

# Marion KY – Vesuvius VA

written by Marcus | 20 October, 2016



“How good one feels when one is full – how satisfied with ourselves and with the world! People have tried to tell me that a clear conscience leaves you very happy and contented but a full stomach does the business quite as well and is cheaper and more easily obtained.”

*Jerome K. Jerome – Three Men in a Boat (1889)*

I have a well travelled friend who is a self-confessed Kentucky Fried Chicken addict. Wherever in the world he visits he will seek out the ubiquitous grinning image of the bogus colonel and dine out on a bargain bucket. Even in Reykjavik where his favourite delicacy was reassuringly expensive he still insisted on walking past the local seafood restaurants to tuck into something that he could have bought just 1.5

miles from his own house. I have to admire his dedication but for me one of the great pleasures of travelling is trying all the weird and wonderful local food that I might not have experienced before. Why have generic fast food when you could be tucking into a battered tarantula or some boiled offal?

There's only one part of the world where Kentucky Fried Chicken might be acceptable and we had just started riding through it.

### **7th October 2016 – 20th October 2016**

We leave Charlie at the Marion Methodist Reform Church for what will probably be our last goodbye as he now veers north towards Pennsylvania. We're asked to take a polaroid photo for the guestbook which is a great idea as we can put a few of the faces against names we've been reading in guestbooks up to this point. The church has been hosting cyclists from when the very first riders took on the TransAmerica Trail so their records go back 40 years.





Kentucky Plate



## Roadside Flora

One of the main industries on this side of Kentucky is tobacco and there's an unmistakable smell when we pass big wooden barns with hundreds of leaves hanging up to dry inside. The barns are decorated with colourful geometric patterns that they call barn quilts. Each one is unique, like a signature for that particular farm.



Drying Tobacco





Barn Quilt



Barn Quilt 2



### Barn Quilt 3

Neat little baptist churches appear by the roadside with surprising frequency making us wonder how there can be enough of a congregation to fill them all? As we've seen all along the TransAm, these tiny communities are all keen to encourage cyclists to stop and support their towns, so a lot of the churches have opened their doors for travellers to spend the night. However Sebree First Baptist Church has taken their hospitality to a whole new level.





## Sebree First Baptist Church

When we arrive at their Cyclists' Hostel we're met by Tony who gives us the guided tour. "Here's the games room, there's a laundry over there, you can use the kitchen and this is a room

full of spare parts if you need to fix your bike". It's an amazing facility that has been set up specifically for touring cyclists. When we ask if we can make a donation Tony holds up his hands and says "There's no need, we are doing this as a service to the people and to serve God".



### Sebree Cyclist Hostel with Chris and Amina

When I walk into the Sebree post office the lady behind the counter asks "Are you Marcus? We have something for you!". With impeccable timing our repaired front wheel arrived that morning now sporting a brand new hub thanks to a generous warranty from Son and the speedy services of Peter White Cycles. The trusty stand-in wheel we had been using for the last week gets added to the spare parts cupboard back in the hostel and we roll away with dynamo power restored.





Following Route 76

The brutal hills of the Ozarks are now far behind us, but Kentucky still has its fair share of climbing as we find ourselves in the foothills of the Appalachian mountains. It's

very much an agricultural landscape, with enormous tracked machinery working the vast fields. We stop at dusty 'Old Time' stores where we have to ask the friendly proprietors to repeat themselves several times until we can understand them. The Kentucky accent is a strong one.



### Kentucky Style

There's been an increase in the number of Confederate flags fluttering from garden flagpoles with Vote Trump signs perched alongside. For breakfast we can now get the staple of biscuits and gravy, a type of savoury scone with white sauce. While staying at one church we read an article about the appearance of a burning cross outside a black family's home. This is very much a 'southern' state.





IVIS Church



### Biscuits and Gravy for Breakfast

Hauling up one hill we're glad to find a reason for a rest at the top. The little cupcake stall draws us in like a siren. Mary has only been open a week and has a huge variety of



coloured cakes on offer. We're invited to try one. She tells us that she found baking was a great distraction and helped give her focus after a nasty accident. She's now taken the bold step of venturing out with this new business. We tell her it's a great spot as she should find a steady trade from passing hungry cyclists like us. We buy another couple and continue on.



### Mary's Cupcake Shop

Through Madrid then on to Ohio county where we change time zones and lose an hour. We see distinctive horse drawn carriages and bushy beards in Amish communities like a step back in time. In amongst the Baptist churches a huge Catholic monastery looks incongruous, even more so with the whisky distillery just down the road.



An Amish Couple





## Makers Mark Distillery

Then we arrive in Springfield, which could be the home of the Simpsons if it weren't for the fact that 31 other states also have a Springfield. By now we have a routine and head straight for the Baptist church, this one a huge and grand building in the middle of town. Inside Jamie and Tommy greet us enthusiastically and are keen to help when we ask if we can spend the night there. Their first idea is to let us use a nearby safehouse but rule that out as it is full of rehabilitating drug addicts. Not so safe for us. Instead they decide to book us into a hotel and pick up the tab. This is far more than we expected and we feel embarrassed that they've even suggested it, but they won't accept our refusal. Before leaving us they offer some prayers for our safe onward journey and present a small pocket bible. "Jesus sent you to us and in that book you'll find true beauty, better than anything else we've seen" Jamie tells us. We feel forever indebted to these amazing people but restore a small portion of our karma by releasing a trapped raccoon from a bin later that evening before heading out for some fast food. Some burgers from Wendy's are just what we needed.



Members of The Springfield Baptist Church





## Trash Panda Raccoon Rescue

As we ride east we seem to climb into autumn. The rolling countryside is preparing itself for its most impressive annual display. Leaves are beginning to curl and move into shades of yellow and red. Our quiet roads wind through tunnels of trees alongside crystal clear creeks before taking us up and onto ridges with panoramic views of the valleys on either side. The temperature is a perfect 25 degrees but we're losing light fast now with sunset closing in by 6pm.



Kentucky Countryside





## A Curious Groundhog

As we descend one of these ridges, the sun is already setting on our backs. We begin to eye up potential camp spots but then we spot a small inviting sign that reads "Bicycle Campers Welcome". Rick and Donna have opened up a field for passing cyclists to use complete with al-fresco shower and a cool box full of useful supplies. I hike up to their house to say thanks and ask for water and end up with an invitation for us to stay in their horse box instead. It's one of more unusual accommodation options but offers a very cosy night's sleep. The neighbouring Texas longhorn cattle greet us in the morning as the sun rises over the hills. Rick tells me to watch out for the vultures that have been known to take newborn calves.





Shower with a view



Home for the night





Rick and Donna



### A Nosy Neighbour

We ride into the Daniel Boone National Forest where the autumn colours have been turned up a level or two. The houses in this region are little more than permanent mobile homes and the level of poverty is very clear. Beaten up trucks with bad drivers make our roads more treacherous than we've been used to for a while. Old sofas litter front lawns surrounded by ever more elaborate halloween displays.





