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Transcript

Speaker 1

It's time for the Outspoken Cyclist, your weekly conversation about bicycles, cyclists, trails, travel, advocacy, the bike industry, and much, much more. You can subscribe to our weekly podcast at outspokencyclist.com or through your favorite podcasting app to listen anytime. Now here's your host, Diane Jenks.

Speaker 2

Hello and welcome to The Outspoken Cyclist. I'm your host, Diane Jenks. Thanks for tuning in today. I don't know how you feel about trees, but I, for one, think they may be vastly underrated and way more important than people might give them credit for. Although you, as my listener, are probably not one of those people. My guests today, Paul Putman and Jonathan Cain, are here to talk about the annual Tourist Trees. A small and very significant ride taking place this September through the beautiful Blue Ridge Mountains. Tour de Trees is a long-standing ride on the multi-day circuit. It raises funds for exploration and science while teaching daily along the way. After our break, I speak with cyclist and author Paul Dunt. In the summer of 2014, Paul, who lives in the UK, came over to the States with a traveling companion to ride the original 4,000 plus mile bike centennial trail. His new book, Trans-Am, Cycling Coast to Coast on the Trail that the US Loved First, chronicles his journey across the country, and he has some great stories to tell. With the upcoming 50th anniversary of the original bike centennial ride, TransAnn gives us a thorough look into not only the trail itself, but what Paul found out about the U.S. 12 years ago. I learned about the Tour de Trees a few years ago when some of our clients who worked for a local tree company told us they were going to ride this event to celebrate trees. It turns out this ride has been going on for a long time, and it not only celebrates trees, it educates folks along the route and raises money for tree research. Scheduled for September 12th through 18th and traversing the gorgeous Blue Ridge Mountains, it's a fully supported ride. Here to elaborate are Paul Putman, CEO of TREE Fund, and I'll let him explain that acronym, and Jonathan Cain, the ride director. Hello, Paul and Jonathan. Welcome to the Outspoken Cyclist. Thanks for being my guest today. How's everybody?

Speaker 1

Doing well. Thanks for having us.

Speaker 3

Yeah, thanks a lot.

Speaker 2

It's my pleasure. So we're finally having spring here in Northeast Ohio. It's actually in the 60s today, although very, very windy. I'm excited to be talking about Tour de Trees because I've known about this event for a long time. I've never actually ridden it, but I've had lots of customers who have. And we had sort of this connection with Davey Tree, which is a big tree company here in Northeast Ohio. People see their green trucks all over the place. So I'm going to begin with you, Paul. Tell us a little bit about yourself and the TREE Fund. I know TREE in this case is actually an acronym.

Speaker 1

Right, of course, absolutely. So my background is actually in adult education and leadership. So prior to TREE Fund, I worked in higher education, and then I worked at a large community foundation, both in grant making and donor stewardship functions before I discovered TREE Fund. And I also live in Cleveland, Ohio. Our entire team is remote as we support research across the globe. And so as you mentioned, TREE Fund is an acronym. It stands for the Tree Research and Education Endowment Fund. We like to call it TREE Fund. Our roots go back to 1976. And the mission of TREE Fund is to fund and disseminate knowledge and research in our boric culture and urban forestry, which is the study of trees, our boric culture, and the study of trees in cities in particular. So we do this through research and education grants and scholarships. And since our founding, we've granted out over \$6 million, which is quite a big chunk of change for this type of work. Last year, you know, federal... Do you have a question?

Speaker 2

I do. I have a real quick question about how the fund is funded. How it gets, is it grants? Who supports the fund? How is it supported?

Speaker 1

Yeah, absolutely. So it's supported by a combination of things. So the biggest one is endowment. So our funds, almost \$7 million is invested in the market. And then we only spend 5% or so to do the research, funding, grant making, education, grant making, scholarships. We also have a number of corporate sponsors, individuals, and the tour de trees is a big part of our fundraising mix, which we'll talk about more. And, you know, we talk about \$6 million is quite a bit going out there. And we saw a big bump in applications last year because, as you know, federal funding for scientific research has been disappearing. So we found that our research programs are becoming more important than ever for scientists who are studying arboriculture. In the fall, We had 139 applications for these research funds, up from about 40 the previous year. So a huge increase in the number of folks needing support.

Speaker 2

What kinds of organizations are requesting research grants or funds?

Speaker 1

A variety of things. So it could be, you know, the folks might think about academics, right? So folks who are in urban forestry, arboriculture, horticultural programs at universities and colleges around the world might be requesting these dollars. It could also be companies. So we have a grant active right now with the Davy Tree Expert Company. Could be we have one with a smaller nursery in Ontario, Canada. So all sorts of different folks, but it needs to be some type of organization or institutions. Our research grants, while individuals run them, we wouldn't grant out to just a single solitary researcher.

Speaker 2

So what are some of the issues that the TREE Fund addresses? I imagine it's deforestation and maybe insects, invasive species, all those?

Speaker 1

All those types of things. We've got, depending on the research program, there's just a, you know, it's a world that I've been learning a lot about over the past three years, right? There's so many things happening. And we know that trees benefit us as humans in so many different ways, right? Tree shaded surfaces can have a cooling effect that's significant. You know, as cyclists, we've all had that, you know, enjoyable moment where we're in the heat and then we get to ride under trees for a little bit. So we get to experience that all the time after the direct sun. trees are making a huge difference with heat islands. We know that there are a lot of health effects with trees and things like that. So Tree Fund is supporting research that might be related to the study of the impact of trees on heat islands or the health benefits in cities or some sociological studies, things like that. But as you pointed out, we also do a lot with invasive species, with diseases and pests, with soils and the fascinating world of soils, all sorts of different types of things.

