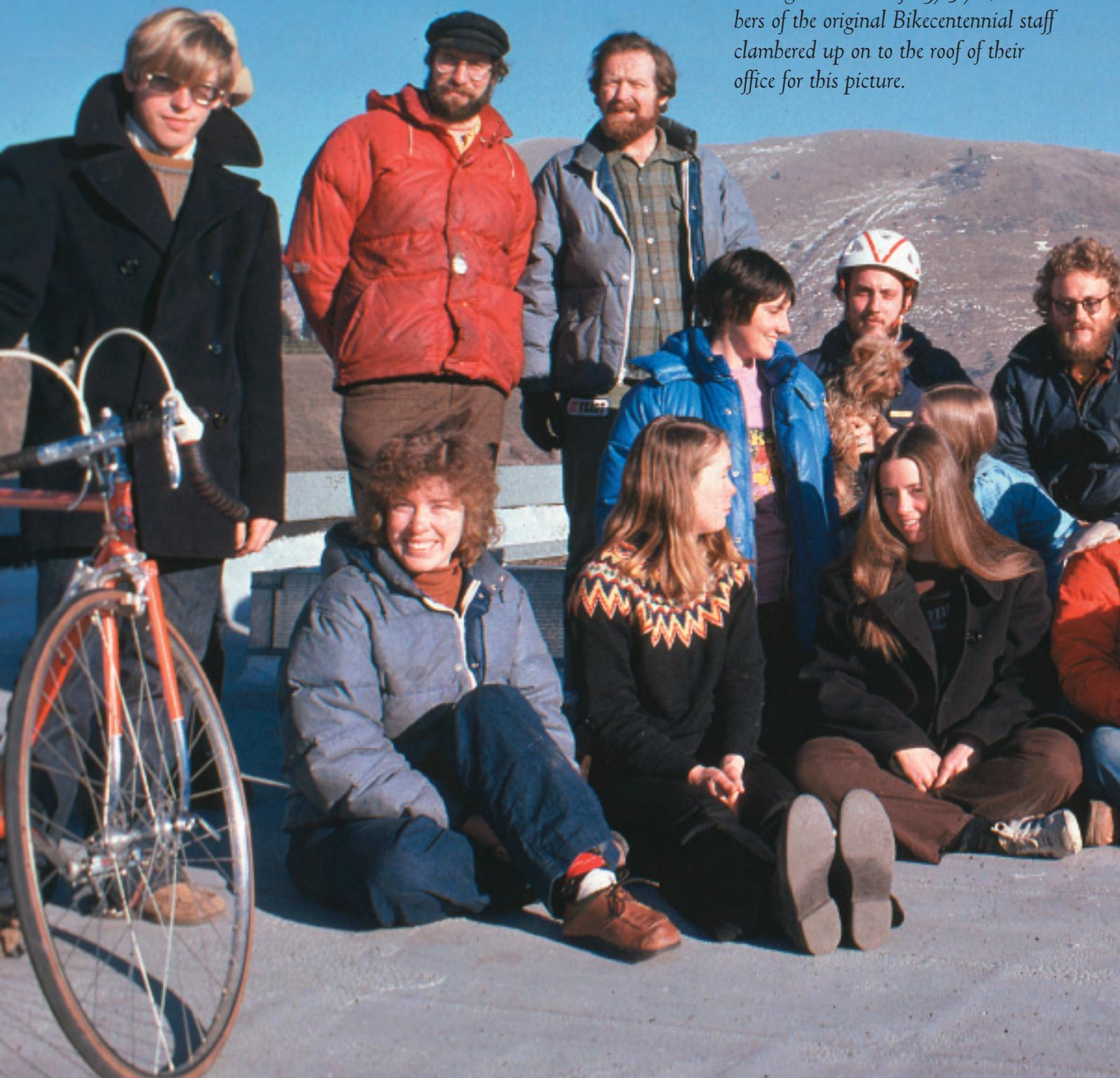


Thirty Years

A History of Adventure

During the winter of 1975-76, members of the original Bikecentennial staff clambered up on to the roof of their office for this picture.



and Counting

Cycling Association



by Dan D'Ambrosio

Thirty years have gone by since Barb Samsøe rode her bike across the country in the summer of 1976, yet it remains one of her greatest memories and an experience she still talks about in detail.

