

FREE SHIPPING AND RETURNS, ALWAYS // FREE INTERNATIONAL SHIPPING OVER \$500

MFF



SHOP

LEARN



0



Embracing the Unknown on the Pan American Highway

[Home](#) / [STORIES](#)

by MACHINES FOR FREEDOM | February 05, 2018 | 5 min read



Riding down the sidewalk when I was four and a half years old, I could have hardly imagined where bicycling would take me. That was my first time on a bicycle, ever. It was my older brother's birthday and it was his first bike without training wheels. My dad turned and asked if I wanted to try. Of course, the answer was yes; even at a young age I was one to take risks and try new things. Normally when a child is learning to ride a bicycle the parent holds on to the back of the saddle to help balance... But I have never been normal. I hopped on the bike and started down the sidewalk. I remember looking back and seeing my dad running to catch up. I made it to a neighbor's driveway, turned around and headed back to our house before getting off with giant grin across my face.



Twenty-seven years later I am still riding. The distances I go may be longer and the hills taller, but the smile is still there. I am currently bicycling from Alaska to Argentina on what's known as the Pan-American Highway; a network of roads stretching from the Arctic Ocean to Patagonia with the Darian Gap being the only break. If you had asked me just a few years ago if I would be doing this right now the answer would have been no. Not because I didn't want to, but because so many things had to happen to get me to this point. Not least of which was getting my dream bike, a Surly Long Haul Trucker I named Yonder Esmeralda Shitkicker.



I often get asked by people I meet along the way where I'm going next, what's my route, and how long it is going to take. All of those are important questions when considering an adventure like this, but a lot of times I don't have a concrete answer. I have a general idea of where I am going (which is South by the way) but having a set schedule and route laid out would rob me of potentially wonderful experiences. Having the flexibility to change my destination for the coming days or week has not only introduced me to new places but also new friends. Just the other day I was in Yosemite National Park and was planning on hiking to Mirror Lake for a relaxing day hike. Upon leaving Camp 4, I decided to turn left instead of heading straight and ended up hiking to Yosemite Point. On the way up, I met Jacqueline and Max and we spent the entire rest of the day hiking and getting to know each other. All the while enjoying some of the most stunning views imaginable. When I woke up that morning I couldn't have imagined that I would meet such lovely people and be able to share such a wonderful experience with them. On our way back down we ran into lots of groups hoping to get to the top and we had to let a few of them know they would likely be hiking down in the dark if they pushed to the top due to their late start. It was like being on Everest and telling people to turn back from the summit because it was after 1 pm. Upper Yosemite Falls Trail = Everest. There I said it!



A few weeks ago, I was told by numerous people that I had to go to the Lost Coast; that it was some of the most beautiful coastal scenery in California. What people conveniently left out was that it was quite the climb to get there! At one point I was going up a 17% grade and was struggling to even push my bike up the road, fearing that gravity would be too much for me and Yonder. I could feel my calves burning as I pushed beyond what I thought was their limit, not willing to let this random road in California beat me.



After what seemed like hours of trudging up this winding and potholed road I finally made it to the top, rejoice! But only for a moment because the view from the top showed me that I had one more hill to climb before reaching the promised view. I had no intentions of giving up so I pushed on, talking to myself, Yonder, and mother nature; anything to keep me motivated to keep me going. By the time I got to the coast, I was greeted by an unrewarding view of private grazing land between me and the ocean with a few picturesque rocks off the shore. Was this what everyone had been raving about?



The Lost Coast didn't stand out to me as spectacular since I had been biking along the entire western coastline since Washington and had seen views similar to this for weeks now. If I could go back in time and tell past Natalie that she would have to work so hard for a view that would leave her wanting, would I tell her not to ride this stretch? I'm not sure, because on the one hand I wouldn't be missing anything super spectacular and I could avoid biking up three large and steep hills. But on the other, some of the experiences that define us the most are the ones that test our resolve and biking The Lost Coast certainly did that. While I didn't get the view I thought I was promised, I can honestly say it's not from lack of trying.



The thrill of the unknown is such a driving force for humanity, and removing that diminishes the drive and ambition to explore, learn, and grow. While it's good to have goals and a plan to get you there, I feel that it's equally important to leave yourself open to new ideas and paths that might get you to your goal a different way, or lead you to an entirely different destination that you didn't even know you sought. There was a time in my life where I was stubborn and set in my ways and dreams. While The Lost Coast showed that I still have a bit of that stubbornness left in me by not giving up, while at same time open to suggestions from the people around me on where I should go and what I should see. One thing that I eventually learned is that the route with the most turns and changes might also be the most fun and rewarding.



FIND YOUR BEST FIT

With our new fit guide, we take the guesswork out of finding your perfect size.

[Learn More](#)



HAPPINESS GUARANTEE

We stand by our products and want you to love them too. We offer a three-tiered guarantee program to protect you and your purchase.

[Learn More](#)



SAVE \$50

Shop Women's Cycling Kits and save \$50. The best women's cycling clothing you've ever worn, in your perfect size, use code: **BUILDYOURKIT!** at checkout.



FREE RETURNS & EXCHANGES

Returns are easy and free for all domestic orders, so you can shop with confidence.

[Learn More](#)





Words and Photos: Natalie Corbett

