

Crossing the Country One Pedal at a Time

Four thousand two hundred eighty five. That's how many miles Mike Farmer biked in celebration of his 70th birthday; it's the distance from Bar Harbor, Maine, to Anacortes, Wash., along the "Northern Tier," a bicycle route established by the Adventure Cycling Association, a bicycle-travel organization.

To be fair, it was not Mike's first cross-country bike ride. At age 55, to celebrate his birthday and retirement, he made his first trip across America. In the years since then, he has traveled to Vietnam, Hungary, Turkey, Cuba, New Zealand, and most recently the Baltics – too many countries to list and too many miles to keep track of. "I like to make trips adventurous," he says.

So what's involved in undertaking a cross-country journey? First is to plan your route. "The second thing is ask your wife if she wants to go," Mike laughs.

Georgie Farmer, Mike's wife, serves as his support team on his ride. For

that first jaunt in 1998, she drove a conversion van fitted with a bed. For this trip, however, Georgie insisted on going in comfort, so the Farmers bought a 23-foot RV that was "plenty big for the two of us and Quincy." (Quincy is the Guide Dog Foundation puppy the Farmers were raising.)

"I bike for them"

Mike and Georgie have always believed in volunteerism, but they had never considered raising puppies for people with disabilities until they read about it. "I told Mike, 'Let's just try it,'" Georgie recalls.

Mike laughs as she says this. "Five dogs later, we were hooked."

The Farmers have raised 12 puppies, the last seven with the Guide Dog Foundation. Of those, five have

become guide or service dogs. But no matter how many they have raised, they still get attached. "Every time we gave up a dog, we cried and cried," Georgie says, but the reward has always been in knowing the dog had a greater calling.

The Farmers were ready for a new puppy to raise just as Mike's planning began in earnest.



Mike and Georgie "reflecting" on a day of adventure.

"We wanted to time it right," Georgie says, so they could get a dog at the right age to make the trip with them.

"Quincy was a great addition to the ride," says Mike. "He's an incredible dog."

It was at this time that someone suggested Mike ride for charity, and the more he thought about it, the more he liked the idea.

The Farmers picked "three of our favorite charities" to support – the Guide Dog Foundation, **Kenmure Fights Cancer (an area not-for-profit that raises funds for area cancer programs),** and St. Gerard House (which offers services for individuals with autism, and their families).

It's not the destination, it's the ride

"You can do all the prep you want," Mike says, "but then you just have to go."

On May 20, 2013, the Farmers (and Quincy) started off from their home in North Carolina and headed up to Bar Harbor, Maine, where they would begin. After dipping his tires in the Atlantic Ocean (a tradition among cross-country riders), "I patted Quincy on the head, kissed Georgie," Mike says, and hit the road.

The most fascinating thing about traveling by bicycle, he relays, is being able to see things people don't normally see when speeding along the highway. "America is absolutely beautiful." He estimates that he met more than 350 people along the way, whose generosity "renewed me."

Georgie concurs. When Mike set

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Mike and daughter Jenny at the Continental Divide. About halfway through, Mike and Georgie were joined by Jenny and her daughters for the remainder of the trek. Mike and Jenny often rode together, while the girls stayed with Georgie.

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off each morning to ride, she would drive ahead to meet him at an agreed location, following the same roads. "Driving that slow," she says, "you get to see so much more."

The home stretch & beyond

On September 2, 2013, Mike dipped his tires in the Pacific Ocean in Anacortes, Wash., to mark the end of his journey through 11 states; about a dozen or so

friends and supporters were on hand to celebrate. The Farmers raised over \$30,000 for their charities, including almost \$13,000 to support the Guide Dog Foundation and America's VetDogs.

As they left Washington state, Mike and Georgie arranged to make a stop in Colorado for a special visit. A puppy they had raised had graduated as a guide dog, and he and his new handler lived in Denver.

"We'd never been able to go to a Celebration Sunday," Georgie says. "It was a very happy moment for us to be able to meet [the graduate] and see Barclay again." (Celebration Sunday is the special day during class when puppy raisers, sponsors, and graduates get to meet; it's a reunion for the puppy raiser and the dog they raised.)

Quincy, however, was destined for another path. During his training, he had to be released for medical reasons. Dogs that don't make our programs are first offered back to the families who raised them; Mike and Georgie decided to keep Quincy as part of their family (and support team member for Mike's bicycling adventures). Today, Quincy also serves as an "ambassador" for Kenmore Fights Cancer.

During his trip across America, Mike kept a daily blog of his adventures (ibike4them.org), but some of his favorite times of the trip were his moments of solitude while on the open road. "I count myself lucky because I got to do this." 🐾



Quincy taking in the sights around Glacier Mountain Park, Mont.

Courtesy: Mike & Georgie Farmer

Continental Federal Campaign and Workplace Giving

The CFC...
September 1 to December 31, 2013
...when most employees choose the charities they will support during the coming year. Be sure to check our website and Facebook page for updates on how you can participate in the CFC if you work for the federal government.

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The Guide Dog Foundation and America's VetDogs also participate in the CFC...
...including special Web campaigns (see website for more information).

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If you are not listed for your company... please contact the appropriate... Guide Dog Foundation... 371 East Jansing Parkway, Danbury, NY 12827... or America's VetDogs... 371 East Jansing Parkway, Danbury, NY 12827.

...
If you are uncertain how to make a... preference for your company... or would like to establish a workplace giving campaign... please call... 371-840-8080 (or 800-224-8044).

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The Guide Dog Foundation for the Blind and America's VetDogs have... the generous support of our... to help us change the lives of... with disabilities.

...
We provide... and... at no charge to... and... or... other... America's VetDogs... guide... and... facility... for... veterans and... active-duty personnel. 🐾

