea anchors, scooping up water and leaving me unable to stand up or otherwise resist the tremendous force of the water. I stared down on the rocks fifteen feet below determined not to let go of my trusty old bike that had gotten me over the Rockies.

One of the two nearby farmers who watched this city slicker in amusement and possibly amazement finally waded over in his hip boots and helped me up and out. I may have hollered to him for help...maybe only in my mind; anyway a compassionate man was Brett Lewis. Directing me to his parent's farmhouse just back from the creek, he let me unload and spread out all my gear on the front porch and use the family clothes dryer in the basement. After about two hours I was able to don dry clothes and quickly repack, ready to hit the road.

I looked at the water crossing again, mentally upgrading it from a creek to Niagara Falls, and reluctantly ruling out my next ploy: walking my bike across. So I ventured a purposely casual request to my benefactor, "Suppose you could throw me and my bike in the back of your pickup and take me just across the creek?"

"Sure, hop in."

"I have this thing about riding every foot of the way home, but I'd better not try this creek on my own."

I was even anxious going across in the truck, but Brett knew what he was doing. I quickly thanked him and pedaled away with renewed vigor, making the seventy-four miles that day to my planned destination.

All my color slides in the camera came out a red monochrome. I took no more pictures the rest of the trip because it took a week to dry out my camera. The pretty young reporter from the Advocate lent me her camera for the four days I relaxed in Marysville at our 45th high school reunion.

So I rode all the way...except for a lousy hundred yards. Sally and I drove through there five years later, but it was so balmy and peaceful I wasn't sure just where the creek had been. You go so much faster in a car that you miss some of the details you see from a bike.


IN THE
BAG
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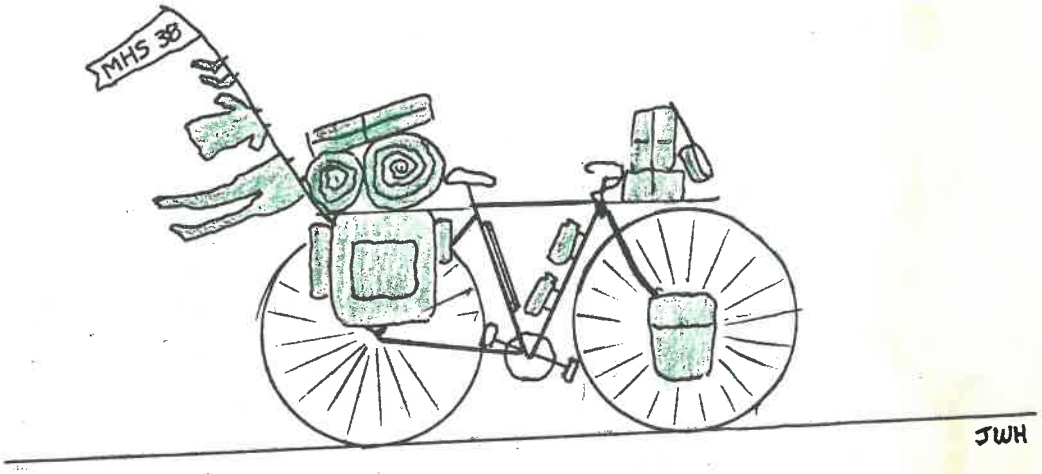

MHS 38
JWH

2. In The Bag

I couldn't believe how heavy her little bike was as I struggled to carry it up to our rooms on the second floor of the old River Bridge Inn in Columbia Falls, Montana. There were nine of us (six guys and three gals) who were pedaling a thousand miles with full touring loads through the Canadian Rockies, and we had scrambled up and over Logan Pass in Glacier National Park this particular day in August of 1986. The Park rules forbid bicyclists from traveling the Pass on the west side between 11:00 AM and 4:00 PM in an attempt to minimize traffic and congestion on the good but old, narrow road winding down southwest into Montana.

Except for two or three eager beavers our group slowly reached the top from the east side about 1:00 PM and had a leisurely lunch and hike in the hanging gardens there overlooking the surrounding snow-covered peaks and valleys. Then promptly at 4:00 PM we bolted down the steep descent down the west side, easily keeping up with the RV traffic for the first ten miles, and then flattening out for the next thirty in our scramble to reach our motel before dark.

During our two-week trip we had stayed in good motels half the time, and the remainder found us camping in national parks and campgrounds. Thus "full touring loads" meant at least two pannier bags (but usually four), a handlebar bag, frame pump, water bottles, safety flag, security cable and lock, speedometer-odometer, tent, sleeping bag, mattress or ground pad, and sometimes fenders. In addition to these exterior, visible items the baggage carried inside the handlebar and pannier bags on a fully loaded touring bike may include bike tools and spare parts, clothing, toilet articles, maps and wallet items, food and drink, pots and dishes, stove and fuel, and usually camera and film. You can see that our bikes were fully

loaded and reasonably heavy.

The last three of us arrived at dusk. I was tired as usual but very pleased to have made our destination after seeing and enjoying all the beautiful scenery that summer day, and anticipating a hot shower, indoor swimming pool, a hot meal and a good night's sleep. Euphoric gallantry overcame my pleasant fatigue and I offered to tote Wilma's loaded bike up to the second floor. She was a good biker but barely over five feet tall with a bike to match in size but not in weight.

"Wow, Wilma, what've you got in these pannier bags?"

"Oh, nothin' special. Just the regular stuff, I guess."

To my amazement as she unloaded her bike outside her room I saw her unpack an electric hair dryer. I was afraid to ask about any of the other items.

"What goes in the bag?" is a question each of us sagless tourists should ask himself. Sagless means there is no accompanying "sag" wagon, a truck or van that sags or lags behind and carries all this stuff, including tired bikers. Without a sag wagon to carry his gear each biker must ask himself re each item of gear, "Do I really need this?" ... and here one person's necessity might become another person's luxury. "If in doubt, leave it out."

Experience has dictated to me the following factors to consider when loading up for a tour: (1) Is this a sagless trip? (2) Ratio of planned camps to motels. (3) Weather most likely (rain, snow, winds, heat). (4) Terrain anticipated (hilly or flat, road conditions). (5) Pace (miles per day). (6) Expected amenities (frequency of groceries, restaurants, bike shops). (7) Possibility of

double duty or multi-use items (the Swiss Army knife eliminates the need for a separate dinner knife, can opener, tweezers, etc.).

The procedure for packing is similar to that for any other type of traveling: spread out all your gear, eliminate questionable items, pack it all up and mount in on the bike, lift the bike (it's always too heavy), and then throw out some more gear. Only once did I overdo this culling process (throw out too much) as a result of a test ride, and then two days into the trip had to buy some more clothes. Generally any errors made are on the side of too much gear. The typical enroute load change, if any, is to ship some of the excess home. So my policy is to stay as light as I can with the gear I think I'll really need.

I remember some other loading anomalies from past tours: riding along with Jeanette who was carrying audio tapes, player and headphones up and over Tioga Pass (9,970 feet) in mid-summer 1980. I must admit she made climbing the long ten-mile grade a pleasant chore, even though I couldn't hear the music. It was certainly fair: she carried the extra weight, and she heard the music.

There was Dave lugging along a frying pan, cooking oil and pancake mix for a breakfast treat for his friends in a primitive campground in the middle of Yellowstone in 1982; and George, a congenial obstretician whose handlebar bag gave birth to two fancy cameras on the coastal stretch near Monterey on our trek down California Highway 1 from San Francisco to Santa Barbara in 1979. One camera was for color slides and the other for black-and-white enlargements, several of the latter being generously sent to each of the eight of us at the end of the trip. Extra weight, and extra fun, I guess.

And of course there was Pete, a very strong biker, who dis-

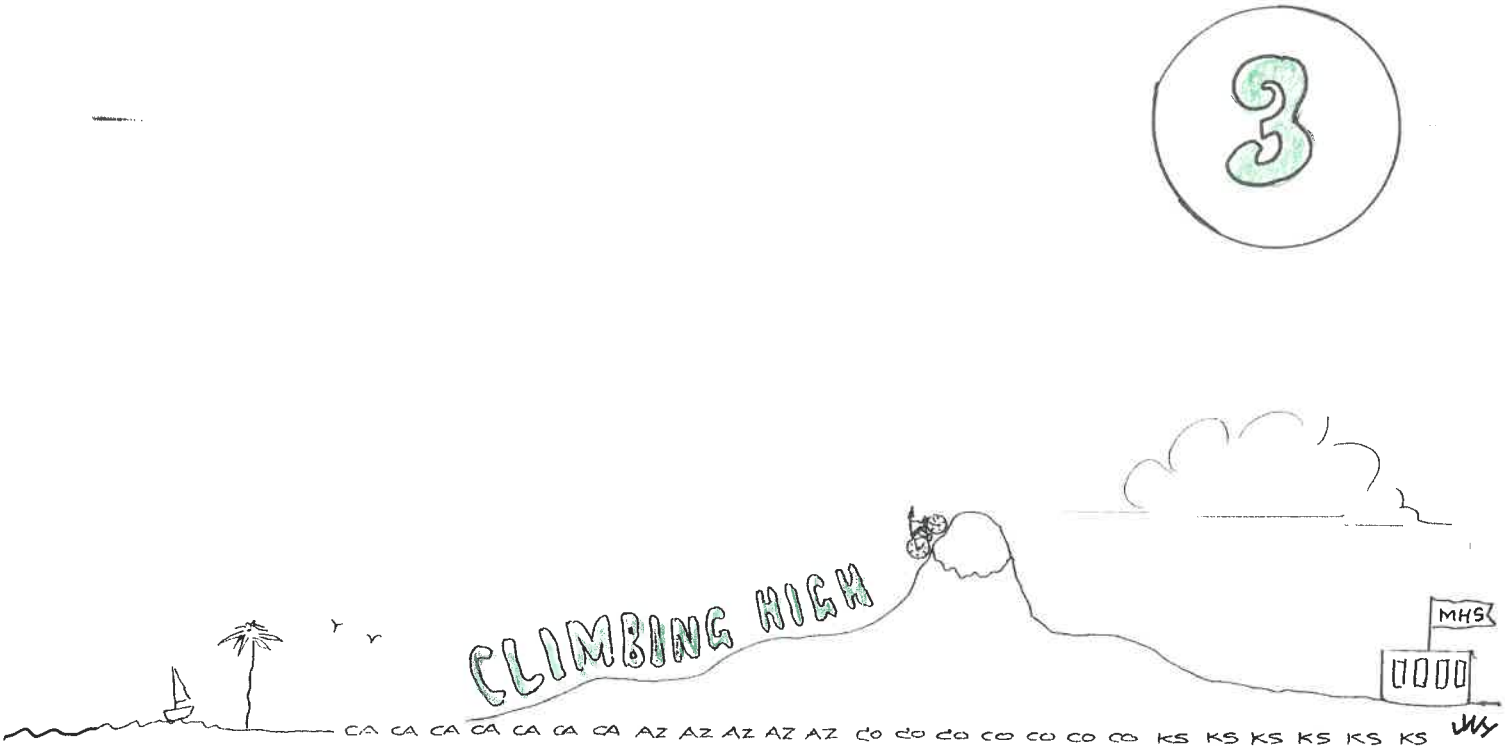
dained the niceties of streamlined bike packing by piling a trash bag full of all his goodies and fastening it to his rear rack (this was on the same trip with Wilma's Hair Dryer and I mistakenly tried to dispose of Pete's load because I thought the janitor had temporarily stashed all the hotel trash atop Pete's bike).

