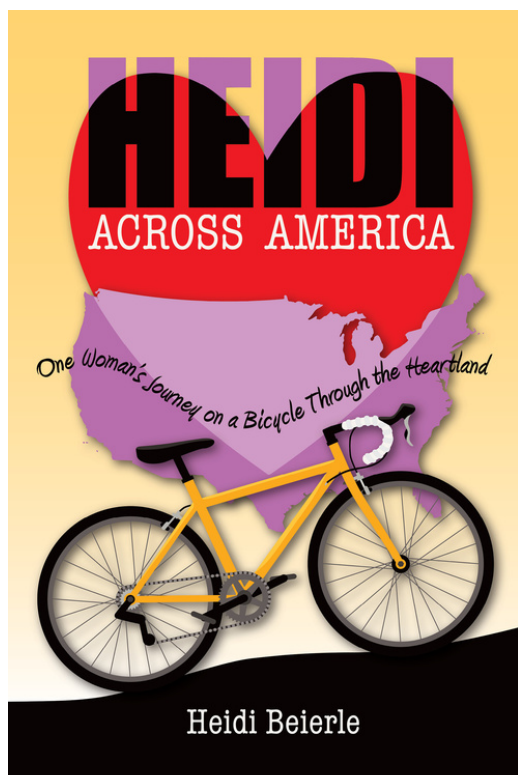


HEIDI

ACROSS AMERICA

Heidi Beierle



Heidi Across America is a gritty story of homecoming and the power of an open heart to connect with people across the nation. With the divisive politics of America in 2024, this memoir offers consideration for others and respect for the spirit of place as bridges to encounter our country and its people beyond the rifts.

Heidi Beierle had just finished her first year of graduate studies in community and regional planning and decided to pedal her bicycle solo from her home on the West Coast across rural America to the Preserving the Historic Road conference in Washington, D.C. What started as a research trip turned into an intimately physical and psychological encounter with self and nationhood.

Heidi was 35 and didn't love much about herself except her ability to endure grueling physical undertakings. She viewed her journey as an opportunity to fix her failures and insufficiencies. There were also some research questions she wanted to explore: Why do people live in small towns and what do they like about it? Did a bicyclist like herself bring economic benefit to the small towns she visited? What could communities do to support or invite cyclists to stay in their towns? What could cyclists do to support the communities? It was an immersion in slow travel.

She was surprised by the kindness of strangers and the emotional pinch of traveling through Wyoming, where she grew up. Her journey led her through the plains and into the Ozarks, where the heat climbed to agonizing temperatures; every pedal stroke in the heat felt closer to death. By the time she completed the trip, Heidi discovered a newfound compassion for herself and a growing love for her country. Strangers opened their hearts to her, and in turn, she opened her heart to herself.

Many Americans are asking themselves the same questions today: How can I be okay in my own skin? What does it mean to be enough? How do I satisfy my desire to travel without harming the planet? What does it mean to love America?

We don't often talk about how Americans seeing America can open us to the diversity, awe, and wonder available right here in our nation. Heidi Across America offers a journey to self-love, consideration for others, and respect for the spirit of place as pathways to find connection and home.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Heidi is a writer, artist, and creepy-crawly lover based in Bellingham, Washington. She writes about the sensory experience of being alive and enjoys detours to the underworld, inner space, and the cosmos. Her work has been published in National Geographic Traveler, High Desert Journal, VoiceCatcher Journal, Journal of America's Byways, and on the Adventure Cycling Association blog. Heidi grew up in Wyoming, where the wind, dryness, and desolate landscape made an imprint on her. This punishing environment taught her self-reliance, the beautiful dimensions of solitude, how to push through pain, and that survival is best friends with adaptation and death. She earned three degrees, two in English and one in Community and Regional Planning, and worked as a consultant in active transportation planning and destination management. Heidi makes personalized collage art postcards and won an award for the cowgirl outfit she crafted from trash bags and duct tape for the Worst Day of the Year Ride.



TALKING POINTS

- How towns can improve the health of their people and economies through equitable access to outdoor recreation
- What Heidi learned about the kindness of others and America along the way
- In an election year when tensions are high, Heidi can share how slow travel can build empathy among strangers and bring people together.
- Tips for a multi-day bicycling journey: how to pick your destinations and routes, and what to pack
- Her advice for other women wanting to go on a solo adventure
- How opening our hearts to others enables us to open our hearts to ourselves
- Tourism focused on learning and understanding an area: climate-friendly and slow travel, equitable access to outdoor recreation, and nature's awesomeness

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