

24. Extraordinary Outings

Some days are gorgeous, ideal for riding. Al picked a late Spring day to go out and slay dragons. Weeks beforehand he examined maps, made copies, marked in colored markers, and summoned courage. He'd long since become adept at measuring a contour atlas and summing segments for total mileage. This loop tackled many bad hills he'd put off for several years. These places were practically mythical, nearby but hardly ever visited by car, or, having passed this way once, wondered how anyone could deal with such serpentine terrain, yet typical of New England. Even road names were intimidating—Black Hut, Chopmist, Snake Hill—with at least 25 major climbs and plenty of hard baked rises and rolls. A dozen waterfalls were indicative of persistent verticality. Loop was roughly rectangular, N-W-S-E, hard to bail out. Even if only recreation, it was a gird your loins, grit your teeth trial.

Fear bars new attempts. How explorers mustered courage to face the unknown is unknown. They probably didn't overly intellectualize, just did it. Then again, landscapes then were much less overrun with lunatics than now. Renaissance thinkers were a bit like God, omniscient at least for their times, practically able to rattle off a concise litany of what was then known. This bred confidence. Modern man has none. There's an impossibly detailed body of knowledge which no human can grasp. Facts on file exceed what 4 trillion neurons can process or remember. Billions driven mad by it race around looking for trouble. The sooner people lose confidence that they know anything at all the better off they'll be. That people retreat into small spheres of input/output only reinforces their false sense of superiority, exactly what happens to religious fanatics. People must learn that they only exist through mutual concern, not through anything they themselves do. You do nothing totally alone. You can't bathe, eat, sleep, survive, work without a cooperative structure behind it all. Only psychopaths want to toss out civilization altogether.

Humans are wired to experiment and explore. Only those who probe the edges will be remembered. Pressed to rate the greatest explorers, some might argue Columbus, Cooke, or Magellan near top of their list. But Armstrong was the first to step on another planet, a leap beyond them all, which took incredible courage, total foolhardiness, or unblinking trust in technology, very likely all three. Armstrong remains an inspirational name by all accounts.

Any of scores of crews who nestled into space shuttles, some of whom never returned, were as brave. What of hundreds of nameless cosmonauts who died in failed Soviet missions? Cortez burnt his boats on purpose so crew couldn't retreat from Aztec resistance. Conquer or die. America's greatest explorers may have been unknown tribesmen who crossed land bridges millennia ago to discover this continent. But in modern times, Lewis and Clark were the first Westerners to probe fully extent of Terra Incognita, the strange beyond promised by Louisiana Purchase. One might argue, then, that America's greatest explorer is actually a girl, Sacagawea, the teenage Shoshone who guided their expedition in part, proved herself useful as interpreter, and validated group's peaceful intentions. She became his spirit guide, and he always carried a coin with her image. His expeditions were fretful and short by comparison, but at least he made an attempt, more an inward journey of discovery that gradually increased self assurance. You don't expect to gain such insights reading books or watching television, do you?

He never did well without carefully charting route and scouting by truck. Bad pavement, bridges out, dogs, maps that showed a road where there was none, overexertion, roads that turned to dirt, trapped at bottom of a hill that made him turn back: poor planning spoiled fun, if not added danger. Was particularly wary of wildlife management areas, with a possibility of meeting bears, coyotes, mountain lions and wolves. Had already seen several lone wolves, just another big mean dog with no owner to call it off. City and country both conspired against careful calculations.

Although edge probes open new territory, those who follow in the very next wave are the real backbone, heroes, risk takers. Pioneers permanently give up a soft life for something harder to develop resources and establish villages. They make situations into which investing your effort and time become worthwhile. Behind Lewis and Clark, prairie settlers had to fight off deprivation, lawless raiders, and vagaries of weather without a supporting social net. Armstrong may have stepped first on Moon, but band who establishes its first colony will warrant more recognition: miners, smiths, and stalwart fabricators who'll turn moon's iron core into bio-domes, glassworks, and livable habitats, mostly underground, to avoid radiation on a planetoid without atmosphere. A single meteor strike would be catastrophic. Yeah, you'd have to be a confident, self-reliant hero to live with that fear forever. In this expanding, pollution sensitive underground city at 1/6 Earth's gravity, steel frame bicycles will be the conveyance of choice.