But I shouldn't shake my head in disbelief because on my third trip down the length of Baja California in December 1990, in a whimsey of weight-saving, I substituted for my normal container of waxed dental floss a smaller vial of thinner, unwaxed floss that really didn't hold up. All that fuss over a projected weight saving here of mere grams, not even ounces, while at the same time I carried a camera and ten rolls of film. In the final equipment review while packing for a trip we should follow the dictum that the last questionable items are probably not worth the space and sweat required to lug them along at seventy miles a day. That painful decision is not always true but, in Damon Runyon's phrase of yesteryear, that's the way to bet.

So my policy is to tour sagless but to stay as light as I can with only the gear I think I'll really need. Sagless touring develops self-reliance and confidence. Carrying a tent, sleeping bag and stove promotes a sense of adventure and release from the spatial constraints of motels and restaurants, which can then be used only if they are convenient or if you are tired. Otherwise you can stay in any old campground or even out in the country or the desert.

If you were pedaling 1790 miles along the south rim of the Grand Canyon, through Monument Valley in the Navajo desert, and up

over Wolf Creek Pass in the Rockies enroute to your 53rd high school reunion, what would be in your bags (besides a plane ticket back to San Diego) and what would you leave out? Send your ideas to me in care of The Advocate. I'll see you Sunday morning 26 May at the Moose Club.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CLIMBING HIGH
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3. Climbing High: Altitude or Attitude

From Cortez, Colorado, below Mesa Verde in the southwest corner of the state, one can see the majestic Rockies beckoning from the eastern horizon. As I pedaled toward Durango forty miles to the east I very gradually climbed through canyons and passes with vestiges of snowfields still there on each side of the road that fifth day of May. The weather was sunny and pleasant, and I had no idea that the next morning I'd begin my assault on Coal Bank Pass in falling snow.

Easily reaching Durango by noon I pedaled around buying some bike parts, getting some unleaded gas for my cook stove, and discovering that the weather had closed the pass just two days before. I was warned that getting caught in the 8,000-foot valley between Coal Bank Pass (10,640 feet) and Molas Divide (10,910 feet) to the north could be trouble if a white-out developed and one wasn't properly equipped to handle hypothermia, dwindling food, getting wet, etc. So even though I made a good camp at a KOA twelve miles north of town at the foot of the grade, I went to sleep that night thinking about that first pass.

As usual I got up early the next morning, somewhat startled by the snow flurries...weather we don't see in coastal San Diego. The floating flakes were pretty but I was a bit apprehensive. Since the road surface seemed good and the snow did not promise to abate soon, I decided to make an early start to try to get over the pass as quickly as possible before the weather worsened.

Slowly reaching seven thousand feet I thought my heart beat a bit fast, and I was definitely short of breath. This hadn't happened to me before, and the condition grew somewhat as

the eight thousand foot marker appeared. I got to thinking about things and my anxiety persisted; "Can I really make it?"

Well, why not? Three years before I had biked successfully over Tioga Pass in the California Sierra Nevada at 9,970 feet, pedaling by the snow banks, snow fields and frozen lakes at the top.

So why was I now a bit light headed, short of breath, and uncertain? I remember thinking, "Is this a true physiological reaction to the altitude, or merely psychological?

I slowly climbed and worried up to nine thousand feet, and finally the ten thousand-foot marker appeared. I took a picture of it, thinking at least I'd have the memento even it I got no farther.

The snow stopped falling as I crawled upward. When I finally saw the sign "Coal Bank Pass Summit, 10,640 feet," I let out a whoop and immediately felt better. My state of being proved ninety-five percent psychological, and I had no adverse symptoms the rest of the trip to Marysville. Now I knew I could make it to the hostel in Silverton. In due time I reached the next summit of the Molas Divide and was amused to see the Highway Patrol giving a motorist a ticket, probably for speeding, while I was crawling to the top at five miles per hour. It was a beautiful ride at the top midst the fallen snow, and I easily coasted all the way down to the ghost town of Silverton.

This psychological phenomenon infuses many other situations too. It's seemingly easier and faster to climb a hill if you're engaged in diverting conversation with a fellow biker than if you tackle it alone. By myself I'm a persistent but slow

pedaler and don't particularly like to show how plodding I often am to anyone close by, so I instinctively put in more effort to demonstrate that I'm not quite as decrepit as I look. This mind-set definitely works. I've noticed the difference on the same hill--comparing a solo climb with one where a companion's dialog or mere presence is diverting...especially if the other biker is a pretty young female (can this be vestiges of latent "machismo" in this long-time women's libber?). The "misery loves company" feeling quietly takes over and makes the load seem lighter.

And then there's the Cash-or-Credit business of tackling hills and valleys. I always prefer Cash (paying the energy cash of climbing first to pay for the coasting reward) over Credit (enjoying the easy downhill on a credit account that's eventually to be settled with the certain climb back up). Cash sustains me with the feeling of "you're paying your dues now--getting it over with" in anticipation of a rewarding downhill pulled by that omnipresent, fickle friend: Mr. Gravity. Bicycles always, and their riders usually, detect gravity ten times faster than automobiles.

Credit induces a feeling, "Buddy, you'll pay in spades for this easy downhill." The mental or psychological aspect of handling hills and valleys cannot be ignored.

Also there was a physical-mental duality in my first two trips down the length of Baja California in old Mexico. On the first one in 1979 my son Geoff and I rode the entire 1,100 miles in fourteen days. Sally took comfort with the hope that we would each look out for the other. Although Geoff endured Montezuma's Revenge for a few days during the two weeks, he really sailed down the road and made it look easy. But I developed a sore butt and

sunburned face (even my ears). Don't ever spend two weeks in Mexico eating burritos and enchiladas with a split lip. On the fourth and toughest day I was No. 34 out of the 35 in the touring group getting into Catavina, riding the last thirty minutes in the dark.

My butt was so sore by the ninth day that I went to bed that night with the decision to continue the next morning only if I could sit on my bike without too much pain. After a good night's sleep / I awoke full of hope and quickly climbed on my bike to test my rear end. Elated to find that I probably could manage to continue, I hollered to our tour leader as I circled by him on my bike, "Bob, I'm going to go for it," and then promptly hit a chuckhole and fell over. Bob was "simpatico" and could recognize a determined oldster, who eventually did make it all the way to Cabo San Lucas on the southern tip of Baja.

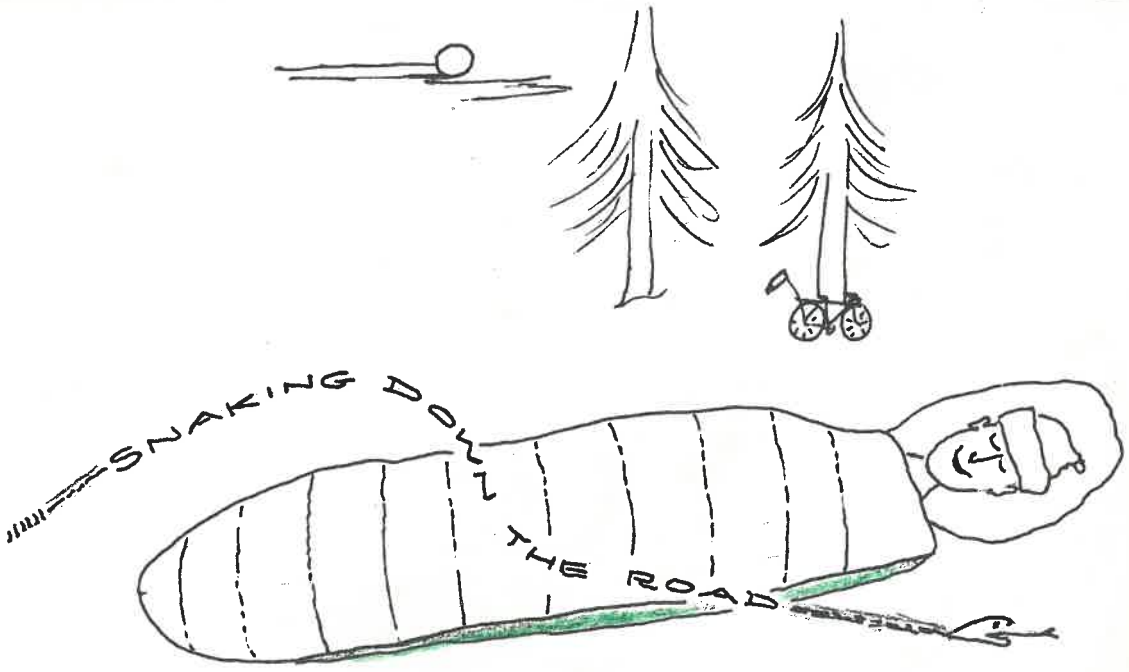
But was this struggling success just good luck? I really had a good time but I wanted to see if it was just a fluke, so the next year I joined the tour again alone (Geoff was one month away from fatherhood and unavailable). This time I was the second one into Catavina. With my dark glasses and gobs of clown white (zinc oxide) I looked like a man from Mars, but at least I didn't get sunburned. And my butt and my saddle by this time were conforming to each other...not exactly buddies but on speaking terms.

So this repeat trip was easier and went faster. Knowing where all the hills were, I got myself "psyched up" each day. Wanting to prove that my earlier success was not just a fluke, I expected my experience to pay off and it did. Motivation had its effect, but

of course the clown white and the broken-in saddle helped in the physical domain. In most things I believe it is mind (attitude, determination, outlook) somewhat over matter (physical condition, age), but I wouldn't push this platitude too far. Better simply to recognize both of these factors for what they are and take some advantage you can of each.