Kentucky Trailer Park



Autumn Is On Its Way





## Halloween Is On Its Way

We stop in Buckhorn to send a post card from the tiny post office but this request is met with a puzzled look by the girl behind the counter. "We don't send many postcards from here". She makes a phone call to find out what she should do but the person on the other end of the line isn't sure either. We ask her to put a stamp on and hope for the best.



### Local Store in Kentucky

We've now left the tobacco plantations of the west side of the state and are moving into the coal mining regions of the east. It seems that Kentucky's industries are a few decades out of date. It's no wonder that the number of roadside Trump signs has increased several times here after he promised that he'll restart the coal industry. We stop to chat to some loggers who fell trees for \$7/hour. They warn us that this area is very depressed and full of crime. "Be sure to lock up your bike!".





Kentucky Loggers





Can you dig it?

The Appalachian mountains have now begun in earnest, so each day we find ourselves tackling several steep hills before plunging down cambered descents alongside deep gorges. We have our last chance for some fast food before leaving Kentucky so tuck into milkshakes at a Dairy Queen before we cross into our final TransAm state of Virginia.



Pause to Admire the View





His and Hers Outhouses



The only sign of Colonel Sanders that we saw in all of Kentucky

All this time we've been looking out for Oli the walking Slovenian that Jeanmarie had told us about back in Kansas. We



keep thinking we must have passed him by now, but then find his name in the guestbook of the next store. When we arrive at Elk Garden Methodist Church we spy a bright yellow pushchair parked up outside and inside we find Oli. With him are several other cyclists, Fred, Jackie and Nancy who are riding to the Ohio river.



#### Elk Garden Methodist Church Hostel

Oli is as pleased to see us as we are to see him. "I've heard about you crazy Brits on a tandem!" he shouts. We quiz him about why he's walking so fast. "I had planned to take a year to walk the TransAm but when I arrived they only gave me a visa for 6 months". All his plans went out the window and he was suddenly on a mission and had to clock up 20-30 miles a day. His pushchair had gained a bit of attention particularly when we was doing a late stint on main roads. "People kept pulling over to ask what I thought I was doing pushing a baby on a hard shoulder at night". He now has a big sign that says



'No child on board'.



Oli the Walking Slovenian

We've got used to not having most of the things that we missed

from the UK but we'll always have a hankering for Marmite. It's with great delight then that we find a jar in one of the cupboards in the morning to add the taste of home to our breakfast. Our housemates are less convinced. Oli sets off early with aching legs to try and get another good day's miles in. It takes us an hour and half to catch him up as he's faster than us up the hills but we make better progress going back down again. He sings cheerfully to himself and waves when we eventually pass him. Clearly a man enjoying what life has given him.

[After finishing the TransAm Oli became a national hero in Slovenia. He then took on an even bigger adventure walking the length of the Americas. He's currently back in Slovenia but will pick up the trail again once it's safe to return.]







## A Curious Groundhog



### Following a Creek in Virginia

The Appalachians are best known for the world's longest 'hiking only' footpath: the 2200 mile Appalachian Trail. A rite of passage for any keen hiker, around 850 people walk its entire length each year. Some even turn around and walk back again. This is the third of the Triple Crown of Hiking trails that we've encountered after the Pacific Crest Trail and Continental Divide Trail.





### Crossing the AT

We cross the AT at Trout Dale and spend the night in a cabin chatting to some hikers. Like cycle tourists, long distance hikers have a particular vocabulary and enjoy chatting about their kit. One thing that differs though is that through-hikers like to give each other trail names. Caleb has been christened "Jetpack" on account of the excessive amount of fuel for his stove that he likes to carry. His adventure sounds wonderful with stories of days in remote forests, wildlife encounters and new friendships forged in the tiny huts that are provided along the route. Another journey to add to the ever increasing 'must-do' list.



Caleb AKA Jetpack

We drop down from the ridge and into a wide valley that marks the divide between the 'new' Appalachian range and the 'old' Appalachian range. A strong tail wind and a respite from the



steep hills helps us make good progress. Up ahead we spot another cyclist who turns out to be Jim, a friend of Chris and Amina. Jim had to leave the other two as he had a shorter window of time to complete the trip. We'd keep seeing him at various roadside stops for the next few days.



#### A Lone Sunflower

This stretch of the TransAm has provided some of the most diverse range of places for us to stay. As well as the numerous churches, we've slept in small huts, been offered the floor of fire stations, camped in town parks and been invited into luxurious houses thanks to generous WarmShowers hosts. Just before the final big climb of the Appalachians we find the best place we've spent the night so far.



A Night at Troutville Fire Station





Mick and Lee who hosted us in Radford VA  
We'd contacted Meghan though Warmshowers and although she wasn't going to be there she had offered use of her cabin for the night. We arrive late in the day and almost miss the

subtle track into the woods that leads up to her property. Pushing up through the trees we're not sure we can be in the right place as the track becomes more and more vague. We round a corner and then there it is. Meghan and her partner have built this 160 square foot cabin themselves from salvaged materials and it forms a beautiful structure in a peaceful clearing. Mismatched windows compliment the reclaimed wood paneling. Inside we find a basic kitchen area and a stove that soon heats the tiny space up. A heaving bookshelf includes titles about self sufficiency and low impact living. There's no running water, mains electricity or bathroom and certainly no wi-fi



### Meghan's Cabin

It may have been the cumulative effect of the last few weeks of riding or the hearty supper we had cooked ourselves but in that tranquil little space we both sleep better than we have for a long, long time. Easing my eyes open in the morning and looking out into the woods I smile contentedly. This is a very special place and we can see why Meghan has decided she will



move here permanently. It gives us lots to think about regarding how we might want to live when we eventually return home and we hope that we can borrow more than a few ideas from this place.



Room with a View



### Cooking in the Cabin

We know that today will be a challenge with the tough climb up Vesuvius to tackle that will bring us onto the final ridge of the Appalachians. We pack up and reluctantly leave the idyl of this woodland clearing. We need to get our minds ready for the challenge ahead and with bellies full of porridge we swing onto the foot of the climb. It quickly steepens into double digit gradients as I work down through the gears to find our granny ring. We grind, grunt and gasp for 5km. The fire in our lungs is matched by the intensity of colour all around us. The road sweeps up to the sky through a towering forest that is now resplendent in all the shades of autumn. The experience is an intense assault on the senses as our legs scream for mercy while we blink sweat out of our eyes to take in more of the surrounding view.





