

At last, the vicious cycle comes to an end

Chicago-based Jerry Soverinsky has been riding coast-to-coast and documenting his trip weekly in the Herald.

By **JERRY SOVERINSKY**
SPECIAL TO THE HERALD

When you reach the end of a 4,000-mile bicycle trip, one of two things can happen: 1. You fall to the ground, weeping with joy, the culmination of your lifelong dream finally realized. Or 2. In your haste to reach the finish line 200 yards in front of you (in my case, the Atlantic Ocean), you inadvertently run over a squirrel.

Guess what happened on my trip? I'll give you a hint: I'm not much of a crier.

I finished my journey a few days ago, and as my Maine microbrew hangover finally recedes, I can start to reflect on the 11 weeks that took me through 12 U.S. states, one Canadian province, three hospital ERs and eight all-you-can-eat Chinese food buffets (two in North Dakota!).

It's been an unbelievable journey, and I leave you with a few of the more significant bits of travel advice I learned along the way.

1. Breakfast: the most important meal of the day. When you're on the road for hours at a time, it's crucial to obtain the proper nutritional elements to sustain you throughout the day. However, choose your foods carefully; the success of your day will depend on it.

Here's a simple poem that's illustrative of two of my recent cycling days, one very good and the other very bad.

Bananas and yogurt, healthy and strong;

Kashi Go Lean and coffee, the runs all day long.

2. Careful camping: When staying at campgrounds during 100-degree summer days, avoid skinny guys with crew cuts who tuck in their long-sleeve turtle-necks. In almost every case, these guys are walking time bombs, whose unpredictable behaviors will leave you longing for the relative sanity one finds on big-city subways.

Early in my trip, I spent the night at an Oregon state park. After settling into my site, over walked my neighbor, as described above. We chatted for a few minutes and he told me that I needed to pay the camp warden, so I began wheeling my bike to the office. He said, "You don't have to take your bike, I'll watch it." To which I responded, "That's OK, I've got all my stuff in the bags attached to the bike."



My reply clearly offended him. He walked away, muttering something about bubble wrap, and throughout the duration of the evening, sat on a lounge chair at his neighboring site, facing my tent, carving sharp, wooden objects, nodding his head.

I had the worst night's sleep of my trip (except for Chili Fiesta

Night in Osceola, Wis.).

3. The sleep sack: It's not just for OCDs. I don't consider myself a germ freak (well, maybe just a little one) but when I was browsing through a Chicago camping store prior to my trip departure and found a sleep sack, I was intrigued. Essentially, a sleep sack is a sheet that's shaped like a sleeping bag and stuffs into a tiny sack.

Thus armed, on my trip when I stepped into motel rooms I tore off the covers and brought out the sack, with no need to worry who or what had been in the bed before. I recommend a sack for any traveler.

Within the next few days, I'll be back in Chicago, no doubt trying to lead a far more sedentary lifestyle than I've become accustomed to these past few months. It won't be easy.

Despite a butt that's been killing me for 80 days; a knee that still hasn't healed completely from an early-August 10-stitch gash; a bladder still trying to recover from two kidney stones; and severe emotional scars, the result of being alone for almost three months, I wouldn't trade my experiences for anything (except maybe the new Xbox — if it lives up to its hype).

It's been an unbelievable trip, more than I could have hoped for, and I've truly gained a greater appreciation and understanding of our country's diverse people and cultures.

And lest anyone be worried about the squirrel: My bike nicked the corner of his tail, and he seemed unfazed. In fact, he had enough energy to dart in front of an oncoming car, causing the driver to screech to a halt. Satisfied with his work, the squirrel then scampered up a roadside tree, eating an acorn and probably laughing.

Truly a happy ending.

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