

JP: Hello, this is Tour Chief Jim, and today we're talking with Caroline Richardson. She's not a guest of ours, but she's been a customer of Bike Tour Vacations. Recently she went on a 600-mile, 12-day trip around the north half of Lake Michigan. Caroline is also an MD, she is the Max and Buena Lichter Research Professor of Family Medicine, Associate Chair of Research, Co-director, University of Michigan National Clinical Scholars Program, in the Department of Family Medicine at the University of Michigan Medical School, did I get that correct?

CR: That is Correct.

JP: And before this you did your undergraduate work at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in Boston, and an M.D. from Harvard...

CR: Correct.

JP: ...and this make you pretty busy.

CR: Yes!

JP: So let's go back first, where did you grow up?

CR: Miami Florida.

JP: Miami? You're a long way from home.

CR: Yes, I'm watching the hurricanes with trepidation...

JP: Tell me about your bike riding before you graduated from high school-

CR: So when I grew up in Florida, where most days were pretty nice for biking, in Miami, I rode my bike to school every day. I never took the bus, I never got a ride. Maybe if there was a hurricane on the way I got a ride, but basically I had to ride my bike to and from, since I was in elementary school...

JP: How far of a distance?

CR: It depends on the year, but usually it was a couple of miles.

JP: Were you alone doing that?

CR: Usually, yeah...

JP: And your classmates?

CR: Did not ride their bikes to school.

JP: OK, so this is an early origin of doing stuff. How old were you when you got your first adult bike, and what was it?

CR: I guess I would have to call that my Miyata

JP: Don't you love Miyata, it's a shame they're gone

CR: I know, I had two of them, my first one was a standard road bike, my second one was a cyclocross. The first one wasn't really appropriate for touring, so I sort of traded up to a cyclocross (bike) that was better for touring, and I rode that one until the frame collapsed.

JP: Did you bike in Boston?

CR: Yeah, out to Walden Pond, and down to Connecticut.

JP: And of course Boston has subway, did you ride the...

CR: Not usually, we usually just got on our bikes and rode. For a while I lived in Wayland, and went to school in Cambridge, and that's a 20 mile ride, and I would ride to school when it wasn't horribly wintery.

JP: Do you remember your first bike adventure trip?

CR: Probably when I was in college, I did a couple of them when I was in college and medical school, were probably my first real tours

JP: Multi-day? Camping?

CR: Yes multi day, camping mostly

JP: On the ground...

CR: When I first approached you (for the 2018 tour) I thought I was going to go camping around Lake Michigan, but you rightly convinced me that that was...

JP: We can talk about that later...

CR:...not good for me (laughs)

JP: So, you're married, you have two kids...

CR: Yes, two boys...

JP: One is off to college, not far from home

CR: Yes

JP: And the other is...

CR: 12 years old...

JP: OK, you have a full time job, and it's a busy position

CR: Yes

JP: How do you find time to bike?

CR: Well, I guess the answer to that is mostly I don't, I don't ride as much as I'd like to. I do hope to increase my biking substantially over the next few years, because it's better for my health, my physical health, my mental health, and I have a little bit of freedom now that my kids are older, and so I 'm hoping to be able to do that. I had hoped that my kids would ride with me, but they are classic millennials and would prefer to play on their iPhones...

JP: We may come back to that question in a bit here. Where did the idea for your Lake Michigan bike trip come from?

CR: Well, that's a complicated question, but basically because I haven't been riding as much as I'd like to, and I'm not as strong as I'd like to be, I wanted a relatively tame route, and it seemed like if you rode around the edge of a lake it would be relatively flat, and that sounded good to me, plus I thought it would be beautiful, plus it was nearby. I actually dropped my son off at an orchestra camp very close to the starting point, and it all just worked out timing wise, and I didn't have to fly anywhere, pack the bike up, or do anything crazy like that. Just drive there, drop my kid off at camp, and then go.

JP: So, this thought was out there and it kind of jelled...

CR: And then I really didn't have enough time to plan it all out, because it was getting closer and closer, and so I called you and asked for help...

