

CONNECTICUT **family** MAGAZINE

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UNFORGETTABLE BIKING ADVENTURE

Two moms, two kids, 335 miles

[RIGHT] Sage Rood (left) and Ginger Jenne at Bolton Notch during one of their training rides. Photo by Bill Penn

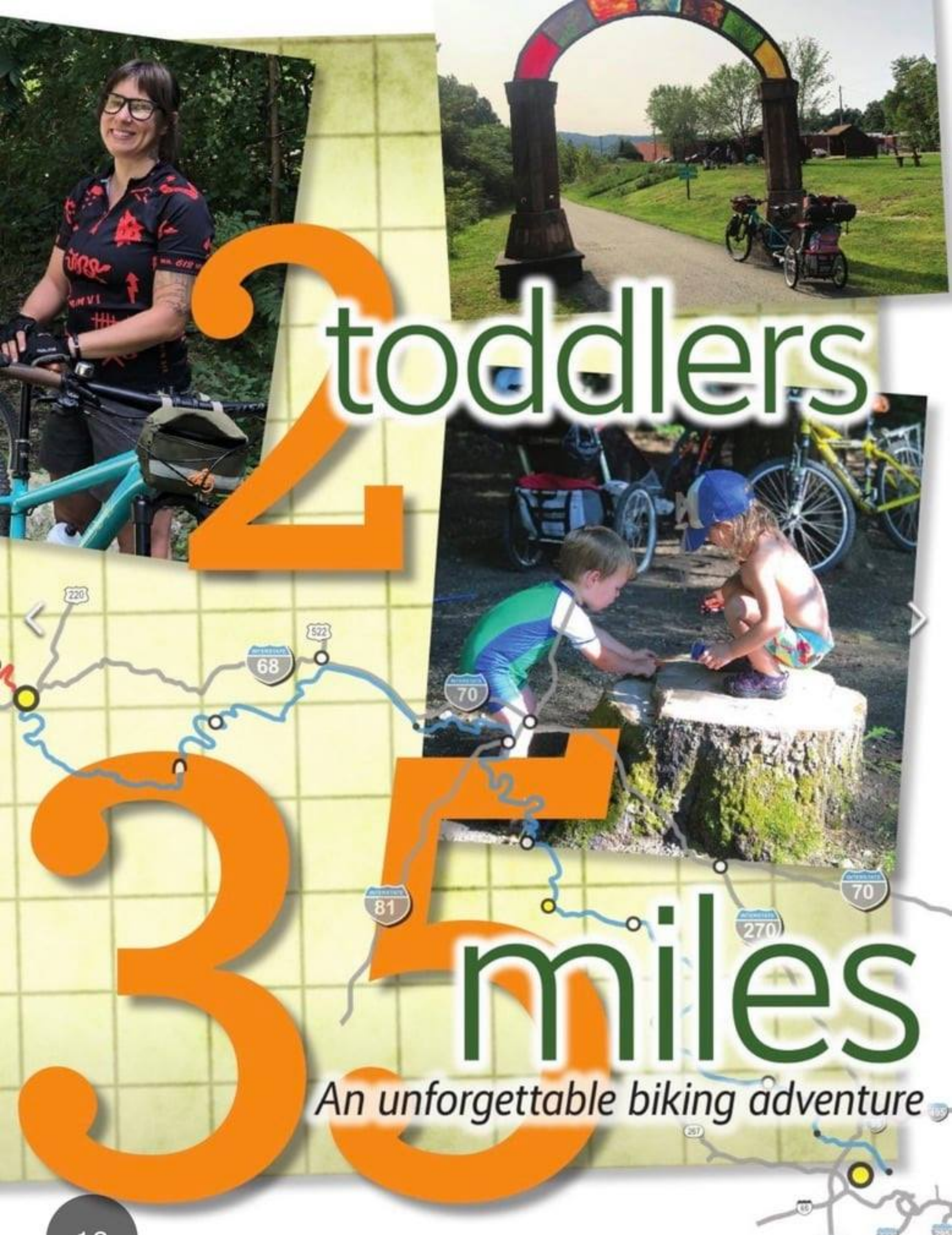
[FAR RIGHT] Riding through the stained-glass archway along the Great Allegheny Passage in Connellsville, Pa., with an Adirondack shelter campground to the right. Photo by Ginger Jenne