Southwest breezes weren't bad, bits of resistance early, cool and helpful on later sun baked easterly climbs. Patches of deep shade helped keep him from overheating, but hid small road hazards, like linear cracks and sharp gravel. The best biking days are lightly overcast when contrast doesn't obscure so much and motorists can plainly see your bright apparel. He was always anxious that yellow might be mistaken for a patch of sunlight against brown tree lines or gray pavement. Cherokees knew yellow to represent strife and trouble, and they were right. He always wore yellow, and nobody brought more trouble than he. Horseman right before the Apocalyptic four will likely wear yellow. But it was good trouble, the sort that got people moving together on correct path. Sometimes trailing riders appreciated his yellowness glimpsed ahead at turns flagging route for them. Lime, orange and white also stand out stunningly on gray days, but carried blasé connotations by comparison. White, in particular, smacks of cleanliness, death in Eastern cultures or snow in Western, humility, innocence, peace, precision, purity, reverence, simplicity. These are clinical, cold, sterile things, nothing at all like him despite a life cultivating each. Besides, white emphasized greasy gray chain marks, so proved harder to keep clean. One expects black slashes on a yellow field, shadowy tree lines against a tawny dawn horizon, tigers burning bright. Dark charcoal and yellow, his colors, were neither black nor white, apocalyptic finalities.

At 36.5 mph, day's max, on knees of Pray Hill he hit a 6' long, 4" deep hole. Had no way to avoid it. Sent him airborne for a second or 2, converted into a panicky high-speed bunny hop. Worried whether this would damage frame or wheels so far from origin. Pushing bike and walking for more than 15 miles was something he wasn't prepared to do. Glad for a cell phone, should he need it, but who was there to call?

So totally submissive to an automotive paradigm, Cripple-A doesn't serve members but their cars, and those who build and insure them. Car club's annual fee provided several benefits if you ever took advantage, but helping members themselves was not 1 of them. Roadside assistance only supports vehicles, not dues paying human beings. When you think of it, towing your car from wherever disabled avoids additional damage insurers would have to cover. Those who ride more miles than drive represent lower liability, require less roadside assistance, and take up less room on roads for other members. Should they quit discouraging bicycling and rectify this indefensible policy, Cripple-A might cut their

own costs, reduce accident causing congestion, and increase club membership. They'd rather scare you into motoring, which serves their interests best, or so they believe. He thought about carrying a list of local cabs, but many wouldn't accommodate bicycles. Forget 911; your distress is not enough of an emergency for them. If you get a flat on your bicycle from jetsam strewn by thoughtless drivers, you must be ready to deal with it yourself. Bicycling is solitary in so many ways.

Cripple-A aggressively advises against bicycling, "So your child wants a bike... ask yourself the following question, 'Are there safe places to operate a bicycle near my home... places such as empty lots, parks or bicycle paths?' If your answer is 'no' and your child isn't old enough to ride on the street, then the question of buying your child a bike must also be answered 'no'. You may be saving your child from serious injury or even death by taking a firm stand. Most motorists are not looking for bicyclists and have difficulty seeing them. When a bicycle/car accident occurs, the bicyclist is most frequently at fault." ["Parents, Buying Your Child a Bike?" Cripple-A, 1986] Only fear of a viable alternative would make an organization go to such lengths to falsely denounce it. Meanwhile, they lobby against bikeways and for shoulderless roads, anything to eliminate safe places to ride, flow more mo-ves, and push slow pokes out of their way. They'd serve their clientele better by advising them to look out for bicyclists and backing laws to accommodate bicycling along roadsides. Everyone who bikes instead of drives opens space on overcrowded roads, which improves conditions for this nonchalant tourism they seem to think still exists. Destinations they support include only their diamond dubbed restaurants and roadside motels. Bicyclists don't spend fast enough for them.

Walking is more far more dangerous. When you see someone walking, what do you immediately assume? Crank or pauper? Who else fritters away so much time? Either suggests expendability to minds addled by automotive convenience, to be run down if they impede speed. Working gentle aerobics into your lifestyle can be difficult. Bicycling makes it easy, since it's also a commute conveyance. At Pittsburgh's Bikefest 2006 Dr. Paul Simpson, a pediatrician at Pennsylvania State College, went as far as to call a bicycle a vehicle to personal and social health. Childhood obesity is an epidemic that will lead to countless health tragedies. Who'll pay for it? In 1999, obesity diseases cost society \$117 billion, ever since increasing. Trips taken on foot dropped 42% in the last 20 years.

