

Student cycles from Pacific to Atlantic Oceans to raise money for drug education programs

Eric Livingston, a senior illustration/arts major, caught the biking bug last May in a big way. He sold his motorcycle and bought a \$1,200 Trek 1400 aluminum bicycle. He flew to Seattle, Wash., and joined 13 other area bikers on the U.S. Bike Trek to raise money for the American Lung Association and drug education programs. By the middle of July he had biked from Seattle to Atlantic City—almost 3,500 miles.

Between May 26 and July 12, the group of 14 college students (accompanied by a van and two drivers) traveled a rugged road across the country. They literally pedaled “from sea to shining sea,” beginning the trip by dipping their rear tires in

the Pacific Ocean and ending it with a swim in the Atlantic Ocean when they reached Atlantic City.

In between, they traveled along the northern portion of the country, pedaling through Idaho, Montana, Wyoming, South Dakota, Iowa, Illinois, Indiana, Ohio, Pennsylvania and New Jersey. The trek, planned in advance, did not follow an easy path.

“A lot of people thought we were crazy,” said Livingston, of Freehold. “And I guess we were.”

The group rode 80 miles the first day. “Everything hurt,” said Livingston. “There was a lot of pain.” The most he had ridden at one time prior to the trip was 40 miles. And he only did it once.

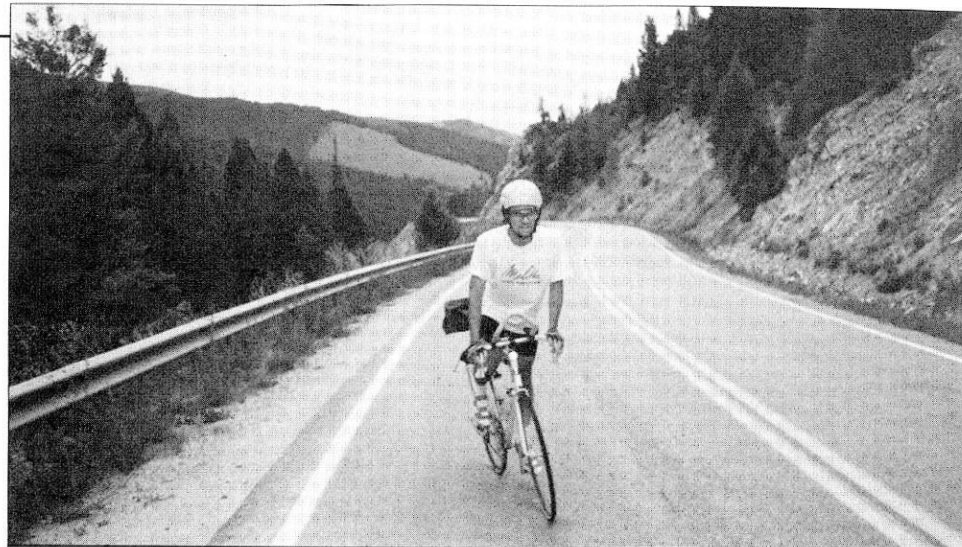
Shortly after the start, the bikers journeyed across the Cascade Mountains to the Rocky Mountains, climbing nine mountain passes. At one point they were 9,666 feet above sea level.

During the first two weeks of the trip, they stopped at schools and neighborhoods to talk to kids about the importance of taking care of their bodies. To support the American Lung Association, the message was “Let’s keep our children and schools smoke-free, drug-free, and proud!” The bikers answered students’ questions and handed out rulers, buttons, and other items provided by event sponsors to promote a healthy body.

They spent nights in school gymnasiums, hotels and camp sites.

“Life was so simple on the trip,” said Livingston. “We were obsessed with eating, sleeping and biking.”

They traveled through Mount Rushmore and the Black Hills of South Dakota. While riding, Livingston was cut off by a buffalo in Yellowstone National Park.



Livingston traveled through some of the country’s most scenic areas, such as the Lost Trail Pass in the Bitterroot Mountain Range in Montana.

Riding through a Sioux reservation in South Dakota was an enlightening experience, Livingston said. It gave the bikers a chance to step outside their lives and witness the wonders of the outside world.

“You have plenty of time to think,” he said. The trip gave him time to know himself and find peace within himself. “I don’t have a fear of the future any more.”

“When you’re biking, you’re part of the environment. You feel the wind. You feel the bumps in the road.”

Staying in shape is important to Livingston. He wrestled in high school and enjoys endurance sports. An Eagle Scout, he also understands the importance of community service. The Trek was an opportunity to show kids that a smoke-free, drug-free body lives longer, performs better and feels better, he said. “We told them they couldn’t do what we were doing if they didn’t take care of their bodies.”

Livingston was surprised by the group’s reception across the country. “People didn’t know us and they just gave us stuff. I think we ate pizza for free across the

country,” he said. Children the bikers talked to along the way wrote to them. “We touched a lot of people.”

Including donations received along the way, the group raised over \$35,000. All proceeds after expenses were donated to the American Lung Association of Mid-New Jersey and drug education programs.

The bikers had a police escort to the Atlantic City boardwalk. Atlantic City’s mayor and other dignitaries met the bikers at a special grandstand to welcome them to the East Coast. “We all wound up jumping into the ocean,” said Livingston.

Livingston bikes three to four times a week—at a more leisurely pace. He participated in a triathlon in October and finished in the top 250 of 500 participants.

For Livingston, the Trek is a twice-in-a-lifetime experience—he plans to do it again in 20 years. “I’ll be 40 then,” he said, and he’ll be ready to learn more about himself. The trip “wasn’t about biking. It was about people and finding yourself.”



Eric Livingston celebrated finishing the 3700 mile U.S. Bike Trek to raise money for the American Lung Association.