[BELOW] The two families are ready to pedal at the start of the ride in Pittsburgh at Point State Park. Photo by Doug Jenne

[BOTTOM RIGHT] The kids play with toy cars on a stump at one of the campsites. Photo by Ginger Jenne

2 moms

10 days 3



2

toddlers

3

4

miles

An unforgettable biking adventure

By Cris Cadiz

Take one bicycle, add a trailer and load it with a small child (preferably yours). Add camping gear, food, clothing. Don't forget abundant water and a heaping cup of patience. Add a dash of blazing sun or a pinch of rain. A good sense of humor and a friend are optional, but will make all the difference. Travel for at least a day. This is bikepacking with kids. Ginger Jenne calls it "kidpacking" and her experience was life-changing.

Jenne and Sage Rood are friends and cycling enthusiasts from Connecticut who took their toddlers on a 10-day, 335-mile bikepacking adventure last September. They pedaled the Great Allegheny Passage and Chesapeake & Ohio Canal Towpath, popular bikepacking routes that brought them from Pittsburgh, Penn., to Washington, D.C.

Bikepacking is basically backpacking on a bicycle. Once considered hardcore adventure, it is gaining popularity, probably with help from the pandemic. This mode of travel allows you to explore the world with limited human contact while experiencing the benefits of nature, self-reliance, exercise and being truly present in your environment.

Jenne's initial impetus for this ambitious trip was to enjoy adventures with her son, Lucas, and introduce him to bicycling, one of her favorite activities. But as she trained for it, she started to realize that bikepacking was helping her heal from a difficult pregnancy and birth. While pregnant with Lucas, Jenne was diagnosed with Rhesus Disease, a condition in which her antibodies attacked her fetus's blood cells.

"It pretty much meant my body was trying to kill my child," she said. The resulting trauma and guilt left her with PTSD and difficulty bonding with Lucas.

When Lucas was 18 months old, Jenne left her job to spend more time with him. She had started taking him on bike rides in a trailer when he was just a year old. She learned that bikepackers sometimes used trailers for their gear, and with no prior experience, she "dove right in" to the idea of bikepacking with Lucas. She didn't realize bikepacking would become her therapy.

"The more I did it with him, the better I felt. It was my chance to bond with my son and resolve the trauma," she says. "It was life-changing for me."

Jenne met Rood at a playgroup and the two adventurous, outdoorsy moms hit it off right away.



[ABOVE] An Adirondack shelter at Dravo Hiker-Biker Campground along the Great Allegheny Passage. Photo by Ginger Jenne

[BELOW] Ginger Jenne and her son Lucas stop to view one of the many public art pieces along the Great Allegheny Passage in Rockwood, Pa. Photo by Sage Rood

[TOP RIGHT] Sage Rood pedals on Big Slackwater along the C&O Canal Towpath in Sharpsburg, Md. Photo by Ginger Jenne

[BOTTOM RIGHT] Sage Rood and her daughter enjoy some family time in Pittsburgh before embarking on the start of the bikepacking trip. Photo by Ginger Jenne





"When I threw out the idea of bikepacking, she jumped at the chance," says Jenne. "Sage was a huge asset, being a former mountain guide. Our kids were close in age; they got along well together." So Jenne and Rood planned a trip and started training on the sometimes challenging terrain of eastern Connecticut's rail trails.

"At first we didn't think we could do it," says Jenne. They were pulling 100 pounds of gear, not including themselves and their bikes, and the trailers had no brakes. "Learning to deal with momentum was hard," she says.

They had mishaps, they walked sometimes, they helped each other out.

"We kept asking, why are we doing this? Then the pandemic hit and everything was closed. What else were we going to do?" she says. "We set a goal, we held each other accountable, but supported each other when we wanted to quit." During training they experienced falls, flat tires, toddler meltdowns, sore muscles, rainstorms and more. But they never quit.