Climbing out of Vesuvius



### View from the Blue Ridge Parkway

We eventually find ourselves on top of the world at the Blue Ridge Parkway. Below us lies the flatlands of eastern Virginia with a patchwork of forests cascading down the hillside. We've timed our arrival perfectly with this being the most spectacular season to be here. In the far, far distance we're sure we can see the Atlantic Ocean. The finish line for the TransAm is somewhere over there, almost in sight. Beyond that, across the water lies Europe and home but surely it's too soon to be thinking about that? We gently make our way along the ridge, teasing out the lactic acid in our muscles. We've conquered the final big hurdle of the TransAm and we're ready for the final leg into Yorktown. But first it's time for lunch.





The End of the Appalachians





A Curious Groundhog

If you like photos then you'll love seeing more in our Gallery.

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## Newton KS – Marion KY

written by Marcus | 20 October, 2016



### Newton KS – Marion KY

Being under lockdown rules has the useful effect of making you realise how valuable the freedom to travel actually is and how much we all probably take it for granted. I'm sure lots of people are already planning some big adventures for when it's safe to get out and about again. My brother has been looking for advice on touring bikes and there's been talk of exciting journeys on the Karakorum Highway or perhaps into the Pamirs. How much better will it feel to finally get out there after

all of this?

In the meantime we've been very grateful for the little adventures we can safely do at the moment. An hour riding on lanes with more cyclists than cars and more pheasants than cyclists. A sunny walk across the fields watched carefully by a herd of young calves. Running through woods carpeted with bluebells. I even climbed a tree the other day. We're incredibly fortunate to have so much space around us here in The Vale of Evesham compared to other people's lockdown environment and we're trying to make the most of it.



Bluebells in the woods on Bredon Hill

As well as travelling I've also missed competing. Last weekend I was supposed to be running the London Marathon wearing a tap costume to raise money for the charity WaterAid. Instead I ran 45 laps around our farm on a tap-shaped course. This was harder than I'd anticipated, but it was a fun challenge to satisfy my competitive urges. The best bit though was the amount of support I received from friends and family via the



wonders of an online stream on Facebook. It made it feel like a proper event even though there were actually more four-legged spectators than people. If you'd like to make a donation to WaterAid, who are needed now more than ever before to help provide clean water and decent toilets to areas of the world that need it most, then please click here: [www.tiny.cc/FastestTap](http://www.tiny.cc/FastestTap).



The Tap Shaped Marathon

***24th September 2016 – 6th October 2016***

In Britain if you refuse to go out cycling when it rains then your bike will stay indoors for most of the year. Pull on a jacket and get on with it is the best policy. The rules in Florida and California are slightly different, so when we check the weather forecast for the day and see pictures of small grey rain clouds Dan and Charlie start to look nervous.

“I think I’ll take a day off today” Dan tells us. “There’s a chilli fest in town that we could check out?” suggests Charlie. We dig out our waterproofs and leave them to it.



A big rig and a large truck

America does all-you-can-eat breakfast buffets better than anywhere else in the world. By the time we’ve finished in The Bread Basket Cafe it feels like we’ve got enough fuel on board to power us for the next week. The road out of Newton gives us a panoramic view of the storm clouds rolling across the plains. We manage to avoid the first one as it rushes across a few miles in front of us leaving soaking tarmac and that unmistakable smell of summer rain.





Storm clouds over the plains

We're not so lucky with the next one and get caught by the edge of it with a refreshing shower. The rain is heavy but warm and is fun to ride in. Wild horses graze the fields alongside the road and are just as unfazed by the weather. We pull the zips on our jackets up to our chins while the peaks of our caps act as a gutter to keep the worst of it out of our faces. While stopped at a cafe some concerned drivers ask if we're OK to be out on the road in these conditions. "It's only a bit of rain!" I reply. Despite our British attitude to the weather we're still glad to find shelter in a church that James in the bike shop had told us about. During the night the rain continues to fall outside and thunder and lightning shakes the windows in the early hours.



And so it pours





It's clearing up ahead



### Wild Horses

We stand, dripping in the corner of a grocery store in Eureka the next morning. Clutching warm coffee in our cold hands, there's already a wet floor sign by our feet. The rain has got progressively heavier, the temperature has dropped and we're not feeling so happy about being out in it any longer. The next customer to come through the door is Robyn who immediately assesses our situation and leaps into action. "Follow me!" she cries.



A soggy cyclist

Soon we're in warm, dry clothes eating sloppy joes and sipping on root beer floats. Robyn has a house that she lets cyclists use when it's not being rented out and lucky for us it's



currently empty. She lets us use the shower and dry our clothes while making arrangements for somewhere for us to stay that night.

We feel recharged and reinvigorated when we eventually leave. The rain clouds finally blow over revealing a rolling road in the Flint Hills that takes us onwards to Toronto. Robyn had told us about the tornado that had wrecked several homes in Eureka last year and we can't help but think about the opening scenes from The Wizard of Oz. It's an appropriate thought when we roll up to the house of Robyn's friend Jeanmarie. To say she's a fan of the film is an understatement, even her number plate says Oz Bcoz! It's the end of yet another tough day that has been saved by a fortuitous meeting with some very kind and generous strangers. Jeanmarie drives us out to watch the sunset over a lake before chatting all evening about life in the Sunflower State. She has hosted dozens of TransAm cyclists but recently had a more unusual guest. Oli was from Slovenia and has been walking the route while carrying all his gear in a pushchair. "He can't be more than a few days ahead of you now so you should catch him up soon". We promise to say hello from her if and when we see him.



There's no place like home





Sunset in Toronto (KS)



Super host Jeanmarie

We're approaching the edge of Kansas now and the plains are starting to ruck up again into increasingly steep hills. Huge cobwebs hang in the trees catching the morning light and a few



unlucky tortoises lie by the roadside. One of the more fortunate ones gets some assistance from Kirsty to get safely to the other side, at least she assumes that was where it wanted to be.



The Sunflower State



### Tortoise Rescue

In the small village of Benedict a hand painted sign invites us to stop at the community store where we encounter another TransAm legend. Pastor Joe is an ex-serviceman full of stories about delivering furniture to John Wayne and falling off scaffolding in Germany but his specialist subject is conspiracy theories. While being plied with free ice cream we're educated on various devious plots by Russia to overthrow the USA using submarines hidden on each coast of the continent. We mock incredulity and try to nod and shake our heads at the appropriate places. Armed with two DVDs that he promises will teach us more, we eventually say our goodbyes and pedal out of there at full speed!



