



Some Basics of Cycle Touring

1. Logistics
2. Camping
3. Gear

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Ever thought about riding a bike across the country? It's actually not as bad as it seems. Three-thousand miles can be intimidating, but taking it from one town to the next, one day at a time, the journey will unravel with tons of memories and a great sense of accomplishment.

At first, we thought you had to be a super-athlete in order to accomplish such a feat; but as it turned out, it wasn't bad at all. We're athletic, but more importantly we like to be out there and doing things. And that's what it took! And trust us, after the first week or so on the bike, you'll be in good-enough shape to pedal the rest of the 3,000 miles!

We definitely encourage you to consider it. It's an experience that you'll gloat with for the rest of your life. If you are thinking about it, here are some of the nuts and bolts:

1. Logistics
2. Camping
3. Gear

1. Logistics

Pick a starting point and an end point; everything else in between can be mapped out and determined as you ride across the country¹. You can use computers in libraries along the way to map out your route from town to town in

increments of 40 to 50 miles, or whatever increments you see fit per your daily riding distance. The majority of our daily-mileage was in the 50-60 miles range, which usually took us six to eight hours depending on how many breaks we took that day. We printed out these maps from libraries and used them during our ride.

We started with Google Maps, but then switched to Map Quest because of a particular function: An option to display gas stations, grocery stores, and/or hotels along a selected route (Google Maps may have this, but we never figured it out). Knowing where gas stations were allowed us to plan where to refill our water bottles. Similarly, knowing where stores were allowed us to plan for food.

The most complicated part of the trip was getting out of Southern California. We followed Google Maps' directions from Huntington Beach to Palm Springs. We did get lost a couple of times, but this was probably due to us rather than the directions themselves. In crowded and complicated areas, getting off route was inevitable. Tauru can't steer and look for street signs at the same time and Christi is unable to see well enough to read street signs. We ended up with a GPS when we got to Flagstaff, Arizona—a good friend of ours insisted that we take his car's GPS for the rest of the journey across the country.

From Palm Springs all the way to the Missouri River about 100 miles south of St. Louis, Missouri, it was pretty straight forward. We stayed on a couple of major highways that passed through the vast Southwest, over the

¹ The *Trans-America Bike Path* is a popular route that follows a network of roads and highways from Astoria, Oregon to Yorktown, Virginia. Internet search it.

10,857-ft Continental Divide at Wolf Creek Pass in Colorado, and then along the rolling hills of Kansas and Missouri.

It wasn't until east of the Mississippi River that the GPS became handy. We used it to navigate the complicated web of streets through towns and cities that were now popping up more often. When we'd pass through a busy city, we would have the GPS in Tauru's jersey's back pocket. When the GPS read out directions, Christi repeated them to Tauru (sometimes in the "fancy" British accent).

In total, we spent 72 days on the road. That's pretty much it for logistics. You really can't get lost—go east, or west if that's your choice of direction. And talk to the locals; their knowledge of the area is extremely helpful, especially in terms of current road conditions, shortcuts, and layout (like if there's a good shoulder or not).

2. Camping

Where to spend the night is a constant everyday concern. Here are some options (see Figure 1 for data on our trip as an example):

- Hotels
- Homestays
- Businesses (like Walmarts & gas stations)
- Camping

Hotels are ideal, but they do add up. We were able to find basic rooms in the range of \$35-\$45 per night. We used them more than we wanted to in the mid-west to hide from tornado storms.

Homestays happen by chance or through warmshowers.com, a website that connects travelers with locals throughout the country (and elsewhere). We were invited to stay with people a couple of times when they found out that we were riding across the country. This really does happen by chance, and by the grace of the goodness of people.

The other option is warmshowers.com. We signed up for it and were able to connect with folks along our path for homestays. We had great experiences with those who hosted us, and so we highly recommend this network.

We had a lot of luck with businesses, particularly gas stations in the rural areas. Most of the time, the cashier *is* the owner and so it was easy to get permission to camp in the back. This allowed easy access to water, toilets, and snacks.

