

Mom and Dad,

I have been thinking a lot about what I should do this summer. Since I do not need to take summer classes, I have two options. One may look at them as to work or not to work. Rather, I think of the latter as an opportunity to take a journey of a lifetime. Along the way, I will learn about myself, nature, and skills that can be applied to most aspects of my life...more so than possible at any summer job.

In short, I have decided to ride my bike from Banff, AB, Canada to the international border at Antelope Wells, NM, following Adventure Cycling's 2,745 mile Great Divide Mountain Bike Route. This route is to mountain bikers what the Appalachian Trail is to hikers, but far less touristy.

The short trip I took last summer did not quench my desire to travel by bicycle...it left me needing more. Until recently, I could not figure out why I enjoyed the trip as much as I did. *Mediated*, a book I read in sociology, identified it. The author described a phenomenon he labeled "mediation." Mediation occurs when something is designed, arranged, or planned for you to experience.

We are most free of mediation, we are most real, when we are at the disposal of accident and necessity. That's when we are not being addressed. That's when we go without the flattery intrinsic to representation.

I realize now that on my trip, the fields I rode past, towns I passed through, and people I met were not there for me to experience, they were just there, and so was I – accident and necessity. It gave me a sense of my real place in the great scheme of things...very small. This is why I am going on this next bike trip – to experience accident and necessity and escape mediation, if only temporarily.

I am not so naïve as to think this adventure will be easy. In fact, it will likely be the most physically and mentally challenging event I have yet experienced. The route crosses the continental divide 27 times, has over 200,000 feet of elevation gain, and travels through remote back-country with re-supply towns few and far between. The most difficult feats yield the richest rewards, though. Many of which are applicable to other aspects of my life. I will have to manage resources, plan ahead despite ambiguity, adapt to changing environments, and quickly learn from mistakes. When the journey ends at the Mexico border and perseverance yields the ultimate goal, I will be rewarded with the self-confidence, self-knowledge, and independence that accumulated along the way.

With that said, I am sure you have questions and concerns about this trip. Over the past month, I have done research about the route, recommended gear, safety precautions, and weather. I am in the process of compiling a packlist, the subsequent shopping list, and a travel itinerary. For safety (and mental stability), I am searching for cyclists interested in joining forces on this adventure. As I gather more information and finalize plans, I will let you know.

Dave

Do not burn yourselves out. Be as I am, a reluctant enthusiast, a part-time crusader, a half-hearted fanatic. Save the other half of yourselves and your lives for pleasure and adventure. It is not enough to fight for the land; it is even more important to enjoy it. While you can. While it is still there. So go out there and hunt and fish and mess around with your friends, ramble out yonder and explore the forests, encounter the grizz, climb the mountains, and bag the peaks.... and I promise you this much: I promise you this one sweet victory over your enemies, over those deskbound people with their hearts in a safe deposit box... I promise you this: you will outlive the bastards. -Edward Abbey