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INTRODUCTION

Desert, forest, mountain, or urban jungle: the landscapes of the Americas are unparalleled in their diversity. So it followed that in order to create this book we approached a similarly motley crew of writers to contribute tales of their epic bike rides on these two continents. We asked hardy bike-packing adventurers such as Cass Gilbert, Lael Wilcox, Mark Beaumont and Sarah Swallow; road racers Keir Plaice, Andrew Bernstein and Riley Missel; the all-star editors and writers of Bicycling magazine Gloria Liu and Caitlin Giddings; and, of course, Lonely Planet's own group of globe-trotters.

That immense range of terrain means that whatever form of cycling you're into, it's not difficult to indulge it, or to try something totally new. For some of our contributors, biking was about escapism and involved nothing more complicated than packing some food, filling a water bottle, and meandering into the distance with the wind at their backs to explore industrial history or rural bliss. One or two went a lot further and, GPS unit in hand, ventured deep into the Andes of South America on laden bikes, powered by nothing more than their legs and a hunger to explore local cultures (and snacks). We've included several routes in the fast-growing field of bikepacking (like backpacking but on a bicycle!) that will hopefully inspire readers and riders to try something new.

Writers with families in tow recommended accessible rides along such rail trails as the Great Allegheny Passage and the Katy Trail. Other contributors pulled on skin-tight Spandex and sought out challenging climbs on vertiginous roads, whether in Colombia or California. Mountain bikers often preferred the descents, making pilgrimages to places like Whistler and Downieville to find their thrills and spills on rugged trails. Competitive types enjoyed the unique camaraderie of the new breed of gravel races. Our contributors crossed states (Iowa, Maine) and even entire countries (Ecuador, the USA two ways). And more than a few authors agreed that a good ride wasn't complete without a beer or two afterwards with old friends or new.

But what became indisputable – whatever your interpretation

of 'epic' – is that an extraordinary range of cycling experiences is available in the Americas. You can have an epic adventure straight from your front door and be back before sundown. Or you can follow in the tire tracks of Sarah Swallow or Caitlin Giddings and pedal from the Atlantic to the Pacific oceans. We can't all take a sabbatical for cycling so this book also reflects varying levels of commitment. Some of these rides take just a couple of hours, others a day or two, a week, or several months. We've given a general indication of whether a ride is easy (in terms of terrain, distance, conditions or climate) or more challenging (steeper hills, longer distances, fewer snack stops). The goal of these stories is to inspire you to get your bike out (dusting it off and pumping up the tires first if need be) and explore somewhere new with the wind in your hair.

Cycling is the perfect mode of transport for the travel-lover, we cover more ground than if we were on foot, but without the barriers that a car imposes. We are immersed in our surroundings, self-powered, independent, and forever pondering the question 'I wonder what's over there?'. The bike rider is free to follow a whim, discover the limits of their endurance, or stop and settle for a while. Hopefully, this book will prove that there's no better way of experiencing a place, a culture and its people than by bicycle. And as some of these tales tell, arriving on a bicycle opens doors, literally and figuratively.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

This book is organized by country in alphabetical order. Each story features a first-hand account of a fantastic bike ride plus a toolkit to aid the planning of a trip – when is the best time of year, how to get there, where to stay. But beyond that, these stories should spark other ideas. We've started that process with the 'more like this' section following each story, which offers other ideas along a similar theme, not necessarily in the same country. Many of these ideas are well established routes or trails and we've suggested sources of detailed information. The index collects different types of ride for a variety of interests and locations.

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Clockwise from left: bikepacking across Ecuador; alpacas in Bolivia; the Golden Gate Bridge from Marin County, California. Previous page, clockwise from top: riding the Grinduro gravel race; mountain biking Downieville; exploring Oregon; a pitstop in Pennsylvania



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BUENOS AIRES' BIKE PATHS

The chaos, colour and character of the Argentinian capital's barrios is best viewed from two wheels, as you ride through its past to its present.

