

Bikes in Bloom Across America



By Frosty Wooldridge

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This summer while bicycling 3,400 miles across America from New Port Beach, Oregon to Washington DC, I met hundreds of Americans, tourists and bicycle travelers. I heard the craziest conversations in coffee houses and diners. You will be hearing some of their stories in the coming months.

While traveling at 12 miles per hour, I really “see and feel” the landscape. I become part of it. I mesh with Mother Nature in a physical, mental and spiritual dance. Hard to describe, but it’s exquisite on multiple levels. When it’s hot, I sweat like a horse. When it’s cold, I pedal to keep warm. When it’s raining, I become a duck on a bike. It takes “true grit” to pedal a bicycle long distances.

You could say that the mountain passes that I climbed “etched” lots of memories into my thighs. Some call it “hard work” while I call it “hard play.” Many commented that it would be easier to ride on the flats of the Midwest. I



responded that I would rather climb mountains to enjoy their

rugged wildness.

My friend John Muir said, "Camp out among the grass and gentians of glacier meadows, in craggy garden nooks full of Nature's darlings. Climb the mountains and get their good tidings. Nature's peace will flow into you as sunshine flows into trees. The winds will blow their own freshness into you, and the storms their energy, while cares will drop off like autumn leaves." There is something special about bicycle travel that encapsulates Americans' imaginations. I tried to capture my adventure in words:

"If the roar of a wave crashes beyond your campsite, you might call that adventure. When coyotes howl outside your tent—that may be adventure. When the wind rips at your tent pegs—that too, may be called adventure. While you're sweating like a horse in a climb over a 12,000 foot pass, that's adventure. When a howling headwind presses your lips against your teeth, you're facing a mighty adventure. If you're drenched from head to toe in sweat as you pedal across a desert, that's adventure. If you're pressing through a howling rainstorm, you're soaked in adventure. But that's not what makes an adventure. It's your willingness to struggle through it, to present yourself at the doorstep of Nature. No greater joy can come from life than to live inside the 'moment' of an adventure. It may be a momentary 'high', a stranger that changes your life, an animal that delights you or frightens you, a struggle where you triumphed, or even failed, yet you braved the challenge. Those moments present you uncommon experiences that give your life eternal expectation. That's adventure!" Frosty Wooldridge

But more than adventure greeted me on my journey across America. When you travel the blue and red highways of our country, you get to meet "Norman Rockwell America" or better yet, you get to meet "Andy and Barney of Mayberry RFD America."

Kids in parks ran up to our loaded bicycles. They took pictures and wanted to touch our cycles and gear. Their parents introduced themselves. They snapped pictures with their smart phones of my sign "Across America" and immediately visited my website on adventure. They thanked us for keeping the "Spirit of Adventure" alive. They marveled at our journey.

In those towns, we thrilled to the architecture from 1880 to 1910 on the fronts of the buildings. We walked into some 120 year old post offices still operating. We ate breakfasts at old fashioned diners with real "down home" cooking. I fondly recall eating at the One Street Down Restaurant in Redmond, Oregon. Best oat meal and pancakes in the country. Another stop in Pinedale, Wyoming at the Rock Rabbit Restaurant served blue berry pancakes and omelets to fight for! But more than the food, the town folks enthralled us. Everybody shared their stories.

After riding through Hannibal, Missouri to visit Mark Twain's former haunts, I pedaled down Old Route 66 along the Mississippi River. On my ride through Cincinnati, I picked up Route 50 to pedal through a bucolic hamlet named Milford, Ohio.

On the edge of town, I noticed a rusted 1950 Schwinn bicycle with flared handlebars. In the front basket, purple and white petunias exploded into the morning sunshine. On the rear rack, another basket of flowers curled their way through its back spokes and covered the seat. "Good grief!" I muttered. "That's beautiful!"

On the back staked into the ground, a sign read, "Bikes in Bloom".

I snapped a few pictures and figured that would be the end of it. But as I traveled down that 120-year-old Main Street in Milford, Ohio, I noticed a bicycle in bloom in front of every

merchant store front. I discovered incredibly beautiful bikes of every description decked out in flowers. I witnessed yarn woven into the shape of a Pac Man on the front wheels, rhinestone ropes curled around top tubes and yarned up seats and cranks. Big bikes in flowers and little bikes in flowers. The entire Main Street exploded in flowers and bicycles.

Every year, Milford, a crossroads for touring bicyclists, features "Bikes in Bloom" as a friendly competition of all the merchants. Tourists, locals and cyclists enjoy community, creativity and fellowship. I marveled at the beauty. Halfway through town and 25 pictures later, I stopped at Bishop's Bicycle Shop. What a blast! I met a bunch of long-distance touring riders working there with Kelly, Chris and Jim. After a great stop, I continued on my way across America with vivid memories and an idea.

How about everyone reading this column all across America create a "Bikes in Bloom" in your own cities, towns and hamlets? I already introduced the idea to my Golden, Colorado city council. I presented photographic examples on an overhead projector like you see attached to this column. They loved it.

Let's move America toward beauty, flowers, peace, joy and community fellowship. It's fun, creative and positive on every level.

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