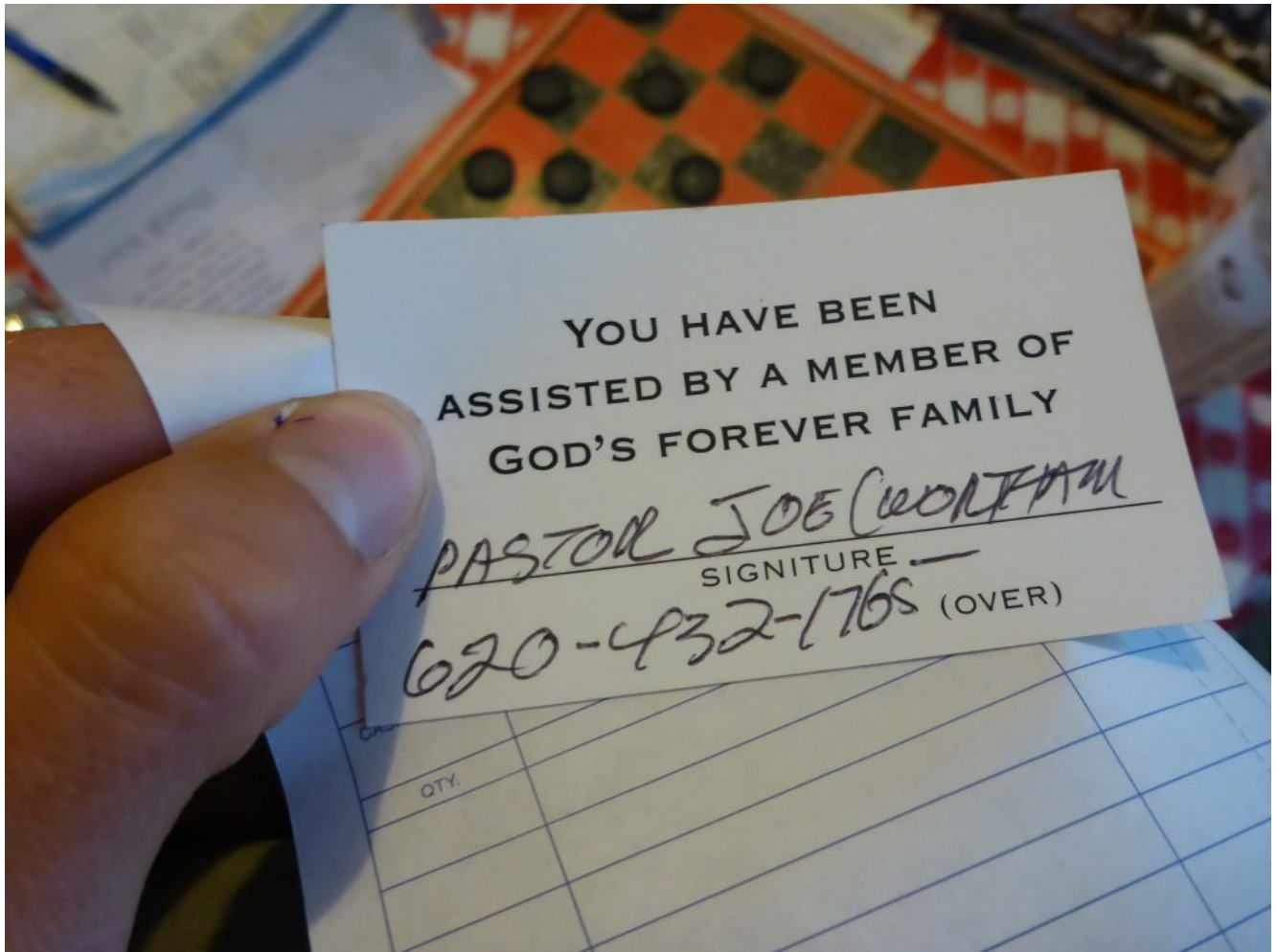


Benedict Community Store





## Pastor Joe



### Pastor Joe's Card

We hadn't expected to see Dan and Charlie again but when we arrive in Pittsburg a couple of days later we're surprised to see them riding down the main street towards us. We all pitch up at the town's community campsite where they tell us that the rain wasn't all that bad after all. We'll have them touring in the UK one day. They'd also made use of Robyn's house in Eureka.



## Parklife

Pittsburg serves as a vital pitstop for us with our front dynamo hub needing an overhaul. It's a specialist job so the wheel gets boxed up and sent off for repairs and we buy a cheap, used option from Tailwind Cycles to use in the meantime. We'll catch up with the repaired wheel at a post office in a few days' time, all being well.





We're Not in Kansas Anymore

Cooky's cafe is famous on the TransAm for serving the best pies on the entire route. We find it shortly after crossing into Missouri and as soon as we step through the door the smell of fresh baking has us salivating. I press my nose to the glass of the counter to study our options but it's no use, all the pies look incredible so we'll have to work through the entire menu.



Cooky's Pies





### Charlie and Dan's Pies

Luckily Missouri takes up where Kansas left off so we can justify the calorie intake as we begin winching up and zooming down the never ending sets of humpback hills. There's a competition amongst cyclists on this road to take a photo of as many if the roller coaster hills in one shot as possible. We manage five which won't win any prizes. The fields around us are now grazed by cattle and the palette of greens would start to look more like an English countryside view were it not for the large red wooden barns.



A five pointer





## Missouri or the Mendips?

We continue to meet up with Dan and Charlie at the end of each day in parks, huts and sports fields across Missouri. Dan is blogging every day so has to make use of free WiFi where he can keep it updated. It's a big commitment and contrasts with Charlie's approach which is to keep his stories to himself for now, to be told over a drink with his friends when the time is right.



Dan conquers another hill



### Stopping for lunch

We all arrive one evening in the confusingly named Houston in the county of Texas, Missouri. It's a town full of big people in big trucks with big tattoos and it happens to be the day of a big college american football game. It's an important event for the town with a large crowd gathering to support the home team. Even the local fire brigade have turned up to sound their sirens whenever their boys score a touchdown. I have no idea what is going on and there seems to be a lot of standing around and not much playing. The marching band at halftime is good though. Houston lose 18 – 40.





Coffee in a diner





Come on Houston Tigers!

Our road is taking us through the Ozark hills which lack the altitude of the mighty Rockies but make up for it with severity of gradient. The Mark Twain National Forest covers most of Ozark county with tall trees now lining the road and filling the view all around us. The drivers behind us wait patiently as we inch our way up and over each crest before gathering as much momentum as possible to get us part way up the next rise. It's always disappointing to see how quickly the heavy bike slows from 40 to 4 mph though. Each of the small shops we stop at have a guest book so we scour the names above us to look for Oli-from-Slovenia's name. He still seems to be a few days ahead of us so must be putting in some huge mileage days on his feet.



Cats Eye Flea Market, MO





River valley in the Ozarks





## Johnson's Shut-Ins State Park



## Elephant Rocks State Park

We're feeling weary when we arrive in Farmington so we spend two nights in the local jail. It's been converted into a cyclists' hostel with such luxuries as sofas, a washing machine and a PC. It's just what we need to recharge our batteries both literally and metaphorically before we ride on into our next state.



A night in jail

The Mississippi river is another major landmark as we cross this vast country. A broad expanse of chocolate-brown water flows slowly under the bridge that takes us into Illinois.



