

# CALIFORNIA DREAMING: Bike trip of a lifetime

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they are able to provide anybody. They specifically host bicyclists coming through their town,” Dircks said. “It was really cool, and I got to meet some really interesting people.”

Somewhere around the Monterey area at Carmel-by-the-Sea, Dircks met up with another biker who said he had lost his phone along the trail a couple of miles back. Sure enough, while putting his phone back in his pocket after a quick call, Dircks looked down and saw the other biker’s lost phone. “What are the odds?” Dircks said. He was ahead of schedule, so he rode back and found the biker and gave him back his phone.

“We ended up riding together for about an hour, and then I went to camp for the night,” Dircks said. “About an hour and a half later, he pulled up to the same campsite and we ended up riding together the next day.”

During the trip, Dircks encountered a road with a very narrow shoulder over a 50-mile stretch. It took him six hours to complete the distance due to the two-lane road, traffic, cracks in the road, and simply quite dangerous. “It was intense, and the worst 50 miles of the trip and my entire life,” he said.

He didn’t encounter any severe weather during the trip. Temperatures ranged between 55 and 75 degrees. He noted that he only had three flat tires when it was raining. “I had maybe an hour of rain during the entire trip, and a tailwind largely the entire way,” he said.

The hardest ride of the trip (and his life) was from Anchor Bay to San Francisco.

“It was nearly 127 miles and 10,000 feet of climbing,” Dircks said. “It was cool because I went through Sonoma Valley and wine country on the way there and it was really pretty, but the whole time I was thinking, ‘I can’t do this anymore,’” he

laughed.

Dircks explained that there were two trains of thought throughout the trip — pre-San Francisco and post-San Francisco.

“I was trying to get to San Francisco as fast as I could to spend as much time with a college buddy I don’t see much anymore, and after I left San Francisco, it became a grind to get to San Diego because there were so many hills that it would get demoralizing at times,” he said.

Dircks describes riding over the Golden Gate bridge as the windiest experience of his life. “I could put my entire body weight into my right side and the wind was holding me up,” he said.

At one point during his trip Dircks found he had lost 17 pounds.

“I could not eat food fast enough, and one day I ate four cheeseburgers. I basically ate my way through San Francisco,” he laughed. “I would stop at a local brewery at the end of each day and have a beer or two throughout the trip.”

His girlfriend, Kandice O’Grady, met him at the border in San Diego.

Overall, Dircks said he biked approximately six to 10 hours each day and climbed around 89,000 feet of hilly terrain. When he finished the trip, the first thought that came into his mind was, “What’s next?”

“It would be fun to do something west to east like San Diego to Portland, Maine,” he said.

Dircks graduated from Mounds View High School in 2012 and recalled that while he was on the track team, his coach, Ross Fleming, told him he was a not a long-distance athlete but a sprinter.

“When he recruited me for the track team, I had mentioned running the 800 or attempting the mile because I thought I’d be good at it, and he said, ‘No,



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Austin Dircks riding with Troy, the man who lost his phone.

you’re a sprinter and you’ll always be a sprinter,” Dircks laughed.

His favorite part of the trip was learning how to actually camp. “There’s something to be said for carrying everything you need to survive for three weeks,” he said.

Dircks said the scenery was beautiful throughout the entire trip, including a spectacular sunset in San Diego. He noted that the hard parts of the trip are the most memorable.

“To sum up the trip to one thing, it would be how simple it was for three weeks in terms of an existence,” Dircks said. “I just wanted to get away from real life and just ride. It was a childlike sense of freedom.”

Noelle Olson is a staff writer for Press Publications. She can be reached at shoreviewnews@presspubs.com or 651-407-1229.

## Changing tastes in watercraft are showcased on Minnesota lakes

BY ROY HEILMAN  
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

It came out earlier this summer that Minnesota is No. 1 in the nation— by a healthy margin— in the number of registered boats per capita. Approximately 819,000 total watercraft were registered in 2020, which was only a slight departure from earlier this century (812K and 814K in 2000 and 2010, respectively). The makeup of the fleet, however, is becoming noticeably different—and it’s not all smooth sailing.

