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Guilford Grads Cross Country

by Julie Marquies

Oxygen rapidly passes through your throat, leaving a numbing sensation. The rapid passing of oxygen feels cold on the inside of your throat. You listen to your breathing rise up through your chest so quickly that you gasp for more air. Something inside your head tells you not to stop. You keep going and catch another breath. It seems to make it easier. So you keep going, knowing that you'll reach your destination.

Now, with that in mind, think of two guys, right out of college taking off for California on their bikes to complete a tour of the United States, 4065 miles in fifty days. There was no

time limit on the trip but driven by wills so powerful, they managed to travel an average of ninety miles a day. Carrying everything they needed on the rears of their bikes, Greg Gwynn and Steve Saltzgeber, former Guilford College students, persevered through temperatures as low as 22 degrees and elevations as high as 4,000 feet to finish their grueling trek in what is appropriately called Victory monument in Yorktown, VA.

While sitting in Dolley's a week after their return I asked Steve and Greg why they decided to take on such a physically demanding task. Steve looked up at the ceiling for a minute before he answered me. A contented smile grew on his face when

he said, "lack of common sense." He laughed and then became serious. "We both did Outward Bound for three months, a combination of hiking, biking, rock climbing. We both like doing that type of thing and this was something I always wanted to do ever since I was a little kid. Everyone thinks about something like that." Greg added that they had been talking about it for two

in the face and answered, "no, after a while I wanted to get back here because of certain things, but I never wanted to stop because of the riding." Steve looked at Greg and said, "We would joke about it but whenever we got serious, we would stop talking and wouldn't think about it. If it ever got really bad, we wouldn't verbalize it. We kept each other going because the other one

bourbon to "free water for cyclists."

I asked them what their families thought of the ride. Greg cracked a smile and said "both of our families thought it was great that we were doing it. They tried really hard to imagine what we were doing and what it was like. I called every Saturday. It's hard for someone who hasn't done anything like that to know."

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was a break from the road-weary wayfarers. Stoddard secured some "party juice" at the hotel bar and relaxation soon set in. Stuart had brought along the Guilford College Student Directory and later that evening, various students received unexpected phone calls from Harrisburg.

Thursday, the two crossed the Mason-Dixon line, with a rebel yell, and drove to Stoddard's mountain cabin in Northern Virginia, making sure to stop by and surprise Grandmother on the way. The cabin, in the midst of an apple orchard, was familiar territory to Stoddard but Stuart had to check it out.

"Does it always smell this way?" asked Stuart.

The apple harvest was in full swing and the pair ventured over to the packing plant to watch the action. Later the pair drove to the top of the mountain and scaled a fire tower for photos of the sky-high panorama. Temperatures at the higher elevation were chilly and the heat was turned on when they returned to the cabin. A lengthy grocery stop, prior to arriving, had stocked the fridge for a nice dinner.

With a broken TV and no

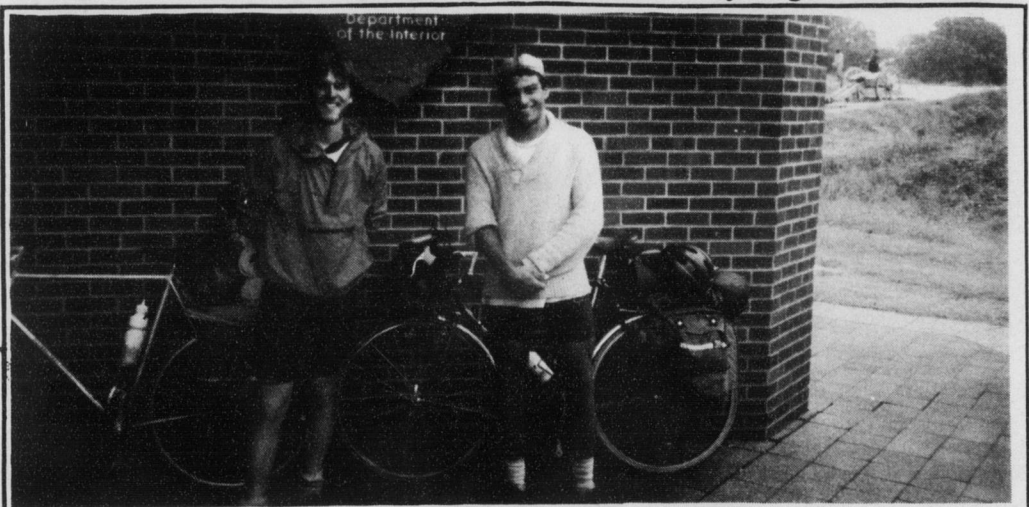
radio, the isolated cabin got very quiet as darkness fell, recalled Stoddard. Stuart found the silence eerie. When mice began making scampering noises in the cabin's walls Stuart got thoroughly spooked.

