

INSPIRING IDEAS FOR EVERYDAY LIVING

Canadian Living

WIN
A TRIP TO
PRINCE
EDWARD
ISLAND

SUMMER FRESH!

- EASY WEEKNIGHT DINNERS
- PACK & GO WEEKEND FARE
- FRUITY SUMMER DESSERTS

CROSS-CANADA FOOD TOUR
FIRST STOP: BRITISH COLUMBIA

WHAT AN ADVENTURE!
ONE FAMILY'S DREAM 14,000 KM BIKE TRIP

SWIMSUITS
35 FIGURE-FIXING STYLES



QUICK & EASY
Grilled Chicken
and Charred
Corn Salad

ROCK THE BLOCK
HAVE A
NEIGHBOURHOOD
BLOCK PARTY

JULY 2011 \$3.99



PM40064924

Easy Riders

How an average family made an extraordinary 14,000 kilometre bicycle trip a dream come true.



The family's adventure started in Calgary, winding along secondary roads, avoiding major cities, to the Baja California peninsula in Mexico, and ended after they travelled up through the southern United States back to Calgary.

Right: The McFerrin family (from left to right: Tanya, Tarn, Rick, Markos and Sampson) changed their route because of heavy traffic along the coastal highway in Oregon – and ended up climbing to an amazing viewpoint at Crater Lake National Park.

LET'S GO, CANADA

Get happy and healthy by spending more time with your family outdoors this summer – then share your photos and stories with us at canadianliving.com/july for a chance to win!

BY KIM GRAY

Rick and Tanya McFerrin sit before steaming mugs of fresh mint and ginger tea – their three boys decorating homemade cookies in the background – and reflect together on an extraordinary accomplishment.

How extraordinary? How about a yearlong family bicycle trip – along with sons Tarn, now 6, Markos, now 8, and Sampson, now 10 – that launched from their front doorstep in Calgary, and took them on a 14,000-kilometre odyssey through Canada, the U.S. and Mexico and home again.

Of course, tackling such an ambitious adventure (which wrapped up around this time two years ago) isn't for everyone – especially with young children in tow. But the McFerrins, who also founded Two Wheel View, a charity that takes teenagers on life-changing international bike tours, aren't just ordinary people.

Whether epic family bike expeditions are for you or not, the couple's stories, unique worldview and can-do attitude are guaranteed to inspire. In their own words, the ever-enthusiastic McFerrins share with *Canadian Living* how and why they pulled off this remarkable journey. »



A WILD RIDE

Clockwise from top left: The family sometimes took shelter from the sun in open churches; a waterfall in Mexico; a quiet border crossing; standing on the line; the highest point in the continental United States (Mount Whitney, Calif.); and the lowest point (Death Valley, Calif.).





Camping off the beaten track in the Baja, Mexico. The family's days were spent homeschooling and exploring.

Right: Arrangements for food and water drops had to be made before entering this park.



CL: You've got to admit, not everyone would consider an adventure of this scope – particularly with a young family. How did your trip come about?

Rick: Honestly, it was just a continuation of who we are as a family. Tanya and I biked through 43 countries in 25 months before we had children. Plus, a great opportunity came up, so we jumped on it. Our friends wanted to rent a house for a year. They were people we could trust. And we could use the rent money to support us for the year.

Tanya: We had already done lots of travelling with the kids. We couch-surfed in Europe when our first two were one and three. Now it's easy. The kids are at ages where you can talk to them and they will do what you say. They follow directions. A four-year-old knows roads are dangerous and listens to his parents.

The great thing about bike travel is that wherever you go, you are welcomed. We felt our children deserved the same fun Rick and I had had. This trip, in a way, made our family complete. The kids got to see who their parents are and by extension, who they are too.

CL: How did you deal with people who questioned the potential risks you were taking with your kids?

Rick: I think if I stepped back and looked at what we did from an outside perspective, I'd say, "Wow, that was crazy!" Well yeah, maybe

it was. But people know we're adventurous. That we do things other families don't consider doing.

Tanya: When my father heard, he said he knew how important our family is to us. He said, "I know you wouldn't put them at risk."

People accept us for who we are. To be sure, our daily decisions were based on safety and we constantly adapted to the needs of our family.

The trip was designed around what was important for the kids. Sometimes we stopped 25 times a day – whether it was to play in a park or look at a bug. We tailored each day so the kids would be happy and we would be successful.

CL: Nonetheless, there had to be challenges along the way. Inclement weather. Physical exhaustion. Mental fatigue. When were you tested over this year and how did you deal?

Rick: I remember when we were on our way home, across North Dakota, we had to get up at 4:30 a.m. so we could be on the road when the sun was coming up, before the headwinds started, around 10 or 11 a.m.

Riding into these headwinds and on these crappy roads with oil trucks, I remember thinking, "This isn't where I want to be." We realized it was time to slow down, to bike 30 kilometres a day instead of 50. »

5 WAYS WE MADE OUR DREAM TRIP HAPPEN

- State of mind is critical. We were prepared to think outside the box. Be sure to plan a trip like this during a high point in life. Don't do it to run away. Do it to enhance the life you already have.
- We paid off our debts and put our finances in order. It's critical to plan so you can afford the trip and you're not stressed financially.
- Planning was paramount. We talked to other people about their travels. We mapped things out. We saw the big picture. We weren't concerned about getting fit because we already led active lifestyles.
- We prepared the kids. They helped us make a calendar that led up to our departure date. It gave them some ownership over the adventure and helped them psychologically prepare for the journey.
- Finally, we had faith and confidence in ourselves and our skills. We had a positive attitude about whatever we did. No matter what, we firmly believed things would work out.