JP: OK, perfect. So tell me a little about the trip. You dropped your son at Blue Lake, you drove to Ludington, the Badger ferry, which is a famous—we shouldn't talk about that 'cause I'll go for hours on the ferry...

CR: ...it was fabulous...

JP: ... but it's an ancient ship (1951) and it's just a real cute way to get across the lake. What time of day did you depart Ludington?

CR: Yes, so I left my kid at camp at noon, drove to Ludington, parked at the (ferry dock), went off and found something to eat, came back and got on the Badger about 7:45 p.m....

JP: Was the sheriff's boat with the flashing blue light escorting you out of the harbor?

CR: I don't think it was, I was up on the bow...

JP: Well, you'd have seen him if it was there...

CR: But we did see 100 people at the lighthouse and the walkway waving to us as we went out, and probably 30 or 40 little fishing boats dotting the bay, it was pretty spectacular.

JP: Good, and then you get to Ludington-I'm sorry, Manitowoc...

CR: I left my car in Ludington and took the bike on the ferry. I had to tie it down so that it wouldn't get bounced around too much, there wasn't really a good place to put it.

JP: The let you do that? Last time (I rode the ferry) we had to give them the bikes and they...

CR: Oh, they took it away? No, they told me to lean it against somewhere, and I tied it down, 'cause I didn't want it to fall. And that worked out fine, and at the end I just went and untied it and walked it off the ferry. It was about midnight, and I looked up and saw the hotel I was supposed to be staying at was just across the river, and was able to easily ride about a mile...

JP: So you're over by the submarine...

CR: Yes, and I just rode about a mile to that, and there were several people from the ferry checking in at the same time, so they (the hotel) were open and expecting us.

JP: OK, the first day of riding should not have been overly interesting, from Manitowoc to Green Bay. Did you take a taxi like we suggested (from Green Bay to Cedar River MI)?

CR: Yes, the second day. The first day I really liked the bike path into Green Bay...

JP: What was the name of it?

CR: The Fox River Trail, 20 miles of beautiful paved trail with services along the way, it was nice. 8:42

JP: And that was not the whole way to green Bay?

CR: Yes, just about 3 miles short.

JP: And then you taxied up to Cedar River, how was that?

CR: Fine, the taxi was fine. The taxi driver was great, he had arranged to pick up another passenger who was going close to Cedar River, so I only had to pay about half a fare...so that was good...

JP: Oh, sweet, how much was that?

CR: It was still a lot of money, it was about \$180 (ouch, but it saved a day)

JP: But if I recall, we were scrounging for an extra day somewhere, and that (taxi) too out some flat riding which had no view...So, you told some friends before going on this trip, what you were going to do. How many of them looked at you and said "you're crazy"?

CR: Most of them really didn't understand what I was talking about (laughs), and they all thought that I was going with a group...

JP: I can see it, Bicycle, 600 miles, that doesn't compute!

CR: And those who understood thought I was going with a group, and nope, going by myself, and they're like, Why? (laughs)

JP: So, the obvious question, you're a single female out there, did you feel unsafe at any point on the trip?

CR: The only time I felt unsafe, there was one, maybe two times there was an aggressive driver who was yelling at me...but I don't think that was gender related, that was an irritable person on the road and I think they would have been irritable to anyone. I actually had to hitch a ride for a short detour to avoid a road that wasn't safe to ride on, (Cut River Bridge), A very short detour, maybe 3 miles, and it was through curvy roads and all of the (HWY) 2 traffic was going there. All these huge trucks, and there was no side of the road (to be on) and the trucks were barely turning, it was impossible to ride.

JP: So, did you stick your thumb out?

CR: I went to a gas station right before the detour, and I waited for a truck to come up that had an empty tuck bed, and I said "Can I throw my bike it the back and sit with it and will you take me through the detour, and he said Sure"

JP: One of the pieces of equipment that we recommended was a USB-rechargeable light set, front and back; did you get that?

CR: Yes, I didn't get the brand you recommended, I got another and used it, I kept it on, kept it lit all the time, which I'd never done before...

