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Rich Hoeg '78 Takes Graduation Bike Trip 35 Years Late

SEPTEMBER 25, 2013 ~ KATHERINE HAKE

There are certain adventures you can only experience by biking more than 2,000 miles throughout New England and Canada. Occasionally turning to his wife, Molly Hoeg, for confirmation or continuation of a story, Rich Hoeg '78 sits in the Hop and relays tale after tale of such adventures, from gorging on lobster dinners and swapping biking tips with complete strangers in their homes to biking through the pouring rain until finding respite in a warm motel and its kind owner. This two-month bike tour is the graduation trip Hoeg never took after graduating from the College 35 years ago, and now that the opportunity has arisen he's making sure to do it right.

Hoeg started working just two days after finishing his undergraduate education. A few months ago, after retiring at a relatively young age from his job as software project manager for Honeywell, he decided to take a much-deserved vacation while still fulfilling his passion for biking. Joined by his wife and with the lightest loads they could feasibly live off of for two months on their backs, Hoeg dropped their car off at the security station at Phillips Exeter Academy in Exeter, which Hoeg attended prior to coming to Dartmouth. Planning to start and end the trip in Exeter, the Hoegs had a general idea of their route, but "we never knew more than a day or two in advance where we were going to go," Rich Hoeg said.

With so much room for spontaneity, the couple often relied on the kindness of strangers to provide them with places to stay. They accomplished this easily through an organization known as Warm Showers, which describes itself as a "free worldwide hospitality exchange for touring cyclists." Rich Hoeg said he and his wife would usually look for older couples to stay with through Warm Showers, but they often found twenty-somethings who created even more interesting homestays. "I don't think they were used to hosting people who were in their mid- to late-fifties," Rich Hoeg said with a laugh.

It was these sorts of encounters that added to the randomness of life on the road and helped shape the stories the Hoegs have gained from this experience. From the harrowing to the elating, biking an average of forty-five to fifty miles per day involved many photograph-worthy moments, which both Hoegs documented through the online blogs that

they use to update friends, family and the biking community on their trips. Food was a major aspect, as well: “I can’t even tell you how many great meals people cooked for us,” Rich Hoeg said, adding that “you always stop for ice cream.”

Perhaps the best contribution to these collections of memorable moments is the discovery of the so-called “Purple Cow,” which began on a previous trip when Rich Hoeg spotted a purple cow statue on the side of the road. Insisting that they stop to take pictures, the attraction immediately became a sort of symbol for the unusual sights one would normally miss from a car or other means of travel but that pop out to cyclists riding by. As such, the term has involved into a phrase the Hoegs use to shout out whenever they see something they absolutely must stop for on the side of the road, whether that be an ornate mansion or life-size models of the prehistoric “cars” from the Flintstones cartoons.

Recently, Rich Hoeg advised one of his sons to work at a canoe outfitter after his own college graduation instead of getting a more commonplace internship somewhere else, telling him not to make the same mistake that he did all those years ago. Yet, in rectifying that mistake through this trip, Rich Hoeg has been able to bring his wife along on his biking adventure and use the internet to share the experience.

“It’s been an education in another way,” Rich Hoeg said of his travels.

The Hoegs, who also celebrated their 30-year wedding anniversary with a shorter bike trip earlier this year, just recently came through Hanover as part of their tour. In town, Rich Hoeg was delighted to encounter a former fellow crew teammate just by standing on the sidewalk waiting for the light to change. A few minutes later, a young woman approached the couple, and they discovered that she was another biker who they had previously encountered on their trip. Purple Cows, indeed.

You can follow Rich’s adventures on his blog, crazyguyonabike.com.

Below is the Hoegs’ planned route:



On the road:



Stopping in Hanover:



Photo Courtesy to the Hoegs

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