Do you remember Satchel Paige? I finally got to see that great athlete-philosopher a few years ago in the Padre Stadium in San Diego. He was in his mid-seventies then, but he pitched several innings in the old-timer's game that preceded the regular contest. Several of the old stars just went through the motions, but ol' Satch, the senior player on the field, was zinging the ball in with surprising smoke.

Watching Satch can get an admiring and imitative fan in a bit of trouble if he isn't careful. But as Satch said, "Don't look back...they might be gaining on you!" That's psychology... maybe we can just call it an attitude. Within one's physical limits and emotional hangups there is a wide latitude of what can be accomplished. Maybe it's just judicious, controlled motivation (there's a happy phrase) combined with a lot of prunes and oat bran muffins.



JWH

4. Snaking Down The Road

The motel manager came over from the plumbing shop and gave me the key to No. 11.

"Looks like rain and colder weather tonight. Think I'll turn on the heat." What I found out later was that this meant he was turning on the hot water being fed to the baseboard heaters in all the rooms.

All a tired cyclist wants is a quiet motel room, preferably clean, and with a hot shower and safe storage for his gear. After the average sixty miles a day I'm usually a pleasantly tired biker, and anything fancy would be wasted. So often I find myself drawn to what I call a Mom-and-Pop type of operation (you know that when applying for a room you have to go to the part-time manager who works in the plumbing shop next door). We're talking about small, plain rooms for working transients and the like.

Before I go on I should tell you my position on snakes: I can take 'em or leave 'em---preferably leave 'em. I'm basically a small town kid who has lived in the San Diego and Los Angeles area for forty years, so I don't know much about farms and animal life.

"Don't you worry about transients and snakes and scorpions when you camp out all alone on a bike tour?" is a question I'm occasionally asked. My half serious reply is that I really don't worry about it. "If I found a snake crawling into my sleeping bag with me, I'd immediately have a heart attack and it'd all be over. So why worry about snakes!"

That was still my policy when I rolled into that Herrington, Kansas, motel in May, 1988. Picture a tired biker with his bike and five pannier bags stashed in various parts of his room. His sleeping bag and ground pad were rolled up, strapped and stowed by the door in a paper sack used that day to ward off the rain. The automatic blowers in the room provided some needed air flow and a bit of white noise that promised a peaceful sleep. After the fifty miles of biking that particular day, it felt comfortable after a hot shower and a light snack to hit the sack...on schedule and only two days away from a 50th high school reunion.

A slight rustling of the paper sack around my sleeping bag awoke me, but I turned over in bed certain that the overhead whisper of air in the room was only a temporary disturbance. A few minutes later I awoke again and reluctantly decided to get up and move the noisy paper sack out of the disturbing air stream. It was somewhat dark in the room, and I was half asleep as I stumbled over to the door and blindly groped for the sleeping bag. Slowly it dawned on me that the smooth, hose-like object I had grasped was too small and dense to be an inert sleeping bag. Half asleep in the dim light filtering in from the security light outside, I thought I must have hold of a piece of rubber tire casing somehow dragged into the room by my bike. Feeling it move slightly I immediately dropped the object and turned on the light in time to see a big, black, five-foot snake slither away from my grasp and disappear through the slotted openings in the molding covering the baseboard heater that ran around the periphery of the room.

Relieved and amazed that there was no heart attack, to my surprise I started to laugh, "Sally will never believe this. George will never believe this!"

Although it was 10:00 PM I decided to call the motel manager. He may already have had his doubts about my mental acuity when I had phoned him earlier in the day to complain about the defective TV reception in my room, when all it took was a turn of the right knob to set things right.

"I hate to bother you at this hour," I quietly stated with intentional understatement, "but I think there's a snake in my room, and I need some help."

Although one would expect moral outrage and a skeptical reaction, the manager quietly said he'd be right down, and he promptly arrived with a broom.

"You can see his beady little eyes there in the corner behind the slots in the baseboard."

"Yeah, you're right, but I don't think we can get him out."

"Well, I don't mind being in the same room with a snake if I'm awake and I know he's there, but I don't want to sleep in here tonight!"

"I understand. I'll move you and your gear to another room."

"No thanks, I've got my bike and my stuff spread out all over. Just leave it in here for tonight and let me sleep in another room. I don't mind coming in here in the morning as long as I already know he's in here."

"OK, I'll put you in No. 12 next door. You're being a

good sport about this."

"Yeah, well I've done a bit of camping." I was quietly full of bravado now that the danger was past...quietly relieved and somewhat cavalier.

The manager decided to let me in on a little secret, a story that was just now unfolding before his eyes.

"You know, that's a valuable snake, probably worth two or three hundred dollars!"

"Yeah, I bet it is! Do you see many of 'em around here like that?"

"No, he's not a native snake," he went on. "He's a pet snake, non-poisonous. A week ago a railroader--one of my regulars--came to stay here as they do while working on the local tracks. He wanted to keep his pet snake overnight in his room--this one, No. 11. I told him, 'No way will I let you keep a snake in your room.' But he pleaded with me that it was harmless, the snake would be lonesome out in the car, and that he would keep him caged and covered in the room. So I relented. Well, that damned snake must have gotten loose. That guy is due here again tomorrow and, boy, will I nail him for this!"

It turned out that the room had not been rented to anyone else in the last week and the snake was probably awakened from a week's hibernation behind the baseboard by the sudden heat.

The manager gave me another key and I went next door and tried to go to sleep, but I kept laughing for the next thirty minutes, secretly glad to be unharmed and amused now that the matter was pleasantly resolved. Failing to sleep I turned on the

TV, and the very first image that came on the screen was the final dramatic scene in the movie Jaws where the shark was attacking the policeman in the underwater cage. The shark's vicious jaws filled the screen like a gigantic snake's head, and I started chuckling all over again. An NBA championship game on another channel quieted me down, and I finally drifted off with a smile on my face, wondering if the motel's adjoining rooms shared common baseboards through which a snake could slither.

The next morning I said to myself, "Don't forget, there's a snake in your room when you go into shave." He was nowhere in sight, so I quickly shaved, packed and hit the road, still shaking my head in disbelief.

Pedaling that morning in the cool, traffic-free air I laughed again every time there was a piece of tire casing or other debris along the highway that could be taken for a snake. Safe and sound on the road again, I felt good to be tackling the daily allotment of sixty miles approaching my home town in northeast Kansas. It was gratifying to see two deer startle and gracefully jump over a barbed wire fence and disappear into the trees. Bike touring is fun and full of wonders, and it helps to keep a sense of humor.

ROUGHING IT

JWH

5. Roughing It

It must have been one o'clock in the morning when the Mexican came out with his flashlight into the rainy gloom of our camp spot. Still dry and warm in our bags and tents, we awoke to hear him offer us the safety of his house if the rain continued and gradually flooded us out. The offer was made in the tradition of "Mi casa es su casa." I figured out his invitation more from the flashlight's probing the new puddles of water encroaching upon us than from the few words of Spanish I understood.

There were forty of us touring in December 1990 from the U. S. border south some 1050 miles to the tip of the Baja California peninsula just below the Tropic of Cancer. This was the sixteenth consecutive trip for our gung-ho leader during each winter solstice...any other time would have been unbearably hot. I had been on two of the previous tours...both Baja V and VI were exhausting but great treks, tough but warm and dry. Baja XVI proved to be cool, rainy and windy... harder than the other two trips combined. The pace exceeded 70 miles per day, but the eleventh day from Ciudad Constitucion to La Paz was 130 miles, presenting each biker with the option of trying to make it in one day, or simply going as far as he could and then camping out in the desert. Nearly everyone tried the former, employing an early start and two hours of night riding...some with ultimate success after many flats due to chuckholes in the dark, and some with failures (hitching a ride into La Paz at the end).

Maggie said she planned to take the bus between these two points because she didn't think she could make it in one day, and she didn't feel comfortable camping alone in the Mexican desert. I thought a bus was heresy on a sagless trip, and soon talked her into joining me on the two-day option...all daylight pedaling. We were the last to leave the Maribel Hotel in Constitucion that morning and we struggled

against the wind and rain, glad to reach just beyond the halfway point at El Cien by 4:00 PM.

No one was stirring in the small gathering of rundown shacks and sheds. Backing away from the young soldiers we discovered in nearby tents, I got permission from a farmer to make camp in a small cowshed plunked halfway between his house and Highway 1. The thatch-roofed shed had an open doorway and walls that ran part of the way up on only two sides. More ramada than shed, at least it had a dirt floor that looked level and dry, so we parked our bikes, unloaded our sleeping bags, and erected our tents. My gas stove provided hot soup and cocoa, and Maggie fixed vegetarian sandwiches. The farmer's kids left playing with their pet pig and came over to watch the gringos get settled. Nearby cows seemed more puzzled than alarmed as we made camp.

It didn't start to rain until an hour after we hit the sack. We each woke up a few times in our tents that nestled in one corner, still dry amidst the light rain that occasionally stopped but really wouldn't go away, and unaware of the deepening puddles until alerted by our host. Refusing to abandon our camp for another hour in the fading hope that the spreading pools would not reach us, we finally awoke to find our tents floating. How we stayed dry is still a mystery. There was water on all six sides...front, aft, thwartships, above and below. Like sleeping in a waterbed.

Reluctantly we trudged through the rain to his house, knocked on the door, and were given a corner of a room where his oldest son was sleeping on a mattress on the concrete floor. For the remaining four hours we slept bundled upright in our sleeping bags atop two recliner seats that had been salvaged from some auto.

We awoke the next morning in a light-hearted mood, happy to have

slept warm and dry and ready to tackle the remaining sixty-odd miles into La Paz. Our host fortified us with hot coffee, and I filled my waterbag from a barrel in a corner of the dirt floor of his kitchen-shed. We packed our wet gear and pedaled away only to encounter a flooded vado (dry wash) across the highway just two miles down the road.

Remembering my 1983 experience in Colorado, I slowly walked my bike through the 8-inch flood. Maggie readily accepted an offer from an American RV to "sag" into La Paz, but I managed to navigate through the remaining four water-filled vados to our destination. It rained slightly and intermittently all day, but there was no appreciable head-wind. La Paz, the bustling capital of Baja California Sur, was a mess of chuckholes, vados and mud, but there was a faint rainbow over the bay to the northeast as I slogged up to our hotel, the fanciest one in town.

