

J This is Jim and today we're talking with Ken Martinek. Ken is an investigator at WJBK News 2 in Detroit, is that correct?

K Yes

J Does your day job involve bicycles?

K No, but I commute to work every day that I possibly can...

J Do you own a motor vehicle?

K Yes, well it's my wife's car now (laughs)

J and it's an 8 or 10 mile ride each way. Tell me about your bike.

K Well, I have a couple. I have a Trek Crossrip that I've outfitted for touring and.. aluminum frame. It's an inexpensive bike, \$800 when I bought it new, and I've put several hundred dollars into it, racks & lights and bags, stuff like that. It's a relaxed geometry bike and it has wider tires, so it's good for gravel and dirt...

J And Trek has done that- I have a newer Trek Domane, similar to Crossrip, the headset is much taller. What they've done, because as we get older we lose flexibility, they brought that (headset) up so we don't have to lean as far forward...

K Right, so our backs don't ache quite as much when were done. And the Crossrip is exactly like that, kind of a zippy little city bike, it does well on dirt roads...

J What are the brakes?

K Disc, and I actually upgraded to Abbot BB7's, it came with BB5's, but I went up to BB7's just because my bike shop talked me into it.

J So it's a bigger brake?

K It's a little bit bigger brake, and it gives you an extra adjustment so that it's a little bit more delicate, you get a little more feel, and it's easier to adjust...

J But you use all the features on it...don't think of that as being a mistake

K No, I love them, I love the features on the bike. As a matter of fact, it (the bike) is exactly the right size for me, it's comfortable, I bought a new seat, new pedals, it's my favorite bike to ride, of all my bikes ever. It's my favorite bike. And of course in the lousy weather when it snows I've got my fat tire bike, Minnesota 1.0 Fat tire bike which always gets me into trouble. You get on that thing and you're 14 again, leaping through snow drifts and end up flat on your back (laughs)

J Have you got studs on that? Are they available?

K No, but I believe they're available. Now on my Scott (bike #3) I was running studded snow tires until I got the fat bike...and then of course my old 1978 Peugeot UB80 Touring bike from when I was in college...Bike gee, yes!

J What was your first bike trip, that you remember?

K My first actual tour was a Michigander ride, about 5 years ago.

J Nothing when you were a kid?

K No, we'd throw our camping gear on the bike and ride out to the woods, a few miles from the house in Plymouth, just down the street. It's all built up now, the woods are gone, the meadow and the pond are filled in and it's all condos now...

J Now days they might ride up to Maybury State Park which has got a little camp for organized group...

K We just went to somebody's field, in the 60s, we sneak out and throw up the tent and have a campfire. We were like 12-13 years old. And that was it. We could walk it, sometimes we'd ride bikes up there. But the Michigander ride was the first actual day to day camping tour. That's a phenomenal ride because they take your gear for you, you don't have to lug it around, how cool is that? And I have a friend who even paid to have someone set up his tent for him! I'm like 'why...this is like the lap of luxury, you know?'

J It's funny, I see this from a whole different perspective. My guests all stay in hotels and we haul their luggage. We really make short days of things so it's really easy. I have two electric bikes, and a third of my biking is on the e-bike. It's really wonderful, have you ridden one yet? I've never tired cocaine, but I perceive that an e-bike is to a cyclist as cocaine is to an addict. I was out the other day on it and stopped at the bike shop, and a guy there said 'oh, you're cheating', well not really! It's going to open up cycling to more people

K That's the beauty of e-bikes, it will make people feel way more comfortable getting out. They'll be less worried about hills. I have friends who don't want to get on a bike because they don't want to be embarrassed by having to walk up a hill. I mean, I've had to walk up a hill before, and it's not that big a deal...

J Before this summer, what was your most extreme bike ride, was it the Michigander?

K Yeah, it was the Michigander

J Is that also your most memorable tour? Have you done any others since then?