From Jorge Luis Borges' short stories of knife fighters and tango dancers who owned the street corners of the old city, to the elegant tree-lined avenues that hark back to the capital's golden age, street life is central to Buenos Aires' lore and legend.

It's no different today – sidewalk cafes where the city's handsome citizens while away hours, vendors selling everything from feather dusters to hammocks, and the city's famous dog walkers wrangling hounds of every shape and size: it all happens on the street. You don't even need to venture inside a museum to see some of the city's best art – a thriving street art scene means you can enjoy contemporary masterpieces without ever dismounting your bike.

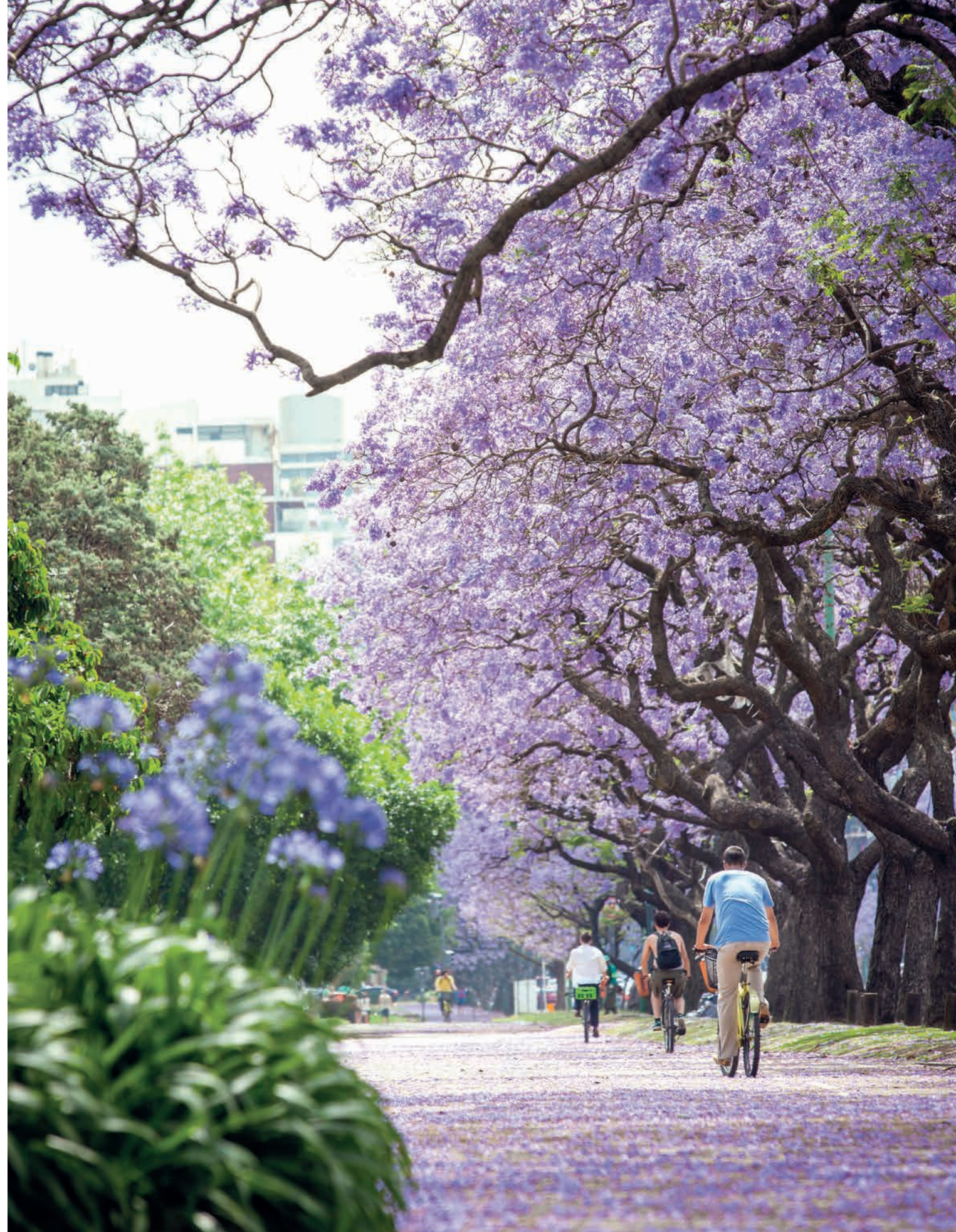
I'd lived in Buenos Aires before the bike paths were laid, and was used to traveling by taxi, bus or on foot. But when I returned on a recent visit I was delighted to find a new way to enjoy the city, cycling swiftly and safely through the cobbled streets of Palermo, sneezing at the plane trees that drop their fine fluff during the springtime, and admiring the purple blooms of jacaranda along Avenida del Libertador.