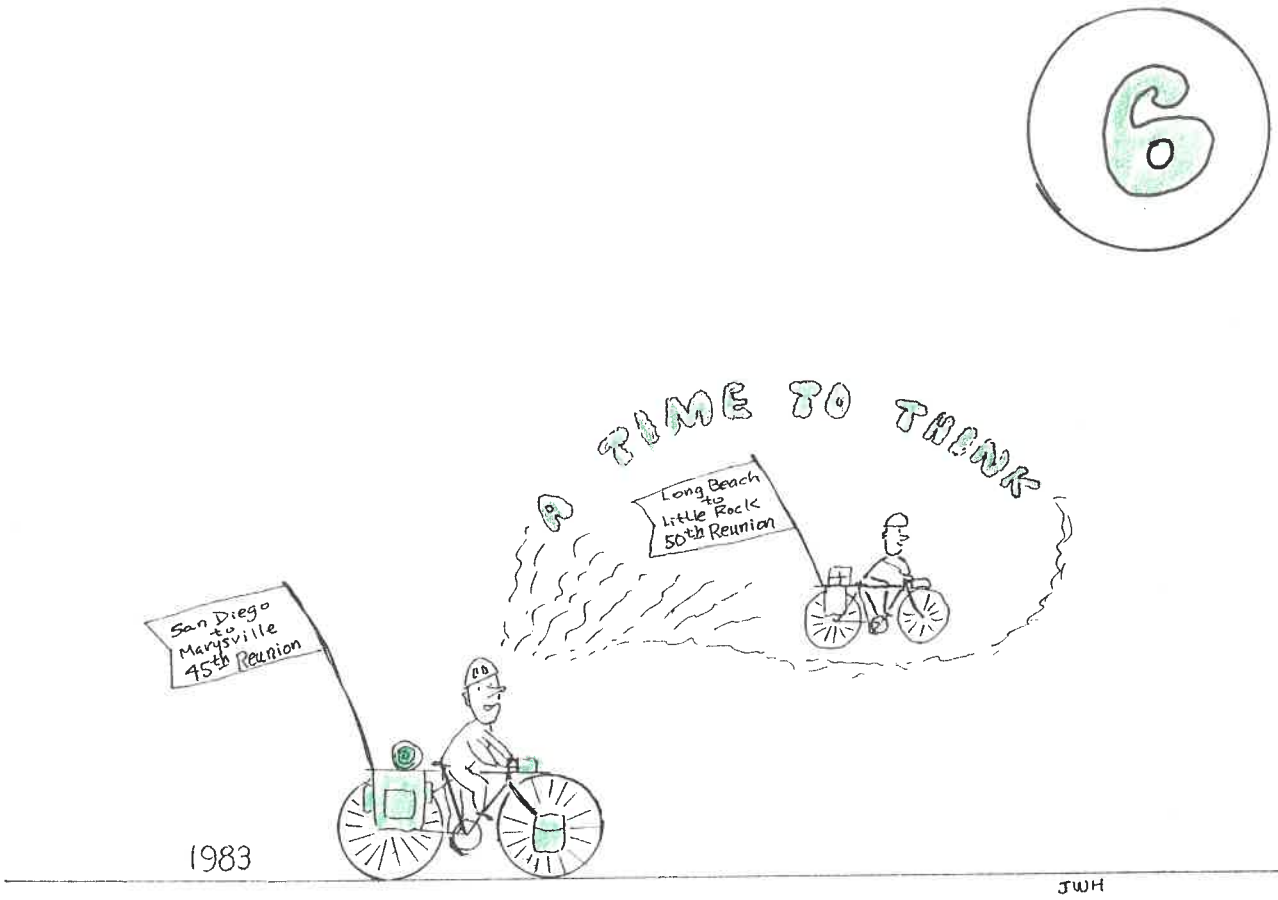
I like "roughing it" and often reminisce about other pleasant experiences:

- Taking a ferry to the sandy beaches of Denman Island in British Columbia...a quiet, primitive, isolated camp spot (1975).
- A frozen water bottle the next morning in an open-ended tube tent in an offroad camp in the Anza-Borrego Desert just east of San Diego (1976).
- The sound of the Pacific surf twenty feet away from my sleeping bag on San Simeon State Beach (1979).
- Hearing carols in the valley way below my hilltop camp on Christmas Eve, Baja V, not far from my floating tent locale eleven years later (1979).
- The gorgeous sunset at the cactus campsite at Vizcaino Junction on Baja VI (1980).

- Sneaking past the buffalo guarding the entrance to the primitive campsite at Otter Creek in the middle of Yellowstone (1982).
- Sleeping in a bowl of red sand hidden from the highway in the Navajo desert country near the Four Corners area (1983).

The reward of "roughing it" is to be sagless, independent of motels and restaurants, away from congestion and traffic, to be free in spirit and close to nature. The cost is the time, extra load, energy and caution it takes.

A comparable escapade was New Year's Eve camping on the center parkway of Sierra Madre Boulevard about 100 yards from the end of the Rose Parade route in Pasadena: bikes stacked around a palm tree, 40,000 people camped along the parade route (touch football, bluegrass bands, bridge games, picnics, guitars, kids, you name it), midnight champagne and front row seats the next morning (1990). This rough camping certainly wasn't away from traffic and congestion, but it was "party time" and we had fun plus 250 miles of biking round trip from San Diego.


60
TIME TO THINK
San Diego to Marysville 45th Reunion
Long Beach to Little Rock 50th Reunion
1983
JWH

6. A Time To Think

Sagless bike touring gives you a chance to get back to basics: the daily regimen of keeping dry and comfortable, finding food and water, making a good camp, doing laundry, restful sleep...all the while enjoying the sights, sounds, smells and feel of the countryside. This routine leads to reverie and thanksgiving...and an appreciation of nature and the simple life. Pedaling gives you a time to think.

I was thinking of the big picture back in April 1983 as I left home in San Diego to start a 2,000 mile odyssey to Kansas City. But I had three flats in the first ten miles, and gradually began to concentrate on the little scenario at hand, finally concluding that my innertubes were simply old and unpatchable. Two new tubes from the nearest bike shop and I continued on the remaining 1,990 miles without another flat. One hundred miles on the second day got me back on schedule and with a better outlook. In fact I only had one flat in subsequent trips through the Canadian Rockies, Taos-Marysville, England, Scotland, Northern Ireland (bingo), Rose Parade, New Zealand, and Baja California. I keep my infrequent flats now in perspective.

As I reflect forwards, backwards and sideways while pedaling along, what is the happiest, most satisfying time of day? (1) A crisp, quiet dawn full of anticipation of the rolling miles ahead. (2) Breaking camp and getting all that gear back on the bike. (3) Breakfast after the twenty to thirty miles of an early start. (4) The mid-morning rest while checking friend bike that has just gobbled up a third of the day's mileage. (5) Lunch break and eating anything in sight. (6) Mid-afternoon picture-taking pauses. (7) Three-quarters enroute with some energy left. (8) Triumphant arrival and making camp. (9) Clean-up first and supper second. (10) Hitting the sack, especially under the stars.

All of the above? Each of the day's segments can be a time to think, a time of reflection, a time of recurring humility. On the fourth day out on that same 1983 trip above, I pulled over from the highway into a small store in the desolate desert of northwest Arizona. At age 61 I was riding clear to Marysville for my 45th high school reunion, rather pleased with myself that I was successfully managing my trip. Who should ride up but an old codger (also four days out of Southern California), a little bit older, heading a little bit farther (into Iowa to visit his sister), and on to his own 50th reunion in Arkansas. There's always someone in life who's a little better, stronger, wiser (dumber?) and more ambitious. Moral: keep your goals and triumphs in perspective.

One must always remember that bikers are the prisoners of good, decent roads, which promote comfortable and safe touring. There is always the hazard of chuckholes, fore-and-aft gratings, sand and gravel, and narrow shoulders. Many conditions that are not harmful or even noticeable to cars are very much so to bikes. Cars can zoom up undetected grades that are very apparent (gravity-wise) to bikes. The perspective and trade-off here is to expend the caution and energy to insure safe cycling in order to reap the reward of healthy exercise, scenery and a closeness to nature.

I think a lot about the road builders while pedaling along. At ten miles per hour you can see the framework and planning that went into the road construction, and you appreciate the pathway laid out just for you. And you're thankful for a lot of other things too.


7
GOOD SAMS
JWH

7. Good Sams

I was puzzled and somewhat alarmed at the "Hey, stop!" shouted at me by the fellow who turned out to be the mayor, police chief, and merchant (farm implements/parade floats/realty) in the small town of Scandia just sixty miles west of my hometown in Kansas. It was 6:45 PM and I was hurrying to reach my night's destination, Belleville, before dark and had another ten miles to go.

For a few seconds I thought I was being arrested for some minor traffic violation, but then he added, "Don't you know there's a storm coming?" His wife in the hilltop house across Highway 36 from his garage had just called him about the storm warning on TV and the lightning she saw on the horizon. He said the rain was only ten minutes away.

I'd ridden in heat/cold/rain/snow before and was prepared to keep pedaling in the remaining daylight. The weather seemed clear to me. His name was Bud White and he offered to let me camp right there in his implement garage. Although skeptical about the storm I accepted his kind offer, and ten minutes later a big cold front thunderstorm blew in and it rained 2/3" in half an hour.

After three consecutive days of 80/94/81 miles I had no trouble sleeping on the concrete floor that night...warm and dry and grateful for another Good Sam(aritan). The next morning I locked up the garage at 7:00 AM and rode over to B&J's restaurant very pleased with the world and eager to pedal on to Marysville.

On that same trip back in 1983 I enjoyed the hospitality of Rod and Barb Cencich in Montrose, Colorado. Their bungalow was one of the LAW (League of American Wheelmen) Hospitality Homes spread over the United States, a collection of Good Sams organized to help bike tourists. After supper we enjoyed a sunset drive in their truck to the Black Canyon of the Gunnison. And twelve days later Brett Lewis was the kind soul

who pulled me and my bike out of the flood waters east of Brighton, let me get dried out on the front porch of his parent's farmhouse, and then trucked me 100 yards over the raging creek and got me on my way.

Headwinds and lack of water are the most pervasive of nature's obstacles to a cycle tourist. In 1988 on Day 3 out of Taos I hoped to pedal 103 miles from Raton, NM to Las Junta, CO to compensate for the headwinds and low mileage on Day 2. The challenge of the early morning climb over Raton Pass proved much less than the final 75 miles through the Comanche National Grassland. Most of the towns in this high desert had disappeared or turned into ghosts, and that meant that water was my main problem.