"I'm gettin' the hell outa here!", shouted Stuart.

"We're not driving 300 more miles tonight," replied Stoddard. "Have a beer and calm down. There are lotsa jigsaw puzzles here," he said cheerfully.

"Stoddard was philosophical in his own way that night," remembers Stuart. "Here we are in the wilderness and he looks at me and says, 'Kinda of slow up here, isn't it?'"

With much rejoicing, the pair rolled into Raleigh, the following afternoon. Among the treasures they unpacked in Stoddard's driveway were two autographed copies of *All the King's Men*, peach wine coolers, dirty clothes and free hotel stuff that had been pilfered along the way, including room service menus, drinking glasses, tiny soaps and elegant stationery. Both students rated the trip a big success and vowed to become world-renowned writers one day. The trip odometer read 2097.0.



Steve Saltzgeber and Gregg Gwynn reach East Coast.

years, "We finally got serious last April."

Steve hadn't trained at all for the trip. "I did a crash course method," he said. "I hadn't ridden in maybe two years. But Greg trained quite a bit."

"I had been training since April," Greg said. "I didn't ride every day, but totaled about 2500 miles this summer." Greg did most of his riding in Greensboro which offers miles of back roads and farm country. He also trained on Mount Mitchell. The trip became physically easier as the cyclists progressed. Steve said, "We only did 41 miles the first day and I thought that was easier than a human being should ever possibly go. By the time we hit Colorado, we were at 41,000 feet and we were averaging 90 miles a day. It was steep in parts, cold, rainy and snowing. I was ready for anything at that point."

As Greg was nodding his head in agreement, I asked him if he ever wanted to quit. He looked me straight

always had more energy. Greg added, "we had a hard time deciding when to stop at the end of the day. One of us would mention how nice it would be to stay in a certain place and the other would say that there was a better spot 10 miles ahead. We usually ended up going the extra ten miles."

The cyclists carried everything on their bikes. They mostly camped and only spent six nights of their tour in hotels. City parks were their favorite where they were permitted to camp under park shelters. In Colorado, they met many cycling enthusiasts who invited them to stay in their homes or gave them names of people to contact for sleeping quarters. One night they were invited to sleep in an unlocked jail cell and another night they slept in a church.

They attracted a great deal of public interest. A local news station interviewed them in Illinois. People offered them everything from a third-filled pint of

families were "nervous about other people on the road because of high exposures to traffic." Greg felt lucky to have the time to take off for the trip, "most people don't have the time to take off like we did. They're really stuck where they are, they've never left home, they still live in the town where they were born and have never had the opportunity to travel." I asked him if he had future plans in serious biking. "Next year I'm taking up racing full time," he said.

I finished the interview by asking for advice about long distance cycling. Steve stressed training. "Greg was in better shape than me," he said, "so more compatibility would have helped. For awhile there was a lot of stress. I was tired every single night, but you get used to it. It becomes second nature. You get up in the morning and start to ride again."