That's typical of the unlikely event, known as Bikecentennial, that led to the formation of this organization three decades ago this summer, and the people, like Samsøe, it so deeply affected.

Bikecentennial changed Barb Samsøe's life, resulting in her marriage to another of those young riders who, often on a whim, decided to spend their summers free from the conventions of the nation whose 200th birthday they were celebrating.

What you may know only as the Adventure Cycling Association, began as Bikecentennial, when some 2,500 people put on a rolling birthday party for America and another 2,000 or so people joined in by riding across parts of the nation.

Bikecentennial was the brainchild of Greg Siple, still the art director of Adventure Cycling, his wife June, and another young couple, Dan and Lys Burden, who in 1972 were on their own ride called Hemistour from Alaska to Argentina.

The young couples intended Hemistour to show what a bicycle could do. All four had extensive backgrounds with American Youth Hostels in Ohio. There they were part of a dynamic chapter of the organization that got people not only onto bike rides, but also into hiking trips, canoeing trips, and even into caves for a little spelunking.

"All four of us were involved in leadership within that outdoor community," said June Siple. "When you led a trip, you wrote a blurb for the newsletter. You were tied into the system that way, and it just made you more aware of how to get people involved."

Greg Siple thought of a way to get a whole lot of people involved when the wandering foursome found itself on a layover in San Francisco.

"I think, because of who we were, we were always thinking about the next thing," June said. "When I went to Golden Gate Park right on the coast there, it just looked like such a great place to start a bike ride across the country. That's when I started to think about it."

Greg's initial thought was to make the ride a rolling Woodstock. The tens of thousands of cyclists Siple envisioned would sweep across the nation like a horde of locusts, a metaphor he would later realize was not exactly the effect they were looking for.

After leaving San Francisco and taking a side trip down the length of Baja, the Burdens and the Siples resumed their southward trek in mainland Mexico, stopping one evening in Chocolate, Mexico.

"It wasn't much of a town," said June. "Just a little spot in the road. I remember there was a big black pot of boiling pork skins. We all proceeded to talk about this idea of a coast-to-coast bike ride and Dan and Lys started adding to it."

June said the couples set up camp for the night in the desert, and the next morning she came up with the name for

the ride they were now certain they would pull off in Bikecentennial.

June looked at the odometer on her bike, and she swears it read 1776.2.

When they reached Mexico City, Dan and Greg decided to create a flyer to announce Bikecentennial to their friends and to seek support. Those friends includ-



Bill and Barb Samsøe. The couple now live in the Bitterroot Valley of western Montana.

ed most of the people involved with cycling on a national level at the time and mostly came from their years of involvement with the Tour of the Scioto River Valley in Ohio, a ride that, like Bikecentennial, still lives on.

"I went into a small office-supply shop, borrowed a typewriter, and composed the original copy," said Dan. "It seemed we should have a route to describe. The logical choice was to stay well to the north of the vast deserts."

Meanwhile, Greg prepared the graphics for the flyer, called "Two Wheels, Two Centuries." The pair mailed more than 100 flyers that week in June 1973.

A month earlier, National Geographic had run an article about the first leg of Hemistour, from Anchorage to Missoula.

The events leading up to that story had begun a year before the two couples left on Hemistour. Greg and June wrote a letter to the magazine about the trip and stirred some interest in the editors, culminating in a "nice chat" with the assistant director of photography.

"The guy was pretty upbeat, but a year goes by and we're getting closer to departure and we're not getting much from them," said Greg. "Finally just before we leave they send a bunch of film, boxes to mail it back, and say 'Shoot this' but nothing about an article."