Fifteen miles out of Trinidad I approached a roadside farmhouse where Miss Lillian, a widow lady, and her dog Spike (always keep an eye on a farm dog named Spike, even if "he wouldn't hurt a fly") let me fill myself and my bottle with well water. And just down the road at Model a lay preacher and his three towhead kids blessed me with some more water. I then passed the spot where the map showed the town of Tyrone (which must have disappeared); there certinly wasn't any water there, just sand and tumbleweeds. By the time I reached Thatcher (Mile 57), now only a single farm but still on the map, I needed water again. Mr. Hill and I visited on his front porch, and he gave me water and showed me his collection of frontier artifacts (bottles and arrowheads) uncovered on his farm. Ten more miles and I rested for lunch midst the few abandoned buildings called Delhi. Then on to the forlorn houses and trailers of Timpas (Mile 85) where an old fellow gave me some of his precious trucked-in water.

Those four watering stops enabled me to reach the civilization of La Junta by 3:30 PM, where I enjoyed some strawberry shortcake at Woolworth's and a good night's sleep in a motel room with elm tree bugs.

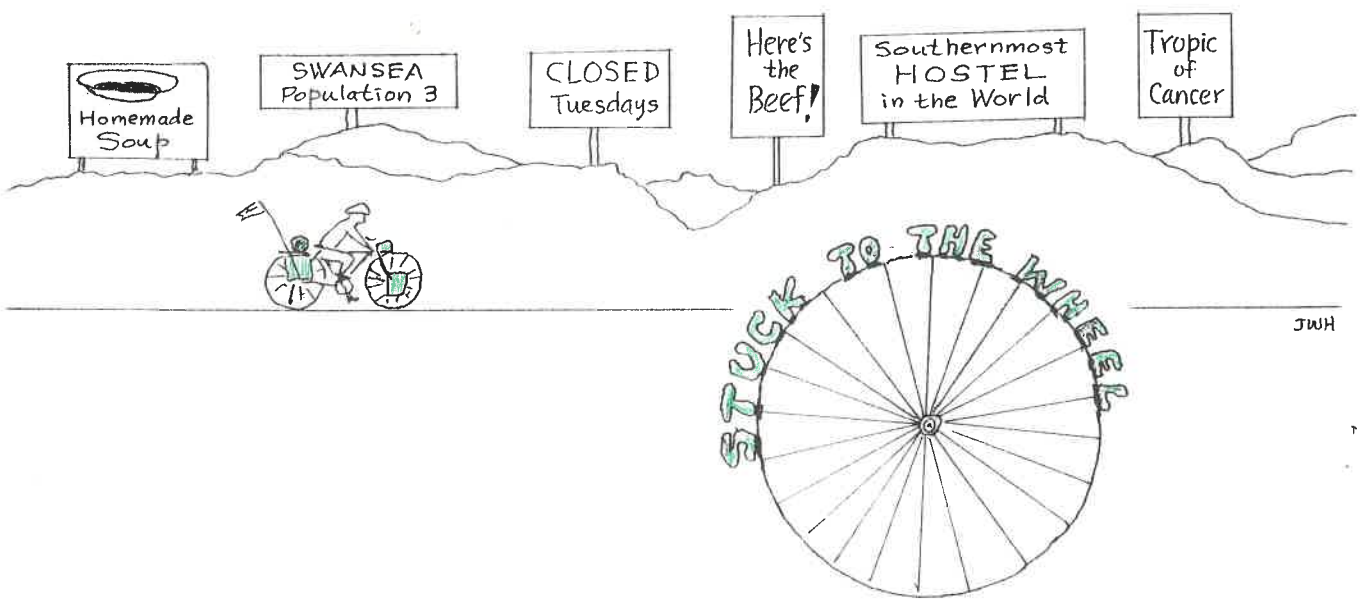
The manager said the bugs were there and were harmless, and she was right on both counts. I slept very soundly.

Youth hostels are also great for helping out in a pinch. Covering both ends of the age spectrum, I belong to American Youth Hostels (hiking and biking) and Elderhostel (one-week academic programs at colleges throughout the USA and many foreign countries). The hostel movement started in Europe but has spread throughout much of the world. Many of the touring hostels get crowded nowadays with car campers, so often the hostel warden, with a sympathetic eye and ear for the weary biker, will squeeze in a bedraggled cyclist who pedals in late in the day. I've enjoyed hostels in British Columbia (1975), USA (1983), UK (1989) and New Zealand (1990).

In particular I remember Molly, the warden at the tourist/ghost town of Silverton, Colorado, who welcomed me with mail and good cheer after my struggle over those two passes in the Rockies; and Irene, who squeezed me in at John-O-Groats, the windy northeast corner of Scotland; and the lady warden who gave me some space on a car seat on a fire escape landing inside the hostel at South Laggan in the Scottish lowlands; and Patricia, who registered me at Whitepark Bay in Northern Ireland, where the youth hostel has large picture windows in the common room overlooking the fantastic Antrim Coast below.

And most recently there was the solicitious Mexican who came out of his small house in the midnight rain to warn us of the impending flood-out of our cowshed campsite and to welcome us into his home, an offer that we later gladly accepted.

There are lots of Good Sams out there in the countryside. Sometimes one goes looking for them, but just as often they show up on their own when they see a need.


Homemade Soup
SWANSEA Population 3
CLOSED Tuesdays
Here's the Beef!
Southernmost HOSTEL in the World
Tropic of Cancer
JWH

STUCK TO THE WHEEL

8. Stuck To The Wheel

Besides the touring Highs and Lows (the "most" this or the "best" that), which I enumerate at the end of these musings, there are many little cycling incidents, all rather simple and unspectacular, that are stuck to my memory wheel...such as:

1975--A little boy riding his homemade soapbox racer in the suburbs of Victoria, British Columbia, as we used to do in Marysville in 1930. I hadn't seen one of those racers in years.

1976--A ringside view of a hang glider launch from a high ledge of Santa Rosa Mountain in Southern California, and then racing it down to the desert floor below.

1979--Enjoying the surf sounds all night long at San Simeon State Beach Park just twenty feet from my sleeping bag.

1979--Holiday music floating from a valley ranch far below up to my sleeping bag on a hilltop. It was Christmas Eve and I was happily camped in the middle of the Baja California desert northwest of La Paz.

1980--Finding frozen brakes and derailleurs on my bike parked outside my tent overnight in an Easter snowfall at Grand Canyon.

1980--Homemade vegetable soup in the little cafe atop Tioga Pass after that long climb enroute to Yosemite.

1980--The gorgeous sunset from the impromptu cactus campsite at Vizcaino Junction in Baja California.

1982--Warily racing by the buffalo guarding the Otter Creek Campground gateway in Yellowstone.

1982--Reading the sign on the fence gate of the small ranch along the road near Keeler west of the Panamint Mountains of Death Valley, "Swansea Population 3: one human, two 45's." I needed some water but decided to pedal on.

1983--Tuesday morning, 26 April: an early dawn start from Aguila on a slow climb midst the high desert of northwest Arizona, pedaling 24 miles through the quiet and desolation, and rolling up to the only restaurant in the town of Congress at 0855 for a hearty breakfast, only to confront the sign on the door: Closed Tuesdays.

1986--Hearing the Tarzan yell of a bugling bull moose in the day-break hours of our final climb in Glacier National Park.

1988--The "Here's the Beef" sign on the stockyard barn in the Colorado cattle country west of Syracuse, Kansas.

1989--Trying to sneak a half-mile ride on the main highway going into Belfast, Northern Ireland, and being stopped by the Highway Patrol, who recognized a bewildered but harmless Yank.

1990--Our bicycles camped in the center divider of Sierra Madre Boulevard in Padadena at the end of the Rose Parade route, and my worrying in my sleeping bag about getting trampled by the youngsters playing touch football at 10:00 PM on New Year's Eve. It was 2:00 AM before we got to sleep, and only seven hours before the parade marched right in front of us.

1990--The sign at the Youth Hostel at Invercargill at the southern tip of the South Island of New Zealand: "Southernmost Hostel in the World."

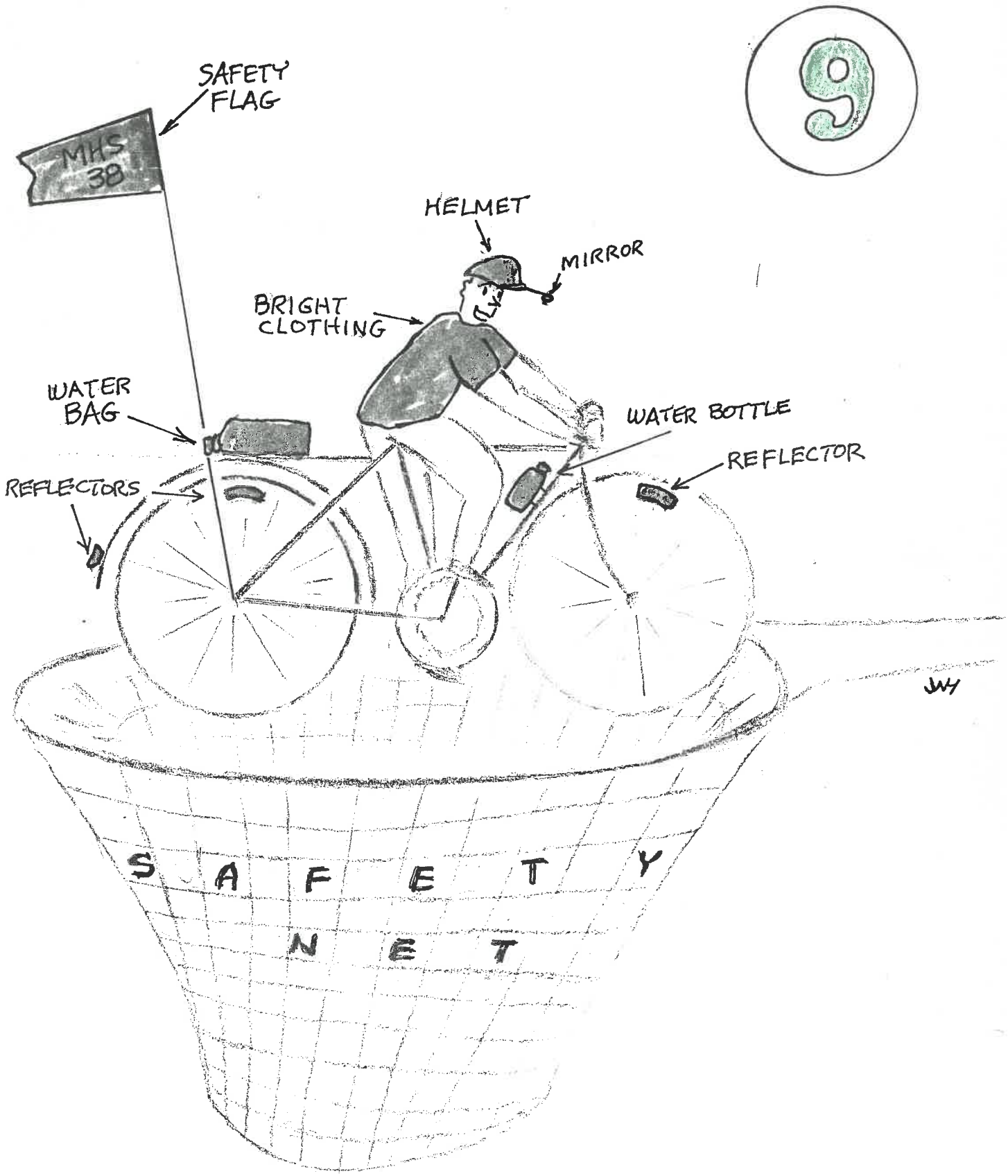
1990--A squadron of pelicans skimming the Pacific Ocean surf at the deserted sandy beach of Todos Santos right at the Tropic of Cancer line in Baja California.