As is commonly known, vehicles are allowed to stay in Walmart's parking lots overnight; so why not bicycles, right? We asked and they allowed—most of the time, they were baffled by such an unusual request.

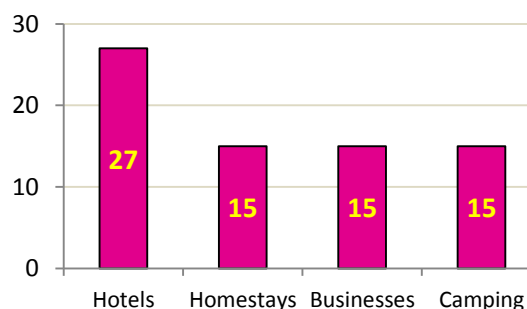


Figure 1: Counts of where we stayed during the 72 nights on the road.

There's also roadside camping, but this is often difficult for us since we can't see well. Finding a spot that's legitimate to camp can often be challenging. You have to keep your eyes opened for a spot to camp in late afternoon just before calling it a day. And you have to try to find a spot that's hidden from the road. No need to have the local police interrogate you in the middle of the night ...as happened to us in Tennessee. But after hearing our story, the tone quickly changed. They were in awe and couldn't ask enough questions about our vision and our ride. People are generally good; give them a chance and they'll prevail.

Roadside camping can be fun because of the freedom, but difficult because of the possibilities of unwanted attention. Although, along remote highways in the Southwest, it was easy because we could ride late into the day before getting off and walking straight into the desert to camp. And the howls of coyotes at night make the experience rugged, conjuring images of covered wagons passing through during the 1800's.

These are some of the over-night options; there are probably others. Pay-campsites and/or RV Parks are also options.

3. Gear

The gear list below is what we used for our ride. Yours may be different, but at least it'll give you an idea of what is needed. We kept it simple to minimize weight and space. Storage space on a tandem is limited, usually not more than a single bike. People on tandems often pull a trailer for additional space. For our upcoming ride through the Americas, we'll be pulling a trailer since we'll be carrying cold-weather gear.

- ✓ Bike
 - Front & rear racks/panniers
 - Spare tubes, patch kits, & pump
 - Tools for basic repairs
 - Bike lock
- ✓ Camping
 - 1 two-person tent
 - 2 sleeping bags, 2 sleeping mats
 - 2 headlamps
 - 1 stove²
 - 1 cooking pot (2 quarts)
 - 2 spoons, 1 knife
 - 2 plastic bowls
- ✓ Clothing (per person)

- 1 pair cycling shorts
- 2 cycling jerseys (1 is okay)
- 2 pairs cycling socks
- 1 pair cycling gloves (optional)
- 1 helmet
- 1 light jacket
- 1 t-shirt for off-bike
- 1 pair shorts for off-bike
- 1 hat for off-bike
- 1 pair of flip-flops for off-bike

Note: You can always pick up whatever you need along the way.

- ✓ Electronics
 - Cyclometer
 - GPS
 - Camera
 - Christi used an mp3 player
 - FM radio for local news/music
- ✓ Toiletries
 - Toothbrushes/toothpaste
 - Suntan lotion

Well, that's pretty much it for gear. Keep it simple and only carry what you need. Oh, we also carried 44-oz plastic cups for Gatorade or soda refills at convenient stores. Getting these ice-cold refills (\$0.59-\$0.89) made the day!

Search around various websites to gather more information to plan *your* trip! Having done such a ride, we now have a greater sense of what human power can do. Great distances can be covered, and adventures can be had given the desire to do so.

More information can be found on the 2B2R website > Info > 2B2R Documents > Our Ride Across America 2009.

² We used an MSR Whisperlite (uses white gas, which can be found in most Walmarts across the country). For 72 days, cooking mostly dinners every night, we used approximately 60 fluid ounces of white gas.

Join us as we ride the Americas and help us raise awareness about blindness and the abilities of the blind.