K Yes, and I did 3 Michiganders, '14-'15-'16...all different routes. I signed up for a Palm ride, but I was training for it riding up north, and I hit a pothole and went through somebody's yard and a hedge, and wound up in a cornfield with a concussion and 5 broken ribs. I couldn't go n the Palm ride, I was devastated! My Michigander buddies all bailed on me, so I found the Palm ride and then I had the accident, so I thought 'You know what, I'm just going to bite the bullet and do the Iron Belle Trail. It's there, somebody needs to do it, and in the back of my mind looking at bike camping. I think I probably thought about it for two years, and finally just decided 'you know what, I'm just going to do it.'" I'm going to get whatever I need for bike camping, outfit my bike, and just go.

J Let me just backtrack. The Michigan DNR, Pure Michigan, and other branches of State Government announced the creation of the Iron Belle Trail back in 2015, and Rick Snyder was governor, it was a big deal, he was on TV talking about this trail. The trail includes both biking and hiking routes from Belle Isle in Detroit all the way to Ironwood. These trails are on opposite sides of the state as they go. In the lower

peninsula the hiking trail runs across the west side, cycling is on the east side, and in the U.P. cycling is in the south and hiking is in the north. The bike route covers almost 800 miles, but you went a bit further...So my question, what got you thinking it would be a good idea to ride this trail? Is it dejection because you couldn't go on the Palm ride?

K It was that, a little bit of that. I wanted to do some ride, but ...Governor Snyder actually proposed this state long trail, from one corner to the other, in 2012. I'm a news guy, so when politicians make promises, or say stuff that they're going to do, I've got to check it out! And then they came up with the name, so this has been in the back of my mind since 2012. These guys said there's this trail out there, well what are they spending our money on 10:57 I should go check it out, and it also would be a whole lot of fun, to check it out. So my original motivation was to see what we're paying for, what we're doing, and it would be 2 weeks of riding my bike (laughs)

J Are you aware of anyone else who's ridden the full trail?

K I'm not. I know that a group of riders rode from Ironwood to St. Ignace, and I don't know if they rode any of the lower peninsula. I haven't been aware of anyone who's done the whole thing...

J You may be the first! There's no prize other than you can claim this.

K No prize other than saddle sores and aching muscles! You do get a little something out of it.

J Saddle sores are not a prize. I suffered this summer, it started, it's still with me. There's a learning curve, because I've never had saddle sores before...you can't get a good picture (of the sores), those are not attractive, you can't see it, stand over a mirror is kind of tough. New underwear, new bike shorts, I bought \$60 worth of two products from a company called Assos, there's the pre-ride which is mentholated, and the post ride, which you apply after a shower. October is my big month to ride at home, so one afternoon I'm drying off from the shower and I've got the hair dryer going, and my wife says "What are you doing?" (it's her dryer) (laughs) "Oh, I could stand here with a magazine and fan my backside so it dries:, you can't get dressed with goop hanging on, so saddle sores are fairly exceptional. We're off track though...So You heard Governor Snyder in 2012, there's some publications in 2015, you ride in 2019...

K They come up with the name in 2015 and announce the trail, and they published the interactive map on the web, and announce it's 62%, then 65%, 69% finished...

J So, you were doing investigation on this before you left. What did that include?

K I looked at the interactive map and compared that with the Michigan Department of Transportation maps, you can download the PDFs, and they have traffic studies, busy or not busy. And of course I googled like crazy. There are two types of maps on the DNR website, the interactive map, and also you can download PDFs. So I used all of those. And I did a lot of online searching, Chamber of Commerce type sites, looking for information. I called some chambers, Manistique, I couldn't find anything in Ironwood. Manistique they didn't call me back, but I got an email and it said 'check out our website'. I laughed because I got their email from their website. If I'd found the information I wanted, I wouldn't have called! And then I called people like you. The guy who builds Tiger Eye mirrors (Todd from Texas), I purchased a couple mirrors and he mentioned that he took one of your tours (Ride to Pictured Rocks, 2015) Wonderful guy, he mentioned you so I called you, and you were kind enough to look and my route

and the six pages of instructions (laughs) and you were like “uh, have you ever heard of Ride with GPS?” (laughs) Oh, I’m such a newbie, such a greenhorn at this!