My favourite ride takes you from La Boca to Parque de la Memoria, an easy 5.5 miles if you go direct, but you'll want to meander through the city's cycleway network, taking in the sights and sounds of several *barrios* (neighborhoods), each one very distinct.

La Boca is the logical place to start, because while it may not be the spot where the city was first founded by the Spanish (that honour belongs to Parque Lezama, which you'll ride past soon enough), it represents Argentina's birthplace as a polyglot,



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Opposite: a volcanic backdrop to bike riding in Bolivia

MORE LIKE THIS REMOTE RIDES

SALAR DE UYUNI, BOLIVIA

Cycling atop the salt crust of Bolivia's Salar de Uyuni – and the more petite but perfectly formed Salar de Coipasa – is an undisputed highlight of many a South America journey. It's a high-altitude ride that takes five or six days, segmented by an opportunity to resupply with water and food at the midway settlement of Llica. As the largest salt flat in the world, cycling here provides an otherworldly experience. There's nothing quite like pitching your tent on a bleached white canvas, seasoning your dinner with the salty ground on which you're sitting, and awakening in the morning to a glow of ethereal, lavender light. This journey can only be undertaken in Bolivia's winter, as during summer the salt lakes are inundated by seasonal rain. See p26 for a story about the Salar.

Start // Uyuni

End // Sabaya

Distance // 186 miles (300km)

RUTA DE LAS VICUNAS, CHILE

If you wish to continue your South American adventures, this route explores the Bolivian borderlands and the altiplano of northern Chile by connecting three areas of protected land: Lauca National Park, Isluga National Park and the Reserva Nacional las Vicunas. The latter takes its name from the wild cousins of the llama that roam this *pampa*. Look out too for flamingos and rhea, flightless ostrich-like birds that are known as *suri* in the indigenous Aymara language. When not watching for wildlife, you can focus your attention on the feast of geographical features – the Salar de Surire salt lake, Volcan Guallatire and several hot springs along the way. The route uses unpaved roads that are relatively straightforward to navigate but beware cold nights, the lofty altitude, strong winds and limited food resupply stops. The dirt roads tend to be in better riding condition in the winter if you can cope with the cold.

Start // Putre

End // Lago de Coipasa

Distance // 182 miles (293km)

Info // www.bikepacking.com/routes/ruta-de-las-vicunas-northern-chile/

MAAH DAAH HEY, NORTH DAKOTA

In the language of the Mandan Native American tribe, Maah Daah Hey means 'an area that will be around for a long time,' but this 144-mile (231km) bikepacking trail has only recently been revitalised, thanks to the efforts of volunteers and the Forest Service (see info below). Today, the route offers a full immersion into the badlands of North Dakota, crossing the Little Missouri River twice, where another immersion is a risk if the water is high. The terrain ranges from clay buttes, layered with color, to grass plains. Numerous access points and 11 campgrounds mean that it's possible to bike just a section of the trail or the whole thing – not to be underestimated, this is rugged country. Wildlife you'll spot along the way ranges from prairie dogs and coyotes to the bison that roam nearby Theodore Roosevelt National Park. Roosevelt himself described the region as 'a place of grim beauty.'