Here are some of my TOURING HIGHS AND LOWS:

Longest Mileages:
(1) California, Yosemite to Los Banos, 113 miles, 1980
(2) Eastern Colorado, Strasburg to Bonny, 111 miles, 1983
(3) Baja California, Constitucion to La Paz Lookout, 110 miles, 1980

Highest Mountain Passes:	(1-4) Central Colorado, Monarch Pass, 11312 feet: Red Mountain Pass, 11018 feet; Molas Divide, 10910 feet; Coal Bank Pass, 10640 feet, all in 1983 (5) Central California, Tioga Pass, 9970 feet, 1980
Steepest Climbs:	(1) Southwest England, Cornwall and other shires, grades up to 30%, 1989 (2) Baja California, Sierra de la Giganta Mountains south of Loreto, 1990 (3) Southwest Arizona, Yarnell Grade, 1983 (4) Southwest California, Banner Grade, 1976
Most Scenic Views:	(1) Arizona, Grand Canyon from Yavapai Point, 1980 (2) Canadian Rockies from Logan Pass, 1986 (3) Colorado Rockies from Coal Bank Pass, 1983 (4) Wyoming, Grand Tetons from Jackson Hole, 1982
Most Historic Spot:	(1) England, Lake District, Hardknot Pass, Roman Fort (114 A.D.), 1989
Highest Latitudes:	(1) 58° N at John-O-Groats, Scotland, 1989 (2) 47° S at Invercargill, South Island, New Zealand, 1990
Lowest Deserts:	(1) Central California, Death Valley, Badwater, 280 feet below S.L., 1982 (2) Southern California, Salton Sea, 235 feet below S.L., 1976
Most Desolation:	(1) Baja California, dry lakes south of Catavina, 1979 (2) Southern California, Borrego Badlands in Anza-Borrego Desert, 1976 (3) Eastern California, Death Valley, 1982 (4) Southern California, Glammis Dunes in the Yuma Plain Sand Hills of the Mojave Desert, 1983
Strongest Winds:	(1) Southwest Wyoming, 60 mph gusts going into Rock Springs, 1982 (2) Baja California, headwinds enroute to Rosarito, 1990 (3) Northeast New Mexico, headwinds into Raton, 1988
Toughest Day:	(1) Baja California, 98 miles of headwinds into Rosarito, 1990
Coldest Nights:	(1) South Rim of Grand Canyon, 17° F. in Mather Campground, 1980 (2) Western Colorado, 19° F. in campground at Gunnison, 1983
Heaviest Traffic:	(1) British Columbia, Lion's Gate Bridge in Vancouver, 1975 (2) Missouri, evening rush hour in Kansas City suburbs, 1983 (3) Canada, morning rush hour in Calgary, 1986 (4) California, Laguna Beach, Saturday just before the Rose Parade, 1989

Greatest Anticipation:
(1) The next tour
(2) Tomorrow's ride
(3) The view just around the bend


9
SAFETY FLAG
MHS 38
HELMET
MIRROR
BRIGHT CLOTHING
WATER BAG
WATER BOTTLE
REFLECTOR
REFLECTORS
JW
S A F E T Y
N E T

9. Safety Net

Sally and I were delighted to spend a week in the Maine woods that August of 1990 with our son and his family. He was generously loaned a cabin on Bickford Pond where we enjoyed loafing, boating, swimming, water skiing, hiking and for one morning some biking. Jeff, wife Jean and I mounted the three bikes he brought from their home in New York, and we anticipated a quiet and pleasant spin on the lane that encircled the pond.

I felt a bit strange and uneasy not having a helmet to wear after cycling over 11,000 helmeted miles in the previous 15 years. A helmet was second nature for me, but the day was clear and the traffic very light, so off we pedaled. A couple of miles took us half way around the pond when my wind jacket tied to the front rack suddenly became tangled in the front wheel. Before I could stop the bike ~~(at only~~ 5 miles per hour), the wheel locked and I did a beautiful but disastrous somersault. As if in slow motion I remember seeing the front wheel, then the pavement, and finally the sky and trees whirling past my eyeballs while I rotated vertically 270°, during which maneuver I hollered, "Oh, shoot!", or something like that.

I was lucky to suffer only a few scrapes and bruises, plus four stitches in my nose. The bill on my helmet might have prevented the latter, but a helmet's primary purpose is to preclude or minimize serious brain injury. So I was indeed lucky to get off so lightly in violating Murphy's Law.

Let me recite a few GENERAL GUIDELINES to cycling safety. These notes bear mainly on touring; they are not definitive but are simply my observations of some useful practices over the years:

First, wear a helmet at all times, preferably with a rear-view mirror. Second, a safety flag (the higher, the better) insures that traffic will sight you two or three times farther away than possible without one. Bright clothing helps make you more visible (my kids used to call me Captain Midnight, who I understand was a courageous and conspicuously clothed man of action on TV). Visibility considerations generally make night riding something to avoid or at least minimize, but a full moon and good lights will reduce the danger and can produce a delightful ride. Third, learn and obey the basic rules of the road (the generally observed vehicular laws). Your bike is a vehicle and you must follow these rules as they apply to bicycles. Lastly, make your cycling moves positive and predictable, with eye contact where appropriate.

With respect to time and locale, I like to get in some good mileage early in the day, starting at dawn if possible, when temperatures are coolest, and winds and traffic usually lightest. The latter factor is helped by picking country roads or minor highways.

Another major concern is access to GOOD WATER. This was a first priority on my three tours down the length of Baja California. Many of my colleagues resorted to bottled water (not always available), but I avoided sickness simply by adding hyperiodide tablets to the motel or campground spigot water, and by taking an amoebacide or other medication daily. I carried over two gallons in a water bag strapped to my rear rack. In 1983 my concern was sufficient water in crossing the Navajo country of northern Arizona, but the Indian trading posts all seemed to have apparently potable water available.

In 1988 I did run out of water in the Commanche National

Grassland in southeastern Colorado on a 103-mile day, and had to make four unscheduled water stops, which were successful but not the natives weren't restless, just helpful. Later during an abortive tour in New Zealand I ran out of water on a short 48-mile day going into Queenstown. At the time it didn't seem that hot, but I became listless and exhausted before getting to some water near the end of my mileage, and I later calculated that I had suffered from heat exhaustion and dehydration, which probably contributed to an incipient kidney stone. But previously I toured at 73 mpd through the Mojave Desert in early summer without any water problems, and in general my experience has been that adequate planning can handle this major problem.

What about POLITICAL UNREST? I arrived midst the graffiti and IRA slogans in central Belfast on Sunday 13 August 1989, the twentieth anniversary date of the posting of British troops in Northern Ireland. Violence was expected and predicted and it did occur that day in Belfast, Londonderry and other Ulster sites. "Tommies" with automatic rifles carried at ready arms were highly visible at several key locations in Belfast during my two weeks there. However, trying to be positive but prudent re the "troubles," I managed to have a delightful tour of the Antrim coast, with a mind-set that placed this political unrest as less hazardous than California freeway traffic and earthquakes, or Kansas tornadoes. The Persian Gulf arena is another matter.

For several years I've been receiving literature from Goulash Tours, an organization run by two women (Hungarian descent?) in Michigan and specialization in lengthy tours behind the Iron Curtain. How can you resist a name like Goulash Tours?

I was sorely tempted by good recommendations before the Curtain ripped, but now I believe the ensuing democratic upheaval and turmoil might be more of a hazard than before. A paper mill strike in British Columbia in 1975, instead of producing a hostile environment, actually provided safer bicycle touring because it removed nearly all the large, rumbling logging trucks from the winding roads. Each situation has to be evaluated on its particular merits.

CIVIL PROBLEMS? My three tours in Baja (1979, 80, 90) experienced no banditos or other problems of personal safety. Occasional stoicism perhaps, rarely sullenness, but 99% of the time friendliness and generosity. The same goes for roadside camping in Navajoland, or in Oskaloosa, Kansas, or in various campgrounds. An illustrative example is my 28-day, 1976 trip to Kansas City in 1983. Toward the end of the second day twice I was teased and threatened by teenagers (Anglo in one car and Latino in the other) swerving towards my bike. It was a Saturday night and they were probably ending a work day in anticipation of an evening on the town. My rear-view mirror alerted me each time to avoid a side-swipe, and this kind of harassment did not occur again in the next 1800 miles. Stay awake, but there are other/more probable things to worry about.

A WEATHER ADVISORY: The bugaboo here is headwinds. They greatly reduce speed and are very depressing and enervating. My toughest day of biking was caused mainly by headwinds. On my 1988 Kansas trek from Syracuse to Marysville I changed my route north when experiencing easterlies, and east when encountering northerlies. My total mileage to Marysville remained within two miles of my original estimate, and I change the headwinds into crosswinds

for easier progress.

Crosswinds are more tolerable but they do cause swerving when gusty. I've seen crosswinds come roaring down a mountain gully and throw a man off his bike with a broken collarbone. In Rock Springs, Wyoming, a spate of 60-mph crosswind gusts forced us to walk our bikes for an hour. We could hardly stand up.

Rain is tolerable if moderate; the same for snow. The main concern is that they don't affect the road surface.