Speaker 2

Wow. I probably have like 100 more questions, but I think we're going to take a moment to reintroduce you. We're speaking with Paul Putman, and he is the CEO of the Tree Fund. Yes?

Speaker 1

This is correct.

Speaker 2

And we will put up links on our site as to how you can find out more. We are going to turn around a little bit and talk with Jonathan Cain. So he is with the Tour de Trees. It

sounds like it's going to be a wonderful event this year. So Jonathan, let's talk about Tour de Trees.

Speaker 3

Let's talk about the Tour de Trees. And yes, it is going to be a wonderful event this year. We're very much looking forward to it. Yeah, it's great to be on here talking to a bunch of people that are very into cycling, very much looking forward to answering all your questions on our tour for this year.

Speaker 2

So I guess we'll start with, it is a fundraiser and that is how the ride is set up. It's like any other big fundraiser. Tell me what the funds are used for and people will go, oh yeah, I want to support that.

Speaker 3

Sure, absolutely. And I'm going to correct you a little bit right off the bat. It is a fundraiser, but just as importantly, it is also an outreach event that we do for TREE Funds. So it is not just an event where we are raising funds for TREE Fund and that money that we raise, that the cyclists help us raise, that goes towards supporting all of TREE Funds programs, all of the grant programs, scholarship programs, it helps towards supporting those. But then in that same vein, like I mentioned, we have, it's very important for us to do outreach events during the week. So we're not just riding our bikes. We are stopping in these different communities. We're working with local groups, whether they be, you know, tree related, like if it's a local garden club or local tree board that some cities have and doing some educational events there. We also do several educational events at different schools. One of our riders comes down from Canada and he actually goes all over the world. to do these kids presentations where he talks all about trees and why they're important and how they and how they help us and what they're made out of and all the different great things that that trees do. And then also we'll work with some other local groups like we'll work with the local Lions Club or or something like that where we'll just get out there and just kind of talk about what we're doing and and why the why the tree research is important to them even though they may not know it. You know, we we talked There's a whole lot of people along the way. And some of them have some knowledge on trees and their own gardens and their own property and what to do. And some of them just think that you put a tree in the ground, but we want to make sure that they know that there's much, much more than that.

Speaker 2

Of course, now I have 80 million more questions. Let's talk about the basics of the ride. And then I want to ask about who makes these stops and is it everybody?

Speaker 3

Sometimes, yes. Okay. So this year's ride, it's going to be September 12th through 18th. So it is a five-day ride that'll be around 300 miles. We have a couple of options for longer or shorter days, but let's just say 300 miles for right now. It is roughly 100 people. We're hoping that we're going to get for this year. We're already up to 71 people that have registered as of this morning, so we're getting close to that 100 rider mark. And it's a wonderful group of people that come from all over the country. And actually we get a couple of international folks as well. There's usually a handful of Canadians that come out and then at least one guy from Great Britain that comes out. So it's a wonderful group of people that loves to ride together and we call it our Tour de Trees family. But as far as going to the different events, we have it set up where in theory, almost everyone can attend all of those. Not everyone is interested in attending every single different thing. We don't force anyone to go anywhere. But we set up aid stations and we set up events all throughout the route. And for those that want to ride the whole route and stop at a couple of the events, we try to time it out. where it works out best, whereas many people can be there at a time, especially for like our tree planting events and different things that are good for taking photos and things like that. But we'll also have like offshoot events which are a little bit off the route and may not necessarily line up as far as time goes. But if people want to skip a section for a day and maybe they only want to do like 40 miles that day instead of 80 miles that day, they can come and they can come to some of those offshoot events where we're either doing a kids presentation adult education thing or whatever.

Speaker 2

How long has Tour de Trees been going on? Because I know about it from quite some time ago, it seems.

Speaker 3

Yeah, so actually, Tour de Trees actually predates Tree Fund. So Tree Fund started in 2002. The tour has been going on since 1993. So it's been going on for quite a long time. It was originally put together by a group of 13 cyclists that wanted to raise some money for the ISA Research Trust, which ISA is a governing body which will do certifications for arborists, and that is the International Society of Arboriculture. They have chapters all over the world. They have members all over the world. It's a large organization that we actually work very close with. But they wanted to raise money for the research trust that that ISA had. And then that research trust eventually morphed into into TREE Fund in in 2002. So it's been it's been a ride that's been going on for a for a long time to help with the support of tree research.

Speaker 2

Wow, so interesting. Let me take a moment to reintroduce both of you. We're speaking with Paul Putman and Jonathan Cain from TREE Fund and Tour de Trees. So we're talking about riding. in the Carolinas. I don't even think we said that.

Speaker 3

I don't think we said that yet. Yes, we're going to be in the Carolinas.

Speaker 2

What could be more beautiful than the Blue Ridge Parkway in September? It's got to be gorgeous down there. So I actually know two people who are going this year, as you, as Paul, I'm sure knows. My very good friend Jody and her partner, Jay. Yes. So Jody and I trained together as yoga teachers and that's how we met 23 years ago, maybe 24 years ago. Yeah.

