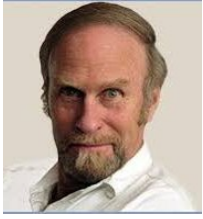


No Motor, No Fun



By Frosty Wooldridge

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"I listened to the ancient, familiar, immortal, dear cricket - sound under all others, hearing at first some distinct chirps; but when these ceased, I was aware of the general earth-song, - which my hearing had not heard...and I wondered if behind or - beneath this there was not some other chant yet more universal...What chant, I wondered? Could it have been the forest air, whispering, "Breathe me and live." -Guy Murchie

When Jack Frost stretches his icy fingers across northern Michigan in late September, he sets the stage for one of the most spectacular parades nature ever created. Beginning in the far north, a runaway color fire of visual excitement soon spreads out of control. No amount of sunshine or warm weather can extinguish the blaze once this annual phenomenon ignites.

Autumn tantalizes our eyes with brilliant colors that look like millions of tiny brush strokes painted across a crisp blue sky. Trees dress themselves in scintillating coats of burnished golds, fiery reds, blazing yellows, sensual crimsons, and radiant oranges. With each passing day, leaves drift down, enchanting us, yet we cannot help but feel a sad note at summer's passing.

The first week of October is perfect for touring. I love taking advantage of autumn's final pleasure. Cool evenings - surrender to sunny days as Indian summer stands as a last bastion against winter. Even with the moderate temperatures, I wear wool tights and a warm sweater.

Additionally, the bewitching month beckons ghosts, hobgoblins, along with black-garbed cackling old women on broomsticks silhouetted against the full moon. Autumn is a time of celebration, a time for tart apple cider, pumpkin faces, and - warming our hands over campfires.

As the change of season gathers strength, we see our breath on a chilly morning. Birds gather in great masses as they begin their retreat to warmer climes, and the haunting cry of the loon echoes across placid waters in northern Michigan.

Northern Michigan like much of North America is blessed with - extraordinary natural wonders. Lake Superior is the largest fresh water lake in the world. Mountains rise to a height of 1,900 feet which makes for exciting bicycle touring, especially when riding at the peak of the color season in autumn. But while visiting most natural wonders in the USA, Americans travel by automobiles. Even if they fly, they always end up in a car. It is a glass, metal and vinyl compartment that blocks out nature's finest moments, especially on a dirt road, deep in the forest.

That's why Doug and I prefer traveling via bicycle. With that in mind, we started out from White Fish Point, Michigan on - October 1st. It was the peak of the color leaf change. We stood near the point known as the Graveyard of the Great Lakes where the Edmond Fitzgerald, an ore ship, went down in a gale. Gordon Lightfoot eulogized the incident in a ballad.

Leaving White Fish Point, we pointed our bikes west on Route-123, headed for Pictured Rocks National Lakeshore. The map - indicated a gravel road through old growth hardwood forest, - mainly beech, maple, and oak. The route traced the shoreline of Lake Superior. It showed waterfalls, cliffs, ghost forests and Grand Banks. Few people know about this national park because of its obscurity, and even fewer of them want to drive its gravel road, or camp in its primitive campsites.

Dark skies greeted us as we headed into a brisk wind toward - Tehquamenon Falls. Soon, cold rains swept over the trees.

"You told me this was Indian summer Doug," I said, as we - pedaled into the rain. "We're gonna' freeze our butts off."

"Don't worry, the weather report said this week's going to be warm and sunny," Doug replied. "We just have to get through this rough spot today."

I wondered why we had launched ourselves into this storm - front, but soon, I warmed up with the aerobic activity and - pedaled through water soaked leaves glistening with colors like fresh paint on a new canvas. A couple of blue birds winged their way across the highway and perched in a tree near us. Their song delighted us. Above, a squadron of Canada geese flew south through cold gray skies. Soon, we made our way to the lower falls, which were ringed with golds, reds and yellows from the maples that lined the riverbanks. Fifty thousand gallons of water pour over the falls per second, and in the autumn, that many leaves fall from the trees at the same time.

We camped in an abandoned house along the road. In the - morning, ice coated the leaves. All was well when a warm sun rose through the tree tops.

It took us the whole day to reach Gitchie Gumee, "The Great - One," named by the early Indians. Camping on Lake Superior was like camping on an ocean without waves. At dusk, Canada geese dropped out of the sky, honking until they settled into silence with the darkness.

Gravel road. It began the next day, and it's what a mountain bike is all about. Fat tires, low gearing and muscle. We pedaled our way into Grand Marais Bay and plucked apples from trees alongside the road.

Heading west again, we made our way around colorful tree-lined

curves, down hills through glades and meadows with flowers along every mile of our path. We entered Pictured Rocks National Lakeshore under a canopy of autumn magic. The trees made the road more like a tunnel painted from an artist's palette.

At Hurricane Campground, we walked the beach toward two old steamers that had been caught in storms and run aground at the turn of the century. Waves lapped at the broken wooden spiked hulls. Nature can be as kind as a calm day or it can rise up with 120 mile per hour winds and cause havoc with everything in its path.