Some of this water will have made its way down from the river Missouri that we'd crossed weeks ago in Montana. Somewhere that seems impossibly far away now. An adventure for another time might be to build a Huckleberry Finn style raft and spend some time following this great watercourse.



### The Mighty Mississippi

Our time in Illinois is relatively brief and features the replacement of some more bike parts and a night in the beautiful handbuilt home of Alan and Anne. All of the logs and stone used to construct the building were sourced locally over many years and you can sense their hard work and love woven into every detail.







Chester, IL. Home of Popeye.

On our way to our next river crossing we stop at some road works. One of the workers rests on his shovel and uses us as an excuse for a bit of break and a chat. "It's a different way of life over here." he tells us "All of my kids had a horse, a motorcycle and a gun by the time they were 16". Denim and dungarees are becoming the standard uniform and we encounter our first chasing dog for many months.



Missouri Locals



A business opportunity

The River Ohio is even larger than the Mississippi at this point but the two merge just downstream and continue together down to New Orleans. We hop on a little ferry as the sun hangs low in the sky. It's now October so the days are getting shorter but the temperature is still very pleasant. We've been passing an increasing number of "Happy fall y'all" and Halloween displays in peoples' gardens. We can buy pumpkin lattes and pumpkin ale to wash down the pumpkin pies that are on sale everywhere. .





Ferry 'cross the Ohio



Happy Fall Y'all

Once deposited on the far bank we find ourselves in Kentucky, our 10th state. We hadn't seen Charlie for a few days but just

before the ferry crossing he'd come past at speed. He had met up with his wife Anna who is now following him in an RV. His panniers now hang empty on his bike so he still looks like a 'proper cycle tourist' but without the inconvenience of the weight of their contents. He and Anna meet us at the methodist church in Marion where we're all spending the night along with some more cyclists, Chris and Amina from Spokane, WA. It's Charlie's birthday so we all help him celebrate with cakes and singing and a mississippi mud pie.



### Charlie's Birthday

It's great to share this part of the journey with other cyclists as we each experience each day in a different way. Everyone's reasons for riding are different, but we all enjoy the little details that are unique to travelling by bike. We compare notes to see what we might have missed. Most interesting of all though is the conversation with Anna, Charlie's wife. She is originally from Tajikistan but her



family fled to all corners of the world during the civil war after independence. She's happy to hear how much we enjoyed visiting her home country and confesses that she sometimes pines for the Soviet era days when things were more stable there.



### Chris's Trek

We're into the last two states of the TransAm route now with the finish in Yorktown edging ever closer. Given the time of year we don't expect to see too many other cyclists on the route but we are curious to know what has happened to Oli the Slovenian walker that Jeanmarie had mentioned. He's obviously making phenomenal progress but surely he can't reach the end before us?!



Bike art by the River Ohio

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# Halfway, OR – West Yellowstone, MT

written by Marcus | 20 October, 2016







### Approaching Hell's Canyon, OR

As we progress along the valley a shirtless cyclist approaches from the opposite direction. Justin is on his 5th crossing of the States and took part in the very first TransAm back in 1976 when 4000 riders blazed the way in its inaugural year. "You've got a long hot climb ahead" he warns. We duck into the river to cool off before crossing the state line into Idaho and taking on the hill up and over into Cambridge. We lose an hour in the process as we move to the Mountain time zone. On the way down the road is thick with dark locusts that seem intent on hopping under our wheels despite my best efforts to avoid them.





Justin, A TransAm veteran





Cooling off in the Snake River





State #3 – Idaho, The Potato State



### Suicidal locust

Cambridge sprang to life in 1900 as a base for fur trappers and miners who arrived to claim the plots of land that were up for grabs on a first come first served basis. All these small towns seem to have their own museum and we get a tour of Cambridge's own collection of artifacts by Del Ray who offers to open up and gives us a private tour. It's a fine display of beaverskin hats and giant chainsaws and an interesting glimpse of how the pioneers set up their new lives in the wild west.





Only 700 years younger than Cambridge University in the UK



Cyclists camping is provided under the Cambridge water tower





## Cambridge water tower by night

We're now gradually gaining altitude and as a result there's more forest and less desert in this part of Idaho. The gaps between towns is getting greater too with plenty of time to enjoy the unspoiled landscape as we rise and fall over the hills with glimpses of deer amongst the trees. That increase in height has only knocked a degree or two off the daytime temperatures but early mornings in the tent are now frigid. It seems ages since we had to layer up for bedtime but we're back to emptying the clothes bag to stay warm until it's time to get up again.



Crossing the 45th Parallel





The road south of New Meadows





No trespassing





Ace Saloon, Council, ID



## Hot dogs

We drop down to The Little Salmon River where adventure seekers ride the rapids through Riggins and we meet some adventurous Canadian motorbikers who are riding from New Mexico to Banff offroad. We reclaim our lost hour by crossing back into the Pacific Time zone and need every minute of it when the massive White Bird pass looms up ahead with our road snaking it's way up and over it. Before we tackle it we decide to fuel up on huckleberry ice cream in White Bird Village, a tiny town of 150 residents that somehow requires 3 churches. The cafe owner advises we use the old road as, although it's longer it's less severe. This turns out to be sage advice as the shallow hair pins allow us to winch up the 800m climb in relative comfort compared to the more direct main road. Our only issue is staying upright against the gusting headwind that threatens to blow us all the way back down again. By the time we roll into Grangeville the effects of the ice cream have long worn off and only a large pizza (each) and a beer are capable of recharging our batteries.





Following the Little Salmon River towards White Bird



Climbing White Bird Hill





## Evening sky on the approach to Grangeville



### Shadow riding

Grangeville is a good place for a rest day, mostly because there's very little to do so there are no distractions that could take us away from the important task of doing very little. Even the swimming pool is shut as the summer season is over. Like all the towns in Idaho we've been to so far they also offer free camping for cyclists in the city park which is handy.





Resting in the Grangeville park with the locals





The Blue Fox cinema, Grangeville's only form of entertainment

With refreshed legs the next day we continue out through huge golden wheat fields and then drop steeply down to the town of Stites and the Clearwater River. This stretch of water will be our guide up towards the Bitterroot mountains for the next couple of days. We stock up in Kooskia knowing that there will be little by way of shops or services for a while now and begin spinning up the valley.

The Selway-Bitterroot Wilderness is a protected area covering 1.3 million acres of glacially carved hills without a single building or paved road and restrictions on any form of motorised transport. It's a popular place for hunters to track down bears, elk, moose, mountain lions and wolves. Hunting is an important way of life for most people round here and every town has a 'sporting goods' store where we could buy rifles, pistols, bows, knives and all the camouflaged paraphernalia that goes with it. It's such a far cry from the

British elite hunting scene of red coats, bugals, beagles and tweed.



Fields of gold





Approaching the Clearwater valley



Stites Grocery store has all the essentials





But how far to the next cake shop?