Traveling with toddlers is challenging, but Jenne and Rood agree that being outside helps.

"All the things people typically worry about are easier to deal with in the woods," says Jenne. "There's room for them to scream, run around, get their stresses out if they are uncomfortable. You can stop anywhere along the trail. There's no sense of stigma from people around you. As long as there's no medical emergency and they have enough toys, they're good. Kids are very resilient."

It wasn't as difficult as they thought it might be.

"I learned that being outside for 10 days straight and sleeping in a tent was the easiest parenting experience I ever had," says Rood. "The kids are either playing outside or getting a sweet ride in their chariots. I never had to worry about what to do to keep my daughter stimulated, entertained or engaged. Nature provides everything."

"The trip itself was amazing," says Jenne. The trail conditions were better than what they had trained on. The route had many places to stop for food and water. And the scenery was perfect. "On this route there's trains to see the whole time. We saw hundreds of trains on active rail lines. The kids loved it."

Along the way, the two moms with fully loaded trailers and toddlers in tow were a wonder to fellow travelers. Although bikepacking typically requires camping, this route offered enough lodging that many carried even less than minimal gear.

"There was no shortage of bikepackers who rode by us with lighter loads," says Jenne. "And the rare few that were fully loaded to camp still dropped jaws when they saw our rigs. Wherever we went people said, 'What are you doing? You have kids, are you nuts?' A lot of people bikepack alone, but having a little buddy with you is worth the extra weight. Sure we were a little slower, but we were comfortably able to pull along our pack."

When they arrived at the National Mall in D.C., "we felt awesome," says Jenne, "especially because it was such a big push to finish with a 56-mile day. The kids were running up the steps of the Lincoln Memorial like they were Rocky. It was so cool. We did this!"

"I am not a professional cyclist," says Jenne. "My special skill is just being able to pedal, like so many others." That said, these moms know their big adventure wasn't easy. They also know that anyone who can pedal a bike can do it with their children with delightful results.

"We realized during training that the little adventures, even day trips, were a big deal for the kids," says Jenne. "You can have a single overnight trip and not travel far. No matter the size, the reward is huge. Adventure, bonding, getting outside and proving to yourself you can do this. You don't have to be a superhero, you can roll as slow as you want. The kids will still think you're their hero."

Some "Sage" advice on kidpacking or any outdoor adventure:

"It seems like all the worst things that could've happened all happened during our training," says Rood. "It made the 10-day trip seem like a breeze. If you're planning a big trip, I recommend spending a good month or two training, practicing on trails, trying out your gear, getting yourself and your kids comfortable on seats or with packs, and find out what really works best for you."

Accustomed to solo trips, Rood admits it was nice to have a partner, but she learned it's really important to verbalize when you need a break or food or a clothing change. "Talk to each other and validate each other. It's fun and challenging and the challenges help us grow."



Don't let fear guide your decisions, she adds. "Take a chance, go car camping, or try an overnight backpacking trip. Start small with day hikes and just allow your kid to lead the way. Kids in nature work really well together. As parents we can enjoy witnessing their experience instead of trying to create content for them. You might surprise yourself with how much fun everybody has. You don't have to have the latest gear, just have extra clothes, get out there, learn to adapt to the elements. Kids are actually pretty good at adapting; it's an excellent reminder for us adults."

Jenne's blog, BikepackingWithKids.com, is a beginner resource for caregivers with children to learn about the experience of pedaling together. It offers advice on gear and training, tips and links, and entertaining personal stories, including a daily record of their big adventure. ■



[LEFT] The cobblestone path where the Great Allegheny Passage and the C&O join in downtown Cumberland, Md. Photo by Ginger Jenne
 [ABOVE] The kids play next to the elevation map inside the tunnel at the top of the Eastern Continental Divide. Photo by Ginger Jenne

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Ginger Jenne and her son Lucas on the National Mall in Washington, D.C., at the moment they completed the 335-mile bikepacking journey with their friends Sage Rood and her daughter. Photo by Sage Rood