J So, you had not been doing Ride with GPS (amazed)

K No, and if you hadn’t told me that...so when you said check out Ride with GPS, I got a subscription and put in my data. Then I got turn by turn instructions! I’d mapped everything out so carefully (and after entering data to Ride with GPS) I didn’t have to do anything on the road except look for ice cream shops.

J So you had the route running on your phone...

K I had a new phone with a little battery pack, and a couple of other battery packs so I could have full service. The beauty of Ride with GPS is that you get turn by turn instructions, you can enter points of interest, a restaurant, the statue of Paul Bunyan, you put that in so you can see that stuff...

(delete 2 minutes of where the statue of PB is located, there are several)

K Grayling to West Branch, to Rose City, then to the south side of the Au Sable River...That’s a gorgeous bike ride, just spectacularly wonderful along the river. One of the interesting people I met along the trip...The Iron Belle Trail connects a lot of places, but more importantly it connects a lot of people. My first interesting encounter was with Bob Salinski from Sylvania Outfitters in Watersmeet, my second day of riding. Watersmeet between Lake Gogebic and Iron Mountain, and there’s nothing out there...so when I got to Sylvania Outfitters, I was out of water I was out of food, and I stopped. They were nice enough to fill my water bottles for me, I bought some beef jerky because that’s all they had for food, but then Bob was telling me about, we got on the topic of Michigan history, and I spend about 20 minutes talking with him. We talked about Michigan history all the way back to when the glaciers receded, 10,000 years. It was delightful talking with him, really knows his stuff, a wonderful encounter. And then 400 miles later, along the Au Sable river, I stopped for lunch on top of the platform, the river spread out below, spectacularly gorgeous, and there’s this guy waling with his dog, his name’s Dave and he’s waiting for his wife Joann who’s training for her big hike on the Grand Canyon, so she’s walking up and down the 376 steps with a 36 lb backpack, and she’s like 5’3”...

J You wrote about this on your blog...

K Yes, and Dave knows all this stuff about the Au Sable river, and the canoe races, and the Lumberman’s Monument, because he’s from the Tawas/Oscoda area. He’s another delightful, wonderful guy who’s willing to share his knowledge of the local area, tell me the short cuts, where to eat, things like that.

J So go back, Gov. Snyder in 2012, a publication in 2015, along the way I’ve been attending a conference sponsored by Pure Michigan, Michigan State, and the DNR. They always talk about ‘we’re doing the trail, it’s good for the economy, etc., and it connects people who otherwise would not be connected.’ So these discussions of yours are significant. You found someone in Watersmeet, you met someone on the Au Sable River. It’s a benefit of the trail...

K I possibly could have met these people if I were driving, but also because I was on the bike I needed to stop for some rest. I never would have stopped at Sylvania Outfitters in the car, just driven the next mile into Watersmeet. Being on the bike gives you the opportunity to meet people and to see things that you would never see (from) a car. It allows you to do it in two weeks, 928 miles in two weeks. 64 miles a day is not a big deal, but it is when you string 14 days in a row!

I have to laugh, one of my neighbors stopped when I had my bike loaded up, and he says "Man, that's a lot of stuff!" You know what, it's not a lot of stuff. It's a tent, a ground pad, a sleeping bag, and a towel filling up one pannier, and the other pannier is a couple of days of changes of clothes, certainly not 14 pairs of underwear and socks, clean shirt, nothing like that. Maybe 3 pair of bike shorts, 5 jerseys, one set of clothes to sleep in...

J I bet if you went again, you'd pair that down a little more...

K As a matter of fact, I would, but I'd also add a couple of things. I did a really good job of keeping things to a minimum. There were very few things that I didn't need or didn't use. There were a couple of things I could have made room for. I read the horror stories of how everyone takes too much, so I thought if I need some thing I'll just buy it. The stuff that I took, I got lucky guessing at it.

