



Patagonia or Bust: Cycling Solo from California to the Southern Tip of South America

Casey Lightner ('06) is at the time of this writing (July 2014) on a solo cycle tour from Santa Cruz to Patagonia. He started on January 7, 2014, and expects to reach his destination on January 31, 2015. Lara Kilpatrick ('85) "caught up" with Casey via email to learn more about his adventure.

What inspired you to take on this personal challenge?

Many people and events inspire me and to narrow it down is difficult. I was inspired by my friend Paul Crubaugh ('05) who at 18, picked up a beat-up 10-speed bike, attached a single pannier, slung a pack on his back and biked to the tip of Baja California from Santa Cruz. After hearing about this, I thought to myself, "What am I waiting for?" This planted the seed in my mind that years later would grow into me building my own bicycle and planning my Argentina trip.

My brother Mike ('02) also did a similar adventure on Kauai years ago. Alone, he trekked the rugged terrain with a day pack and minimal gear. I am inspired by how little one needs to survive. With strength, courage and perseverance, one can conquer many of life's obstacles.

What, so far, has been the greatest test of your solo journey?

The greatest test is mental, and finding the strength to continue through fear, loneliness, and discomfort. There are mountains to climb, winding roads filled with trucks, and constant heat that turns into cold rain at the top of mountains. Challenges that lie ahead of me are the deserts of northern Chile and Bolivia, the tall mountains that form the spine of South America, and finally the windy, open plains of southern Argentina.

What personal traits are serving you most during this journey?

An ability to stay positive, to see the good in most situations and realize that even if it is "bad"

in the present moment, it too shall pass. To be on this trip is to enter into the flow: to be flexible to inevitable changes and hardships; and knowing that the more you look for the good, the more good you will find.

You have lots of time to think each day. What do you think about most?

That depends on my current mental state and how recently I've been in contact with people. I try to concentrate on my breath and the beauty before my eyes, instead of thinking about all the "what ifs" or "shoulds" that normally cloud my mind. With that said, when I do think – and believe me there is ample time for both meditation and reflection – it is about what my next step will be. What pieces of my previous life do I want to bring forward and what pieces no longer serve me? I think about how I can make a difference in this world in a way that I would be proud of with the skills and potential I have.

I love cycling and have considered teaching teens to be confident cyclists so that they can shed their dependence on vehicles and at the same time get some great exercise. I've also thought of trying professional cycling and racing for a cause. I often contemplate education and believe that true progress can only come through education. A better educated society, educated not only in math, science, reading and writing, but also in nutrition, reflection, communication and consciousness, will pave the way for a 21st century interconnected world in a way that is open to others' thoughts and beliefs. External peace cannot

be achieved without internal peace, first. With that in mind, I'm considering raising money for education programs that serve a well-rounded humanistic approach. There's an event called Race Across America, a no-help, no-frills bike race from San Diego to New York. I'd like to start there and see how that goes. No matter what I do from here on out, however, I will do it wholeheartedly. To paraphrase Patrick Barber ('04) when he was my volleyball coach answering a question about how he could jump so high, he responded: "When I jump, I jump as hard as I can, every time."

In 2010 you received a B.S. in mechanical engineering from Cal Poly. What's next in your life? Where do you see yourself in 5 – 10 years?

Immediately following this trip I will be completely broke. I have a job offer with Miasole so I may be a design mechanical engineer again while I get back on my feet financially. I'm inspired to share what I've learned and want to write a book about my journey. After the book

and possibly a year or two as an engineer, I'm considering a master's degree in international development or wind power engineering.



Casey in Isla Ometepe, Nicaragua, with a friend who is taking time off from wilderness firefighting in Colorado to ride his dual sport motorcycle to South America.

What knowledge, experience, and/or skills have served you best in your work?

In engineering it seems there are so many who know nothing about the actual hands-on application of how things work in reality. In my university education, the curriculum was heavily focused on theory and “sit down and think” engineering – which is great, and the reason why engineers are well paid. There is a balance, though, and when the scales are so tipped with engineers wanting to sit and think, engineers who enjoy getting their hands dirty and making mistakes out in the shop become very valuable. I’ve always enjoyed working with my hands and seeing my designs become a reality under a spinning tool or welding arc. The skills that have served me best are a desire to work hands-on, a positive attitude, and an ability to communicate and form friendships with people from the bottom to the top, from the guy who cleans the floors to the company president.

Looking back to your years at MMS, what was your takeaway?

Many teachers influenced me in different ways. During middle school – a time in my life filled with chaos and turmoil – communications class with Badri Dass provided a quiet place for our class to sit down and simply talk. For one hour each week, we would leave all the “bs” at the door and just be ourselves without judgment or fear. What a powerful concept for a middle schooler! This class taught me how to listen and to speak confidently about what I’m feeling and who I am.

The togetherness that existed between the school and the Mount Madonna Center community was so powerful. For many years, walking between classes meant walking past adults sitting in meditation, slowly strolling in walking meditation, or gardening – and simply living their lives in ways that were not necessarily condoned by society. Some of the best school days were when, instead of taking the

Our bodies are meant to do extraordinary things. In the age we live in, we rely heavily on our minds, a wonderfully powerful gift. Our bodies are designed to be strong and quick, versatile and adaptive. Through smoke and poison our bodies persevere. Injury, lack of sleep, parasites, we live on. All is possible, but not all at once, conditioning and training, building and growing, mentally and physically. Patience is the key, patience and balance.

May 28, 2014 – Reflections



Solola, Guatemala, beginning the descent from Solola to Panajachel on Lake Atitlan

road from the lake to the gym, we took the forest trail. Walking down by the creek, watching the sun squeak through the canopy above was recharging and enlivening.

At school, the performing arts program was at first my most hated and dreaded place to be! As a young kid, I tried to opt out of the *Ramayana!* but was told it was mandatory. Now, I couldn’t be happier that I was forced to join. I loved the performance, the preparation, the singing and dancing. The knowing that, even if I was nervous, scared or unsure, all I could do was give it my all, and if I believed and took it seriously,

I would learn and grow, fail, reflect, and try again.

At school I was always surrounded by others, never alone. My life outside of MMS has better prepared me for this solo bike tour, allowing the space for quietness and to see nature’s beauty all around. As a kid I walked through the woods, curious about life separate from human contact and influence. In the summers, I spent days on my own, riding my bike over to Manresa to swim and walk alone. On such a long journey it is very important to have a strong foundation and self-confidence. On that level, all other additions are

bonus points to the wholeness of self, and at the end of the day, when all is stripped away and I am alone, I am ok, whole, not scattered or wanting.

Words of wisdom for MMS students and fellow alumni?

Life is full of mountains and valleys, rivers to fish and lakes to swim in, times of abundance and times of drought. Know that whatever state you are in at this moment, it shall pass. The next moment in your life will be profoundly affected by the energy you choose to focus on, and it absolutely is a choice each time. Focus on the positive, revel in your times of warmth in the sun and learn and reflect in times of hardship and famine. Allow yourself to suffer if suffering is the state you are in. Do not be afraid to shed the influences and distractions in your life that keep you from being who you want to be. Remember to breathe.



Read about Casey Lightner’s cycle tour at www.patagoniaorbust.tumblr.com