Speaker 3

Oh, and now that I know that, I might have to bug her to do like an evening session of yoga one day at hotels or outside or something just to get a nice stretch in the middle of the week after an 80 mile ride. That might be a good thing.

Speaker 2

She'll kill me. No, and she's got an interesting, she has some interesting techniques, yoga techniques. You know, we all develop our own sort of way of being in yoga, and I really enjoyed her. Anyway, that's all beside the point. The Blue Ridge Parkway is not exactly flat.

Speaker 3

It is not.

Speaker 2

So are you recommending any specific kind of bike?

Speaker 3

So the way we have it set up is it is almost 100% a road ride. Obviously, there's a couple of times where, depending on where we're going, it may not be completely paved every single year for every single mile. So every once in a while, we'll have some gravel rd sections. But The way it's set up, it is set up as a road right now. A little bit of background on this year's ride. We are going to that area because our tour director of 22 years is retiring at the end of this year and he actually lives in the Asheville area, which is where we're going to be ending up. So we're going to be highlighting all of his favorite everyday routes and where he likes to go on the weekend and all this stuff. So he is very excited about putting this route together for us for this year. He will also sometimes do some gravel riding and he'd like to show some of that off. So a couple of folks, if they want to bring their gravel bike around to, or if they have the ability to have to have tires that'll work on the gravel roads, we will have a couple of gravel sections to ride off of as little offshoots for people to do as well. But it is set up primarily as a road ride.

Speaker 2

So here's my professional take on gravel bikes. And that is that years ago when we sold bicycles and they were quote unquote adventure bikes, touring bikes, that they could have been ridden on gravel then. So it's all about the tires. You're absolutely right.

Speaker 3

All about the tires, yeah. And we will have people that come out on standard road bikes. We'll have come out people on hybrid bikes. They'll come out on mountain bikes. One of the guys comes out with his big fat tire bikes that he will ride all up the mountains all day and that's what he likes to do.

Speaker 2

And what I'm hearing you say is that a lot of these people are repeat customers.

Speaker 3

Yes, they are. Yes. So can I explain? So I said we had 71 people that have signed up so far. We have 12 first timers so far for this year, which is wonderful, but that's about right. It's about that 20% are first timers, but everybody else is coming back. Like I said, it's something that we call our Torte Trees family, and the relationships that you will make during the week of writing will definitely last forever. And these are people that they go out and visit each other throughout the year, and if they're traveling for work, they'll always look each other up. and they're always on their social medias and texting each other all year and talking about stuff. So it's a wonderful group of people that not only just gets along during that week, but they generally enjoy people's time and camaraderie for the rest of the week.

Speaker 2

Okay, so it is a fundraiser, and there is a requirement. It's an inexpensive entry fee. And it takes to cover a lot, but there is a fundraising portion of it that needs to be met. How do you work that? How does that happen? And I saw that there are a lot of people come in as teams, not necessarily individuals.

Speaker 3

Yes. So there's a couple of answers to all that question. So first answer is yes. The registration fee is only \$100 to sign up. So if depending on how your fundraising goes, if you only want to pay \$100, that is all you have to pay in order to do the ride. And that includes a hotel for the week. It includes all the meals, except we do do one day where it's on your own where you get to explore a little bit. But we cover all the breakfasts, all the lunch, all of the dinners for the week. It also covers getting your luggage from one hotel to the next. We cover all of that. We cover all of the aid and bringing out the snacks and drinks and all that other stuff. It also comes with a free bike helmet. It comes with two jersey credits to sign up from Volair. We do our custom jerseys through them

with say torta trees on it and two water bottles. plus a goodie bag. So we are a full service ride and that's what you get for the \$100 for the registration.

Speaker 2

Okay, that's worth the price of admission right there. What the heck?

Speaker 3

That's worth the price of admission right there. Yes. So to answer the next parts of the question. How does how does everything get covered? Well, some of that gets covered from our wonderful sponsors, either their sponsors of just the Torta Trees or their sponsors of the Torta Trees and Tree Fund as well. We have a bunch of wonderful corporate partners that help us defray some of the costs of the week. And then there is a fundraising minimum. So the fundraising minimum is \$3700 per rider for the week if you're if you're participating in the entire week. So what you do is when you register, you get set up with a fundraising page on tortatrees.org. That is TOURDESTREES.org. And then you can set up a personal page on there so you can put in photos, you can update your text, put in your stories, it'll actually have a tracker for your mileage. for the summer as you're training, so you can show what you're doing as you're getting ready. But that is the minimum for the week to raise for that.

Speaker 2

I think it just sounds like such a fun ride to begin with. And you know what's really nice is it's not super crowded. a lot of these big fundraising rides, the Rides for Cancer, for example. And we're talking hundreds, if not thousands of people. And Velosano is the big one here in Northeast Ohio. And it's like you and, or like RAGBRA, you and 10,000 of your best friends. But it's nice to have a small, intimate group because people get to really know one another that way. And I think that makes a difference, especially when you have a goal around something right now that's really important, I see, as climate change and other things are affecting us as a species.