J So, you contacted me in May or June, do you remember what you asked? You were real specific. "How do you get to Ironwood" (everyone laughs)

K I had absolutely no clue!

J The cool thing which I learned, there's a flight from Chicago to Ironwood for about \$120. It's in a Cessna, but we really don't care. So How'd you get to Ironwood?

K Indian Trails Bus, from Pontiac. Just a few miles from my house. I called Indian Trails and said, you're the only public transportation that will get me there and I want to take my bike, how do I do that? And she said, wonderfully friendly, said box your bike up, certain size, and we'll take it as luggage. And we wont even charge you for it if that's your only luggage. So I carried my panniers on the bus with me and stuck them in the overhead bins, so it didn't cost me a penny to ship my bike...

J I imagine that your wife drove you to Pontiac...

K As a matter of fact, she didn't (laughs) She had to work, so I called a private service out of Lake Orion. It cos 2/3 what the bus ticket cost. It was \$96 to get to Ironwood, so it was \$65 to get to the bus stop, then \$96 to get to Ironwood.

J So I want to know timing. The time you left your house, when the bus left Pontiac, were there any transfers, and the time you got to Ironwood.

KI left my house about noon and got to the Pontiac bus station about 12:30, a couple of hours before the bus left at 2:30. We drove up the Iron Belle trail, so I got to scout out the trail in reverse which was really helpful. We got to St. Ignace and transferred busses there, one transfer at midnight. I got to Ironwood 6:30 a.m. Central time, sleeping on the bus.

J Were there many people on the bus?

K From Pontiac to Flint, the bus was jam-packed. By the time we got past Bay City, there was almost nobody on the bus so we got to spread out. And there were very few people on the bus from St. Ignace to Ironwood, so we had plenty of room. It was very comfortable, a nice trip. Long, 16 hours on a bus is a long, long time. But it was a nice ride, the bus drivers were great, they were helpful. So they dropped me off at the Gogebic Transportation building in Ironwood at 6:30 in the morning, and there's nobody there. It's empty, and I've got a box full of bike parts. There's a great picture on my Facebook page, I spread out the bicycle on the sidewalk, with the frame on the box, wheels, panniers, all the stuff. I had

everything out, and now I'm checking my pockets, patting my pockets looking for the 3 Allen wrenches, if I can't find them then I can't put the bike back together! I had taped them to my gear bag. I reassembled my bike in the parking lot, and snuck my empty box into someone's dumpster, and rode over to mile 0.0 of the trail, just a half mile from the bus station. The trail is all paved (in Ironwood) very nice, you couldn't ask for an easier start.

J You were a solo traveler; any difficulties with that?

K You know, the beauty of solo travel, solo trekking as I poetically explained it to my daughter, is you don't have to listen to people complain. (lists complaints) because you're alone. You only hear that when the little voice in your head goes off, "Who picked this route" and "What were you thinking..." The disadvantage is it's all your own fault. I got lost a few times, planned some turns I never should have...

J Part of that, it's the journey, too...

K Yes, some of getting lost is fun. There was one day that was hugely frustrating. It seemed every time I tried something new, I'd run into a dead end. Coming out of Grayling, on one of the proposed routes (not finished), there's a two track through the woods, its so sandy, 8 to 10" deep. I was going down this two track, and it turns into a No Track, and there's a big pile of dirt & debris blocking the road. It wasn't too hot, no horseflies, no no-see-ums, no mosquitos, I was hugely lucky. But between Grayling and West Branch it was a very frustrating day. Hiking that portion would have been spectacularly beautiful, because you do not see anything associated with civilization... I have to say, everything from Ironwood to Grayling was just phenomenal. My biggest complaint was riding through Escanaba, the route is not well thought out there. The flip side is that the proposed route, one of the most beautiful bike routes of the whole trip, lovely dirt roads through the forest and Mastadon Township. The route in the UP, as long as you don't mind US 2 with cars whizzing by...

J (looks at map) 39:25

J 41:14 So, you went about 900 miles, 14 days. Is that 14 nights on the road, or 13 nights?

