

Simply One Page-Backwards Mike

This piece was created from my own reflections and vision. I used ChatGPT as a tool to help shape the text from my original concepts and structure. The final form is the result of thoughtful revision motivated by my one page intent. Mike Haddorff 2628

In 2001, a handful of us decided to test out a new route we'd been hearing about, the Great Divide Mountain Bike Route, stretching from Canada to Mexico. That summer was our trial run, a "let's see how this goes" kind of trip. We had no idea it would turn into a seven-year tradition, taking us from border to border.

I was in my element, organizer, equipment wrangler, map-maker, and chief enthusiast. I'd rented the van and trailer, collected stoves and gear, and, with a new set of National Geographic map CDs, set about creating custom route books for everyone. Each little spiral notebook included the day's map and, my proudest feature, an elevation profile showing the ups and downs ahead. This was 2001, no apps, no GPS. Just a laptop, some CDs, and a lot of faith in my ability to point the line in the right direction.

Our first day started at the Wyoming-Colorado border. According to my charts, the route was supposed to be an easy start, mostly downhill. Spirits were high. My oldest daughter and I had the support van that day, so after a quick detour into a small Wyoming town for forgotten supplies (and, I'll admit, coffee), we got back on the course and started driving toward camp.

Early on we came upon our group. We stopped, my brother commented, "This seems harder than you said." Like any big brother, the one in the know, "don't worry it will get easier." Another ten miles and something didn't feel right. The road just kept climbing, up, and up, and up. According to my profile, we should've been coasting down. I kept thinking, this can't be right. But it was.

Late that afternoon, back at camp, I opened my laptop, stared at the map, and realized the truth: I'd plotted the route backwards. The "mostly downhill" day had, in reality, been a steady uphill grind.

My brother rolled into camp, legs burning, and just shook his head. "Mike," he said, "what did you get us into?" The nickname "Backwards Mike" stuck before the tents were even up.

Looking back, I wouldn't change it. That first day wasn't easy, but it was the perfect beginning, one part planning, one part chaos, and a good dose of humility. Every adventure needs a few backward steps to get it moving forward.

It seems that every great adventure starts with a wrong turn or two, even three.