Start / End // The northern trailhead is 15 miles south of Watford City; the southern trailhead is at the Burning Coal Vein campground

Distance // 144 miles (231km)

Info // www.mdhta.com

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WHITEFISH TO BANFF

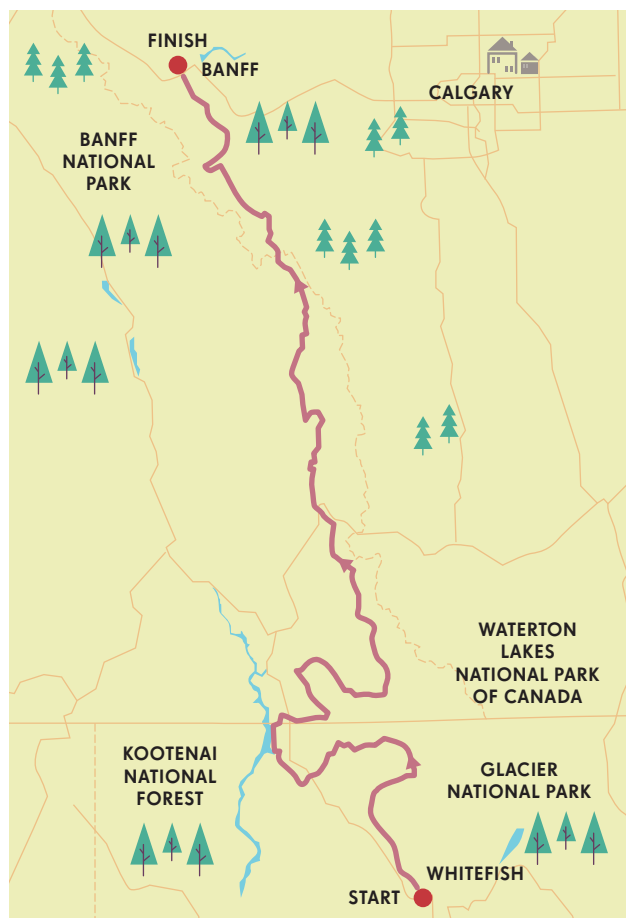
Don't have the time (or legs) for all 2700 miles of the Great Divide Mountain Bike Route? Fear not. This wild 350 miles into Canada packs in its greatest hits.

The Great Divide Mountain Bike Route (GDMBR) is a legendary 2700-mile route from Banff, Alberta to Antelope Wells, New Mexico along the Continental Divide. But if I had to choose just one leg, it would be the wild 350 miles up from Whitefish, Montana to Banff. Renowned for its passage through vast wilderness, commanding views of the Canadian Rocky Mountains, glacial lakes, wildlife sightings, and technical terrain, the ride from Whitefish to Banff guarantees to deliver all the adventure of the GDMBR in a fraction of the distance. (In case you're wondering how the Continental Divide gets its name, rivers arising here either drain into the Pacific or, far to the east, into the Atlantic.)

Crisscrossing the Continental Divide through northern Montana and southern Canada you'll climb 24,000ft along surfaces that range from pavement to good gravel, 4WD roads and singletrack. The native wildlife is as impressive as the landscape: in the densely wooded and rugged terrain live grizzly bears, wolverines, mountain lions, bighorn sheep, elk and moose.

Most of the GDMBR through-bikers travel from north to south, but since the route can get busy with cyclists during the peak summer season, I prefer to ride against the tide, south to north. This way, I still encounter other inspiring through-bikers but maintain my own rhythm – it also means that, come the ride's end, I'm rewarded with the grand scenery of Banff National Park.

The ride begins as it goes on: with a leg-draining climb concluding in a high-altitude reward. From the adventure hub and historic logging town of Whitefish, Montana my partner and I make our way up the 30 miles to Red Meadow Pass, where we cool off in a small, pristine alpine lake with mountain views. Refreshed,



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