Exploring To The Edge Of The Map

By Frosty Wooldridge

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During this Thanksgiving week, let's take a rest from the grief and tribulations of the world. Let's plan on exploring to somewhere new, somewhere else, somewhere to the edge of the map. Someone once said, "The best road is the one that leads to the horizon."

Some pedal for emotional peace. Others pedal for exercise. Still others pedal for the "high" it brings to every cell in their bodies. Many pedal for friendship in a group ride. A few find spiritual bliss…well, make that "many" find spiritual harmony. Others pedal for the competition to see who can burn up their thighs in the process of going for more speed. As you age, you pedal to relax while you pedal around the neighborhood hoping to stop and talk with someone. It's a mix of emotions on your bicycle from that first ride at the age of seven until that last ride at the age of seventy…or maybe eighty.

But some men and women possess a need to "Pedal to the Edge of the Map." You read about them cranking their bikes all over the globe. Why? What makes them do it? How can they survive those tenuous miles across the Outback of Australia or the endless sand of the Atacama Desert in South America? What makes them want to ride up to the Wall of China or visit the Taj Mahal. What would drive a man like Robert Fletcher at the age of 80 to ride from Alaska to Panama City in 2022 (BTW, he

just made it December 12, 2022)? Or, Heinz Stucke to ride around the planet his entire life?

After 50 years of chasing toward the “edge of the map”, I think I’ve discovered what drove Amundsen, Shackleton, Amelia Earhart, Bird, Leif Erickson, Lewis & Clark, John Muir, Jack London, Nellie Bly, Jane Goodall, Harriet Adams, Heinz Stucke, Gertrude Bell, Sarah Marquis, Thomas Stevens, and many more.

Heinz Stucke has pedaled over 600,000 kilometers in 60 years of bicycle travel. How do you wrap your arms around that?

When I finished college, I made a promise to myself that I would pedal all seven continents and as many countries as possible. I hadn’t heard of Stucke. Why did I make such a preposterous commitment? At the time, I didn’t understand what I was telling myself. But “myself” kept speaking to me somewhere in my gut, or maybe in the deeper recesses of my creative mind.

Whatever that “myself” was saying to me, I simply answered the call. I made plans to ride coast to coast across America. Of course no one would go with me. “You are out of your mind,” several friends told me.

I’m sure they said that to Columbus, Shackleton, Amundsen, Scott, Captain Cook, Amelia Earhart, Nellie Bly, Jane Goodall, and all the rest. Well, screw them! Some of us dance to the beat of a different drummer. Some of us hear something in the wind. Others of us decide that we want as much out of life as we can stuff into our 80 years of living. What separates those who quest versus those who sit and watch? Action! Perseverance! Guts! Gumption! True Grit!

And finally, creative living with a certain gusto!

Once I pushed off the Pacific Ocean in 1975, with a fully loaded touring bike…and not knowing what the hell I was

doing…I just kept pedaling. Once I got out onto the Mojave Desert of California, the road stretched to the horizon. I followed it. I drank a lot of water. I devoured gobs of food.

What did I notice? The horizon pulled me toward it. It beckoned with sunrises that stunned me. Those mountain peaks tugged at my heart-strings. The breezes whispered in my ears. That heat caused me to sweat whether in Death Valley or the Atacama Desert or the Outback.

Was it miserable? You bet it's miserable in 120 degrees F. heat with bush-flies trying to eat you alive in the Outback. Just cooks you in the saddle and the flies rattle your brain. Was it wet in the Amazon? Gees, four hours of rain every day…mildewed my gear…sweated me to death…and the bugs…oh my God the bugs. How do you survive 1,000 miles of nothing but sand in South America in the Atacama Desert, the driest in the world.? And yet, the edge of the map pulled me through.

Yes, that's where the edge of the map really tests your resolve. Do you really want to get to the edge of the map?

For those of us that feel the "tug of adventure" in our guts, that "edge" brings some pretty amazing moments.

To this day, I remember the West Coast of Australia where I stopped at the Pinnacles of Cervantes, north of Perth. I had to grind it out on a sand road to reach those giant sand pillars near the ocean. In the morning, I woke up with sand in my tent, but as I packed, a mother kangaroo and her little roo jumped out of the bush, up a ridge and vanished into the dunes. Mother Nature knows how to entertain a long-distance touring cyclist. Later, I made it to the Pinnacles to see one of the strangest sights on that circumnavigation of Australia. How did Nature form them? Why? What purpose? Walking among those natural skyscrapers was like walking through downtown New York City.

Later, I rode up on Monkey Mia Beach where I discovered some

people playing with dolphins racing around in the water. The Aussies invited me to play with the dolphins, too. I jumped into their play-pin to catch a ride on their dorsal fins. I was literally dancing in the water with wild Indian Ocean dolphins. How's that for pedaling to the edge of the map?

Do you remember Jurassic Park I ? Remember that frilled lizard that surprised the escaping fat boy who stole the embryos of dinosaurs? At first the lizard looked innocent enough, until he "frilled" his fan to scare the living crap out of that bad guy. Well, in Northern Australia, I awoke one morning, looked out of my tent to see a lizard looking right at me. When I moved, he "frilled" his red fan that scared the crap out of me. Thankfully, he wasn't big enough to eat me like in the Jurassic Park movie. But I'll tell you this, that moment remains in my mind for the rest of my days. Talk about pedaling to the edge of the map!

In the end, what's your "edge of the map?" Are you pedaling toward it? Do you possess the same "guts" or "determination" associated with Jack London, Amelia Earhart or Thomas Stevens (the first man to bicycle around the world, and he did it on a Penny Farthing High Wheeler 1884 to 1886.)?

I can say this: it's not a foreign country or those "moments" in wild places that tingle your senses, enthrall your heart or scare the living hell out of you. It could be a ride across your own state or across your entire country. You will have countless "amazing" moments in the USA as you will have on all the other continents. It's that amazing formulation of the creative yearning that dwells in every cell of your body while you're alive on this planet. Some heed it, most don't.

If you heed it, you may equal anything Amelia Earhart, Jack London, John Muir, Nellie Bly or any of the rest of those famous people accomplished. The road awaits you for your journey to the "Edge of the Map."

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