The valley is pristine with only our stretch of tarmac disturbing the natural wonder of the crystal clear river and thick forested hillsides. We stop for a swim in the river one day then for a dip in a natural hot spring the next bringing back memories of Hokkaido in Japan. (Only here they keep their clothes on.) The river gradually gets narrower which can only mean that the end of the valley must be getting closer. Sure enough, after a night on the lawn of the Lochsa Lodge we're faced with the Lola Pass up and over the granite ridge in front of us. The top sits at 1600m and marks our entry into the next state of Montana as well as losing that hour as we change time zones yet again.



Clearwater river





Clearwater River





Weir Creek hot spring





25 while we were there



#### State #4 – Montana, Big Sky Country

There was smoke in the air near the Lochsa Lodge and as we descend off the Lolo Pass we pass through large areas of burnt trees that have been engulfed in previous years, sometimes worryingly close to buildings. Our historical journey continues as we now follow the route of the Nez Perce Indian tribe who were chased from Oregon into Montana during the summer of 1877 by the US Military. In a bizarre and terrifying journey they were pursued for nearly 1900km and were within sight of the Canadian border and safety when they were captured and driven back into a reservation.





Burnt trees coming down off the Lolo Pass



## Montana residents

Looking at the map it seems that we've come a long way north on a journey that is supposed to be taking us east. There are several reasons for this not least of which being that the route is designed to show us some of the best bits of the country but it's also making sure we pass by the Adventure Cycling Association's (ACA) head quarters in Missoula. These are the guys who set up the Transamerica trail in 1976 and have since become the country's expert in long distance cycle touring. When we arrive at their offices we're given a warm welcome and a complimentary cold ice cream. The ritual for TransAm riders includes having our photo taken and added to the wall of fame and a tour of the building. It's a surprisingly busy place with tours and holidays being organised in one room, a magazine being produced in another while several people sit at PCs pouring over Google Street view to make sure all their maps and guides are up to date. Not a bad job really planning the best cycling routes in the country for a living. The Association has come a long way since those early days and the founders must be proud of what has been achieved through the success of the TransAm and everything that has been born out of it.





Adventure Cycling Association HQ, Missoula, MT




A vintage touring tandem at the ACA HQ



to Yorktown

DATE: 8-15 2016



Nikki Ullug  
Austin, TX  
denver, CO → Seattle, WA

DATE: 8-19 2016




NAMES: Wendy Rose  
HOMETOWN: Makawao, Hawaii  
TRIP (From/To): Astoria, OR → Billings, MT

DATE: 8-22 2016



NAMES: WILL & RACHEL CARILE  
HOMETOWN: SHEFFIELD  
TRIP (From/To): YORKTOWN → ASTORIA

DATE: 8-22 2016



NAMES: DAVID MOBLEY  
MARION MOBLEY  
HOMETOWN: DENVER  
TRIP (From/To): NYC → Florence, OR

DATE: 8/22 2016



NAMES: DAVE BUNGDON  
HOMETOWN: MT BELVIEW TX  
TRIP (From/To): ASTORIA TO TEXAS

DATE: 8/23 2016



NAMES: SARAH CUSHMAN  
CEDAR + ROB LEVIN  
HOMETOWN: BRIDGEMAN, MAINE  
TRIP (From/To): CAPE HENLOPEN, DELAWARE  
→ (HOBOKEN!) SEATTLE, WASHINGTON

DATE: 8-25 2016



NAMES: Jeff Battiste  
HOMETOWN: Eugene, OR  
TRIP (From/To): Glacier to Denver (??)

DATE: 8/26 2016



NAMES: DAVID WALTHALL  
HOMETOWN: Chicago, IL  
TRIP (From/To): Chicago → Astoria, OR

DATE: 8/26 2016



NAMES: KIRSTY MCGAUL & MARCUS MUMFORD  
HOMETOWN: BRISTOL, ENGLAND  
TRIP (From/To): BRISTOL TO BRISTOL  
VIA EUROPE, ASIA AND USA

The latest addition to the wall of fame (bottom right)



A new sticker for the bike





You don't have to be mad to be an adventure cyclist but...putting a sticker on your head definitely helps  
Missoula is a quirky town and we're pleased to find they have a music festival taking place on the night we're there. While

jiving to the sounds of The Lil' Smokies and their funky bluegrass sounds the mayor interrupts the set by jumping up on the stage. Dressed in denim shorts and a Hawaiian shirt he rallies the crowd by declaring that Missoula must be "The best darn place the universe!" before flicking a peace sign and letting the band continue. Would the mayor of Bristol get away with that and still look cool? I doubt it. Even Bruce, our Warmshowers host is as laid back as they come with the door to his house always open to cyclists and musicians passing through the town.



The Lil' Smokies. Finger pickin' good

Did I ever mention how the wind has a grudge against us. I'm sure I must have. On the way into Missoula we had a headwind and now retracing back along the very same road the wind is in our faces again. How does it know? What have we done to offend it? We're now travelling down the other side of the Bitterroot mountains and that fire we'd seen hints of has grown in size with a haze of smoke now wafting across the road. We ride into Hamilton where we stop for the night exhausted from battling



the breeze. Our tent gets another nice wash from the auto sprinklers in the park and I get a refreshing bath when I hop out in the middle of the night to unsuccessfully stop them from working.



Red sky at night, wildfire in sight



A Pontiac TransAm AKA Kitt from Knightrider





## Pontiac TransAm

Amongst wealthy ranches we pick our way along a gravel track to Darby but as the valley narrows it can only mean that things are about to head back towards the sky. We rejoin the nice smooth road and spend most of the afternoon winching up to the top of the Chief Joseph Pass, another nod to the Nez Perce tribe who were led over these hills by this determined chief. We're now at 2200m and at this point straddle the Continental Divide for the first time. Rain falling here will either run down one side to the Pacific or the other side to the Atlantic with this ridge splitting the country in two from Canada down to Mexico. It's not the last we'll be seeing of it either.