Americans walked <6% of their trips in 1997 and 1998, while pedestrians accounted for 8% of all vehicular deaths. In 59% of cases for which information is available, pedestrians died in places where they could not find a crosswalk or sidewalk. Of those nearly 11,000 deaths over 2 years, 1,500 were children. Buying bikes might save lives, but improving infrastructure to include biking and walking and restrict motoring would both encourage more bicycling and save lives, heart health and wellness. Motoring is always inimical.

Shortly thereafter he found sand covering entire breakdown lane. Where were maintenance crews? Thinking about it, asked how many riders used that stretch of misery. Few to none? No wonder nobody noticed. Needed a clearinghouse for information on things that are intolerable risks to public safety. A lack of response for assistance topped his list. It won't be until you're cut down by gunfire or missing for weeks that officers will laconically respond. Must you put your faith in a higher authority or nearly unattainable self sufficiency? During catastrophes, authorities advise citizens to stay home, although statistically that's where most accidents occur, because they're there most of the time anyway. They seem to say, "Stay in your rat holes out of our way."

Seasons change as they see fit. After practically no Spring and having waited until April for his Siberian crocuses to flower, which usually occurred in late February, Summer seemed suddenly upon him. Not only were flowering trees, forsythias and wisterias in bloom, some lilacs were starting to show, expected in June, earlier in town than out in country, where trees remained in bud not leaves. He drifted by postcard scenes of deep woods, farm fields embracing sunshine, knots of bayberry and native Rhododendrons, and not so lovely lonely roads lined with emaciated tall trees with their darkened understory of broken limbs and inky bogs. The right juxtaposition of cool and warmth urges flora to burst forth. Made for fragrant riding. Didn't recall noticing such stuff when addicted to motoring.

Weeks before he had gone out before dawn in Winter togs and got in a chilly 25 miles before breakfast. Meandered around precincts he knew, in no particular hurry or direction. Found several enchanting lanes. A certain alley ran away from a dreaded circular into relative oak shrouded tranquility around a small pond with swans, a nice way to circumvent an irksome intersection. Bicyclists often discover workarounds which, because of stop signs and traffic controls, motorists avoid, but were no impediment at bicycling speeds. Tucked fact away for future use. Further up, main road dips and twists around river contours by old New England mills,

a few barely hanging on, others soon to close, and rest decaying hulks of once busy enterprises that harnessed river for hydropower. It's a historic district all but ignored. Small diners and shops hang on by serving neighbors in duplex mill flats who commuted elsewhere for work. He'd later discover that older of 2 firehouses was confirmed as haunted, if one believes in ghosts or reproducibility of paranormal analyses.

He pulled up by that other firehouse. Stopping was something you're not only tempted to do on a bike, eager to take a breather, but to which you often acquiesce. Next to a cherished firebell was a bronze plaque with an innocent inscription, an jejune old poem about remembering firemen who put life on the line for their community. "Say a prayer every time a fire truck passes." Recent events elevated cornball into a tear stifled lump in his throat. It brought September 11th horrors back into sharp focus. Simple words can have power in given circumstances. Everyone *should* read and remember. Most people had already forgotten this senseless sacrifice of thousands of innocents. Were it to happen again, it would be forgotten again the following week. Hundreds of thousands died in a tsunami half a World away, and people here go on with their daily routine as if nothing's happened. Suppose you can't go to pieces with every new tragedy. Even the horrified survive. Ultimatums only work when there's shock value or threat of loss. When too few share in prosperity, apathy rules.

It almost seemed laughable they'd think that Americans might cower over a random bombing, as trying to destroy Western Evil in 1 fell swoop by knocking down World Trade Center, great international mercantile. Sure, symbolism was evident, but not infrastructure that makes it all work, which is suffuse throughout trading world over wires and within computers. Took no time at all to be back trading pork bellies and whatever Moslems find revolting. No, Americans have survived construction failures, design mistakes, improper maintenance that cause bridges to collapse, natural disasters, poor planning, and an unabated daily bloodbath in cars. Having witnessed horrors so often, they had become mostly immune. If you can't get along nicely, murder already seems a reasonable alternative. More fictional homicides are depicted every day on television than really occur in a year. Discontents used to complain about dehumanization, instead they've begun to devalue life themselves, insect hives using dead body parts opportunely. But when did random bombings ever accomplish anything? Never. Nitwits slam what they don't understand, plain and simple.