Speaker 3

Yeah, absolutely. And it's great to have the 100 riders and yes, everybody is very close with each other and we're in the same hotel and we're at the same meals for the entire week. Typically, once we get a few miles in and everything starts breaking up a little bit, we'll split into packs of usually 5 to 10, maybe sometimes a little bit smaller when there are mountains in the way, so that might get a little more split up, but even during the week, People who are typically towards the front might back off a little bit and ride with some of the mid-packers or someone who's usually at the back and saying, I want to have a really nice fast day and I'm going to go join up with those groups. It's not like a, Here's your group of five. Don't ever leave your group of five. You can never talk to or ride with anybody else the whole time. Our group is, like I said, it's a wonderful group of people and they love just getting in touch with each other and riding with each other and

they'll change in groups throughout the week and you'll see that and they'll hang out with each other at the aid stations and things like that.

Speaker 2

We've been speaking with Paul Putman and Jonathan Cain from Tour de Trees and Tree Fund. So you can go to actuallytreefund.org, you can go to tourdetrees.org and sign up for the ride, find out more about it. Sounds like a really fun week. It is in September, so you have plenty of time to get ready and train. It's in the Carolinas, so you're gonna get some hilly days. But it sounds like a really fun ride, and they don't have lots of slots left. So if you're interested, get your registration in and get your fundraising going. Thank you so much for talking with me today. I really appreciate it, and good luck with the ride. We will check back in at some point and find out how it went.

Speaker 3

Thank you very much. It's great.

Speaker 2

You're welcome.

Speaker 1

Thanks, Diane.

Speaker 2

Talk to you again. My thanks to Paul and Jonathan for joining me on the show today. As of this posting, there are already 82 riders signed up, so if you're interested in joining or just learning more about the ride, go to tourdetrees.org. That's T-O-U-R-D-E-S-T-R-E-E-S.org or treefund.org. We're going to take a short break, and when we return, Paul Dunt, another Paul, cyclist and author, will join me to talk about his experiences on the Bike Centennial Trail back in 2014 and his new book, *Trans Am*. You're listening to the *Outspoken Cyclist*. We'll be right back. We are back on *The Outspoken Cyclist*. I'm your host, Diane Jenks. This summer, the Adventure Cycling Association will celebrate the 50th anniversary of the first bike centennial ride back in 1976. Then, several thousand people took to what has become the, quote, trail that America loved first, end quote, according to author and cyclist Paul Dunn. Back in 2014, British riders Paul Dunt and Terry Willard took redundancy from the BBC, or retirement as we know it here in the States. They packed up their bikes and panniers and came over to ride the Bike Centennial Trail using the original Adventure Cycling Association paper maps. Paul and his cycling companion Terry found the trail very friendly then, and his comments about the differences between the folks in the U.S., where he learned more about someone in half an hour at a gas station stop than in the UK where people are much more reserved, were amusing, if not illuminating. Not all of their experiences were sweetness and light, but overall, the U.S. showed its best side during their trip. His new book, *Trans Am*, is

available now. And with the upcoming 50th anniversary of the original Bike Centennial ride, it just might be the ticket for you to sign up. If not, it's at least a great summer read. Hi, Paul, welcome to The Outspoken Cyclist. Thanks for being my guest today. How is England?

Speaker 4

I don't. It's great. We've got sun here, which is quite nice for April. It's beginning to warm up a bit. I went out for a ride yesterday down to the Essex coast, I'm just to the east of London, about 30 miles east of London, just near the Thames, but our local river is the Crouch, and I took a ride out there, and it was lovely.

Speaker 2

Nice, very nice. What kind of bike are you riding?

Speaker 4

Well, I actually went on my Surly. The bike that I did the Trans Am on is a Surly Long Hill Trucker, which is about 12 years old now, and yeah, it's heavy, and it's old, and but it's just so comfortable. And we've got a huge problem in the UK at the moment with potholes in that the roads haven't been repaired. So much so that my Garmin app has actually got an alert and it will tell me on the bike when a pothole comes up and it's got like a red bar across the top and it says pothole 0.2 of a mile. It's red all the time. It's red all the time. And I know with the Surly that if I hit a pothole, it's not gonna buck me off, you know? Right. Whereas if I'm on my old racing bike, it's just gonna get a puncture. And so, yeah, it's just a comfortable sofa, really.

Speaker 2

We built a lot of long haul truckers back in the day, but I'm interested in this Garmin app. I wonder if our Garmin's here 'cause we sell Wahoo, which is just a slightly different computer. I wonder if the Garmin app here gives you pothole you know, like, what do you call it?

Speaker 4

Alerts, it is really.

Speaker 2

Alerts, right, pothole alerts. Because around here, you're right, they would be red all the time.

Speaker 4

Yeah, I think it must be new, 'cause I've never seen it before until I went out recently.

Speaker 2

Interesting.

Speaker 4

And it was actually really useful. And then once you've gone past the pothole, or gone into the pothole, you can then push a little tick on it or across to say, Is the pothole still there or not? So that's quite... That's quite useful.

Speaker 2

It's like the ways saying, are the police still there on the road? Yes, that's right.

Speaker 4

Yes, yeah, absolutely.

Speaker 2

Let's talk about your book. So April 20th, your book will be launching here in the US. It's called Trans Am Cycling Coast to Coast on the Trail the US Love First. So this is the 50th anniversary of Bike Centennial, which is pretty exciting. So I have a lot of questions because you're in the UK and this book is about American riding.

Speaker 4

Yeah.

Speaker 2

Tell us a bit about yourself, your riding companion, and when you did this cross-country event.