JP:...I'm sure you be doing that in the future. My experience is that in 1600 miles of riding (in 2018) I've had only 3 occurrences where somebody came too close. So, it's a huge (improvement).

CR: The thing I didn't tell you I had, I got a smart helmet...not only does it have a blinker, it has speakers, embedded in the straps, bone conduction speakers, so you can still hear all the traffic noise and nature noise, but you can also hear turn by turn directions transmitted from your phone...

JP: From your phone? And did you have a battery pack to recharge your phone?

CR: I did, my phone could last about half of a day, and then I had a battery pack...and would recharge it at lunch. I also had to recharge the helmet at lunch. It's a Coros helmet.

JP: So let's go back to your work. You've done a lot research on physical activity and how it helps your patients. What did you learn from this research, if anything, which helped you on your bike ride?

CR: Yes, so I do diabetes prevention research, and one of the things we're looking into right now is lower carbohydrate diets. One of the most interesting areas is the interaction between physical activity and lower carbohydrate diets, because most people think you have to carb load to do a big physical activity adventure. But the truth is that you can actually burn fat as your fuel instead of carbs as your fuel, pretty efficiently. Your peak performance is probably dulled a little bit, but if you're going for length and slow & steady- (laughs) I'm not a fast rider, I'm a slow steady rider... when you ride all day at a slow steady pace that's perfect for burning fat. You really don't have to carb load, so I was able to eat a protein heavy, fat heavy diet without many carbs. I didn't eat bananas & granola bars all day, I didn't drink gatoraid, and I

ended up losing about 5 pounds in 10 days, which is pretty amazing. Some additional fat was probably burned which was made up for in weight of additional muscle, in just 10 days. I felt fine, I never crashed, I never hit a wall, never was hungry.

JP: So on day 3, were you tired coming in at the end of the day, and was that different vs. the last day?

CR: I was pretty much tired coming in every day. The difference would be in the (following) morning, my first hour or second hour would be fine, whereas in the beginning just getting on the bike was hard. By the end, my first 3 or 4 hours were fine. I would have to work in the last (half of the day) but it was doable, I wasn't worried I'm not going to make it. I just did it. Also, one of the things I did, I took a 2 day tour, as a test tour, the weekend before I left, so in some ways my first day was like my 3rd day, 'cause I had only 2 days of rest in between. That helped a lot too, I think.

JP: So, and August tour, 600 miles, 12 riding days is that correct?

CR: Ten riding days!

JP: so you were 60 miles a day average around the north half of Lake Michigan, What was the best day on the tour? Was there one?

CR: Oh, gosh, every day was good. Every day had something interesting. The most remote days up in the UP, there was nothing, I had to carry a lot water and it was very hot, 95 degrees most of the days)...I was (concerned) over running out of water and still 10 miles to go...but every day was really great.

JP: Ok, best or most memorable lodging that you had?

CR: I did stay at Chamberlin's (Ole Forest Inn), I was able to jump into the lake there, it was really nice to swim around in, after swimming the food was good. The best lodging was in Charlevoix, it was expensive but nice...the Weathervane Terrace Inn and Suites in Charlevoix. It was expensive, but it had a whirlpool, and a nice room, and a very nice restaurant attached to it, and it was in the middle of a town so you could get ice cream and stuff. I ate a lot of ice cream on the trip.

JP: Best meal on the trip?

CR: There was a little restaurant near Charlevoix that I ate at that was fantastic. (searching phone) Coros is the name of the helmet, C-o-r-o-s, there's an app for it.

JP: And you said the helmet was communicating with your phone, and what app were you using on the phone?

CR: Ride with GPS, and I used your maps which you sent by email, downloaded them no problem, they worked perfectly. Turn by turn directions, no problem.

JP: That's good to know, I love to hear that!

CR: So I didn't have to take a bike computer, I just used my phone and my helmet...

JP: In terms of technology overload, which many people-me included-suffer from, I simply want no more devices which connect to anything, just use what I have... (20:24)

CR: Well this was certainly different from other tours, whenever I got to (my destination) I had to plug in my lights, my helmet, my phone. I actually had to carry an iPad (for access to medical charts).

