

are talking all these idealistic words of world community, and to actually see it working—well, it raises questions for me that I'm still playing with."

Suddenly, it seems, it's August 16. The four routes that have been crisscrossing the country finally meet at the National Guard Armory in Fredericksburg, Virginia, a day's ride from Washington, D.C. Noting the riders' many sunburned shoulders and thigh-long patches of white (from the cycling shorts), one cyclist sighs: "It's so nice to see other people with funny tans."

The next morning they rise, one more time, at dawn. The group gathers a few miles outside of Washington, so they can ride the final stretch together. The mood is both jubilant and wistful. "I'm starting to get real emotional here," Miquelon says as she climbs on her bicycle for the last time.

A short distance later, someone shouts, "I see the monument!" On the far side of the Potomac River, a towering white spire appears above the trees—the Washington Monument—and all hell breaks loose. The bikers sound their horns and bells, squirt water bottles, and exchange high fives. This is it. Coast to coast, Washington State to Washington, D.C., 3,600 miles in 63 days.

It is one o'clock as the seemingly endless line of bikers snakes around a corner and crosses the Arlington Memorial Bridge. The Lincoln Memorial appears ahead. "Baby Blue," shouts one woman, patting her bike, "hold on for me!"

In front of the memorial a knot of well-wishers, parents with cameras, and friends bearing flowers and balloons applaud as the road warriors form a circle and take a final spin—a victory lap. After a press conference, speeches, and endless numbers of group photos, Miquelon stops for a moment and tries to interpret the celebration and sum up the experience that is Bike-Aid.

"This is a wonderful culmination to the summer," she says, "but I don't think that is what Bike-Aid is about. Bike-Aid is about Minneapolis to Red Wing, and Red Wing to Rochester, and Rochester to St. Charles, it's the day to day on the road. It's talking to the farmer at breakfast. It's working together with the community to paint a house. It's getting dirty and covered with grit and rolling into a town and wanting to go to bed but knowing you can't because you have to make a presentation."

Miquelon looks like she wants to go to bed right now. But her work isn't done. Tomorrow, after spending the night in a local church, the Bike-Aiders will reconvene on Capitol Hill, where they'll meet with congressional staffers. But today, the Seattle group has one bit of unfinished business. They gather beside the reflecting pool in front of the Memorial, the closest they'll get to the Atlantic Ocean, and dip their front wheels in the water. I hold the cameras and snap the photographs: pictures of 12 bikers, dirty and covered with grit, exhausted after a summer spent saving the world. ●

BOB DAILY, a Chicago freelancer, is proud to say he rode 170 miles without the aid of a motorized vehicle—and he has the sore butt to prove it.

ACCESS

BIKE-AID '90

This summer, Bike-Aid is hoping to raise \$200,000 and recruit 120 riders. Groups will leave from six cities: Seattle; San Francisco; Los Angeles; Portland, Oregon; Austin, Texas; and Montreal, Canada. You can sign up to make the whole trip or just part of it.

Bike-Aid also needs drivers for support vehicles, and people to house the cyclists and set up events for the riders as they pass through towns. For more information, contact Bike-Aid, 2940 16th St., Suite 110, San Francisco, CA 94103, 800-827-4480.

PLANNING YOUR OWN TRIP

A cross-country bike trip takes serious planning and training. So if you want to go on your own but don't have much cycling experience, Jim Fremont, education director of the Bicycle Federation of America, suggests first trying a weekend tour to a nearby motel or state park. Then, when you're ready to go out for longer than a weekend, go with a touring organization. **College Bicycle Tours**, an outfitter catering exclusively to the college-age group, offers summer tours in Colorado and Europe. Trips range from 12 to 47 days and cost \$635 to \$2,300. Contact CBT, 22760 Kenwyck, Southfield, MI 48034, 800-736-2453.

GETTING READY

When you're ready to tackle a longer tour on your own, it's critical that you learn about gear use and flat-tire repair. Your bike owner's manual should explain most simple fixes, and most bike shops will have books—and maybe classes—on maintenance and repair.

To plan your route, talk to someone who has ridden the terrain. The **Bicycle USA Almanac** lists numbers for bike clubs, tourism offices, and touring-information directors for each state. To get the book, you have to join the **League of American Wheelmen** (dues: \$25 a year). Contact LAW, Suite 209, 6707 Whitestone Rd., Baltimore, MD 21207, 301-944-3399.

Bikecentennial, a national bike-travel organization, sells maps of low-traffic, scenic cycling routes on 15,000 miles of U.S. roads. A \$22 membership includes map discounts and *The Cyclist Yellow Pages*, a guide listing state and county cycling sources. Contact Bikecentennial, Box 8308, Missoula, MT 59807, 406-721-1776.

Also check out cycling magazines and **Bicycling Across America** by Robert Win-

ning (1988, Wilderness Press, Berkeley, CA; \$12.95), a book that helps you plan everything from choosing companions to buying the right shoes.

TRAINING

At least a few months before the tour, start riding 20 miles three or four times a week. Duplicate as many different conditions as possible: seek out hills and ride in the rain. Also, use the bike you'll be touring with, and load it as you would for the trip (30 to 40 pounds of equipment is usually the maximum).

If you're planning to camp on your tour, test your gear before you go by taking a few overnight practice trips.

SLEEPING ON THE ROAD

Be creative when you're thinking about where to bed down. A local church may let you pitch your tent on its grounds, for instance. Here are some other sleep-cheap sources:

The **American Youth Hostels Handbook** lists hostels across the country where beds are just \$5 to \$20 per night. The handbook is free to members (dues are \$25 a year) and \$7 for nonmembers. Contact American Youth Hostels, Dept. 950, Box 37613, Washington, DC 20013-7613, 202-783-6161.

U.S. and Worldwide Travel Accommodations Guide (\$11.95) lists 650 colleges around the world that offer summer dorm rooms for \$12 to \$24. Contact Campus Travel Service, Box 5007, Laguna Beach, CA 92652, 714-497-3044.

Women's Cycling Network, an organization for both women and men, offers memberships for \$10. When you join, you'll receive a newsletter and a list of members who let touring cyclists stay in their homes for free. Contact the network at Box 73, Harvard, IL 60033, 815-943-3171. —Elizabeth Robbins