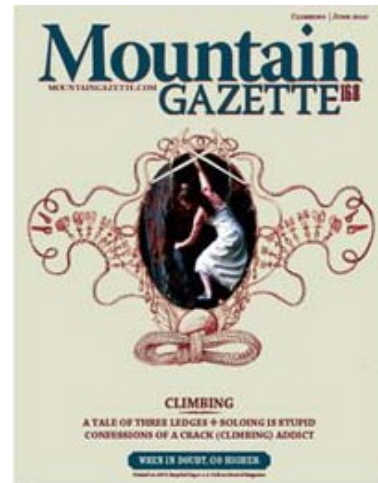


## **I am doing something extraordinary, as you have probably read on my Facebook page**

by Brendan Leonard  
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I began to hate myself about 2,500 miles into a 3,000-mile bicycle trip, when I realized that I was apparently more interested in telling the Internet about my trip than I was in actually experiencing it. Somebody should really come up with a word to describe the feeling you get when you're telling your uncle about the craziest goddamn thing that happened on your epic cross-country bike ride, and you realize he already knows the story because he read it on your blog a couple weeks ago.



When a friend and I decided to do our two-month tour, we started a web site to accomplish two things: To raise money for a nonprofit, and to give our friends, family and girlfriends a place to track our progress, were they so inclined to follow along. Hey, I told people we met on the road, let me give you this card that has our web site url on it. If they were also on bicycles, headed the opposite direction across the country, half the time they handed us a card with their web site on it.

After we built our web site, we put up a Facebook fan page to advertise it, because the Internet is a giant sea of garbage, but Facebook is like a TV channel that only contains news coverage of people you care about. Or went to high school with. Or had a college class with. Or made out with once. Or dated a friend of yours.

Then we got a Twitter account, because I mistakenly thought that was the only way we could update our Facebook page by sending text messages from my cell phone. Then I put the Twitter feed on our blog, in case anyone wanted to read an update in 140 characters or less. All of this was a great way to get away from it all for a while.

I scrutinized all my gear in the weeks leading up to our departure date, carrying an absolute minimum of clothes, camping supplies, spare parts and tools -- one jersey, two pairs of socks, a single pair of pants and T-shirt for off the bike. Smallest crescent wrench I could find that would turn my freewheel puller, a multi-tool containing all sizes of hex wrenches and a spoke wrench and a chain breaker. Spork instead of a fork and spoon. A little one-ounce screen contraption that made coffee. No deodorant. Ultralight tent.

Then I packed a 13-pound bag full of cameras, chargers, cords and a small laptop.

In the mid-1980s, fathers-to-be were given a choice in hospital rooms: they could be there holding the hand of the mother of their child during the once-in-a-lifetime experience, or stand behind a handheld video camera and shout encouragement to the mother of their child during the once-in-a-lifetime experience while recording it all.

When I sat my bag full of once-in-a-lifetime-experience-recording equipment on the baggage scale at Denver International Airport and saw that it weighed a whopping 13 pounds, I realized I had become the second dad. It was a full one-fourth of the weight of my bicycling gear, weighing almost as much as my bike trailer.

We are perhaps the first generation to think about how to relay or relate our experience to others as we're actually having the experience. I have actual memories of sitting on a beach with a friend, trying to capture a sunset on my digital camera, instead of memories of sitting on a beach with a friend, watching the sunset. My friend Mick had done a four-month bike tour back in 1985. I told him about the giant bag of cameras and computers I was taking on my trip, and he said, "Times sure have changed."

You ain't shittin', I said. I remember when the Internet was half porn. Now it's one-third porn, one-third Facebook. Our love for talking about ourselves has nearly outgrown our love for looking at naked people. And that just makes me sick. Do you have a blog? Of course you do. Tell me some more interesting things about yourself. Oh, you eat food? And you breathe air?

As we crossed the country at 12 mph, 60 miles at a time, or 80 miles on our long days, updating our blog started to feel like a part-time job. I began to feel that if I had 10 photos of myself on my bike trip, at least one of those should have been of me sitting in front of a laptop, while wearing a bike helmet. We completed our trip in 49 days, coast to coast, and I had updated our blog on 45 of those days. In Langtry, Texas, there are two stores, at which you can buy Snickers or a Coke (as long as you get there before 5 p.m.), but you're 60 miles from an actual grocery store where you can get a can of beans. And that's a day's ride on a fully-loaded bicycle. But, the one campground in Langtry has free wireless Internet access. So you can update your Facebook page to tell the world how you're starving in the middle of nowhere, if you want to.

On day 49 of our trip, after dipping my bike in the Atlantic Ocean at St. Augustine, Fla., I tweeted the word "Done." I put up one last blog entry that night, and then I stopped. I spent my next day sitting on the beach, writing in a notebook. With a pen.

A study by the Pew Internet and American Life Project showed that the discovery of a new text message on one's phone triggers a release of dopamine. I'm sure

it's the same thing when one discovers a new comment on his blog about his epic bike ride. After we were finished, I was immediately nostalgic for a couple things about our trip -- all the thinking time I had out on the open road, the simplicity of carrying everything on my bike, eating 6,000 calories per day and 1,000 of that in chocolate. And probably the excitement of six or eight people caring enough about what I was doing, to leave a comment on our blog.