Here are the highlights of my sixteen tours relative to ROAD CONDITIONS:

- British Columbia--(1) Beautiful, high Lion's Gate Bridge with heavy commuter traffic. (2) Absence of expected logging trucks in the woods. 1975.
- San Diego County--A four-day Thanksgiving trip in 1975 aborted because of ice and snow in the mountains. Trying to return home on the second day I found the road was clean and dry except for the clear ice on the pavement shaded by nearby trees. I thought one could scoot across the icy areas safely on a steady straight line, but the rear wheel always slid out. Dumped in my bright red jogging suit into the roadside snowbanks, I looked like a skinny Santa Claus who needed his reindeer. After two or three crashes I wisely spent the next 15 miles walking my loaded bike across each icy stretch until the lower elevation and the morning sun eliminated the problem. I successfully tackled this trip the next year: cold, but no road ice. 1976.
- Highway 1 in Southern California--A narrow, steep, winding road

wrapped around the coastal cliffs. But what a view! 1979.

- Baja California--Narrow roads, disappearing shoulders, epidemics of chuckholes, even in the towns and cities. Highway traffic problems only with American RV's, and Mexican trucks and busses on a tight time schedule. 1979.
- Grand Canyon--Unexpected snow and ice during Easter. The ice, this time rime instead of clear, still caused nearly all of us to take a spill. Moral: get off and walk, especially near traffic. 1980.
- Southern California--Day 3 brought a very steep (16%) downhill into the Mojave Desert from the summit at Big Bear. We checked our wheel rims for excess heat due to braking. 1980.
- Baja California--Same as before. The Mexicans do not "cut and fill" their roads very much, but just go over the top. Lots of "vados" (dry washes) with their marker sticks at the bottom ready to indicate water depth to the wary traveler when the rains come. Dry this year of 1980.
- Yellowstone--(1) An 8500-foot pass with snow banks in late June (but good road surface). (2) Carrying our bikes on the narrow wooden plank road leading into the remote Otter Creek Campground. 1982.
- Death Valley--The monochromatic sandy color where bike flags really help you get seen in time. Lucily no blowing sand this time. 1982.
- San Diego to Kansas City--(1) The diagonal bumps on the shoulder of US Highway 95 (Interstate 10) east of Blythe, California. I like biking on the Interstates in the rare places where it is permitted (no alternative route). The shoulder is as wide

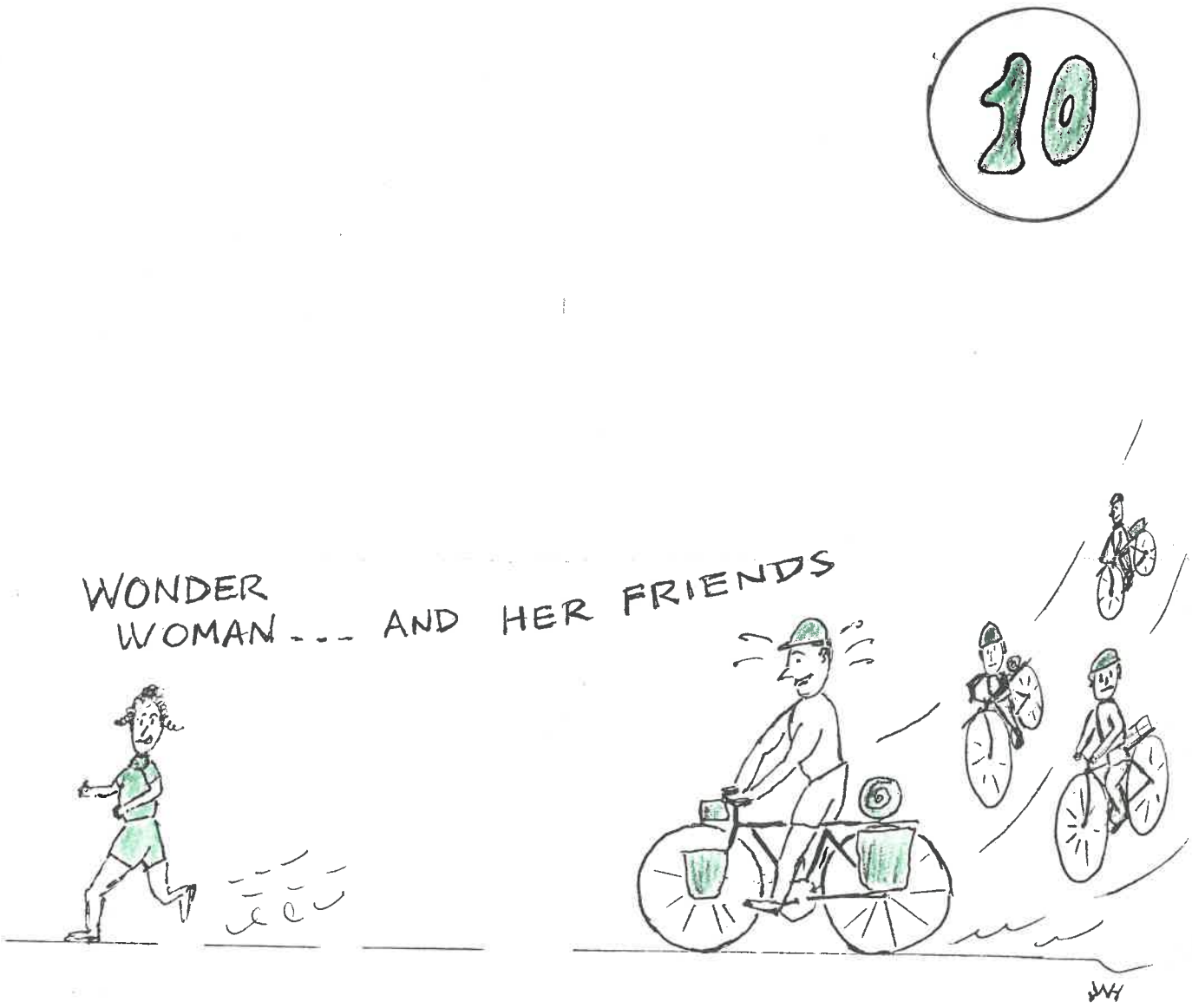
as a traffic lane and I think safer than regular highways. (2) The power of spring floods near Brighton, Colorado. 1983.

- Canadian Rockies--The narrow, winding, steep road down the west side of Logan Pass. Bikes are not allowed from noon until 4:00 PM. 1986.
- Taos to Marysville--(1) US Highway 25 posted from Raton, NM to the Colorado border as "No Biking," but the Raton police said it was probably OK, especially in the early morning before the highway patrol worries about traffic. Upon reaching Raton Pass at the border the next morning I saw signs allowing bikes on US 25 in Colorado, and I sailed down into Trinidad with a clear conscience. There was no alternate route. (2) Brick streets in Trinidad, as in Marysville, make for a rumbling ride. 1988.
- United Kingdom--(1) Riding on the left side. I had my mind set positively about this and had no biking problems, but I felt funny riding in a car as a passenger in the left front seat. (2) Grades up to 30 and 35% in Cornwall. (3) Single-lane roads with periodic turnouts. (4) Shoulder-less roads. Vertical cuts in the roadside brush. I saw mowers in operation with their blades tilted over 70°. This is not the mower angles I remember in Kansas. 1989.
- Rose Parade--Day 1, Laguna Beach traffic. Day 2, New Year's Eve traffic. Day 3, New Year's Day traffic. Day 4, less traffic, but some rain. Still it was fun. 1990.
- New Zealand--Riding on the left side, but no problems. 1990.
- Baja California--(1) Making adobe bricks with the clay mud and grass weeds caught between my tires and fenders in downtown La Paz. This was the rainiest of my three Baja treks.

Detours through some sandy and rocky vados adjacent to the collapsed pavement. 1990.

In summary here are some reminders: Helmet--Ask the man who owes one...his life, or at least his peace of mind. Safety Flag--Bikers like kids should be seen and not hurt. Headwinds--They slow you up and sometimes you have to pedal downhill, but the safety problem is that reduced speed means reduced stability, with gusting an additional danger. Road Surface--Keep a weather eye on the texture as well as the width of the road. Rules--Bikers have their rights, but along with them are the rules to be obeyed. Bikers lose all ties in contests with cars. It's better to be safe than quarry.

Let good planning and ingrained practices be the net that scoops you home safe and sound...a net that permits you to enjoy a potentially dangerous sport with relative safety, and with an adventurous but respectful attitude intact.


10
WONDER WOMAN --- AND HER FRIENDS

10. Wonder Woman And Her Friends

She was only five feet tall, about 105 pounds, trim in appearance and pleasant in manner. Her muscles must have been paragons of strength and efficiency, but they didn't dominate her physique. She was the strongest rider of the 30 of us, and we called her Wonder Woman out of respect, not derision.

I never got to see her much on that Baja California tour in 1979. We averaged over 75 miles per day, and she often reached our daily destination by one or two o'clock, and then went jogging or swimming, I guess to keep in shape, or maybe just for fun. I would drag in about four or five o'clock with my tongue hanging out, tired but happy to be a part of the gang. Leader Daddy Wags, plus her brother, my son, and four or five others were the strong bikers of the tour group, but Melody was the best.

Daddy Wags is the best leader of rigorous, fully loaded (no sag wagon) tours I've known. I'd go anywhere with him and try to keep up. He pioneered the Baja California end-to-end tour in 1974, and at last count successfully led 16 consecutive tours down there, all during the winter solstice, a time of minimum daylight but tolerable temperatures. He has led many other western tours in the USA, and himself is a strong, disciplined, and friendly and generous biker as well as leader. Working in aerospace reliability engineering and quality control has made him also a maintenance freak. I bought my second bike, which I've had for 12 years now, based on his practical experience and recommendation.

There were other strong bikers such as Don, a Canadian transplanted to San Diego and a member of our tour of the Canadian Rockies in 1986. There were eight of us who gathered in Missoula, Montana,

that August to trek westward to the Idaho panhandle, and then north through Couer d'Alene and Sand Point into British Columbia, and through Kootenay National Park to the pale blue waters of Lake Louise. From there we headed west to the woods and peaks around Banff and on to a dude ranch in Seebe, Alberta. This is where Don met us that ninth evening of the tour. In three days he had ridden 436 miles from Edmonton, where he'd been visiting his parents and friends, via Highway 16 to the glaciers of Jasper, and then down Highway 93 to Lake Louise and our route to Seebe. The first day to Jasper he covered 227 miles, and then 209 more miles in the next two days, all with a fully loaded bike! The following day in our continuation to Calgary he merged neatly into our tour. Cutting back to that day's allotment of only 50 miles didn't bother him one way or another; he was just one of our group.