National Geographic was planning a cycling article, prompted by the phenomena TOSRV had become, with thousands of people riding 200 miles in two days through the Scioto River valley. At that point, Hemistour was a sideshow in those plans. It soon would become the main event.

"I think they figured: Here's some kids going on a bike ride, maybe we'll get a shot for the article," said Greg. "But when our stuff started coming in, they said, 'Wow, this stuff is really good' and decided to do an article based on the pictures. That article helped get us Bikecentennial. It gave us real credibility."

After reaching Oaxaca, Mexico, about 200 miles south of Mexico City, Dan, Greg and Lys flew back to Washington, D.C., to discuss a second article with the editors at the magazine. Frustrated with the group's inability to communicate in Spanish, June



City park camp. A typical morning breakfast scene for a Bikecentennial camping group.

opted to attend a language school in Guatemala.

The trip was also a chance to determine what sort of interest the flyers had stirred up. To their surprise, the trio learned the idea outlined in the Mexico City flyer was already circulating in some bicycling publications.

Dan and Lys returned to Columbus, Ohio, to start work on what they thought would be the second National Geographic article. As it turned out, that never happened.

But communicating through the mail — Greg was in Schenectady, New York,

with his folks — Dan and Greg put together the copy and graphics for their new flyer: "Bikecentennial '76. The 76-day, 3,000-mile Bicycle Birthday Party." The TransAmerica Trail would actually end up at 4,250 miles.

Nevertheless, the second flyer, in the form of a magazine advertisement, would become one of Bikecentennial's most effective producers of inquiries.

The initial mailing of 10,000 flyers went to bike clubs, bike shops, and other pockets of cyclists throughout the United States and overseas. The money to pay for it, a thousand dollars, had come from Open

was over.

Greg and June, however, were determined to finish the epic ride. For them, it was Bikecentennial that was over and, for the next two years, their only contact with the project would be through the mail.

“I’m incredibly fortunate to have Bill,” Barb said. “I tell my mom that Bill is one of the best people I will ever know.”

During those two years, an art-school friend of Greg’s named Lynn Kessler would design Bikecentennial’s logo, its stationery, fund-raising packages, membership materials, newsletters, promotional literature, and a poster – all as a volunteer.

“Lynn made the Bikecentennial idea look good in the mail,” said Greg. “Without Lynn or some other artist in this role, Bikecentennial would have been without one of its greatest assets – quality promotional materials.”

It was time, however, to promote something specific. Burden turned again to old TOSRV friends, including Charlie Pace, the long-time director of the ride – and later, Adventure Cycling board member — and Scott Warner.

Scott laid Greg’s Golden Gate dream to rest in favor of sending cyclists across in small groups.

Charlie said it wasn’t too early to begin making community contacts along the route – which didn’t yet exist. Only one section of what would become the TransAmerica Trail was established. It would follow the Hemistour route through Oregon and Idaho. The remainder of the route was only a vague notion. Something well north of the deserts of the Great Basin, but not too far north.

The design of the trail fell to Lys Burden, as Dan’s hepatitis was hanging on.

“Lys Burden was the architect of the TransAmerica Bicycle Trail,” said Stuart Crook, Adventure Cycling’s former leadership director. “When I joined Bikecentennial in the summer of 1975, she had been working on it, designing it, for two years.”

Toward the middle of December 1973,

Dan’s hepatitis had abated enough to allow him to organize a mass mailing, enlisting the aid of friends and family in Columbus. The mailing to 3,000 people brought in more than half of the money required to launch Bikecentennial.

Two days later, Dan flew to Missoula, where he had attended the University of Montana, to re-establish a home.

“It was a logical place to start Bikecentennial, since I had many friends, a university from which to draw talent, and a place where we could live inexpensively,” Dan said.

