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Local 18-Year-Old Completes Solo Biking Trip from Canada to Mexico

By Clare Varellas



Riggins on his bike at the Mexican border. Photo courtesy Matthew Riggins

purchasing biking shorts and a plane ticket to Canada, as well as attaching supply-filled bike bags onto his mountain bike, he was off.

"Without really knowing what I was doing or really having any experience at all I just kind of got on this plane to Vancouver," said Riggins. "I built my bike in the airport, was riding away from the airport, and the front tire of my bike literally exploded. I was like, 'What did I get myself into?'"

After a temporary patching job on his bike, Riggins rode what he refers to as the longest 30 miles of his life to a friend's house in Vancouver, where he stayed for several days and had his tire fixed before continuing to explore the Northwest. Among his stopping points were Nanaimo, Victoria, and Sydney in Canada, then San Juan Island, Anacortes, Cape Disappointment, and Port Townsend in Washington. Riggins rode along the Hood Canal to Aberdeen, Wash., then continued to ride along the Pacific coast.

While Riggins said he did not see many other cyclists in Washington, in Oregon he encountered a large number of people biking the same route and continuing on to Mexico. After some persuasion from them, Riggins decided that he, too, was going to keep biking all the way to Tijuana. Unfortunately, he did not enjoy the southern half of the ride from San Francisco to Mexico nearly as much as he did the northern half, but he tried to embrace all parts of the experience.

"It was an incredible ride from Canada to San Francisco, but from San Francisco down [it was] super hot, there were just extraordinarily dangerous roads the entire way, no trees, and bad drivers," said Riggins. "It was a disappointment from what I thought it would be. But that's beside the point. I was doing it because I said I was going to do it. It was a challenge."

Riggins spent most of his money on food, as lodging proved to be extremely inexpensive. Thanks to two forums called couchsurfing.com and warmshowers.org, he was able to bathe and crash in houses of complete strangers. Riggins stayed in a hotel once or twice, but spent most of his nights camped in state parks.

Now back home in Orinda, Riggins says the most wonderful part of his trip was the generosity exhibited toward him by complete strangers, especially those that offered him food or lodging when they didn't have much themselves.

"Money gives people this image that they're better than [other] people, and people that had nothing were so incredibly generous to me," said Riggins. "When I was in Santa Monica, or Malibu, or nice places in Carmel, nobody talked to me. But when I was in small towns in rural areas, everybody wanted to know what I was doing, and that's when people bought me meals or let me sleep in their houses."

Having now become an avid biker, Riggins plans on biking 4,000 miles from Washington to Maine next

For most college freshmen, the summer after their first year away is a nice time to reconnect with friends and family, take part in a low-key job or internship nearby, and enjoy being back at home.

This is certainly not the case for 2012 Miramonte graduate and current Northern Arizona University student Matthew Riggins. The 18-year-old forestry major only recently returned from a solo bicycling trip that started in Vancouver, Canada, and ended in Tijuana, Mexico. In total, Riggins covered about 2,000 miles in 37 days, covering all expenses with \$1,200.

Riggins, who had minimal experience biking prior to the trip, had originally planned a biking trip with his girlfriend from Flagstaff, Ariz., where he attends school, to the Pacific Northwest to see Washington and Oregon.

"The only experience I had [biking] was from riding to school in the morning," said Riggins. "I wanted to see where I wanted to work and I wanted to see that part of the country. I knew I wanted to work somewhere up there; I just wasn't sure where."

However, a twist of fate four days prior to the couple's planned departure date brought their breakup, along with the cancellation of the entire trip. Riggins scrambled for a plane ticket home to San Francisco, but he wouldn't be home for long.

Riggins, who had spent his first semester of college studying abroad in Mexico, had recalled encountering bikers traveling from Canada to Panama, and was inspired to try a similar trip from Vancouver to San Francisco. So after

summer.

"I'll probably plan a little bit, but not nearly as much as most people do," said Riggins. "I didn't really plan much before and it worked out beautifully for me."

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