

Bicyclist travels the globe

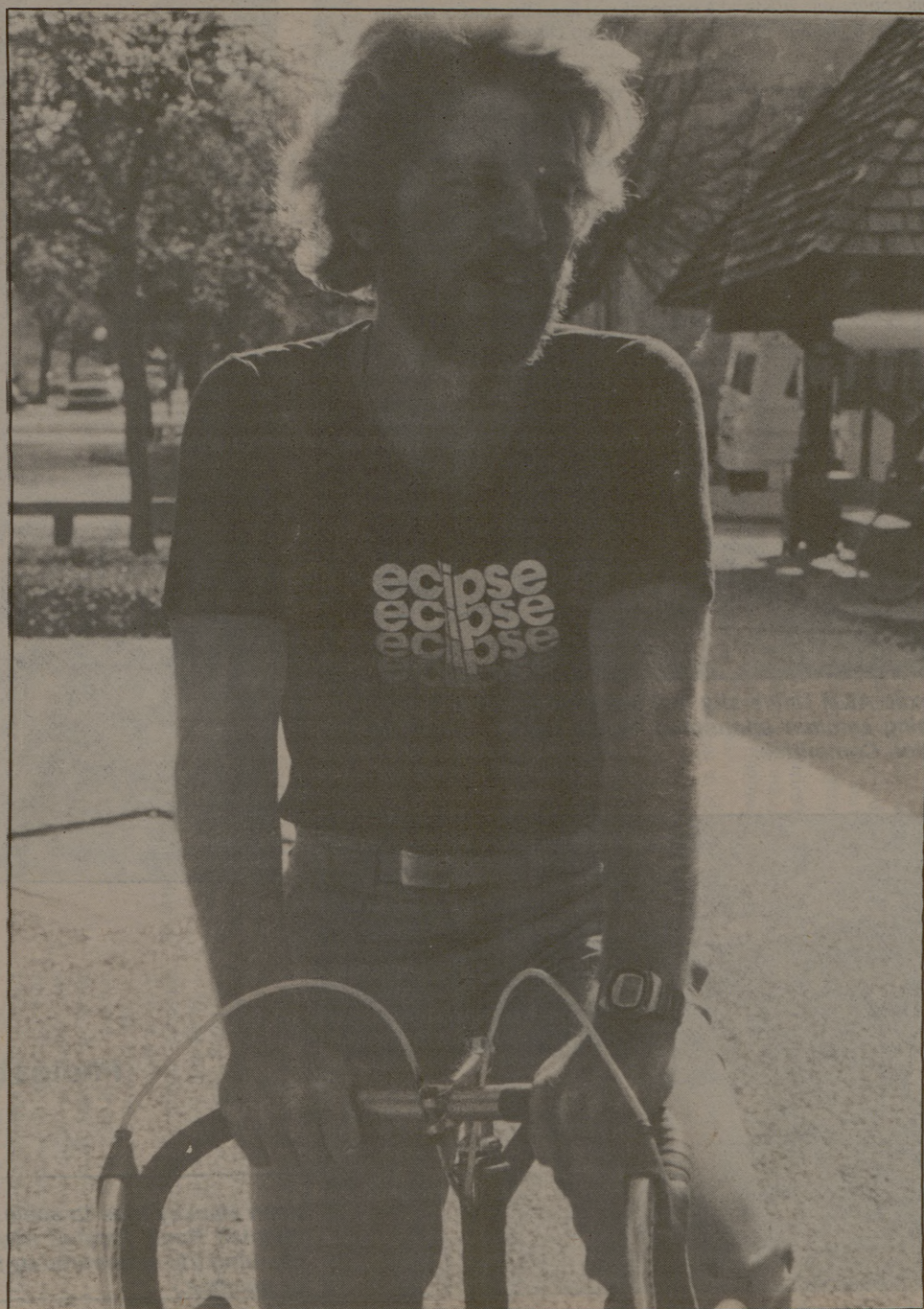
by Tricia Brunhart

Focus Staff



Dan Harrison, a 30-year-old former reference librarian at Texas A&M University, has spent the last eight months traveling around the world. Most of his traveling is done by bicycle, but he has also traveled by car, motor home and sailboat.