By late December, Dan and Lys had leased a small, one-bedroom apartment in Missoula for \$85 per month. For the next year, the apartment served as

Oregon six weeks before the trip,” Barb said. “I was really excited about it.”

Samsoe was getting the same excited feeling she’d had when, graduating from nursing school in 1974, she had spent eleven weeks traveling around Europe by train. Nevertheless, when her mom drove her to Reedsport for the beginning of her ride across the country, doubt and fear began to creep in. Then she remembered what her father had said.

“Dad said, ‘Any daughter of mine can do this,’” Barb said. “I thought, ‘Oh, gosh, I really have to do it now.’”

Bill Samsoe was working in a ski area in northern Wisconsin in 1975 – “kind of a ski bum,” he said — when he saw a flyer for Bikecentennial. His sister Marge told him she’d answered the call for leaders and was going to guide a group across the country.

At the invitation of Bonnie and Tim Liefer, two old American Youth Hostel friends who were in charge of leadership training for Bikecentennial, Bill Samsoe headed west to Missoula, sleeping on the



A trio of TransAmers. Their gear may look quaint to us but it was standard in 1976.

Bikecentennial’s modest headquarters.

Barb Samsoe was living in Honolulu in 1975, working as a nurse, when a cycling friend asked her if she had heard about the tour across America. The twenty-three-year-old Samsoe said she hadn’t but decided she’d like to give it a try.

“I stopped working and went home to

floor of the Liefer’s apartment. The apartment was within walking distance of Bikecentennial’s original office on North Higgins Avenue in a former hotel above a bar called Eddie’s Club.

Bill ended up only advising at one leadership training course and was helping out around the office when he was tapped to lead



a TransAmerica trip leaving on June 15, 1976.

“I’m not exactly sure how I was designated to lead that group,” he said. “I was working in the office until just a few days before the trip left. Then I took a bus out to Reedsport.”

The stage was set for Barb and Bill.

Bill was leading a camping group across the country. Barb was in a group that left the same day but was using the “bike inns” – church basements, gyms, and other local facilities – that had been set up across the country.

Both Michael McCoy, Adventure Cyclist field editor, and Stuart Crook helped set up the bike inns used in 1976.

Mike, who has also served in capacities for the organization ranging from route researcher to assistant director, remembers that he and his wife Nancy found a wide variety of accommodations along the trail from Astoria to Missoula.

“They ranged from rat-infested fairgrounds in Tillamook (Oregon) that people didn’t like, to pretty nice places like the old Walluski Community Center outside Astoria,” he said.

Mike and Nancy ended up replacing the fairgrounds with another overnight. The two of them weren’t yet married when they were field coordinators, which led to some problems in the conservative countryside.

“We were trying to set a bike inn up in Cambridge, Idaho, and our contact immediately took a disliking to an unmarried couple traveling together,” said Mike McCoy. “He got very adamant. He said, ‘We don’t want a bunch of hippies like they get at the fiddle contest in Weiser.’”

Stuart Crook and his then-wife Polly found their marriage to be one of their strongest assets when talking to locals about bike inns along an eastern portion of the trail.

“The fact that we were married made a huge difference,” said Crook. “They pointedly asked, ‘Are you married?’ and if the answer was no, that would have been the end of it.”

But the lasting memory that both Mike and Stuart have from their work that summer is the impact it had on the riders.

“One of the things I value most is that I



We are family. For most of the '76 riders, the group was at the center of the experience.

touched the lives of literally thousands of people,” Stuart said. “Even now, thirty years later, there are people who say ‘two years before I rode the TransAm’ or ‘during the TransAm.’ It’s a touch-point in their lives. To be part of that still is very meaningful to me.”

Thirty years after the TransAm, Barb Samsøe still remembered her first impression of Bill Samsøe.

“I can remember seeing him, a neat-looking guy and interesting too, a real athlete and a nice guy,” she said. “Unfortunately, I was dating a guy in Honolulu and wasn’t interested in developing a relationship with anybody.”