Main Street continues its rise past ruins of a mill recently destroyed by fire, waterfalls and wrought iron vestiges of elegant estates, then ends in a village called Hope. The brook there trickles waste water eternally, but not so a trickle down economy. Turned to head back on an old bypass of toll road, long since reverted to a secondary, past boulder fields and rivulets, climbing gradually in stages, a place enduring as a charming backwater, a boon to bicyclists. Somehow reason would rise again, he prayed. Another war-monger might soon be out, and better policies prevail. One way or another, change was coming, because America couldn't keep footing this monthly bill in billions for no discernible goal. He'd become less afraid of terrorists than the current administration. America Dream wasn't entirely gone, yet. Patriotism just needed to be reborn.

There are messages in stones. Boulder fields remain because it would've been too hard to clear for too little return. Sameness of rock with that of mountains hundreds of miles to North was no miracle, just remnants of enormous glaciers that once covered entire region and had rolled boulders from there to here. Stone walls marked off former fields, often played out and returned to hardwoods. Massive oaks had grown from acorns since last time these fields were plowed. Suddenly a bunch of condos appear to displace them, in turn, and are fully occupied between time you last passed and now. Sameness disruptively dissolves into flux until shock wears off. Change and wonder are the only constants, whatever the scale or venue.

Once, after 80 miles of rigorous climbing during a century ride, exertion got him to drop his head, certainly hazardous. He noticed the pavement there was novel, pleasant to ride on, smooth without splits, unlike chip seal. Instead of asphalt's uniform grimy gray, which you seldom notice, it had tiny flecks of color, some kind of crushed aggregate like a miniature version of the tarmac he remembered as a kid. Perhaps he was hallucinating, but the flecks seemed to line up into a digital code or semaphore trying to tell him something he couldn't understand. Too fanciful? Messages everywhere go undetected. This train of thought led in insane directions, an intense desire to recognize patterns through archetypes that could be used to pry open codes manifest in printed pages and websites, which later he dreamt fitfully about. Consciously, you toss out such stuff, but in your inventive subconscious portents and signs hold rich meanings. Perhaps these flecks were akin to neurological pixels, like those you perceive while watching television, of which your brain makes sense by reconstructing into

a series of images that represent things in action. Rolling along taking in reality, his brain was trying to superimpose meaning where there couldn't possibly be any, conditioned to respond to such subliminal stimuli by advertisers and network executives. These duplicitous manipulations annoyed him. Both ads and shows pump up hysterical responses, turn you into an emotional wreck, then sell you products to ease your pain and regain equilibrium. Pharmaceutical companies call this smart marketing. They distribute cosmetics that make you allergic, then sell antihistamines to alleviate discomfort they cause. Worse, they sneak around your defenses by putting coworkers and friends on commission through vertical marketing schemes, so you can't let legitimate excuses, like you don't use cosmetics, clot your pocketbook hemorrhage.

Once he gathered a group to ride to a new bikeway opening, a show of force for bicycling community with nearly sane adults arriving on bikes en masse. Rode all 3 bikeways in 1 day *and* a nice set of roads between, *connecting the dots*. He had an agenda, alright, showing how bicycling to any destination is possible if you picked a good route. Both local television channels had coverage and he was shown. Networks and newspapers interviewed and photographed him among dignitaries. It was mildly gratifying to be the first official rider after ribbon cutting on this newly christened segment. Immediately, it felt as if it had been there forever. Rail rights-of-way were festering abandoned bits of real estate which become conduits for felonies and misdemeanors. Stalkers watched homes from them. Teens experimented with drugs and sex around them. Paving them introduced observing eyes of passersby, a subtle deterrent, practically ineffectual, but a restraint nevertheless. Only the most rabid bike activists found them controversial, although they are no substitute for sharing roads.

He didn't confine riding to his own area, even organized group rides out-of-state on occasion. Always questioned mentality of burning a lot of fuel going somewhere far off to do something as enviro-friendly and low impact as cycling. On one hand, it did cut amount of driving after start point was reached. Better to carpool or lease a bus if a group wanted to go. But few attend such rides... too inconvenient. They could ride locally and see so many things they had whizzed by and never noticed, why bother going elsewhere? Conversely, they could experience another place that way, and plans for such a trip motivated frequent local riding to get into shape. A few people he knew went to the extravagance of visiting Austria, Belgium, England, France, Ireland, Italy, Scotland and

Spain specifically to poke about on bikes, although eastern European and Scandinavian countries might make better destinations.

