

Season 3 – Part 4. Through the Appalachian Mountains on bike trails.



Fr 6.11.2015, day 117. Onto the C&O trail and Great Allegheny passage.

After a waffle breakfast we got the tour of the house. All the girls play instruments and their music room is out of this world, with guitars, two drum kits, grand piano, and all sorts of saxophones, trumpets and clarinets. No doubt about it. When I grow up I want something exactly like that! But the work shop down in the basement was pretty amazing as well with all sorts of tools for watch and clock making.

Finally they showed us their motorhome. I have never been inside one and it was quite stunning. The whole side of this one moves out turning it into a huge house, big enough to sleep 6, with full sized shower, kitchen with oven and full size fridge.

We left their place in awe. Quite soon we got down to the canal and onto the C&O trail. This is a superb trail along a canal that used to be used to transport steel from the rust belt to Washington. It is a national park, great to ride on and has free campsites every 8-12 km. We needed to cover some distance and so we rode on until it got dark. We got to our camp spot and were disappointed to see there was already a tent there. Then this black clad old guy comes towards us huffing and puffing. Turns out he is homeless and living in the forest. It was not really possible to talk to him, as he just went on and on about how there are no jobs, how he has no money, how everyone treats him bad, etcetc... However he seemed nice enough and so we spent the night there.







Sa 7.11.2015, day 118. Day on the C&O trail

It was a rather restless night. The huge freight trains with over 100 wagons on them, that ran just the other side of the river made a thunderous noise and sometime early in the morning some really loud siren went off. At about 8am we crawled out of bed. It was overcast but still quite warm. We packed up and cycled right off. Our neighbor was already up and walking around mumbling to himself. After about 10 km we stopped for breakfast. We had granola and warm milk. The new regime! Also Siria made a bread that was baked over the camp stove. It was really delicious! After that we headed off along the trail. It is very nice, but after a while somewhat monotonous as the scenery never changes. But it is really quite unbelievable that in the 1850ties these guys dug out this canal by hand. There must have been thousands of workers. Apparently many of them were Irish immigrants fleeing the potato famine.

Just before we were going to stop for lunch I had a broken spoke. I replaced it while Siria cooked couscous for lunch. We are now down to one reserve spoke. I'll have to buy some more in Pittsburgh! Highlight of the afternoon was the Pawpaw tunnel. They built a 1 mile long tunnel for the barges shortcutting through a meander of the river. Really quite amazing!

We arrived in Cumberland just before dusk and found the way to the YMCA that allows you to put up a tent for 10\$ per person just outside their facility. So this is what we did and then went in for a nice hot shower, swim in the pool and bask in the sauna. We eat the rest of Siria's bread in the tent and headed off downtown and found there was absolutely nothing! This is really a problem in the USA. The town centers are completely dead. But we found a McDonanald with a broken ice cream machine, so we had coffee and apple pies...







Su 8.11.2015, day 119. Crossing the Appalachians on the Great Allegheny Passge.

The program for the day was simple. Get on the Great Allegheny Rail Trail and go uphill for 40 km and see if we have any energy left to go further. So off we headed in beautiful sunshine. The trail follows an old railway line up to Frostberg on which a tourist steam train runs. The commercial railway line follows the same valley, but runs on the other side of the valley. After that the trail continues on up the hills at a constant grade of about 1.8%. The bike ride was quite hypnotic. We maintained a pace of about 12 km/h and made 2 short stops for some granola bars. As we rose the landscape slowly opened up around us. We crossed the famous Mason-Dixon Line and rode through a couple of old railway tunnels. At about 1pm, after climbing for 3h, we reached the top. The ridge we crossed is also the eastern continental divide, meaning that all the water to the west sheds into the Atlantic and all the water on the east goes to the Mississippi and into the Gulf of Mexico. We cooked some Spaghetti just after reaching the top and rode downhill for some 35 km reaching Rockwood. The place was like a ghost town, the only thing open being the convenience store at the gas station. And there was also a camping. The offices were closed, but we rang the doorbell of the people running the place. They told us the water was turned off as the season was over, so no hot showers, but we were welcomed to pitch our tent. And they still charged us 10\$ per person. At least there was free fire wood, so we cooked a soup, made a huge fire and toasted marshmallows. When we went to bed it was getting quite cold.







Mo 9.11.2015, day 120. A freezing start to a big day: 6000 km biked!

The night was again quite restless due to the thundering roar of the freight trains passing on the other side of the river. How anyone can live in a village with those trains going through is beyond me. It would drive me bananas!

In the morning for the first time on this trip I felt cold inside my sleeping bag. After snoozing for a while I started getting dressed, trying to stay inside the sleeping bag while doing so, to stay warm. I got out of the tent at about 7:30, the sun was just starting to shine through the trees. And everything was frozen solid. The thermometer on my bike computer was showing -7°C. The water bottles were almost completely frozen and there was a thick layer of frost on the outside of the tent. First thing was to get the stove fired up to melt the water. We eat granola and warm milk in the tent trying to stay warm, then packed up and headed off. Soon both hands and feet were feeling very cold indeed in spite of warm gloves and overshoes. We pushed on for about 35 km arriving at a place called Confluence. There we found one place that was open, Sisters Café. We went straight in and had a delicious second breakfast of coffee and triple egg omelet with cheese and bacon. After that biking was significantly easier. It was actually a great ride, the path was quite well prepared went downhill ever so slightly all the way. We were averaging well over 20 km/h. We had a quick stop in a Wendy's for a nasty 4\$ hamburger meal and ice cream and soon before arriving at Cedar Creek, where we spent the night, we reached the mark of 6000 km biked. And today was our 120th day on the road, so we have done exactly 50km per day, exactly as planned!

The evening at the camp site was great. I had a quick swim in the river to wash off the sticky sweat. It was very refreshing! There were two lean-tos, we pitched our tent in one of them. The other had a fire place complete with chimney. We made a nice big fire, cooked spaghetti, played the guitar for a bit, toasted marshmallows and waited for the rain that had been forecast. At about 10 pm the rain started falling while we were nice and dry under the roof of the lean-to. But tomorrow was going to be a wet day. The forecast was lots of rain all day.

Also we had fixed the plan for the next leg of our trip. We decided to stop in Pittsburgh and take a train first to Chicago and then on to Albuquerque. We were probably going to ship our bikes with FedEx. We also had Warm Showers organized both in Pittsburgh and also in Chicago. Two nights were going to be spent on the train... So everything is planned and we are ready to go!









Tu 10.11.2015, day 121. A wet day towards Pittsburgh

The night was very cozy. It started raining at about 10 pm and continued all through the night. But as we were under the lean-to everything stayed bone dry, in fact the tent has not been so dry for weeks! We had nothing left for breakfast and just as we were getting up the rain eased, so we decided to leave. We biked on the wet bike trail for about 35 km. It started to rain again and also I noticed that biking was getting tougher. I soon realized that I had yet another puncture. This time on the front wheel. This is number 4 and I was really feeling quite pissed off, pushing the bike up some busy road in the pouring rain. Luckily there was a McDonalds not far away, so we took shelter there, waiting for the rain to ease. I fixed the puncture and eat some junk food and started to feel a bit better. Unfortunately when replacing the front wheel I didn't pay attention and pulled the brake piston out with the rotor and got air into the brake system, so my front brake stopped working. Bummer! After about 2h we were on our way to our Warm Shower hosts for the day, Bob and Maggy. They were really nice, we had some cheese and crackers to start with, then some chilli con carne. Afterwards I even found enough courage to sing a couple of songs. Funny how I freeze up and forget lyrics and how the songs go when playing in front of other people...