Another stalwart was Doc, a steady and strong member of our Yellowstone tour in 1982. What I remember most was the afternoon of our seventh day, a leisurely 47 miles from the Canyon area to Grant Village. I enjoyed a lazy day of late reveille, breakfast, easy biking, sightseeing, picture taking (geysers, fumaroles, bison, swans, etc.), and eventually pedaling into our camp spot by 5:00 PM. But Doc, who I'm sure enjoyed all of the above, told me he also wanted to see Old Faithful, which was a 35-mile round trip west of our route. I was in too mellow a mood to join him and I don't believe anyone else did either. True his total mileage for the day finally totaled less than 90 miles, but I was impressed by the sprightly way he tacked on a considerable side trip late in the afternoon. Doc was no spring chicken, but he certainly ate up the miles and was a good companion to boot.

Ball Bearing Bill got his name from his very strong knees which must have been constructed of metal rods and ball bearings. He was one of the 19 of us touring north from San Diego up the Owens Valley to Lee Vining, and then west over Tioga Pass to Yosemite and on to Monterey for a coastal return to San Diego. I think his bike had only 3 or 5 speeds; in any event his lowest gear was so high that, on our second day climb up to Barton Flats in the mountains northeast of Los Angeles, our road speed was about the same but his crank / rpm's were half of mine. All of which means he was exerting twice the pedal pressure I was in climbing that steep grade. My knees ache just thinking about it.

Maintenance in the field is another valuable talent. The aforementioned Daddy Wags, with his longtime interest in biking and practical engineering, was a valuable tour leader in this respect also. Our club leader Harmon could and did (probably more than the once I remember) respoke a wheel in the countryside. And Joe, a combination rider-mechanic on Baja V, where bike parts and shops are scarce, rebuilt a collapsed wheel by borrowing 2 or 3 spare spokes from various members of the tour group, and got the hapless owner back on the road.

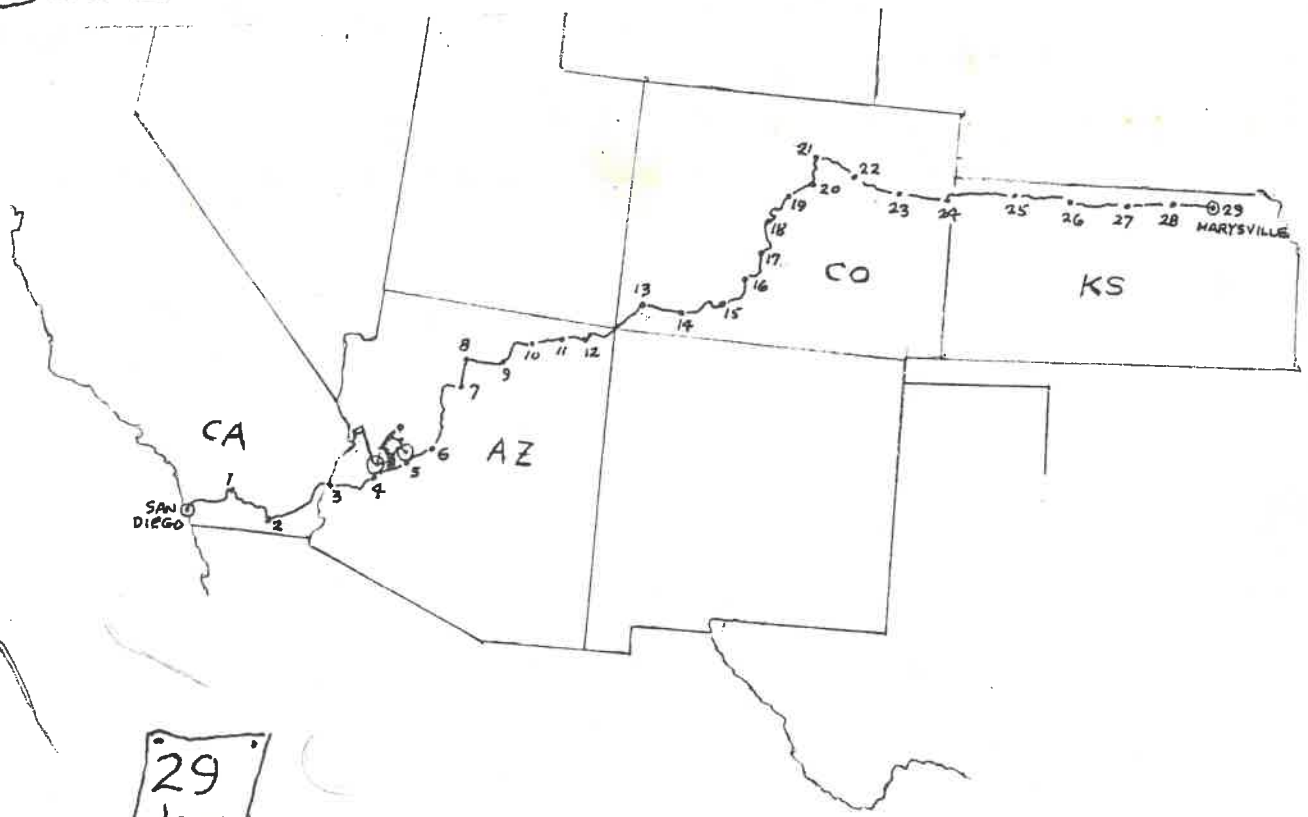
But the standout tour mechanic-rider for me was Ernie. He can fix or jury-rig anything in the field...a permanent repair or a "temporary" to get you into the next town, using a coke bottle as a hammer, fence rails as a vise, liberal doses of Loc-Tite for loose fits, etc. His background as probation officer (coping with recal-citrant humans) and bike shop owner-operator (coping with recalcitrant parts) stood him and us in good stead. He could get a repair done while I was just thinking it through.

For pleasant surprises I nominate Vida and her eight-year-old son Bobby. I thought they on their tandem would slow us up on our British Columbia tour, but they did just fine. Nearly five years later at age twelve Bobby, with his mother now on a separate bike, was again in the middle of the group, pedaling the South Rim of Grand Canyon.

There are undoubtedly other strong tourers I've omitted only because they melted into the lead pack and were casually involved in quiet camp activities by the time I dragged in each day. I was always the slow, old (or oldest) codger, Tail-End Charlie, who managed to get in without hitching, due more to determination and luck than to strength or skill. I'll accept that.

11

PLAY IT AGAIN, HAMBURG



29 days

58 mpd

1676 miles

10850 feet max elevation

11. Play It Again, Ham

I guess my old bones are as ready as they ever will be to bicycle from San Diego to the MHS alumni festivities in May. Unless cursed with swollen knees, a tender butt, sunburn or persistent sniffles, all of which have plagued me occasionally on past trips, I anticipate no enduring physical problems.

The old bike has been a trusty companion--lots of little nicks in the original paint, but no real structural problems to my knowledge...sort of like me. So with two new tires, a new 6-speed cluster, new cables if I need them, and wheels trued, I hope and expect to reach Marysville with only one or two flats (probably none) and no substantial mechanical glitches.

Except for the middle of Colorado my itinerary will be the same as in 1983. The route, which I think is very scenic and relatively traffic-free, is a good one, divided into four basic segments, roughly one week each: (1) a gradual northeastern climb from sea level at San Diego to the 7000-foot plateau along the south rim of the Grand Canyon, a wonderfully quiet and desolate trek through high desert; (2) an essentially flat easterly run across the red sand of northern Arizona through the Painted Desert and Monument Valley of Navajo country, and into the western foothills of the Rockies at Durango, Colorado; (3) some steep climbing in the San Juan Mountains and ultimately over five passes at the 9-11,000-foot level, heading northeast along the morning side of the Continental Divide through the Rocky Mountains into Boulder: and (4) a flat, easterly downhill roll on US 36 across northern Kansas to Marysville.

The total trip is roughly 100 miles shorter than before, but the third week will keep me more continuously at higher elevations.

My greatest concern is that the passes will be open. the road surface safe and with good traction, headwinds minimal, and precipitation infrequent.

The contents and weight of my touring load will be about the same as on the previous sixteen trips in different places. The new camera is better but heavier, and I've added a micro-cassette recorder, both fully compensated by eliminating the stove and fuel. Result: better pictures and colder meals in the open country, and no more poking fun at other riders' touring loads.

At 58 miles per day for 29 biking days I hope to travel the 1676 miles from San Diego to Marysville from 17 April to 23 May, with occasional layover days (marked * below) including five with relatives in Boulder:

Biking Days	Mileage	Destination	Cumulative Mileage	Elevation (feet)
1	55	Julian, CA	55	Sea Level to 4220
2	78	Brawley	133	113 below Sea Level
3	89	Blythe	222	277
4	67	Wenden AZ	289	
5	44	Congress	333	
6	48	Prescott	381	5354
7	73	Williams	454	6770
8	62	Grand Canyon*	516	6876
9	57	Cameron	573	4201
10	46	Red Lake	619	
11	50	Kayenta Junction*	669	6750 over Marsh Pass
12	55	Red Mesa	724	
13	62	Cortez, CO	786	6198
14	39	Durango*	825	6505
15	60	Pagosa Springs	885	7108
16	44	South Fork	929	10850 over Wolf Creek P.
17	52	Saguache	981	
18	56	Nathrop*	1037	9011 over Poncha Pass
19	40	Fairplay	1077	9340 over Trout Creek P.
20	53	Conifer	1130	9993 over Red Hill Pass
				10000 over Kenosha Pass
21	49	Boulder*	1179	5360
22	66	Bennett	1245	
23	67	Anton	1312	
24	52	Idalia	1364	
25	73	Atwood, KS	1437	2843
26	62	Norton	1499	2275
27	60	Smith Center	1559	1800
28	63	Belleville	1622	1512
29	54	MARYSVILLE	1676	1154

I look forward to seeing my classmates of '38...Marge, Richard, Walt, Opal, Art, Berniece, Dolly, David and all the rest of us who answer the roll call. And Clara Miller, Norman Nork, Marge Goddard, Ruth Wiley, Eulalia Guise and the other friends who surround our class.

I've subsequently studied the road map of the area just east of Brighton, Colorado, where I got dunked in 1983. That nefarious, unnamed stream, which I remember well, is bigger in my memory than its neighbor, the South Platte River, which I don't remember crossing. A wet look sharpens the memory; a dry look can fade away.

During snow-melt spring floods the creeks and rivers become less distinguishable, and maybe any identifying signposts were then under water. I'm going to have another look for sure, and maybe get to thank my Good Sam, Brett Lewis, one more time if he and his pick-up are still nearby.

BIKE DAY	CUM. MILES	PLACE	TERRAIN	ELEVATION
0	0	San Diego	Coastal	0
2	133	Brawley	Desert	-113
16	929	South Fork	Mountain	10,850
29	1,676	Marysville	Plains	1,154