Speaker 4

Yeah, so I rode it with my friend Terry Wooler in 2014 and it came about, we both worked for the BBC. I was a TV producer and radio producer and Terry was a video editor and I'd been there 20 years. The BBC was scaling down a bit. They were offering some voluntary redundancies and I was ready to do something different. So I thought this is probably the time to go and started planning. I thought, well, if I'm going to leave, I'll have a little bit of money. I can do a longer ride. And I started looking at what might be available and intended to do the Trans Am on my house. Then I got a phone call from Terry saying, I've taken redundancy as well. I leave on the same day. Can I come with you? Which was, you know, it turned the trip on its head a bit. But I'm so glad that he did. Because I certainly can't imagine doing it on my own, although people do do it on their own. But we formed such a bond. It was incredible, really. And the amazing thing is, we'd never really cycled. Well, we'd never cycled before together. We've been friends for years. He's a very, very keen cyclist. He'd been cycling in Vietnam. He'd been cycling in South America. Incredibly fit. He's one of those people that's sort of a natural born cyclist. He's all lean and brawn. He's like a whippet on a bike. He can strip down a bike with his eyes closed. He can service his bikes, change, change. He can do

everything. I'm more like Mr. Bean, really. I'm completely uncoordinated. I'm a bit overweight. I try hard to learn the mechanical stuff and I'm getting better, but I'm not brilliant at it. And whereas Terry can ride all day, I struggle a bit, really. I'm the slow one, he's the fast one. So we were a pretty unlikely pairing. to be honest. I mean, similar in ages. I was 49 when I did the Trans Am. Terry was 60. So he was old, but that doesn't make any difference for Terry. He could be 90 and he'd still be miles up the road ahead of me. So it's not an issue. So yeah, so we sort of tied those plans together and decided that we were gonna go to America and ride the Trans Am.

Speaker 2

Did you ride your long haul trucker on that ride?

Speaker 4

Yeah, I did. I took a try at the Surly, which I bought specially for the trip. I did some research and long haul truckers were good. And fortunately, we got a local bike shop and one of their specialisms, they're a Trek bike shop, but they also did Surlys. Which was brilliant. And they built the bike up for me, did a fantastic job on it.

Speaker 2

Surly came out of Quality Bicycle Products and it was a really nice brand. I don't know what it's doing right now, but again, you know, they made four or five different models, but the long haul trucker was sort of the workhorse of the line. And people love them. I know they're heavy, but they are bulletproof.

Speaker 4

What amazing, never having had a tour, I mean, I toured before, but basically on a converted road bike. And what really surprised me about the trucker and, you know, true of all steel touring bikes, really, I guess, was that it didn't matter how much gear you loaded on it. I mean, I had, you know, two front panniers, two back panniers and handlebar pannier, but whatever you put on it, in fact, the more weight you put on it, the more stable it became. I mean, the harder it became to get up a hill. But it became, and even things like when I was practicing before I went out, I'd go out with one pannier on the front, fully loaded, to see what it was like. And it seemed to spread the weight across the bike. It was extraordinary, really. And I've done trips since where people have had problems and have had to sort of shed some of their gear, and I've chucked more panniers on the back, just on the back wrap and strapped them down. And it just handles it without any problem at all. It's lovely.

Speaker 2

It has a really long wheelbase and you have those kind of wide, you know, comfortable wheels. So I, yeah, they're just really stout and reliable machines.

Speaker 4

Yeah.

Speaker 2

So let me take a moment to reintroduce you and then let's start talking about your book because it's interesting. And I think with the bike centennial coming up, People might want to read this before venturing out on the ride. And it's always nice to have a new book for your bookshelf. We're speaking with Paul Dunt. His book is Trans Am: Cycling Coast to Coast on the Trails the U.S. Loved First. And let's talk about that a second. When you say the U.S. loved it first, is it because it was the first cross-country trail?

Speaker 4

Yeah, it was because it was the first cross-country trail. I did quite a bit of Research into the ride in 1976, and it's not this isn't particularly a history book about that ride, because there are other there are other books out there about the seventy-six. ride. But I've spoken to quite a few people who did that initial ride in '76 in terms of some of the research. I met some of the people, in fact, Carla Majanek, who worked at the ACA and was their roots director. I spoke to Carla for the book. And I guess what I was aiming to do was, I mean, back in '76, you know, 4,000 people, most of whom had never ridden any distance whatsoever, you know, 2,000 of them cycled across the States. An incredible achievement. And I guess with the book, what I want to show is that I'm not a particularly fit person. I'm certainly not a natural cyclist by any means. And I do think something like the Trans Am, if you're the sort of person that can go out and do 50 miles on a day ride, then you can probably do the Trans Am. There's an awful lot of it you can do. that you get fit as you're riding each day. But as long as you pace yourself, as long as you ride your ride and not somebody else's ride, and you take rests when you need to, it's achievable. You don't have to be an Uber athlete to do the Trans Am. And the ride is transformational. I mean, I've been trying to write this book for years. And unfortunately, of course, work and family always get in the way. And I saw that the anniversary, the 50th anniversary was coming up in 2026. And I thought, if I don't do it now, I never will do it. And it's a great peg to hang it on, isn't it? That it's 50 years. What's lovely about it is talking to people like Carla and corresponding with quite a few people who are involved in '76 is, although an awful lot's changed in 50 years, a huge amount hasn't. Basic things about the ride, the places, the hospitality, the friendliness, the comradeship between riders, it's all exactly the same as it was 50 years ago, which is just marvelous, really.

