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Interview with Bill Weidenfeller

Name: Bill Weidenfeller

Age: 64...and holding!

Bill, when and more importantly, how did this madness for crossing continents begin? Early in 2004, I made a decision that changed my life. As an inexperienced cyclist I committed to a bicycle ride across America. My wife, Betty, had recently died after a long battle with cancer, and I was searching for a way in which to memorialize her life, find inner peace, and to help others in some way. I was off!

I cycled from California to Maine, 3796 miles in 52 days, and raised approximately \$50,000 for the American Cancer Society. I found a way to "start over, but cherish the past", and had experienced the challenge and adventure of a lifetime. I became an impassioned cyclist. I then rode the length of the Mississippi River the next year, and in 2006 completed the second ride across America. The 2007 the ExpeditionPlus! continental ride from St. Petersburg to Istanbul was magnificent in every respect. I was hooked on the joys of long distance cycling!

Do friends, family join you for these rides or do you travel alone? I went by myself on the first ride, but I never felt alone. I had such overwhelming support from family and friends, and made such lasting friendships along the way that I always felt a part of a team. On every bicycle trip since, I have joined with friends, met mainly on previous rides, or family.

You have ridden across the US twice; did you use the same route. No, the Cross Country Challenge in 2004 was across the center of the country, over the Sierras, the Rockies and through the "heartland" of America. The Across America-North ride in 2006 began on the Oregon coast, rolled through the Cascades, the northern plains states, the upper Midwest and onto the New Hampshire coast. Both routes were challenging, eventful, and brought a lifetime of wonderful memories.

You also maintain a blog of your rides, www.bikingwithbill.org. What inspires you to blog at the end of a long ride? I began blogging to keep family, friends and supporters to my ACS fund raising ride apprized of my progress. (Believe it or not, I had some "doubters" of my ability to finish!). I have continued to post my daily website journal entries and photos on every ride since. I enjoy the "responsibility to report", and I am continually thankful that I have a "record" of the journey that I am able to relive at leisure. Some days it IS a challenge to take the time to publish, but I view it as a responsibility I took on. "Just do it" becomes my mantra.

In your application you said, "you must do it" (the [High Andes Expedition](#)) is it possible to explain why? Easy! This is a cross Continent journey! This is BIG! Sometimes I can become a bit "single focused" when there is something I want to do. This is one of those things—I MUST DO. Imagine crossing the ANDES on a bike, experiencing the cities, countryside and cultures of Chile, Bolivia, Uruguay, and Argentina (and dancing the tango in Buenos Aires!) Can't wait!

There seems to be a gap between cyclists who consider themselves cycle



tourists and those who race—how do you categorize yourself? It is clear, I am a touring cyclist. I began too late to consider racing. However, I do feel competitive juices when I bike. I want to do “personal bests” in terms of distance and times. I want to climb higher, go faster, maintain speeds longer etc. But nothing beats the joy of just riding a bike with friends through new and interesting landscapes. I am a proud and happy touring cyclist!



How do you train for these long rides? There is no substitute for long hours on the bike—day after day. I also think a cross-training sport such as tennis is helpful in keeping fit and active—and it's fun! In the gym, I take spin classes and some weight training, which I'm sure pay dividends on the road.

Magical things seem to happen to cyclists on the road—can you share a couple of stories with us? I have seen a lot of things happen on the road. I have heard many stories. Some are amazing, some amusing, and all too personal or long to tell here. Many are heart- warming and inspirational...and private. Long distance cyclists are "themselves" on the road. You get to know them—you are with them for long hours and sometimes days and weeks on end. The camaraderie is strong and lasting. Any stories I could tell would be of outstanding people doing incredible things with their lives.

What do you do for fun when you aren't riding your bike? I am an avid, competitive tennis player. I love to read, am a serious French student, and continue to work on behalf of the American Cancer Society. I particularly enjoy and receive great satisfaction in my volunteer work with Special Olympics, coaching "my special athletes" in tennis and cycling.

What questions do you wish we would have asked, and how would you have answered?

What has cycling meant to me?

Recently, on a rest day during a group ride on the Blue Ridge Parkway, I had time to reflect on the many ways CYCLING has made a positive impact on my life. I wrote on my website that day the following:

- Having biked in 36 states and 14 countries, cycling is responsible for my visiting and experiencing incredible sights, places and cultures, otherwise unknown to me.
- It has allowed me to have close friendships with interesting, active and wonderful people.
- Cycling has made me healthier and fit, more conscious of how I treat my body to promote good health.
- It has provided challenge after challenge—on and off the bike.
- By dedicating certain long distance rides in support of a charity or cause, such as the American Cancer Society and Rails- to- Trails Conservancy, I feel I have benefited others in a meaningful way.

I have enjoyed life immensely through these cycling adventures, and plan to continue on this path for as long as I am able.