For starters, canoe ownership is not as strong as it used to be. Though Minnesota is host to the nation’s most-visited wilderness, the Boundary Waters Canoe Area, canoe registrations have declined by 26% since 2000, and are currently around 110,000.

By contrast, kayaks have surged in popularity. In the same time period, kayak registrations increased from around 11,600 in 2000 to more than 64,000 in 2020 — more than a five-fold increase. That increase in registrations swells when compared to 1990, when there were just over 2,500 kayakers registered.

The number of canoes and kayaks registered in Minnesota as a proportion of total watercraft has not

changed much in the last two decades. In 2000, canoe/kayak registrations amounted to about 19.8% of watercraft registrations statewide; in 2020, that number was about 21.3%.

It should be noted that an unmotored craft less than 10 feet in length is not required to be licensed/registered. Since a large proportion of single-paddler kayaks are shorter than 10 feet, the actual number of kayaks in use is generally assumed to be much higher.

Sailboats, like canoes, are largely accounted for in registrations due to overall lengths of boats. Like canoes, their numbers have declined steadily. In 2010 there were 13,257 registered sailboats. In 2015, that number was 11,591; by 2020, it had dropped to 10,224 — a decline of about 23% over the past decade.

Aside from more traditional watercraft, there are some newcomers on the scene. Stand-up paddleboards (SUPs) are considered watercraft in Minnesota. As such, they require users to have life jackets in possession, and require a watercraft license if they’re longer than 10 feet. The DNR has begun to track SUP licensures and reports almost 7,000 were registered in 2020. SUP’s now rank fifth among nonmotored watercraft (behind canoes, kayaks, sailboats and rowboats).

Another relatively new sight on local waters is the motorized hydrofoil surfboard. Lift Foils, a Puerto Rican company, claims to have invented them and have only made them available to the public for a few years. Their website lists three retailers in Minnesota that sell their “eFoil.”

The motorized hydrofoil consists of a short board with a “mast” below it, which

supports the propeller and stabilizing “wings.” On the water, the user appears to be floating on the board, inches above the water surface. They are controlled by a wireless device and can attain speeds over 25 mph. On July 4 this year, Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg was famously filmed riding a motorized hydrofoil board while holding an American flag.

Another rapidly increasing sight on Minnesota lakes? “Wake boats” (also: “wakesurf boat” or “wakeboard boat”). Their primary purpose is pulling wakeboarders and creating large wakes ideal for wakesurfing. The creation of those types of wakes is achieved through hull design, wake-shaping attachments and taking on ballast to set the boat deeper in the water. The rise of wake boats has also ushered in a fair amount of debate.

One point of controversy is the potential of wake boats to spread aquatic invasive species. A 2018 study from the University of Minnesota measured volumes of water retained by different compartments of recreational boats, as well as numbers of zebra mussel veligers (larvae) present in the samples. Results were unflattering to wake boats, saying in part, “recreational equipment that contains one or more ballast tanks poses the greatest likelihood of moving high numbers of veligers.”

Perhaps even greater controversy rolls with the waves themselves. Research studies from Canada in the last decade have shown that those types of wakes impact shorelines much more than others. Wake boats, the studies say, contribute to suspended sediments, which in turn increase phosphorus levels in the water. The St. Anthony Falls Laboratory at the university began



PHOTO BY ROY HEILMAN

If licensing patterns are any indication, racks of canoes like these are becoming a thing of the past.

a crowd-funded study in 2020 to measure these potential problems. The results are expected to inform decision-making by state and local officials as well as local organizations and law enforcement who have been fielding many complaints from boaters about large wakes.

White Bear Lake Conservation District (WBLCD) board member Scott Costello cites big wakes as one of the main complaints the board receives. And he says that not only is WBLCD aware of the university’s wake boat study, the organization contributed to its funding.

Costello reports that the district is “waiting to see the results,” and that they anticipate taking some regulatory action. He thinks it could come in the form of a setback from shorelines and other boats, measured in hundreds of feet. When it comes to translating scientific findings into policy, however, he knows they’re in uncharted waters. “What we’ll do, who knows?”

Roy Heilman is a contributing writer for Press Publications. He can be reached at news@presspubs.com or 651-407-1200.



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