Speaker 2

Yeah, it is. I want you to tell a story, though. Right at the beginning in the prologue, you were stopped by the police. And I'm not sure if people will understand how Everybody who does a ride across the country usually comes back and says, everybody's so friendly. Everybody's so nice. This was your inaugural day. What happened?

Speaker 4

Well, no, it was the start of the book, but it actually happened. It was in Montana that it happened. I suppose it's one of those differences between the US and the UK. There's huge number of similarities, but I'd say one of the differences is that Figures of authority in terms of, say, border, police, et cetera, probably don't have the same sense of humour that British police officers do, for example. I'm not saying they're unfriendly. I'm not saying they're particularly officious, but they're doing a job and they treat it very seriously. And they're not persuaded by chitter chatter and a few jokes and a few winks. So we were cycling on one of those really long American roads that goes on forever. And by that point, there were three of us. We were cycling with an American chap called Mike Evans from Chicago. And we'd not seen any cars in miles and miles and miles. And we heard sirens behind us. And It was a sheriff's car that was coming up fast behind. And of course, the sirens got louder and louder and louder. Eventually, they're really loud. And we're thinking, right, any second now, he's going to shoot past and off into the distance after Smoking the Bandit or whatever. But he stayed behind us. And then it sort of became clear that it was us who was pulling over. And bear in mind, there's nothing around for miles. There are no buildings around for miles. There's just farmland. and the three of us on the loneliest road in America. And it turned out, it was related to the fact, about 10 or 15 minutes before, a huge great truck had passed us, and it had passed really close, like really close. You know, I thought that we were gonna lose one of the panniers off the side. There were inches to spare, which was bizarre because there was so much room on the road. But it turns out, according to this police officer, that Montana law is that you can't ride more than single file. You have to be single file. And we were three abreast, just chatting on this very lonely road. And if we'd heard anything, we just moved over and went into single file. What had happened was one, the truck driver had reported us for being three across the road, which is why I think he went so close. But also the police officer claimed that one of us had given him the finger. And both these things.

Speaker 2

I'm surprised all three of you didn't, but okay.

Speaker 4

Yeah, exactly. I think he was one of those officers who'd not given a ticket in a long, long time. Needed a quota, yeah. Yeah, and he was a quota. Anyway, Mike from Chicago made himself scarce. Terry and I tried the cheeky, trappy routine, you know, about the fact that in the UK we can ride to abreast and it's not a problem. There was no one around, you know, what was the issue? And it was a ridiculous law and isn't the law an ***? And, you know, surely he's got better things to do with his day, which didn't go down well. And he soon made it perfectly clear that the bikes would fit in the back of his pickup and we could accompany him down the station. At which point we relented, said, We're very sorry, sir, put our heads down low and did as we were told. And once we'd said that, his mood changed completely. And he said that, he was a cyclist. We rode a recumbent. And we said, Well, don't you think the law's a bit crazy? And he said, Well,

yes it is, but this is my job and this is what I have to do. And who gave the finger? And Terry and I said, Look, we didn't give the finger. We wouldn't do that. Anyway, eventually he went off down the road and we caught up with Mike who'd made himself very scarce. And it turned out that Mike from Chicago had given The driver, the finger, and cause most of the problems.

Speaker 2

It's a very American thing. Flip them off. Yep, I get it.

Speaker 4

Yeah, exactly, But that was, but we had no real other issues with a fish of them at all. That's good.

Speaker 2

Let's take a short break and when we come back, I ask Paul if he and Terry had any frightening encounters while they were here. You're listening to the Outspoken Cyclist. We'll be right back. We are back on The Outspoken Cyclist. I'm your host, Diane Jenks, and we're speaking with author and cyclist Paul Dunn. His new book, Trans Am, Cycling Coast to Coast on the Trail that the US Loved First, has just been published and chronicles his 2014 cross-country trip on the bike Centennial Trail. Did you have any frightening encounters on, I mean, this was a 4,000 plus mile trip.

Speaker 4

I was going back and looking at those and I didn't want to mention dogs first because it worries me, being a dog owner myself and you have a dog as well. It worries me that if you talk too much about dogs on the Trans Am, it will put off people from riding the ride because they'll be worried about being chased by dogs. So to be clear, Yes, you will be chased by dogs, but for absolutely the most part, they're friendly and they're just doing their job. They're just really chasing you to the end of their property, to the edge of their property, and then they stop. I think most of the time they don't mean any harm whatsoever at all. You know, you can tell by a dog, you know, if it really means harm. And these dogs are just doing their job to sort of escort you off their piece of road.

Speaker 2

Right, they're protecting their own property.

Speaker 4

Yeah, they're protecting their property. Right. And we saw lots of people that had armed themselves with hault spray. You know, they kept seeing the pepper, you know, chili spray for dogs and people that had emptied entire cans on the road. I don't want to spray a dog in the face with chili pepper, unless I'm in, Absolute danger. I'm not gonna do it. And in fact, we did some research before we came out and we bought these things called dog dazers. And it basically emits a very high frequency sound that

humans can't, teenagers can hear it. It's great for teenagers. I tried it out in a few teenagers. And they definitely heard it. I couldn't hear it at all. But if you use that when the dogs come in near you, if it's running for you, it will stop and it will stop dead. They were fantastic things. So we used dog dazers on the dogs. There was only one incident we had near Damascus. We arrived in Damascus in Virginia near Trail Day. So there were loads of Appalachian hikers all coming down off the mountains and joining us at all. And yeah, we were chased by two dogs. And one of them got its teeth into my pannier, my rear pannier, and was so strong, I couldn't pedal. I mean, it was dragging me back down the street.

