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# Time Traveling and Bike Touring

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by MACHINES FOR FREEDOM | September 21, 2018 | 4 min read



Natalie is currently riding from Alaska to Argentina as the first trans woman to ride the Pan-American Highway. We last heard from her on the Northern leg of her trip. Keep reading for her latest dispatch from Belize.

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When I started my tour over a year ago, people often asked me how long it would take. I generally just told them a year and a half, which is on the short end for most people who do this trip. I never really believed that I would finish in that time but it seemed like a good number so that my mom wouldn't freak out too much when I told her. (*Sorry mom!*) Different parts of this journey have seen me go at different paces, for different amounts of time each day, and for different motivations in each case. In the months leading up to the start I was asked to be a bridesmaid in a close friend's wedding back in Minnesota. I looked at the map, saw the 7000 kilometers between Deadhorse and Minneapolis and thought '*yeah I can probably do that in three months. And hey, it's only 2000 kilometers out of the way.*'

In that first leg, there were times I felt rushed to get to Minnesota, and I felt like I was missing out on really experiencing the places I was biking through. It's not that I didn't enjoy my time in Alaska, Yukon, and B.C. (on the contrary those are still my favorite places on this trip to date), it's just that I feel like I have more to see and do which is something we all feel when we first visit a place; you can never get everything out of life, there is always one more thing you want to do. One of the hardest decisions I had to make in that part of my trip was whether or not to ride through Jasper and Banff Nations Parks in Alberta. I have dreamt of visiting those places for most of my life and part of the reason this trip exists was to go there. As I was cycling south across the southern Yukon and northwestern British Columbia I started to see and feel the affects of the wildfires ravaging the rest of the province of B.C. and I had to make the difficult decision of whether I would continue to wait at the doorstep of Jasper for better conditions or to turn my bike east and head to the plains and my friend's wedding. I chose the latter.

The mountains will still be there in the future. My time with them will come, when both of us are ready.



Once I got back on the bike, riding south along the west coast of the US I indulged my desire to go at my own pace, taking my time to explore the sights, and hike the trails in the woods and mountains on the ample rest days I was taking. I loved being able to spend a week in Yosemite Valley among the Granite Goddesses that are the temple to my religion of the wild. When I entered the Valley, I did not know when I was leaving. Eight days later, when I finally got back on Yonder and made my way back out of the Park, I felt content in what I was able to see and do while there, all the while knowing that I would be coming back one day with my climbing gear. Further south I continued the trend of taking my time, camping on the countless beaches that make up the southern California coast. By the time I started cycling through Mexico, taking a week off to relax was becoming more and more common. I routinely would take extra days off just to relax by the ocean to read, hike, and swim; not caring that at that pace I might never make it to Argentina. I was living my life at my own speed, not beholden to any schedule but my own and it was liberating.





Recently I have felt my time divided between the current and the ancient; the here and now suffering through the oppressive heat and humidity found in the tropics at sea level and the beauty and wonder one feels when seeing the ruins of an ancient civilization for the first time. The first ancient pyramid I ever saw was the Great Pyramid of Cholula, the largest pyramid by volume in the world. The feeling I got when biking into the city and seeing it at first from a distance, it seemed a beacon guiding me home for the night. Now that I have been biking through the main area of the ancient Mayan civilization, seeing pyramids has become almost a daily occurrence and I still have the wonder and awe I felt on that first occasion, which brings a much needed smile to my face as I pedal on through the tropical heat. Time here in the tropics is much more important to me that it was farther north. Before, I could wake up at any time and ride all day without any problem, whereas now I must manage my days carefully to avoid heat exhaustion that comes with riding past 11 AM. My watch becomes my guardian against the elements, my only protection in the seemingly unwinnable fight against the sun. When I arrived at Chichén Itzá I was transported back hundreds of years instantly walking amongst the temples and palaces of old before the heat of the day hastens my exit back to the relative cool of the shade.

My relationship with time has changed dramatically throughout this journey from an overbearing clock ever present in the back of my mind making sure I would be on time for my friend's wedding to a guardian looking out for my well being on a daily basis. And now that I am roughly at my half way point based on distance traveled, how will time come to affect me in the future as the destination nears and becomes something tangible and not just a far off idea?

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