One daytrip went to Southern Berkshires. Arrived at dawn in Lenox to smells of freshly mown grass and old money. Locals amidst palatial estates were already awake, painting and primping for tourist trade. First 15 miles was practically all downhill past gardens and meadows. He joked that they'd pay later. Definitely not what you'd call elite cyclists, they were tourists willing to take on a challenge not suited for everyone. Bicyclists who go for 2-hour high cadence spins, see God, then puke wouldn't have emerged unscathed. His band of slowpokes survived nicely, taking their time, even walking steepest part of a 3-mile hill to begin last 3rd of this 77 mile excursion. Quaint general stores in hamlets that time had forgotten provided short breaks that repeatedly revived them. It was no ego satisfying flat century or time trial, yet more rewarding in other ways. Number of miles completed in a day never mattered, particularly if terrain was particularly challenging.

They scrambled over 5,000 feet of ridgeline and rolls. Many climbs were hardly noticeable, except when looking at cyclometer, which they didn't much on account of some spectacular scenery that drew your eyes: rolling hills blazing green with patchwork quilts of farmland fields or woodland shrouded in mists with storm clouds on horizon. Strangely, certain climbs just shrank and others sucked your tires into ground. It made for engaging conversation as they rode seldom separated by more than a few hundred yards. There were several long rollouts without intersections to foul them up, hallmark of superior ride design, tough to duplicate in mo-ve choked suburbs. After a long but gradual climb up Beebe Hill near MA-NY border, they screamed down for 2 whole miles. Aware he was going pretty fast, didn't dare check cyclometer until after he wiped away tears: 41 mph, the day's maximum.

It sprinkled a little just after start, but somehow sun seemed to chase them around while conditions remained exquisite. Upstate NY, within sight of a ridgeline that separates it from MA, is in a different microclimate. There's nothing better than smooth dry pavement after a quick downpour, which brings out the best fragrances, clears debris, and moderates temperatures. They were cooled by shade on long gentle rises and fanned by sub-70's breezes on gradual descents. Trickle of brooks sometimes drew eyes into hollows filled with wildflowers. A whiff of sweetness revealed pink honeysuckle. They were tempted to join family barbecues and volunteer picnics, from which aromas wafted their way, or stop to

admire verdant valleys with singular white church steeples or read historic markers. Amidst good company and wonderful conditions, there was nothing to detract from the peak experience and sheer pleasure of aerobic adventure. Their guide was a transplant who knew the best roads, season and scenery. This ride could have been baked by sun or plagued by vehicle emissions in Summer, but on a Saturday in Spring, it was satisfying in every way except for a slow final grind past Tanglewood on tired legs, like slogging through a briar patch.

In late Summer he could only get a scant dozen to accept his challenge of the Heritage Trails Tour. Knew they were in for a strenuous day after elevating 750' only 2 miles from start. This was not a ride to be taken lightly with nearly 10,000' of steep grades, every bit as hard as the Tour de France mountain stage won by marvelously fit Mellow Johnny Legstrong that same weekend en route to a historic record victory done in far less time than they could ever muster. A scrub like him had to prepare months in advance. Did centuries every week and a hilly half-century a few days before just to get pumped. Spent 2 days carbo-loading, hydrating, and sleeping in. Mounted a new chain and rubber all around. Might have done better on smoother tires, but did avoid pesky flats.

You only look forward to a bike ride when your body can handle it. Take a day off, and legs, lungs, mind get flabby, lose fervor and focus. You again grow desperate and vaguely dissatisfied, only now it's worse than ever by relative comparison, and you begin to hate everyone and everything, especially cycling. Truths reverse themselves; what was once arguably positive becomes undeniably negative. Pray Kant was wrong, because all reality would be subject to hormone flux. Climbs would heighten, distances lengthen, and intensity of bonking might become unbearable. And yet, experientially, they do; you find yourself routing around slight inclines at ride ends and starts when relatively unfit for them. The memory of torment transforms a landscape.

