

Writer's bike tour — and his life — promise a wild ride

Chicago-based Jerry Soverinsky is about to embark on a coast-to-coast bike trip, which he will be documenting weekly in the Herald. Soverinsky is a contributor to National Lampoon and is a graduate of Chicago's Second City Training Program. He was also the founder of a successful bicycle touring company, which he sold to pursue a career as a writer, and is the author of "Cycle Europe: 20 Tours, 12 Countries."



I've always had great difficulty reading women, but when I walked in on my girlfriend, Ruby (not her real name), having sex with someone other than me, I pretty much assumed (correctly!) that my long-term relationship was in trouble.

I suffered a bit of emotional fallout from the breakup and began acting un-

predictably, at one point even listening to salsa. But what really depressed me, besides the agonizing public embarrassment thorough annihilation of my self-esteem and devastating emotional crippling was the cancellation of our often-discussed travel plans: a cross-country cycling trip.

One of the things that had immediately attracted me to Ruby was her love of cycling.

It was a common passion that we shared, and as our relationship de-

veloped, we thought it a romantic prospect to cycle coast-to-coast for an extended trip (perhaps even a honeymoon). We laid out the plans: The entire United States (well, 12 states, but that's a legitimate 24 percent of senatorial representation) by bicycle. Oregon to Maine. Forty-five hundred miles. Ruby and me. And a binful of Advil.

Skip ahead seven months and \$16,000 later in psychoanalyst fees, and I had this inspiration: Why not

set out cross-country on my own? After all, I reasoned, I had already purchased a gel seat.

I deliberated the details. The practical considerations were overwhelmingly in my favor: I had no pressing personal commitments (a co-worker had given me a ticket to a late-Augus: Cubs game, though the seating is obstructed); I'd seen all the summer movies; and my milk was

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expired. I was officially onboard.

As for my preparation, I've been involved in cycling for roughly 20 years. While a college student at the University of Michigan, I spent my summers guiding teenagers on multiweek cycling trips. I enjoyed it so much that a few years later, while wandering aimlessly through law school, I launched my own bicycle touring company. From 1990 to 2004, I hosted thousands of travelers on European cycling trips, during which I personally guided more than 100 group tours. I sold my company last year to concentrate on writing.

I'm not sure what attracts me so much to cycling. Certainly not spandex shorts (at least on me), though I am a fan of the jog bra (but not on me). And I'm not one of those elbow-scabbed bike messengers who streams Giro d'Italia coverage on the Internet, either. I have a basic under-

standing of bike repair and equipment, but I'm not obsessed with anything remotely bicycle gear-related. In fact, I'm probably the only former spinning instructor who used to wear cut-off army fatigues and pocket T-shirts while leading group exercise classes. I like the exercise, I'm a bigger fan of being outdoors and most significantly, I enjoy the excitement of travel. Pretty simple.

My upcoming route combines several commercially prepared North American cycling maps. The first few weeks trace the final stages of Lewis and Clark's 1804 expedition — in reverse (just as well, *dyslexic mildly I'm as*). To familiarize myself with my itinerary, I purchased "The Journals of Lewis and Clark" and read it backward: In my reading, after a two-year trip, they grow stronger and end up at their starting point, deciding to venture out on the same trip they just completed (I'll be developing the narrative into a dra-

matic play and selling the rights to Harold Pinter).

In mid-Montana, I'll head east, through North Dakota and Minnesota, before passing through Wisconsin enroute to Michigan's Upper Peninsula. I'll continue through lower Michigan, cycle along the northern edge of Lake Erie in Ontario and emerge stateside near Buffalo, N.Y. From there, I'll cycle through Vermont and New Hampshire before finishing in Maine.

If my insomnia, chronic diarrhea and loss of hair these past few weeks are any indication, I'm probably pretty anxious about the journey. Close to 5,000 miles by bike. But I'm equally thrilled at the opportunity to visit parts of our country that I've never seen, acquainting myself with a rich diversity of people and places — our country's greatest assets.

Jerry's experiences will be chronicled beginning next Sunday.