

# Sisters man treks cross-country on bike

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Correspondent

When 64-year old Tom Harris of Sisters approached the Togwotee Pass located on the Continental Divide in the Absaroka Mountains riding his Felt Z6 carbon-fiber road bike, a light mist began to fall. As he climbed in elevation and approached the summit, the mist turned into a snowstorm with whiteout conditions.

On April 14, Harris left Sisters to cycle cross-country to the Capitol building in Washington, D.C. on his road bike, pulling a 50-pound Burley two-wheeled trailer with the bare essentials — sleeping bag, tent, food, water and clothing.

Harris has never expressed an interest to bike across the United States and describes the driving force behind his Capital to Capital Ride as a spiritual one.

“I started training for the ride in the spring of 2015 with the thought of just riding from the Capitol building of Salem to Sisters. I began to cycle 30 miles a day and by the end of the summer up to 70 miles a day,” Harris said.

On September 10, 2015 his wife, Barb, dropped him off at the capitol building in Salem.

That morning, before leaving the capitol building, Harris walked by and touched the statue of Jason Lee, a Methodist missionary instrumental in the American settlement of Oregon, then began his 110-mile ride to Sisters.

“I felt I carried the essence of his spirit with me when I left Salem,” Harris said.

As the year progressed, Harris’s vision grew and he resolved to ride across the country to the nation’s capital in Washington, D.C..

The following March Harris trained again, this time for the cross-country ride with a 50-pound trailer behind him.

He downloaded his GPS bike route on a small bike computer, but he also took a map for areas without connectivity.

On April 14 Harris set off from Sisters, since he already rode the first leg of his ride from the capitol building of Salem the previous year.

“We decided that every week until Tom got to the Rockies in Jackson, Wyoming that I would meet him for a few days and we would go sightseeing in the car,” Barb told *The Nugget*.

For most of the ride Harris pitched a tent at campgrounds, rest stops, city parks and in one rural town, next to a baseball field.

Harris peddled seven to eight hours a day on average. And for the first couple of weeks he got a workout, since there were several passes between 4,000 and 5,000 feet and he hadn’t even arrived at the Rockies yet.

In mid-May Harris began his ascent up the Teton pass in Wyoming.

“The pass was very steep, and as I climbed I would stop and rest at the pullouts. The spectacular 12,000-foot mountain range rises up out of the ground right in front of you, it’s truly amazing,” he said.

After cycling through Jackson, Harris was on his own and the Togwotee Pass stood before him. He took the time to mentally prepare himself before crossing over.

The Absaroka Mountain Range, located on the Continental Divide, stretches about 150 miles across the Montana-Wyoming border. The Togwotee Pass crosses the Continental Divide at 9,658 feet.

A light mist fell over Harris as he made his way up to the top of the pass. As he

neared the top the mist turned into a snowstorm with strong headwinds and poor visibility.

“I knew I was in trouble, but I also knew I was just about at the top, so I kept going over the top and down the other side. It was so steep going down that I coasted in the gusts of wind for about 25 minutes.”

After the tumultuous ride over the pass Harris stayed at a hotel in Dubois, a town 12 miles away.

“Once you leave the Rockies everything is downhill to the Mississippi. There is a grading and you can feel it,” Harris said.

Sometimes Harris relied on the kindness of strangers.

“When you’re cycling in the middle of nowhere it can be hard to find a place to camp. People would let me camp on their property,” Harris said.

In Manning, West Virginia he had intended to camp in the city park, but while in the park he met a woman who was interested in his story. She invited him home to dinner with the family.

Barb and Harris reunited in the hills of West Virginia and put the trailer in the car.

“I helped him for the last five days,” Barb Harris said. “We stayed in hotels from then on.”

Harris rode his bike into Washington, D.C. on the fourth of July. The date was unplanned.

“They were closing everything out for the 4th of July festivities, but we made it to the Capitol building. Tom biked to the steps and we found someone to take our pictures and we left,” Barb



PHOTO PROVIDED

Tom and Barb Harris on the steps of the Capitol Building in D.C.

said.

Harris peddled 3,000 miles and cycled for 87 days. Harris believes there were three purposes for his ride across America.

“I felt as though I carried

the spiritual essence of Jason Lee from Salem to our nation’s capital. I also prayed for the healing of the American land and prayed to strengthen the churches that I passed along the way,” Harris said.

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**Why Consumer Spending Matters to the Economy**

There are a variety of factors that determine the strength of the U.S. economy, including government spending levels, imports versus exports and currency values. Yet, the biggest factor in determining the health of the economy is based on consumer spending, which is the case in most developed countries.

According to statistics from the Federal Reserve (the Fed), expenditures from American consumers account for more than two-thirds of the nation’s Gross Domestic Product (GDP), the measure used to determine growth in the economy. While the role of the consumer has not always played such a dominant role in driving the economy, it has generally been responsible for 60 percent or more of economic activity dating back to the post-World War II era.

It is notable that consumers have played a more prominent role in recent decades. According to U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis, a half-century ago, in 1966, consumer spending accounted for 59 percent of total GDP. By 1991, the percentage had risen to 64 percent. Today, consumer spending represents 68.1 percent of GDP, and has been in a similar range since 2008.

**What is the role of consumers?**

Economists and market analysts often keep a close eye on trends related to consumer activity. If consumer spending is strong, it can be an indication that most Americans have a high level of confidence in the direction of the economy. The total amount of consumer spending isn’t the only measure people keep an eye on. The types of expenditures can help determine how high consumer confidence may be at any given time. For example, if sales of luxury goods (expensive cars, jewelry) are lagging and people are putting more money into necessities like food, shelter and clothing, it may not reflect a strong vote of confidence about consumer expectations.

The data on spending plays an important role in how businesses and government agencies plan for the future. If consumers show a high level of confidence, businesses are more likely to boost spending as well to try to capitalize on the opportunity for increased sales. By contrast, if consumers are cautious about spending, businesses may invest less and government policymakers have, at times, chosen to provide stimulus through tax cuts or increased spending to help give the economy a boost.

Consumer spending trends also have a big impact on monetary policy, which is directed by the Fed. If consumer spending is lagging, the Fed can decide to reduce interest rates and take other steps to help jump-start household and business spending. If consumers are spending too much too quickly, it might signal that inflation could become a threat. The Fed may take steps, such as raising interest rates, to try and control economic growth.


**What can we expect?**

It’s difficult to predict what the future will hold for the markets and economy. One thing is for sure – economists and financial analysts will likely continue watching trends in consumer spending to gauge where the economy is headed.

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