Speaker 2

Wow.

Speaker 4

That was a bit frightening. But Terry came up from behind with his dog Dazer, gave it a blast, and it scurried off. Very easily.

Speaker 2

Interesting, dog gazer. I'm gonna have to look into that.

Speaker 4

Yeah.

Speaker 2

During your ride, which was in 2014, we're talking 12 years ago, I think technology was a little different. What did you do for navigation then? Was it just maps, like the AC maps, ACA maps?

Speaker 4

Yeah, yeah, we used the 12 ACA maps, which were fantastic. I mean, we soon learned that the one thing that you don't do is go off the maps.

Speaker 2

Right.

Speaker 4

Because they've researched those routes and they're excellent. Again, it's a bit of a difference between the UK and the US in that to get to one place in the UK, you've probably got an A road you could get there onto, a smaller B road. There'll be country tracks, there'll be paths. There's usually lots of alternatives. So you can find different ways of getting to places. With the ACA maps, they've obviously route, they've checked the best route and if you stray off it, you quite often would look and think, well, why is it

taking me from A to B to C when I could just cycle from A to C without any problem at all? And you soon find out that there's a reason why it goes that way. We had one particular day where Terry and I saw a shortcut and headed off and we found it was a logging road. And we had 10 or 20 logging trucks. trying to inch past us as we made our way up through the Appalachian Mountains and things, and it wasn't particularly safe. Terry's very much one of these cycling ninjas in that he won't pull over for anyone. So there were times I was watching these huge trucks go past with 40-tonne cedars on the back, just held in by wire, about a few inches from Terry's head. would get past, I tended to sort of stop and let them past. But the AC maps are really good. Once, if you stick to them, and they update them all the time, so they do updates and things online, so you can check those before you go. And it makes a lot of sense to stick to them.

Speaker 2

Well, now everything of course is downloadable.

Speaker 4

You can take it into- Exactly, yeah.

Speaker 2

And watch it as you go. So do you have a particular story that illustrates your sense of America compared to how you ride in the UK? Was there something about your ride that was like quintessentially American?

Speaker 4

Yeah, do you mean in terms of the actual cycling itself?

Speaker 2

Well, or just an encounter or something you just saw or did that you would never come across in the UK.

Speaker 4

Yeah, I suppose hospitality is a big one. People in Britain are very friendly. But we are much more reserved. I mean, I've met Americans at gas stations and spoken to them for half an hour and known more about them than I know about friends that I've known all my life. And I love that side to the States. I really do. I just find it, it just cuts out all the small talk and you get to know people really quickly and people are so open as well. Of course, we stayed in the Bible Belt, and in fact, in lots of places in America, in churches, in fire stations. I mean, if you turned up at Westminster Abbey and said, Can I put my bike in the vestry and sleep under one of the views? You're going to get very short shrift. But in the churches and things, everyone was so friendly. And often in some of those communities you stayed, they weren't rich communities by any means. I mean, to be honest, we had, you know, Terry and I were much richer than the people who were looking after us and showing us such warm hospitality because we could afford to fly to

America with two bikes and take 2 1/2 months off work. these people, particularly in some of the old coal mining communities in Virginia and Kentucky, these people didn't have a lot. But we'd turn up and not only would they give us a place to stay, they'd provide us with food. Some of them would provide us with shaving kits. give us the Wi-Fi password, lay out blankets on the ground. I mean, they could not have been friendlier and more welcoming. And that's something that we found all the way across the US. People in Britain are friendly, but if you suddenly knocked on the door and said, Can I stay in your house? They'd be, they'd just be a bit wary. You know, it'd take longer to break down the barriers really, you know, and staying in fire stations. I mean, you'd never stay in a fire station in the UK. Courtesy of the drivers, I felt safer cycling across the United States. And bear in mind, this is on the ACA route, so they're the safest routes. I'd imagine some of them are busier now, 12 years on, than they were in 2014. But I felt safer for the most part doing that 4,000 odd miles. than I do cycling to my next town, which is three miles away, because the roads here are so busy and they're tight where we are. It's quite sort of a busy area. And some of the drivers would be so courteous, you almost had to stop and ask them to drive past you because they were hanging behind you for so long. I think they were just worried about going too close. But the other big difference is that there are drivers in America who, if they really don't like you, They really don't like you. And they make it perfectly clear. You know, they'll wind down their windows and tell you that they hate cyclists. And we had a few occasions where they'll go past, particularly in sort of pickup trucks, or no, not exclusively, when they do this thing called rolling coal.

Speaker 2

Rolling coal, yep. It's obnoxious.