As it turned out, Bill’s group and Barb’s group would parallel each other across the country. Near Cassidy, Wyoming, the “Prairie Chicken Capital of the World,” Bill, Barb, and another rider spent the day together.

“I can remember it being so hot. It was so, so hot,” said Barb. “It was one of those days he wanted to be away from his group. The three of us rode together. There were grasshoppers all over, in your mouth, your ears, everything. We had such a wonderful visit. That’s where I really thought: he’s really a great guy. Oh, he is just really, really neat.”

The feeling was mutual.

“We were getting toward the end of the trip, and the leader and assistant leader of Barb’s group, me, and one or two other people were out in the country at a little store,” Bill said. “Barb goes riding by and I said, ‘I think I’m in love.’ One of the other guys said, ‘Yeah, me too.’”

At the end of the trip, everyone gathered in a steakhouse for a farewell meal and dancing.

“Barb coaxed me out to the dance floor, and we had a dance together,” Bill said.

After returning to Honolulu, Barb realized her relationship with the man she’d been dating wasn’t all it should be. Life had changed. She had changed.

She and Bill began writing, and then Bill, a new employee of Braniff Airlines, took every flight to Honolulu he could wrangle.

“In 1977 he proposed, and in 1978 we were married,” said Barb. “I’m very happy. What’s really neat is that, where we live is

WHEN ZIPP'S PROPRIETARY WHEEL
TECHNOLOGIES MEET INNOVATIVE
MANUFACTURING METHODOLOGIES
THE RESULT IS UNPRECEDENTED VALUE
FOR CARBON COMPOSITE WHEELS.