Left: The kids get a mouth-watering taste of a fish fry in Tupelo, Mississippi. This page: Enjoying the scenery of the Natchez Trace Parkway in Alabama.

We found all these great little towns with public swimming pools and we gave ourselves permission to rest for a while if we needed to.

Tanya: I remember an extreme weather day where we were intermittently blasted by sand. We got off the roadway, held onto the bikes and struggled to safety. The kids were off the road, wearing long pants, long sleeves, hoodies, sunglasses and helmets. They were safe. And they overcame the challenge. Strength comes from overcoming adversity. My children grew from the experience.

CL: Talk to us about cost. Can you give us more details about how you financed this trip?

Tanya: Again, we had a renter for our home and we knew the rent would more than cover our monthly needs. They paid us \$2,500 a month. We had no bills. We have no debts. We're fortunate enough to own our home. But we do live within our means and we value travel and adventure over material things.

Rick: Keep in mind, our costs were pretty minimal. We budgeted for \$2,000 a month and we spent less than that. Mostly on healthy food, wine [he laughs] and beer. We ate a lot. We were burning lots of calories, so we had to have high-energy food.

We only stayed in one hotel in the U.S., and when we were in Mexico we stayed in hotels once every few

weeks. Otherwise, we were in campgrounds or at homestays.

We met new people every day. They were curious. We'd tell them we were looking for a place to camp and plenty of them would invite us to their homes or farms.

We'd also camp out in city parks with permission from local authorities. And we contacted people online through the Couch Surfing Network or the Warm Showers Network. Nine times out of 10, they wanted to host us.

CL: How does a family prepare, logistically, for a trip like this?

Rick: We researched different tandem bicycles – that was probably the biggest thing. We eventually found bicycles designed to accommodate small kids, opting for Co-Motion bikes made in Oregon. So we bought two new tandems and a tag-along. Tanya and Markos were together. And then there was me, Sampson and Tarn.

Plus, we made a calendar five months before our departure date listing different things we had to take care of, such as finding the right rain gear, tents and supplies.

We also carefully studied different routes. One of the places we wanted to get to was the Baja California peninsula in Mexico.

CL: How did you manage taking the boys out of school for the year?

Tanya: You might think you're setting your child back because he or she isn't in school, but we found an education program that met our needs – something we could do that wouldn't affect our trip negatively. The program, through the Argyll Centre in Edmonton, allowed us to do what we would normally do. Journal. Write. We designed a curriculum that would complement our trip. I was an elementary school teacher and have a master's degree in special education. I was very comfortable with this role.

As for the kids? Markos loves school and he was initially worried he wouldn't be having his own teacher, that his parents would be teaching him. This was something he had to overcome. The kids were on board for the adventure side of things. So we were just creative when it came to schooling – capitalizing on what came across our path.

The fires in Kelowna were an education. We rode past a crew of firefighters in a rural town and they taught the kids about how helicopters are used to fight fires. We did Junior Ranger programs at national parks when we rode through them. And we camped out one night at a salmon hatchery and learned all about the pros and cons of fish production.

Rick: I wondered most about Tarn. We had to teach him how to read. He would have been in kindergarten »

that year. I also wondered whether he was going to get the socialization he needed. But we met a lot of people on the road. We stayed with everyone from a person who lives on a commune to a doctor to a big executive type to a guy who had chickens in his backyard.

In the end, Tarn did great. You can't question his social skills now.

CL: Can you describe what the payoff has been for you – since you've come home and you've had time to reflect on your trip?

Rick: The payoff for me is that the trip is still fresh in my mind. And we talk about it daily. It's still fresh in everyone's minds.

We were in the media a lot. So Calgarians and Canadians knew what we were up to. We recently had a fund-raiser for the 10th anniversary of Two Wheel View and everyone was

inquiring about how things went. I watch my kids interact with other people. I see the respect they get from teachers or people in the community for what they have accomplished. Our kids have done something other kids haven't done and likely will never do. They're street smart. They have interesting stories to tell and they like to share their experiences. They have a sense of who they are in the world. We enjoyed seeing our three kids be brothers and friends. They set up tents together. Slept together. Fought together.

Since we got back, they understand the connection to the outdoors – to the sun and the moon and the length of the day and the weather. They get it. What's more, they know they can ride their bikes to Mexico and back. How cool is that?

Tanya: We haven't let the bikes fall to the wayside. We bike to school. We

bike when we get groceries. We just talked about going to Montana and Tarn just assumed we were biking there. In the end, this trip reaffirmed the values that Rick and I live by – two pillars that are integral to our family. We have incredible stamina. We can go the distance. Emotionally. Physically. Mentally. We'll make it through anything. And we believe things always work out. If you have faith, have no doubt in your mind that everything is going to work out, then anything is possible. Everywhere we travelled, we met folks who were kind and generous. I think people should know that, for the most part, the world really is a great place. ■

For more information about the McFerrins, their family bike expedition and their charity, Two Wheel View, visit twowheelview.org.



BREAKFAST GOES A LONG WAY

When a child is hungry, it's hard to learn. That's why Breakfast for Learning helps communities to start and sustain student nutrition programs, provides nutrition education, funds research and advocates for quality nutrition in schools. We help ensure children are well-nourished and ready to learn – so they can reach for the stars.

Help give our children a better chance of success...invest in their future.



To Donate or Volunteer:
www.breakfastforlearning.ca
Toll Free: 1.800.627.7922