Climbing up to the Chief Joseph Pass





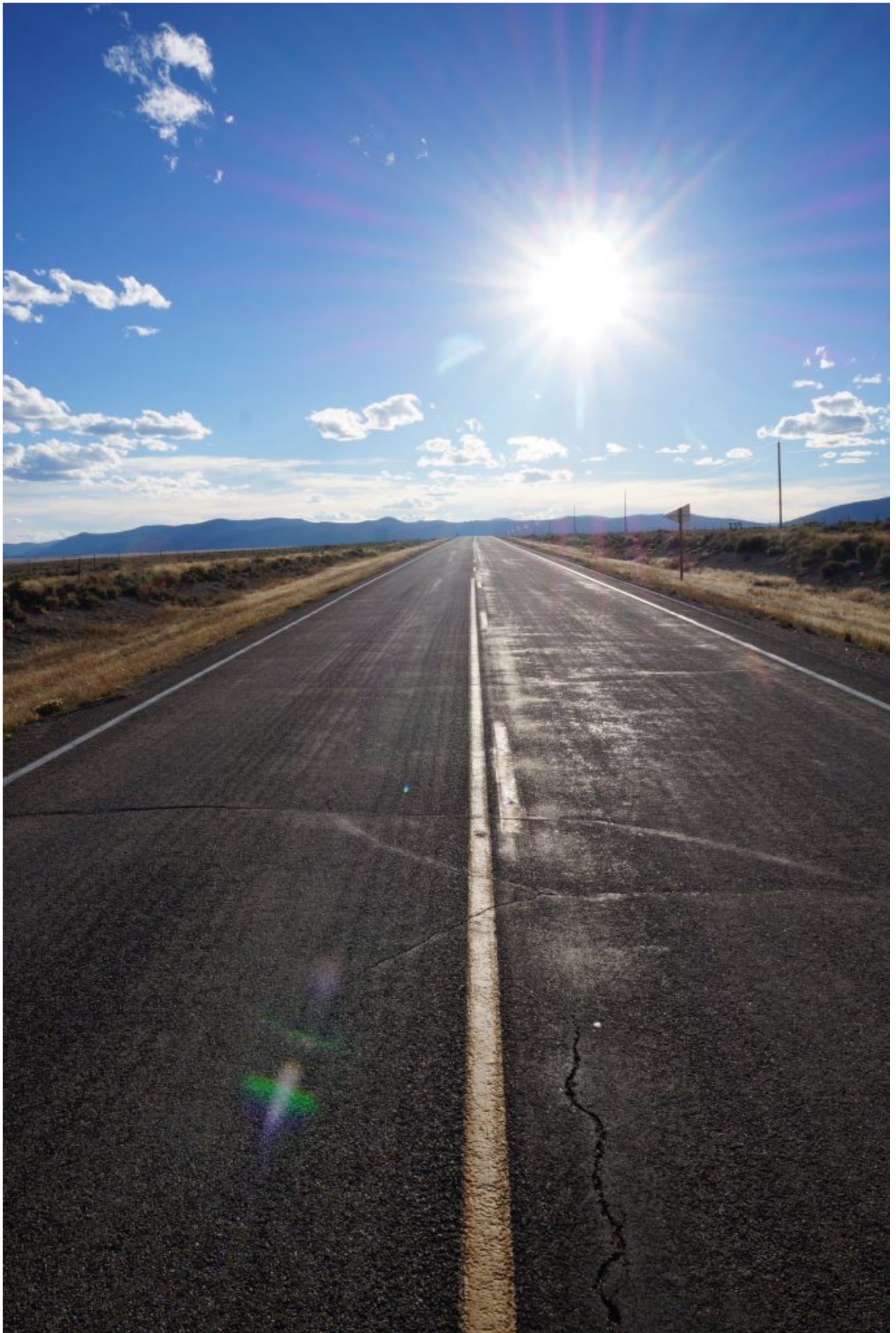
## Relatives of the Nez Perce?



### Our first visit to the Continental Divide

Woodland and wilderness pass by in a blur as we speed down past the Big Hole battlefield where Chief Joseph faced one of his fiercest and most bloody battles. We end up in Wisdom, a tiny remote town without neighbours, claimed to be one of the coldest places in the country recording freezing temperatures for an average of 277 days of the year. We shiver the night away in a hut provided in the memorial park just outside of town. Again a facility that welcomes cyclists in return for a donation.







Past Big Hole on the way to Wisdom



Cyclist's accommodation in Pioneer Park, Wisdom, MO



### Evening view from Wisdom

There's not a lot out here. It's a barren, open plain surrounded by stark mountain ridges where cows, horses and hay are the only ways to make a living. That and hunting of course. People seem to be making a go of it and even nestled in an otherwise deserted valley next to the Pioneer Mountains there's another ranch all on its own with signs that someone is in residence and somehow surviving.





Enormous livestock trucks in Wisdom



Wide open space outside Wisdom





A silence seeker



Hunter's bar in Jackson





Hotel in Jackson



Jackson Main Street



Gateway to the Pioneer Mountains



Haystack making device and the cows it will feed

With Big Hole Pass (2255m) and Badger Pass (2042m) climbed we're made to work against the wind down into the town of Dillon which now feels like a city by comparison to the half deserted places we've just come through. Our search for a park to pitch our tent in is about to begin when we're approached by Mark. He's familiar with the look of a tired and hungry cyclist and guessing our next move he offers his front lawn for us to camp on. It's a real treat to be able to make use of their shower and in the morning we're invited in for breakfast. Mark and Tammie worked as missionaries in Brazil for many years before moving to Montana where Mark took up the post of Baptist pastor. He's now retired from helping people in a spiritual sense but still enjoys offering physical help like this. Being on the TransAm route gives him the chance to look after riders that are passing through so we're not the first to have occupied his lawn. Clean and full we leave with grateful souls and make our way onwards with only a brief stop



to load up the panniers and drain the credit card in the all too tempting Patagonia clothing outlet store.



Mark, our host in Dillon, MO



Camping on Mark and Tammie's lawn





## Dillon Historic Downtown

Passing Beaverhead rock we're reminded that Lewis and Clarke witnessed these very same sights and used this distinctive feature as a waypoint as they pushed West. We also think about how many cyclists have enjoyed this road over the years. The Adventure Cycling Association estimates that up to 1200 people now take on the challenge each year and that amount of passing traffic can have a useful impact on some of the small towns along the route. Twin Bridges is one town that wanted to capitalise on this so they have set up a Bike Camp with a cozy hut, shower and work stand for bike fettling in their park. If it encourages more cyclists to stop here then that could really help the local restaurants and stores. It worked for us as we stock up with food and use the local library before retiring to the bike camp. In the grocery store there's a wall of pictures showing proud hunters with their trophies and in the library there's a stuffed lion from a former resident's more exotic game hunting trip. In the camp we also meet Jeff,

who is piecing together a unique route from the north down into Utah. Many of the Adventure Cycling Association routes intersect allowing people to be creative by combining and linking parts of various longer routes. In Jeff's case he's taken the Northern Tier, The TransAm, the Rocky Mountains 'Great Parks South' Loop and the Western Express and come up with what looks to be an amazing trip.



Beaverhead Rock





Proud trophy hunter



There's a lion in the library!





Bill White Bike Camp, Twin Bridges, MO



Bill White Bike Camp, Twin Bridges





## Twin Bridges

Not all towns are as enterprising as Twin Bridges. This is an old gold mining area, an industry that is long past its boom times leaving behind deserted streets at Nevada City and a restored theme town in Virginia City. These 2 ghost towns that have retained a few breaths of life thanks to the tourists that come to visit them. Away from the main road other clumps of houses are left decaying and unloved, fading back into history.