We returned to the bikes. I stood hard on the pedals and grimaced as I cranked up a sandy incline from the beach. When I reached the parking lot, two fishermen watched as Doug and I labored under our 60 pounds of gear strapped to the bikes.

"Looks like a whole lot of work," one of them said.

"It's a whole lot of fun," I answered, as I pulled past him.

"No motor, no fun," the other guy shot back, chuckling as if he had made the smartest statement of his life. "Ain't no way - you'd get me on something that don't have a motor."

At that moment, I thought about defending my point of view. But something inside me said, "Let it go."

I cranked through some heavy sand out to the firmer surface of the road. Doug followed close behind.

"What was that all about?" he asked when he caught up with me.

"Those guys think that the only way to have fun is to have a motor driven vehicle," I replied.

"Little do they know that we've ridden these bikes around the world," Doug said. "I tell you we don't get no respect."

Several miles down the road, I was still thinking about the no motor, no fun comment. Leaves fell like colored raindrops. The dirt road hugged the coastline of Lake Superior providing peaceful vistas of birch, maple and cedar trees backed by the clear waters of the lake. A redheaded woodpecker belted out his own song as he rat-a-tat-tatted against a tree. Adding to the display, two squirrels chased each other through the branches, chattering at one another more in jest than confrontation. A bumble bee zipped by on its way through the woods. Not far from the road, a chipmunk rustled through the leaves as it scurried over the forest floor.

A special music plays in the wilderness. There is no way a person can hear that magic on a motor driven machine. You have to stop and listen in the woods. Sublime music plays on the breezes. The grand orchestration creates rhythms that can only be heard in silence, like when you walk or ride a bicycle.

Those two fishermen drove their pickup into this beautiful woods without hearing, seeing touching or sensing nature. They jumped out of their truck only to fire up their powerboat to roar across the water to a fishing hole. When they arrived, their radio drowned out any wildlife experience. I've seen it many times in my rides through other national parks where hikers screw a Walkman radio into their ears, becoming oblivious to any natural experience around them. They miss the essence of the nature for which they came in the first place. Many campers come in their motorhomes complete with large TV antennas, and sit inside, around the television at night—instead of sitting by a fire, swatting mosquitoes and listening to the night sounds.

Maybe I was lucky my parents never had a TV in the house while we kids grew up. I missed the no motor, no fun concept. Dad and Mom took us camping on weekends. We gathered wood for the fire and pitched the big tent together. Dad got into conversations with fellow travelers. We fished lakes and climbed mountains, catching glimpses of animals, which fired

our thirst for the natural world. That's why I jumped onto my one-speed in the first place. After my paper route, it carried me into adventures in the woods. Advantages? Self-determination for one. Satisfaction was another benefit. Worn out at the end of the day, from so much physical activity, I slept like a rock. Riding that first bike gave me appreciation for uphill and downhill. Each is necessary. A balanced outlook prevails when dealing with life's trials.

"Looks like a steep climb coming at us," Doug said, - interrupting my thoughts.

"I can feel my sweat pores opening up right now," I said, - laughing.

"Hey, look out, those no motor, no fun guys are coming up - behind us," Doug said.

Sure enough, those guys were speeding toward us, with a dust - cloud billowing behind their truck. As they approached, the woods became captive to the roar of their engine. The next sound we heard was a car horn. Then "Whoosh!" They sped past us in a cloud of dust. We smelled dirty exhaust from their tailpipe and tobacco smoke from their cigarettes. As if to punctuate their philosophy, they tossed a beer can out the window after passing.

Moments later serenity returned to the woods. A crow squawked from a distant tree. Mosquitoes circled our heads. A - hummingbird buzzed across the road but hovered a moment to look at us. A covey of white-winged butterflies danced over the last wildflowers of autumn. Maple leaves fluttered their golden colors in the trees. I knew that before the day was out, we would see a deer slipping across the road and into the woods, his white tail flashing through the fall colors.

(Sandi
and
Frosty
riding
through
autumn
colors.)



As Doug and I mounted the bikes once again, he looked at me grinning, "Like the man said, 'No motor, no fun.'"

"Yeah, I guess you can't argue with logic like that," I said. "Let's get on with our own insufferable misery."

We reached Miner's Castle at the western end of the park. The view from the cliffs is one of Michigan's finest natural - attractions. The castle is actually a rock formation created by wind, water and waves. Anyone looking out over Lake Superior can't help but feel a sense of peace from down deep in his or her spirit. I think it comes from the silence, the waterfalls, and the pace of life in the wilderness.

Henry David Thoreau wrote: "We need the tonic of the - wilderness, to wade sometimes in the marsh where the bittern and meadow hen lurk, where the deer play and where we can hear the booming of the snipe; to smell the whispering sedge where only some wilder and more solitary fowl builds her nest, and the mink crawls with its belly close to the ground."

(Sandi and Frosty riding through autumn colors.)

Excerpts from my book: The Kickstand Chronicles—The
Miraculous, Funny, Sublime, and Downright Terrifying Subtitle:
Inevitable Moments of the Ride, Bicycling Across Six
Continents, 45 years, 150,000 Miles by Frosty Wooldridge

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