Photos by Lynn Blanco



Most world travelers don't take time out in the middle of their adventures to change their mode of transportation. But then, most world travelers don't travel by bicycle.

Dan Harrison, a 30-year-old former reference librarian at Texas A&M University and a bicycle traveler, has had to do just that.

About eight months ago, Harrison decided that he wanted to travel around the world. He had met and read about people who were traveling like this, and it was always in the back of his mind to do it.

He said since he loves to bicycle, and it was the cheapest way to go, his plans all seemed to come together.

He originally started out to bicycle around the world, because he knew that it had successfully been done.

But since starting off, Harrison, who was visiting College Station last week, has decided that bicycling may not be the only way to get around.

"Really, I'm just sort of improvising as I go along, just traveling and following my nose — my instincts," he said.

Harrison toured from near Detroit, Mich., (his home town) across the United States to California, and down into Mexico. He then traveled down through Central and South America to Peru, with the idea of sailing from there to New Zealand.

He found out, however, that the crews going to the South Pacific get together in the Virgin Islands, so he decided to double back to Michigan first.

He said he left his bicycle, because it is impossible to get a bike on a small sailboat of about 35-40 feet — every space is spoken for.

Originally, Harrison mapped out his route by placing pins on a world map in places that he wanted to go, and connected them with string. He said he followed that route fairly closely until he got to Peru.

Harrison arrived in College Station about two weeks ago driving a custom-made car direct from the factory in Detroit to its new owner. He is now on his way to the Virgin Islands, driving another car to Miami, Fla.

While he was here, Harrison said he had learned a lot from his travels so far.

"My preconceptions about what I was going to be doing and what I was going to see, and what the route was going to be like and what the places I was going to visit would be like, were totally wrong."

It quickly became just taking the present situation and going with it — improvising, he said.

When he got to California, he got travel information by talking to people about the best way to go.

Harrison said he would ask people questions like: What is there to see around here? What's up ahead? What would you want to do if you were me?

"There were places that I just thought of as being blank spots on the map. I didn't know what was there, because I'd never heard about it. They turned out to be some of the most marvelous places I visited."

In the United States, Harrison stayed in national or city parks, and one time he spent the night in front of a courthouse. People would often offer him a place to stay.

In Mexico, he usually stayed in \$2 hotels or camped out. He also stayed with people he met.

Right before Harrison got to Guatemala, he injured his knee that had been injured previously when he raced on the Texas A&M Cycling Team.

Just when things seemed to be at their worst, he said, he ran into a German who was traveling through all of North and South America in a 22-foot motor home and who didn't speak any Spanish.

The two agreed to travel together until his knee got better, and Harrison helped out by being able to speak Spanish.

Harrison spent two months with him, and they traveled 8,000 miles all the way to Rio de Janeiro. They toured through Central and South America to Peru, where in Cuzco, his friend developed an illness and had to be airlifted back to Germany.

To finance the trip, Harrison had saved up his money, so he wouldn't have to work on the road. He used cash, travelers checks and credit cards, and carried his money and his passport in a pouch around his neck.

It's amazing where American culture has penetrated, he said.

"You'd go to some little village up in the Andes, in Peru or Ecuador, someplace like that, and you see a little shop where they're selling handicrafts and right there on the front is that little decal that says 'We Take Master Charge.' Just when you'd thought you left civilization behind."

Harrison began his trip in May of last year and had good weather for the most part, but he got snowbound in the Rockies in the middle of June.

He would ride from about 5 a.m. to noon or 1 p.m. which was usually pushing it, he said. One should be off the road by 10 or 11 a.m., he said. This would get him 60-80 miles.

His equipment included a tent, a sleeping bag, an air mattress and enough tools to completely overhaul a bike.

"Everything you'd carry on a backpacking trip, except less food, especially freeze dried food. But I made up the difference by carrying all of these tools."

The bike itself weighed about 25 pounds and the rest of baggage weighed about 80 pounds.

Harrison rode as much as he could to get in shape for the trip.

"I learned fast that racing is very poor preparation for touring; they're two completely different things. Physically it wasn't bad preparation, but psychologically it was terrible."

He got discouraged because it took twice as long to get somewhere as it did when he was racing a lightweight bicycle.

Harrison plans on traveling for a couple more years. "After about three years, I'll be either out of money or out of breath."