Speaker 4

Yeah, and we had that a few times where they'd go past and they'd sort of open the stacks and we'd get covered in this black, noxious, gas that came out. There were two extremes really, although for the most part, incredibly courteous. I suppose the other big difference between riding in the US and riding in the UK is, of course, in the UK, our towns are much nearer to each other. You're much nearer to services. The thought of riding for 60, 70 miles without any services is virtually unheard of in the UK. There'll be a few places in Scotland, but most places there's somewhere to stop. And the other big difficulty in America was trying to find fresh food, trying to find fresh veg and fruit, particularly in the, you know, you're talking about the flyover states. You know, there's no big cities on the Trans Am. The biggest is Eugene in Oregon. So you're going through very small communities and most of them I mean, you know, you talk about an obesity problem in the States and then we've got an obesity problem here, but there's no fresh fruit available in many of these small communities, unless you can drive 40 or 50 miles to a Walmart. So for about two weeks, and Terry's a vegetarian, which made it even more difficult. And for about two weeks, I think we lived on veggie subways

because that was the most vegetable matter that we could get and fresh fruit. the search for the holy banana was a regular one among cyclists on the Trans Am.

Speaker 2

You know, it's so interesting to hear all of this. And I'm wondering, years later, what your experience would be now, which, of course, we don't know. Maybe after this year's ride, I can, you know, try and look for somebody who is going to do this 50th anniversary ride. But I'm wondering, given the political climate that we're living in right now, if there would be the same kind of hospitality and openness and welcoming that I've always heard about for cyclists doing cross-country rides. And it is my hope that is the case, but I'm not sure I could guarantee that today. As far as the food goes, I don't think that's probably gotten any different either. In fact, farmers are struggling very, very badly now right now in the US.

Speaker 4

Yeah. I mean, I tend to think on that, there's a need to talk now and meet people outside of your normal group and your normal people that you meet in your lives. There's a need now to meet people with different views, different opinions from different areas and sit down you know, over a meal, over a beer more than ever, really. I think it's absolutely important. You know, I mean, the idea that they had, we know with Bike Centennial was an idea that the trail would bring America together, you know, and I think 50 years on, it can still do that. I think, I mean, the lovely thing about being on a bike is you arrive somewhere and you're completely non-threatening. You're not turning up with any sort of agenda. You're at the mercy of the town that you've arrived in. You have no power in terms of a vehicle. You're very vulnerable. But that also means that people seem to trust you very quickly. And they'll and they'll take you in and show you hospitality. So we rode the Southern Tier five years after the Trans Am. Oh, you did? Yeah, which was. a very different experience from the transom. But I mean, okay, if we take on board what you were saying earlier about whether it would still, whether we'd still face the same hospitality, I think you've got to go with a very open mind. And I think you've got to take people as they are. We were going through one particular area in Alabama and a guy pulled up in a pickup and said, Why don't you come to my house for coffee? He said, You're going to be on the route. You'll go past us. Now, this guy was a gun-toting, Confederate flag waving, Trump supporting chap who bore his political views very much, you know, on his sleeve. We sat down in his living room and he got his coffee out. His first question was, How did you vote on Brexit? You know, and Terry and I, Both voted against Brexit. So it was clear right from the start, we had very different political views. But do you know what? We sat there for an hour. We had a really good chat. He was as friendly as you could possibly be, you know, shared some of the fruit and stuff from his orchard with us, shared his coffee with us. It turned out that he was a great fan of the British TV series, Antiques Roadshow. Aren't we all? Yeah. I mean, there were so many different things about him. And we had a really good open and frank conversation. It was an eye into a different world, I think, for both of us, really. And I think if anything, if

cycling encourages those conversations, I think the most worrying thing that I've seen in America, and it's beginning to happen here, perhaps not to such an extent, is that people have stopped talking to each other. people have come very, people have got different views and they've become polarised. And we're not even going to discuss things with you. And I think if you can just get people talking, I know it's hard, but if you can get people talking, then... That's got to be a good thing. And the Trans Am is a great way of doing that.

Speaker 2

Well, I think on that note, let's tell people how they can get a copy of your book. We've been speaking with Paul Dunt. His book is Trans Am Cycling Coast to Coast on the Trail the U.S. Loved First. And the Bike Centennial Trail will be recreated in its 50th year this coming summer. And this would be a great book to kind of introduce you to the trail and some of the stories that Paul and his companion, Terry, came across on their trip in 2014. So will it be available in all the usual places, Paul?

Speaker 4

Yeah, at the moment it's up on Amazon. It's on the US Amazon site. You can buy it as a paperback or you can buy it as a Kindle.

Speaker 2

Oh, you can, okay.

Speaker 4

Yeah, so both options are, and it's also on Kindle and limited. So if you sign up to that at the moment, you can get it for free.

Speaker 2

Well, and I got my book from you, so I really appreciate it. And thank you so much for writing it. Thank you so much for the interesting and enlightening conversation. Good luck with the book, and I hope we get to talk again.

Speaker 4

Great, thanks very much. Nice to talk to you, Diane.

Speaker 2

My thanks to Paul for joining me today, such an interesting conversation. order his book TransAm from Amazon or ask for it at your local bookseller. We have links to the ACA 50th anniversary ride on our website too. Today's episode was the first in a series that will highlight rides in and around the U.S. this spring, summer, and on into fall. Remember that May is National Bike Month, so there'll be a lot of great opportunities to celebrate by riding your bike. Thank you for listening. Please remember that you can find links, photos, and a written transcript of the show on our website,

outspokencyclist.com. Follow us on our socials, Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, and YouTube. And subscribe to my Substack for added commentary about a variety of related topics. Please stay safe, stay well, and remember, there is always time for a ride. Bye-bye.

Speaker 1

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