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See Europe on Your Own Two Wheels

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SEE EUROPE

On Your Own Two Wheels

by Mary Odegard

Technical Journalism Junior

MOST of us find it hard to pack the clothes we want for a two-week trip into several suitcases — Jerry Ann Tillotson, a junior in the division of science from Des Moines, spent three months touring Europe with her complete wardrobe packed in saddle bags on her bicycle.

In those saddle bags were: 1 skirt, 1 pair of peddle pushers, 1 pair of jeans, 1 pair of shorts, a wool shirt, a jacket, 2 T shirts, and 2 blouses.

"True," says Jerry, "it did get monotonous wearing, for instance, the same skirt for two weeks of sight seeing in Italy." But she maintains that such a wardrobe took care of all her needs during the trip.

Talks fast

"People get me!" exclaims Jerry, "They think that going to Europe is so impossible!" Jerry and two girl friends began making definite arrangements for their trip in March. First of all, of course, came informing parents of their plans. This, Jerry says, was not too difficult — they were a bit skeptical at first, thinking that the girls wouldn't actually go through with it. They later, as Jerry puts it, "became resigned to the idea." Much of the money for the trip Jerry earned in previous summers working on a ranch in Wyoming. (Jerry had experience in hosteling before, having bicycled from Massachusetts to Duluth and back during one summer — an organized tour which involved pedaling 1,800 miles.)

All aboard!

Arrangements completed, on June 11th the three girls stepped onto a student ship in New York to cross the ocean — their object: to see how Europeans lived by traveling through their countries without the aid of organized tours. They had secured membership in the Youth Hostels, and had decided to purchase their bicycles in Great Britain, because there bicycles are made light and durable enough for long-distance traveling.

After a rough ten-day trip across the Atlantic, three of which she spent in bed, Jerry says the English sea-coast was really a welcome sight. At South Hampton, England, they each removed their saddle bags and sleeping bag from the ship, purchased their vehicles, and began pedaling. England, Belgium, Holland, Germany, Austria, Liechtenstein, Switzerland, Italy, and France all are vivid memories, as parts of their three-month trip, for Jerry and her friends.



Their first night in England Jerry recalls as quite an experience. Since the ship had docked late, all hotels were filled, and the jail seemed for a time to be the only place available for lodging. However, a woman offered to let them use her dining room, which turned out to be so small that Jerry was forced to sleep under the table. Since the table was set with china, every time Jerry moved the china would rattle, much to her companions' dismay and loss of sleep.

Though sticking mainly to back roads, small villages, and native-operated eating places while en-route in order to get a real view of the people, the girls also managed to see most of the famous cathedrals, museums, and art centers in the countries they visited. Jerry even tells of attending an opera in Innsbruck, Austria, wearing a red flannel shirt. She had lost her jacket shortly before, and the shirt was her only warm wrap at that time.

Riding babit

Asked if she never felt a bit out-of-place dressed in such necessarily rough clothes during their trip, Jerry replied, "No, we became so used to it, we didn't think about clothes. Besides, everyone knew we were students and were always very helpful and generous." From her experience Jerry advises travelers in Europe to "be yourself and act like one of them; then they'll go out of their way to be nice to you."

Most of the time they spent the nights in hostels which, Jerry proclaims, are "marvelous, generally." Though charging only 15 or 20 cents per night, these hostels provide large, clean rooms and allow travelers to eat at the hostel or cook their own food — as they prefer.

Jerry's advice to persons planning long bicycle trips like hers, however, is: "Don't plan to go too fast at first." After the first week she says they averaged about 60 miles a day, which was "going easy." Though such travel would seem a logical way to lose weight, Jerry

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says that isn't the case, because one eats so much bread and potatoes.

Since the girls carried mess kits on their bicycles, they often cooked out and sometimes slept out in their sleeping bags. Jerry tells of one such night that they slept out in Switzerland and woke the next morning to the sound of rifle fire. They had pitched camp on a rifle range. "It was alright, though," she adds, "they knew we were there because they had to pass us to look at their targets — so we had breakfast there before leaving!"

Familiar faces

Meeting other hostellers, both from the United States and from other European countries, was one of the best parts of the trip. Many helped show the girls around in Rome, Paris, and other of the larger cities. One girl whom they met before beginning their trip back in New York became quite a familiar figure before the end of the summer — they ran into her first in a sweet shop in Heidleburg, Germany; next in a museum in Rome; then a hotel in Paris, and finally on the ship coming home.

In many countries, says Jerry, it is so easy and inexpensive to travel by train that it is better than by bicycle. In these countries she says bicycles are put on trains just like people. They were quite amazed to find that in Austria train fare for a bicycle was more

than for its owner. Traveling third class in Italian trains is unique in Jerry's memory. Different classes must ride on separate cars, the one for third class having wooden seats. "We were surprised enough to find chickens in the car," said Jerry, "but when a group of hunters got on with their dogs, it was really a bedlam!"

Thinking that a summer in Europe would cost too much is a mistake in Jerry's opinion. She recommends the low-rate student ships as an ideal arrangement for getting across.

In all the girls pedaled 1,200 miles. It would have been more had they not been forced to travel by train through Italy and France because their time was running short. With hundreds of snapshots to remind her of the wonderful places she has been, Jerry is now looking forward to another trip as soon as possible when she can visit the countries she missed last time.

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