K 13

J You talked about a trail coordinator. Have you made any trail suggestions about the unfinished portions?

K I did, I wrote a little synopsis, and next week on Tuesday I'll be talking with them, sharing my experiences with the Iron Belle Trail committee meeting in Detroit. They're talking about commissioning art for the Belle Isle Trail head.

J Tell me about dining along the way: what was the best dining?

K I had a couple of very pleasant, nice surprises, and one near-religious experience.

J Start with that!

K Kozie's in Otter Lake...

J Where's Otter Lake?

K I'm not tellin' cause it's the best secret... No, its about an hour and a half from hear, east of Flint on the Southern Links Trail...Kozi's, I went there and it was Chinese night. OK, the special is General Tso's chicken, home made egg rolls, a typical 16-year old waitress; the place had a giant plastic ice cream cone out front, nothing special, so I didn't have high expectations but decided to get the special. And I said I'll have two egg rolls, and egg rolls are usually pretty small, and I'd ridden 60 miles that day, and the waitress says 'and you want the sweet and sour sauce.' I said, OK, that's probably fine. She said "no, you WANT the sweet and Sour sauce". So I get the two egg rolls, each as big as my fist, and the Sweet and Sour sauce. I've never had this before. You've seen those little packets with Sweet & Sour, that's not real. This sauce was from scratch, all fresh ingredients. The main course, all fresh, superbly prepared and presented. A gourmet meal...

J They're way out of their league...

K This was the best meal, probably the best meal I've ever had in my life. And I've eaten at some fancy restaurants before, and not enjoyed it as much, or had the quality dining experience I had there. And this is jus a little hole in the wall restaurant at a place nobody knows about.

J What did the dinner cost?

K Uh, with ice cream, around \$10. It was an incredibly amazing meal. And in Cheboygan, a little place called Nourish. It's a little new-age, associated with a yoga studio. All healthy food, counter service, pick up silverwear, condiments, stuff like that. Local artisans have their crafts and art and paintings on the wall, stuff like that. So I ordered the kale, egg, and shitake mushroom and other healthy greens sandwich, right? Because it's hard to eat healthy on the road if you're eating at restaurants, and that's why I stopped there. Derek, the nice young man behind the counter, says "excellent choice. Would you like to upgrade that with sausage and cheese?" I'm sitting here, thinking I've just come from St. Ignace, 20 miles in the rain, with a soggy tent, and damp camp clothes, heck yes I want to upgrade! It was the best breakfast sandwich I've ever had. The whole restaurant is the brain child of Emily, I've got her picture on my Facebook page. Nice young people, it was a wonderful experience, and so totally Michigan, you know. Here's this place you could plunk down in Manhattan a block off 5th Avenue and it would hold it's own, and yet "you can upgrade your sandwich with sausage and cheese" yes, that's wonderful. So the dining experiences were wonderful 49:00 And the 906 Café outside of Gogebic. They have great breakfasts!

J So, let's look outward. How would you attract other people to do this ride? Part 2, how should you or me or anybody entice non-cycling adults to get on a bike? These are really tough questions.

K They are tough, and there's no real easy answer. Encouraging people to get on the bike is tough because you have to make some kind of connection with people first. Its very difficult to take out a TV ad and say 'ride your bike this week', it just doesn't work. You need to work through bicycling groups, and social engagement on a more personal level, maybe at the art fair you have a bicycle booth, maybe the local bike shop. They're so important to getting people out on bikes because they know their communities better. Other bicyclists are the ones who are going to get their friends on bikes. I have a friend who's daughter did the Michigander ride, and he talked to me about biking, and said 'Im going to buy a bike and do this ride' and so we talked. I helped and encouraged him, and then he talked me into doing the Michigander ride, so I got a great experience from it, I did 3 Michigander rides with him. So it's that personal connection, you have to make those connections...

J So I'm looking at this (interview) and blog post, and the others in the series this fall, somebody's done something on a bike which is out of the normal, 2 weeks and 900 miles is out of normal, it just is, it's good. But what was the motivation, what was the inspiration, and how do we get other people motivated and inspired. I'm looking for the answers.