The weather was wonderful, no rain, a cooling breeze with each crest, puffy afternoon clouds a welcome respite after hours of baking. Route was roughly trapezoidal. First cue item was 34 miles due West. It then wended 25 North into Vermont, arched 21 East to Brattleboro, then twisted 16 South to finish. Elevating 2200 feet to Witcomb Summit was relentless but charming. Who thinks Florida is flat? Even route's roadkill was classy; how often do you see a mink? Didn't dare stop after noticing a "Bear Crossing" sign, added motivation for keeping up climbing cadence. Mohawk Trail

traces Deerfield River, babbling and splashing alongside deep woods that shaded their ascent. Was tempted to give up and jump in its cool eddies. Passed walls of random stone dotted by wildflowers dripped with groundwater. They rose gradually for 10 miles and steeply for a mile to East Summit, where everyone but him scrambled up a white observation tower for a well earned panorama. Mystified how they summoned enough energy. There were so many distractions, touring reigned, time was forgotten. Stopped at a man-made Bridge of Flowers. Killed an hour at a Natural Bridge, a remarkable gorge carved out of limestone by a river, with walkways to the best observation points. Gloried in sinuous landscapes ground out by glaciers millennia ago. If it wasn't brooks, falls, and refreshing murmurs, it was quaint towns and spectacular ridge views. This had been his most scenic ride to date, possibly best club had ever offered, and without question a credit to his ride design portfolio.

Equipped with elevation graphs and maps, he could plan his assaults and reload fluids before tackling the next. Whatever goes up must come down. Flew around Hairpin Turn at 40 mph on a 3 mile, 1200' drop from Witcomb. Routinely hit high 30's and maxed at 41 mph despite carefully dodging linear cracks. A daredevil could have hit terminal velocity in spots. Half way, foot burn set in, cooled in a mountain stream, and hands needed a rest from braking, which they got it on long crawl to Searsburg, where a granny gear and triple chainring would have been extremely useful. The only one among them driving a double and 27 cassette gear, he couldn't spin anymore and had to drop back after 6,600' of total climbing to that point. Walked for 3 miles in cleats up grades to 14% in mid-80's heat without shade near summit. Wasn't ashamed to dismount, but he wondered if it wouldn't have been easier to weave up using small switchbacks, since walking such a grade was almost as difficult, but dismissed that tact after being passed several times by trucks at turnpike speeds. Recouped by coasting down to Wilmington, wiggling surprisingly on raised tar strips, then took a much needed rest, restocked fluids (used 7 liters in all), visited Molly Stark memorial statue, and realized daylight was failing. A final big summit lay ahead, Hogback Mountain, 3 miles of varying grade rewarded by another fantastic view of late afternoon hills casting deepening shadows. Reminded him of a happy Roches tune, "Up and down hills/zippping through the town/past the reservoir/when the sun slips down." More anxious than happy, he pushed on, hoping but not relying that someone heard his plea, "Send sag wagon!"

Was spent. No amount of training could have prepared him. Had to dig deep to make it to a much appreciated 100'/mile rollout for 10 miles into West Brattleboro. After turning over another covered bridge—more authentic Americana—he began to really worry on the final leg. Long since out of gas, slogged up another 400 footer to a stretch of smooth, hard packed dirt. Wondered whether he was still on course. Read map carefully. Doubts strengthened. Just missed colliding with a doe skipping across road, who chirped her disapproval, or was it a another fevered hallucination? Pavement reappeared at intervals amidst stereotypical Vermont countryside: cows, eagles, fragrant fields, riders on horseback. Still had a couple of 300 footers left and sun was close to setting. Had they started an hour earlier, wouldn't be ending after dark without flasher, head lamp or street lights in the boonies.

Good rides don't repeat road segments, out 1 way, back another. This can become a challenge to designers; sometimes you'd want to get another look at an interesting view at a different time of day or might have to endure terrible traffic to catch a pristine country scene. Club rides made a pretense of being better, yet, since traffic had increased on even the most obscure roads, they were becoming indistinguishable from riding just anywhere. Superstitious route planners never make loops of 13, 26, 39, 52 miles or any multiple of 13. Wouldn't be lucky, but who'd notice? Some riders even take on an extra few blocks to get odometer to churn onto 66 miles just so drive home isn't jinxed. Numerologists show the number 13 to equal 4, symbol of justice, not something that truly righteous should dread. Triskaidekaphobia started when someone invited one too many disciples to dinner, they say, just as overthrew matriarchal societies with years ruled by 13 lunar and menstrual cycles. Writers of chapter books include enough so even if you divide by 4, a safe 12 or 14 is their dividend. Why tremble before indefensible intangibles?