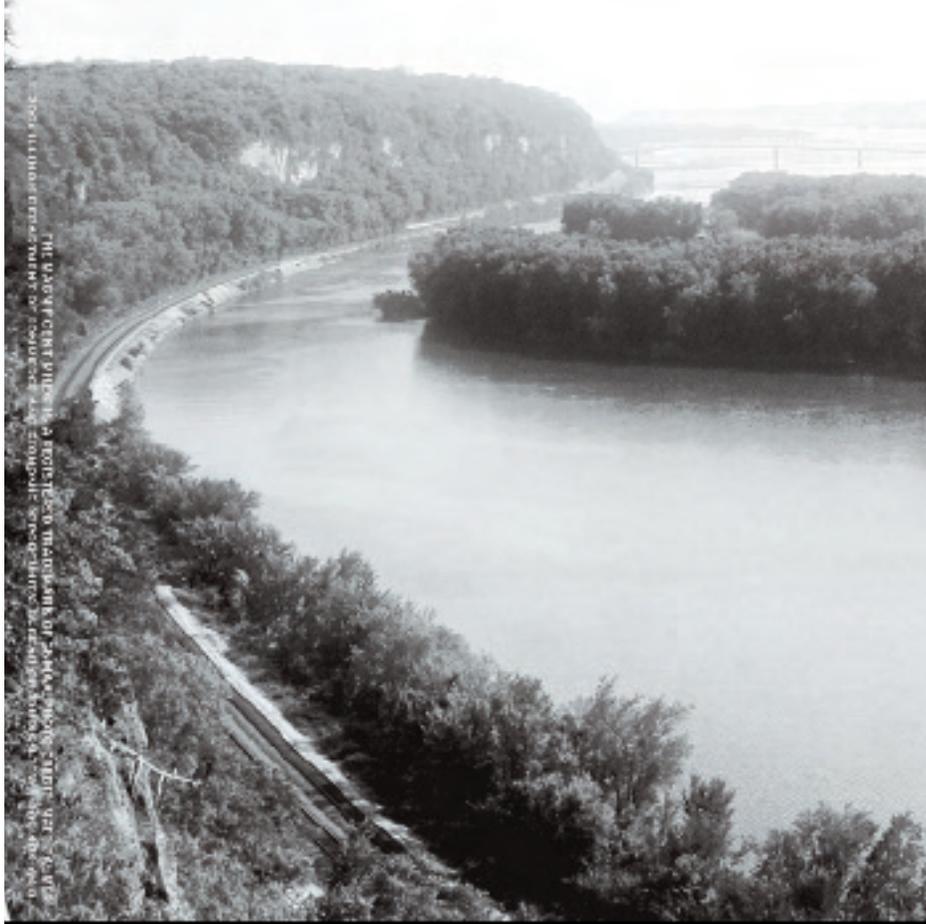




AT AROUND \$1100, COMFORT AND PERFORMANCE
HAVE NEVER BEEN SO AFFORDABLE.
WWW.FLASH-POINTRACING.COM
1-800-230-2387

**THE SILENT BEAUTY OF ILLINOIS.
INTERRUPTED ONLY BY THE
SCREAMING OF YOUR LEGS.**

THE GREAT RIVERS RIDE IS A REGISTERED TRADEMARK OF ADVENTURE CYCLING. PHOTO: GARY MACFADDEN. COURTESY OF THE MISSOULA CHAMBER OF COMMERCE. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED. PHOTO: GARY MACFADDEN. COURTESY OF THE MISSOULA CHAMBER OF COMMERCE. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.



THE GREAT RIVERS RIDE, SEPTEMBER 10 - 16, 2006



Trek nearly 400 magnificent miles along 3 great rivers for 7 colorful days. Together with great new friends, enjoy daily prizes, nightly events, and delicious foods. The Great Rivers Ride is

limited to the first 300 cyclists. Plan quickly and register at 1.877.GRR.7007, ext. 217 or visit illinoisgreatriversride.com.

ILLINOIS. MILE AFTER MAGNIFICENT MILE.

right on the bike route. We live right outside Florence (Montana).”

Barb, a nurse, and Bill, membership director for the Missoula Chamber of Commerce, raised a son and a daughter who love to hear the story of the summer of '76 and their parents courtship.

“I’m incredibly fortunate to have met Bill,” Barb said. “I tell my mom that Bill is one of the best people I will ever know.”

That’s one story among literally thousands - not all love stories, certainly not all marriages - but all life-changing experiences.

Gary MacFadden, longtime Adventure Cycling executive director, was a recent graduate of the University of Montana School of Journalism when he spotted a three-by-five index card on the J-school jobs board — “Bicycling group looking for editor.” The phone number turned out to be Dan and Lys Burden’s.

“I kind of knew him, but not really. I knew of him,” Gary said. “We chatted, and he said to come in for an interview.”

A few months later, Gary was hired to put the meat on the bones of the newly minted TransAmerica Trail, traversing the entire route in a motor home to create the guidebooks that would tell riders where to stop and what to see along the way.

MacFadden would take photos, visit small-town museums, and talk to the locals to get a feel for the area. He was on the road for the entire summer of 1975, which he says was a little bizarre.

“Traveling by yourself and going to a new place every day, you get disoriented,” Gary said.

When he returned to Missoula, he was in for another disorienting experience.

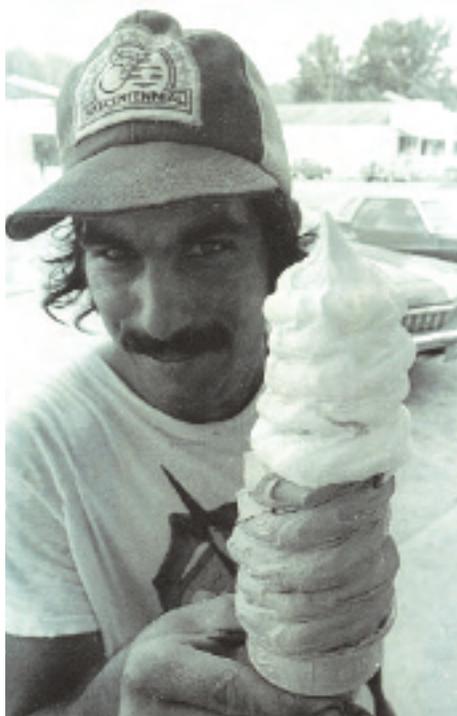
“I get back and walk down the hallway of the old hotel above Eddie’s Club, and there are people all over the place,” said MacFadden. “I didn’t know anybody, yet I had been working for the organization almost the longest. June and Greg were still on Hemistour when I was hired.”

