Del Norte Triplicate

NEWS

A Path to Discovery: One man, one bicycle, one dream

October 18, 2023

“Traveling is a very German thing” Paul Mader told me.

I met Mader as I was heading south on Highway 101. I’d pulled over to take pictures of the rocky ocean shoreline. He had stopped to rest, his bicycle leaned against a guardrail, loaded down with bright red, blue, and violet paneers, and a Day-Glo rainbow of stuff sacks, every conceivable space filled. He had a Coke and a water jug on the rail post.

His smile and wave hello let me feel comfortable asking about where he was heading. When he told me that his destination was Argentina I had to know more.

Turns out he had landed in Seattle from Halle, in the former German Democratic Republic (GDR) or east Germany, a month earlier. After two days in a youth hostel in downtown Seattle, he headed down the coast,

with a few detours inland, in a relaxed ride to where I met him just south of Gold Beach.

We met in Brookings the next day where he told me he ate at Taco Bell for the first time. He had a large burrito; he liked it. As we were deciding what to have for lunch, he spotted a sandwich called the “Patriot” in a display case. He commented on the difference in serving size between what he saw and what is available in Germany. What he saw was so much larger, so many more meats in the sandwich. He also found it “weird” that Americans drink out of straws.

“This is how babies and kids drink in my country,” he said.

The journey

As we sat and had our lunches, he told me the story of how he wound up here on a bicycle he built himself. He'd had “four proper good bikes” before but wanted one that would be right for the trip down the U.S., Central and South American Pacific coasts.

This trip wasn’t his first trip to the states.

“When I was a kid… I was 10 years old," he said. "I was here with my kindergarten friends and their parents. I was still playing with Hot Wheels. So, the coolest thing back then was seeing all the cars and trying to find a Hummer. That was the game that we were playing.”

About five years later, back in the U.S., now with his family, “two-and-a-half weeks… in Florida… I was looking for American cars, was happy to see them, and was looking for alligators,” he stated.

Then there was a road trip around L.A.

“I flew to Los Angeles and we did a three-week road trip by car with my father, my brother," he said. "We called ourselves three and four half men because it was three dads and four sons. We rented two cars and then went all around Los Angeles.”

Following that adventure, he spent three weeks in a school exchange in Texas.

Right after he finished high school Mader said he traveled abroad for nine months to New Zealand on buses and hitchhiking.

"I realized that I'm really good at traveling and that it’s a lot of fun," he said. "Now I'm coming back to [travel] again. It doesn't feel like I'm starting a new trip or… something completely different. It's more like [doing] something I'm really good at …[something] I really like, now it's just doing it in a different way; instead of hitchhiking and traveling by bus and by train I’m cycling it, on my bike.”

Path to discovery

These trips were the beginnings of what has since become a primary driver for Mader, his path to discovery.

“For me it's about the experience, about doing something that I like, discovering the world and not about telling a great story afterwards," he said.

Mader said he'd been wanting to do the bike ride for a couple of years and in the beginning he wasn't sure what route he would take.

"So, five years ago I was thinking about starting in Europe and then heading east, like going through the former Soviet republics and maybe China, because China is one of the most interesting countries there is at the moment," Mader said. "But then I met an ex-girlfriend, and I started learning Spanish and with learning Spanish South America and Central America makes a lot of sense. So, I switched over to this route and then I started cycling and I thought, well, I don't need to do the route by car. I can also just do it on my bike. One-and-a-half years later I'm here, and doing it by bike"

Mader began this trip about a year-and-a-half after graduating university with a teaching degree. After graduating he was working as a social worker, with young adults who are doing their civil service.

He described a special government program in Germany, whick seeks people with degrees in education and who helped those young adults during that year.

"That was my job for a year," he said. "Also working in a night shift in an orphanage and I didn't spend a lot of money. So, with within a year, you can save money if you work at your job and are living on a small budget."

That savings got the now 28-year-old to Seattle about a month ago.

"I was quite anxious and scared and was like, was like, okay, my hostel was in downtown Seattle, the inner district, not the best area to be around," Mader said. "Seattle was a massive city, [it] was loud. There were many homeless people. It was dark. I didn't know a lot about Seattle and the West Coast so far."

This trip was starting off a bit differently for him than the others he'd been on. He described it from the beginning.

"I flew in, I came in at like 9 30, 10 o'clock," he said. "Then I did assemble my bike at the airport. And it was 11 or 12 when I, got on the train, but the train didn't go all the way to the city center. So, I got off the train at the last stop and had to go for another 20 minutes to my hostel."

While the train ride was uneventful, Mader said the closer he came to the city center, the more homeless people he would see.

"And then I was on the big street where the market is. Pike Street Market. Pike Street. Good," he said.

After two days in Seattle, Mader said he was was quite ready to leave and eagerly headed down the coast.

Time in Oregon

"This is a lot nicer here." He told me "Yeah. And the people are a lot more interesting. A couple of days ago in Lincoln City an older couple took me in for two nights because of the rain. And they did introduce me to Pickleball"

Then he headed inland to get off the highway. The traffic was becoming difficult. He wanted less traveled roads, saying that Highway 101 isn't the most interesting. It's those other smaller country roads.

“I went off the coast for quite a while, and I needed some water, so I pulled up to a farm, asked if they have some water," he said. "We started talking, I was asking what they were doing. They invited me to eat with them, and I stepped into their house, and they were pickling, cucumbers, large, massive jars of pickles."

Mader planned to continue down the coast for a while. Maybe heading inland around Eureka. He’s not certain much beyond that, other than a general direction.

“The route isn't planned” he told me. “There are ideas I would say. I decided to start in Seattle and then go on the coast, but I still don't know where I'm gonna cross the border to Mexico. I do want to see the Sierra Nevada. I hope I can see parts of Arizona if I'm good. If I'm good on the bike, maybe I can make it to the Grand Canyon.”

https://triplicate.com/news/b49bef12-1201-59f2-953d-3aae55a5c7dc Printed October 9, 2026 · © Del Norte Triplicate