Club maps could sometimes be reversed to defeat their *challenge everyone* mentality, but then you might wind up with vicious descents into or worrisome left turns across traffic. On long outings early excitements should give way to easy miles. This signifies good ride design: work first, rewards later. "It's not meant to be a struggle uphill." Even slight rises dishearten when core temperature spikes and legs are shot. Cyclists seldom are so blessed as to have ride designers consider their late ride needs: availability of water, easier hills, long luxurious rollouts by beautiful scenery, places to sit, snack stops, street lights as darkness falls. Such issues come up when people ride for pleasure, not for transportation. No choosing

routes to avoid hills when you must go from A to B; if hills intervene, you must go over them. In some small towns they provide bicycle lifts, like ski tow ropes, but you had to be agile to use them. Tall suspension bridges could come equipped with enclosed cable cars, so bicyclists and pedestrians could get across safely, but never do. At least the Brooklyn Bridge has motoring excluded walkway. They suspended a bike-ped bridge over James River in Richmond, VA, below USr's pier bridge to popular Belle Isle Park.

Although ordinarily on your own, other riders might provide a safety net. Someone rode downhill from Searsburg to see if he was still alive, and share a drink—an assistance good for future karma, to be sure. Appreciated any help, particularly the patience of his carpool buddy, Will. While frontrunners finished 3 hours earlier, he came back thinking such a tour was too demanding no matter how well he prepared; it was very strenuous for anyone, even the likes of Larry. Didn't think he could count on 10 fingers club cohorts who could complete it outside his exceptional dozen. Beyond remarkable riding, spectacular scenery on a sultry day, what was incredible about this ride was the support of those who share a passion for extreme cycling. Being among people who care encouraged a once dedicated couch potato to get out and try what only a few avid cyclists would dare. As Himalayan Sherpas say, "When I help you climb, I, too, reach the summit." The Sherpa way is active participation. Each stair to heaven is 1,000 feet climbed together. Yet people can find excuses not to unite in a 1,000:1 ratio.

Pleasant interaction isn't typical. Friendly conversation is squelched by stating likelihood of turning off ahead or preference for riding single file. Few want to peer into the ultimate portal into bicycling culture with its endless contradictions and facts of which they were never aware. Seems egotistically inadmissible and frighteningly odd. Most can't handle anything extraordinary, particularly in human form, prefer a beating or cheating to thinking.

Subsequently skipped a club repeat ride he'd recently done yet didn't feel he missed anything. Instead, he honored mothers in his life by spending time with them on Mother's Day. Those who don't possess the patience or skill to ride in town prefer tranquil venues along empty side streets and through easy intersections. Realized his own rides were far more interesting, anyway, taking in annual gardens, beautiful lawns, flowering trees, massive urban architecture, and neat residential homes, not necessarily those you'd envy, but of a modest, neighborly kind. He rode amongst humanity, not members of bike clubs, whom he seldom saw after the start, unless to offer assistance when they broke down. Occasionally, in shabby

hoods teens offered to race him. He just smiled and sped on; if they wanted to compete they'd just have to catch up, but they never did.

Bound to miss some stuff. Can't cover everything even if you try. Focused on things that affected him most. Passion drives a writer onward; too hard to write about something for which you have no emotion or interest. This accounts for a general lack of objectivity, never showing both sides of an issue, or not questioning long held policies, which probably no longer have any basis in what's needed. For critics to offer anything useful, they need to expose themselves for what they are, make themselves familiar to their readers. Only then can they know whether a writer's advice is for them.

Felt shortchanged by the fact so many he met were negative rather than positive. Or is it that negatives profoundly hurt and positives go unnoticed? Believing that you should "Count your blessings" acknowledges there's not much good in the World—pessimism—while closing your mind to only what serves your own interests—greed—and overlooking sins against you—cowardice—even though this helps to smooth its impact, if only on a nonphysical plane. Pain, after all, can be short circuited by ketamine, mental discipline or morphine drip, but only ethics, nonviolence, and safety awareness work to prevent suffering.