As the big event approached, everyone in the main office was caught up in its momentum.

“There’s no way of describing how exciting that was,” said Gary. “Something that had never been done before. Not for

money, but for a goal. It was a lofty one, and we pulled it off.”

MacFadden is the longest serving of Adventure Cycling’s five executive directors, taking the reins in 1981 from David Prouty, who succeeded Dan Burden after the sum-



DAN BURDEN

A summer summarized in an ice cream cone.

mer of '76 and is generally credited with saving the organization from a disastrous downturn in 1977.

In 2000, Gary MacFadden was succeeded after nineteen years in 2000 by Bill Sawyer. Jim Sayer, the current executive director, came on board in November 2004.

“It was just a great time,” said Gary MacFadden of his years leading Adventure Cycling. “I’ve looked for that sense of having a goal and accomplishing it in everything I’ve done since, but it has never been that intense.”

It’s still that intense for Jim Sayer, who said the number one strength of the organization is the extraordinary relationship it has with its members.

“The organization has remained very focused on a clear mission to promote bicycle travel,” he said. “The challenge now is how do you translate that mission into reaching new audiences.”

One of those new audiences, said Jim, is the African-American community and the South in general – a driving force behind the

decision to create the new Underground Railroad Bicycle Route.

Routes and Mapping Director Carla Majernik explained that the new route roughly follows a clandestine trail described in a song called “Follow the Drinking Gourd.”

The drinking gourd in the song refers to the Big Dipper, which helped escaping slaves navigate their way north.

One verse – “The river ends between two hills, Follow the Drinking Gourd. There’s another river on the other side, Follow the Drinking Gourd” – told the slaves that when they reached the headwaters of the Tombigbee River, they were to continue north over the hills until they reached the Tennessee River, where a number of escape routes converged.

Carla said the song was a compelling way to focus the direction of Adventure Cycling’s latest route.

“If you look at a historical map, there was no one individual Underground Railroad,” she said. “It’s everywhere. That was our biggest challenge – to find the route we were going to choose. We heard about the song and really liked the idea of using it.”

From the TransAmerica Trail to the Underground Railroad, the momentum that began 30 years ago with two young, idealistic couples on bikes is undiminished.

John Schubert, the dean of *Adventure Cyclist* columnists, first laid eyes on Adventure Cycling’s budding predecessor, Bikecentennial, nearly thirty years ago and remembers thinking it was something special.

“There was a sense of community in the organization, a sense of humor,” he said. “Think about all the organizations that have come and gone since 1976 or metastasized beyond recognition. Here’s this thing that sounds so improbable, located in Missoula, an out-of-the-way place, starting out with this big Woodstock event and no plans beyond that.

“Yet it has really kicked butt,” he said.



Dan D’Ambrosio was the editor of Adventure Cyclist magazine for eighteen years. He is now a reporter for the Waterbury, Connecticut Republican American and lives very close to where current Adventure Cyclist editor Mike Deme was raised.

COME CYCLING IN THE WEST OF IRELAND



Celtic Trails organize the best cycling holidays in Ireland - renowned for their top quality organization. We cater for all size groups, from small to large. But don't take our word for it, ask some people who have travelled with us in the past...

Fully Escorted by
Experienced Irish Guides.

Stay in Castles & Country
Manors.

Cycle on very safe roads.

Spectacular scenery
every day.

Gourmet picnics.

Total back-up service.



www.celtictrails.com
tours@celtictrails.com