



BIKING
AMERICA

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On the coast, and already a sinkin' feeling

Chicago-based Jerry Soverinsky is riding coast-to-coast and documenting his trip 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."

By JERRY SOVERINSKY
SPECIAL TO THE HERALD

I've got a horrible sense of direction. This makes my previous career choice working as a tour guide in Europe, where I was forced to confront my weakness on a daily basis, all the more curious. (Psych textbooks call this "implosive therapy." My clients used to call me "dumb ass.") While leading cycling tours, I used to remind travelers I was cycling at the rear of the group so no one would feel left behind. Truth is, I didn't like to cycle at the front, because I had little idea where I was going.

It's a shortcoming to which I freely admit, but wish I could correct. But directions-orientation, navigation — they've always given me trouble.

So it's little wonder I'd be incredibly anxious anticipating this trip (visions of my great-aunts, may they rest in peace, cautioning me to "Go slowly, you don't want to overheat" don't help); even with detailed maps, I still plan to count on the help of locals to find my way. But one of my first trip encounters, far from reassuring me, had me reaching for my inhaler.

The route I decided to take officially begins in Astoria, Ore. However, Astoria isn't quite on the shores of the Pacific, and because I'm obsessive, I decided to start my trip in Seaside, Ore., 20 miles from Astoria, but bordering the ocean.

I found a motel within my price range, and because I'm neurotic (Did I already mention that I'm neurotic? I mentioned that I'm neurotic, right? Right?), as the receptionist, Karen, was processing my credit card, I asked, "You're by the Pacific ocean, right?"

"Hold on a sec, let me see," she responded, before whispering to her pregnant colleague. "Kris, that's the Pacific we're near, right?"

"Pacific, right," Kris confirmed, in between bites of a sub.

"Yep, we're four blocks from the Pacific," Karen proudly announced, before finishing the details of my reservation.

On the scale of what information a local might be excused from *not* knowing far on the scale must be not knowing for sure whether planet Earth's largest water mass is located *four blocks from your tourist motel*, which is located in a town whose name describes its geographical boundary.

I found my room, downed a beer and stared at my bedroom ceiling until sunrise. I'm officially at the start place. I have 4,500 miles to go. But come on, America. At least sound reassuring when I ask for help. I'm counting on you for some answers.