Nevada City and Virginia City, MO



Nevada City. This town's becoming like a ghost town.

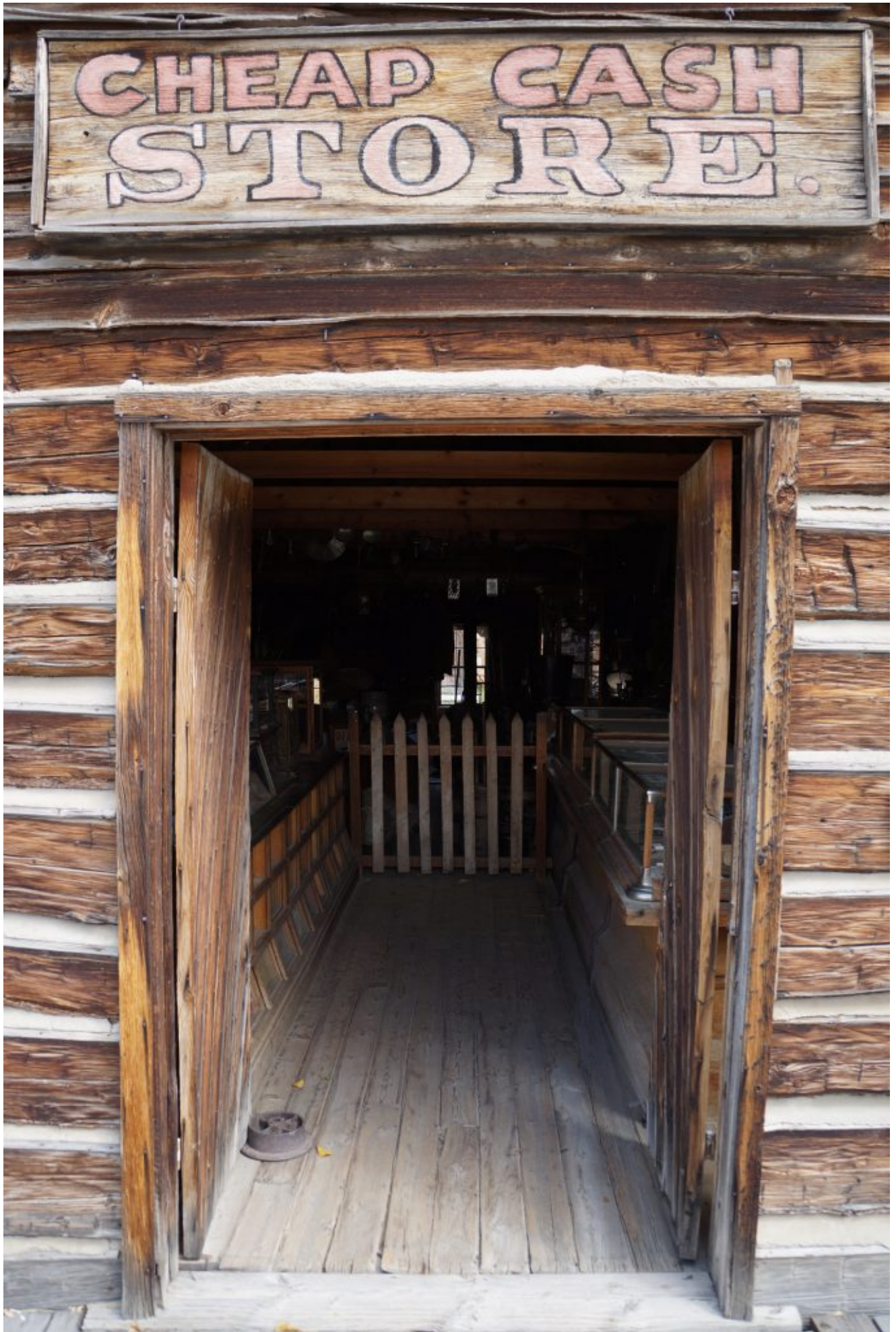




Nevada City Saloon



CHEAP CASH  
STORE.



## Cash Converters, Nevada City

We seem to be riding over endless ranges of hills, the land ruffled up by the colliding tectonic plates and getting larger as we get nearer to the main part of the Rocky Mountains. After another steady winch we arrive in the Madison Valley and speed down into Ennis following signs to Willie's Distillery. Could it be possible that there are two distillers of good whiskey in this country? Sadly not as Willie hasn't had the same education that Chuck had had the benefit of back in Washington and has ruined it with various sweet additives. We are surprised when the barmaid asks if we're the British couple of the tandem when we walk into the tasting room. Surely we're not that famous? No, Jeff had arrived 3 minutes before us and told her to expect us. We find him camped behind the distillery and although it's tempting to stop there too we make the decision that we should push on a bit further.



Looking down into Madison Valley





Willie's Distillery delivery truck

The wind has other ideas. Try as we might we can't get the bike moving much above 10kph and by the time we arrive at Cameron, the next tiny one horse town we're wiped out. We set up the tent in as sheltered a position as we can and eat like a horse that's been on the stage coach run before collapsing into bed. Again I may have mentioned this before but hills are hard work but rewarding so I don't mind them too much. A headwind on the other hand is hard work with no prospect of a view or a swooping descent. I hate it.



Fields near Cameron, MO





## Prong horned antelope

There's no hiding from the now howling gusts the next day either and we continue to crawl along at maximal effort and minimal speed. We stop for a break at Windy Point boating area with no explanation needed as to how it was christened. Jeff catches us up and is glad he's not alone to be suffering today. "I've been shouting at the wind all morning!".



## Big Sky Country

We ride together for a short while but his light load and young legs mean he's soon off up the road without us. His route takes him back down into Idaho anyway so we let him branch off while we head on to Earthquake Lake.

In 1959 this area experienced a huge natural disaster when a massive earthquake caused the side of the valley to collapse taking the lives of 28 people. The landslide dammed the Madison river forming Earthquake Lake while upstream, Hebgen Lake tilted causing flooding on the north shore and leaving boats high and dry on the south side. A lot of the results of

that fateful night are still visible as we ride through the valley past partly submerged trees and strewn boulders. It's a striking example of the power of earth and how little we can do about it.



Approaching Earthquake Lake, the landslide took out the road ahead





### Drowned trees in Earthquake Lake

We camp next to Hebgen Lake and sleep restlessly on constant alert for any tremors. Then it's a short ride down into West Yellowstone, the town that forms a gateway into the world's first national park. At 2.2 million acres, the same size as the States of Rhode Island and Delaware combined this is a part of the journey that we've been really looking forward to. It'll also be the point that we cross into our next state and in Wyoming open space is due to take on a whole new dimension. The TransAmerica trail continues to carry us on its meandering journey east, but that's a story for another blog.



Nearing Yellowstone where the beasts will be big





Hebgen Lake

There are plenty more photos in the USA Gallery.