K You sent me that question, and I've been thinking about it for days. I think getting information out there, showing people that it can be done. A 61-year old guy like me (laughs) can do it, 14 days, 900 miles. Boy, that sounds like an awful lot of miles, but it wasn't, really. I was certainly ready for a break after 2 weeks, but I'm 61! I did a little bit of extra riding to get in shape for this, but not THAT much! You don't have to do 900 miles in 2 weeks, you could do 280 miles in a week or 6 days, there are tours out there where you can go 30 miles a day. Join one of your tours and holy cow, That's luxury! I'm there in Tawas State Park, and they've got these water-saver showers, and I'm sittin' there thinking 'if I were with Jim, I'd be sitting down to a gourmet meal, but here I am hitting the shower button again and again and again. So there are very different ways you can tour. They're all fun, they're all great, and you can go as luxurious as you want, and you can go as spartan as you want. 54:45

J One way is not better than the other, they fit different needs, different budgets.

K Exactly! They're each just as much fun, just slightly different ways. You might want to go all out crazy, 900 miles roughing it, or you might want to do the lap of luxury. Heck, do both!

J So tell me, what is your next tour?

K I was thinking about doing something a little bit shorter, maybe the C&O Canal Towpath and on into Washington DC, because that's only 650 miles instead of 774 miles (laughs)

J But you can do that one and only carry a couple changes of clothes, there are B&Bs along the way

K Sure, sure, and I was thinking I could ride from Detroit to Washington DC, and take Amtrak back, just roll my bike on the train, and it's 100 miles shorter than from Ironwood to Detroit...

J People don't get geography in Michigan, because it goes forever...

K Yes, and I didn't believe it either (how DC could be closer to Detroit than Ironwood) because you're going around Lake Erie, and then south to Pittsburgh, and then to DC...either that, or I'd like to do a week around Michigan. I've never ridden the Tunnel of Trees...

J So, what have I not asked you? What else do you need to say?

K That anybody can get on a bike, even if it's just for 5 miles. It will be worth getting on that bike. You will feel like you're 14 again, and if you ride for a couple of days in a row, you will feel healthier and you'll be happier. The reason I started riding is because my daughter challenged us to find something that was good to do for the economy, so I thought I'd kill 2 birds with one stone, finding an exercise to help keep the weight off as I was getting older, and reduce my carbon footprint, and that was 15 years ago. And now, I can't not ride. If I don't get to ride every day, I don't feel right. So, it's fun, healthy, it's good for the environment. So many benefits that you don't even think about, you just got to get out there and try it.

J Thank you Ken.

K Thank you, and thanks for all your help. If you hadn't told me about Ride with GPS, I might still be somewhere in the U.P., lost!

J That, as a tour operator, is the biggest hurdle I have. We tell people 4 ways, we give mapping 4 different ways. The Electronic version, Ride with GPS, and that works on several platforms (apps) on a smart phone. We have printed maps, sometimes there's two maps per day. You flip the map over and there's a cue sheet, turn by turn instructions.

K And with Ride with GPS, your family can track you. My daughter followed me every inch of the way, every mile, from Ironwood all the way to Belle Isle, and the 28 miles that I had to ride home from Belle Isle. She was with me the whole way. "Oh, are you going to stop at Zenders, outside Frankenmuth?" What? "you've got to stop at Zenders and have a chicken dinner". It's that granular, every 5 minutes they get an update. When I was in the U.P. I'd get a phone call, 'you haven't moved for 15 minutes, are you all right?' But she followed me the whole way. And then my wife would call my daughter and ask, where is he now? It was a great thing. When I got to Hartwick Pines there was no cell service, and my texts were not going through. It took hours to track down the camp host, who let me use her phone with instructions, "you have to stand on the other side of the pickup, hold on to the antenna, and lean out so you get a signal" (laughs) it was that crazy. But my daughter had texted my wife saying she didn't know why texts weren't going through, but he's at Hartwick Pines. So it was a relief to my wife to know I was there.