JP: So, let's talk about equipment just briefly. You had the Coros helmet, you have a new Seven bike...

CR: Brand new, I bought it (this spring) and that's what made me start planning this tour. My old Seven, the frame rusted out after 15 years.

JP: You had an iPhone, and a compatible charger for the iPhone, this battery pack you used every day during the day. You carried gear, how did you carry gear?

CR: I used Ortley rear panniers and a front...

JP: (interrupts) A woodchuck is right outside the window (of your office)...

(she has a ground floor office overlooking a pond)

CR: ...yes, there's a whole family there.21:52...front handlebar bag, the Ortley handlebar bag has an extension so you can put a post that goes up...and I had a phone mount on that, and there was another post that went down under the bag that my front light was on. Worked perfectly.

JP: How much weight of stuff did you have; did you check it?

CR: I didn't check it, but I would guess it was somewhere around 35 pounds, medium.

JP: What did you take?

CR: I took a change of clothes-I took two sets of clothes for riding, one set of clothes for off bike, and then I took a bunch of stuff that I never used but I thought I'd have to have. I took warm clothes, I thought going to the U.P you need warm clothes, but it was 90 every day, I never took them out of the bag. I took a pretty good sized first aid kit and bike repair kit because I knew I was going to be by myself, and those 3 things I never used. Then I had my electronics.

JP: You swam at Chamberlin's at Manistique Lake, anywhere else did you swim?

CR: Pretty much every place after (riding) it was good.

JP: Any hills surprise you along the way?

CR: There were definitely some hills that were rough, even after I got pretty far into the tour. Not long, not most of the time, but occasionally you got a good one that took some energy to get over.

JP: Particularly on the (west coast of the Lower Peninsula) coming into Ludington, between Frankfurt and Arcadia...

CR: Yes, that was the worst! And I had to take an extra 10 miles (due to lodging) so I had ended up doing those three horrible hills on the last 10 miles of the day, and I ended up in Onekama...They were steep hills, and the really cool thing about Map My Ride (Ride with GPS) is you can see the elevation, so I knew it was coming. They were pretty steep.

JP: What is your advice for other people who might have this notion kicking around in their head? Got any?

CR: Just do it? You know, you can go as slow (or fast) as you want. A lot of people are like "oh, I could never do that", well you could, just slower, or fewer miles, or take more time, but a day is a long time, and you can get pretty far if you just keep going...it was a great ride.

JP: is there anything else you thing I need to ask you?

CR: I guess the reason I like riding by myself is that it's sort of like meditation. When you're working hard and dealing with difficult people all the time, and you're stressed out...being able to disconnect and just go and focus on riding all day, you kind of get into a trance...

JP: I'm pretty sure I do my best thinking on the bike...

CR: I had pretty significant and dramatic improvements in fitness and weight loss that I've been able to maintain for at least a couple of weeks...

JP: Does anything from this trip translate back to your research?

CR: Absolutely. As I was riding I was definitely paying attention to carbohydrates vs protein vs fats, and I think there's a misperception in the cycling community that you really need to eat a lot of carbohydrates to be able to go on a long ride. That's clearly not the case. I've been on rides before where I did the sort of standard cycling diet of bananas and granola bars and Gatoraid, and did not feel nearly as good or get as much benefit cardiovascularly or weight loss wise as I did on this bike tour where I focused more on protein and less on carbohydrates. I felt fine the whole time, I didn't feel like I couldn't ride. There have been times on previous tours where I couldn't pedal one more (stroke) and had to use Gu or something to keep myself going (because) I hit a wall, it was a hard stop wall. That never happened this time. I think there is something about metabolic flexibility where you can either burn fat or you can burn carbs and you're not so tied to one or the other, that we've all gotten out of the habit of using. It's interesting that you can get back that metabolic flexibility pretty quickly if you limit your processed carbohydrate intake while you're cycling 60 miles each day.

JP: Thanks so much, we've been talking with Caroline Richardson, she's a cyclist, she's an MD, she's a professor at the University of Michigan, I appreciate your time, thanks...

CR: Thank you!