



SOUNDER

Serving Orcas, Lopez and San Juan County

Wednesday, December 15, 2021 ■ VOL. 54, NO. 50 ■ \$1 ■ islandssounder.com

It's never too late | Island elders take on the world



BY LAURA KUSSMAN
Sounder contributor

It's late summer 2021 and Steve and Mary Gropp are in the midst of a gnawing, moveable feast: hiking the final leg of the 3,100-mile Continental Divide Trail, an endeavor they've been chewing on for years.

It's the last stage of their nearly 5,000-mile, human-powered journey stretching in a continuous line from Skagway, Alaska to Mexico completed in five stages over the course of 40 years. A palate of mesas, volcanic formations, and mountain ranges that seem to pop right out of the desert floor are in view, along with cacti and grass varieties that are home to small rodents, snakes and lizards.

"Southern New Mexico is quite a hostile environment," 66-year-old Steve recounts.

Dennis Dahl, who sits adjacent to the Gropps and who recently returned home from bicycling the entirety of the Continental Divide Trail, agrees, citing the desert's bites, stings and stabs. "Everything has thorns. It's really hard to navigate. We started encountering rattlesnakes. Twice Mary almost stepped on these huge, coiled Diamondbacks," Steve said.

Mary remembers she wasn't paying attention to the trail when a friend yelled "SNAKE" and she jumped back, detailing the viper's posture and size, narrowly avoiding an encounter.

"And there were these whip snakes that would go up in the trees way up above your head," she said. "You're walking along trying to figure out where the trail

is and you've got twenty miles to go for water and your head is just constantly in motion watching the trail, watching for snakes..."

"Sounds like Highway 21!" Jim Bredouw laughs, "but instead of semis and rumble strips, it's whip snakes."

Bredouw also traveled on his bicycle, unsupported, across the northern United States from coast to coast with friend Jim Schuh. He, too, had been anticipating his tour for years, ever since he biked the same route in 1997 inspired by a septuagenarian on the trip.

Bredouw, Dahl and the Gropps are a handful of locals over 65 who threw their hats (or helmets) into the ring this year and committed to testing their limits. Savvy Sanders, who modestly declined to be part of this piece since he doesn't yet consider himself a senior, says he "only summited Mt. Rainier." For each, the trip was a hunger whet by years of personal motivations and planning.

Bredouw says it was Martin Lund who originally introduced him to the world of long-distance cycling when they were in their twenties. Lund invited Bredouw to ride with him from Portland to San Francisco, on what Bredouw assumed would be a motorcycle. He admits he wasn't aware that bicycling that far was even possible.

Twenty-three years of pedaling Mt. Constitution every Sunday morning with friends, including Schuh and Rolf Eriksen — another 70+ athlete, a dozen biking tours spanning the west coast, Canadian Rockies, French Alps and the Pyrenees prepared Bredouw not just



CONTRIBUTED PHOTOS

Above left: Jim Bredouw and Jim Schuh cross the Rockies northern apex in Glacier National Park. Above A big climb out of Breckenridge, Colorado for Dennis Dahl: Right: Packing lightweight gear is of paramount importance. Mary Gropp shows off their primitive tent.

physically for this self-organized and supported 2021 tour. He says these challenges are critical to his sense of well-being.

This year, the route took him and riding partner Schuh from Spokane, Washington to Long Branch, New Jersey in 51 days, mostly hugging the stress of the highway with a few unexpected, wildcard routes peppered in by "The Google Lady," including a 30-mile stretch of washboard gravel which both Jims endured on road bikes. Because of the nature of the tour, the duo "ate out quite a bit," he says, including one too many meals at Dairy Queen, Howard Johnson's and Cenex gas stations. Remarkably, neither had a single injury, flat tire or mechanical issue for the entirety of the trip.

"I forgot how hard an unsupported ride is," Bredouw admitted, meaning both riders carried all their provisions, food and water on their bikes. "And one of the drawbacks of riding with traffic is it's not as beautiful as riding off-road."

Upon recalling any notable ecological or geological sights along the way, Bredouw shared, "From St. Mary's to Cut Bank, MT, it was 102° and, looking for shade relief to avoid possible heat stroke, I was shocked



to discover that there wasn't one single tree for 30 miles straight. For some reason, this possibility had never occurred to me and we had to ask a passerby for a water refill, taking temporary shade refuge behind a tiny 3' x 4' historical road sign."

In their twenties, Steve said he and Mary had their "first big date" rowing a 16ft open dory around Vancouver Island, stopping each night to camp on the ocean's shore. The trip took 80 days.

"I just came to Steve's house one day with all the charts," Mary laughs. "I hadn't done any rowing since I was a kid."

The longest trip the duo took thereafter was a four and a half month row up the Labrador coast between Hudson Bay and Greenland. Eventually, Mary approached Steve with another good idea. "We should go on a walking trip."

"You meant Greenlake, right?" Bredouw jokes as he, Mary, Steve and Dahl swap stories. She meant

something greater.

Over the course of two months, Mary and Steve hiked the final 1,000 miles on the Continental Divide Trail, a feat Mary says is "mild" for Steve, who humbly lives a life notched by impressive physical feats, including ascending Yosemite's granite edifice El Capitan twice.

The Great CDT winds along the continental divide through parts of Canada, Glacier National Park in Montana, Idaho, Yellowstone and the Tetons in Wyoming, the Colorado Rockies and New Mexico terminating at a Mexican border crossing which has been temporarily closed since April 2020. The route is rich in history and anthropology as it weaves through long-abandoned gold rush mining towns and cultural First Nations sites. The areas are native to grizzly bears, elk, moose, mountain lion, deer, wild horses, pronghorn antelope, eagles, osprey and sandhill cranes

SEE OUTDOORS, PAGE 4

San Juan County takes the lead in state vaccination rates

BY SIENNA BOUCHER
Staff reporter

Vaccine distribution in San Juan County has been a bit more unique than elsewhere, with health department staff members and National Guard traveling on whale-watching boats and school buses to roll out vaccines. Despite the odds, San

Juan County is the most vaccinated county in the state.

"San Juan County got off to a great start on the vaccination effort because we got this tremendous support from the Washington National Guard and the State Department of Health to bring up some mass vaccination teams," said San Juan County Health Department Director Brendan Cowan.

Currently, according to data from the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 75.1 percent of the island population is vaccinated. This is 15% higher than in the rest of Washington state.

By the end of this week, there will be 6,000 islanders receiving their booster shot, according to Cowan.

"It is important to remember that the vaccination effort is ongoing and the work has never really let up," he said. "The shifting rules around vaccine eligibility and need for booster shots mean that vaccine clinics are still going strong."

While San Juan County is currently in the lead for vaccination rates, the road to reaching that goal was rocky.

Without large pharmacies or health care providers able to offer large vaccination clinics, the islands struggled with pulling ahead at first, which some islanders were concerned about. Despite that, Cowan would like to recognize

Friday Harbor Drug, Ray's Pharmacy and Lopez pharmacy for putting in hard work to vaccinate as many people as they could with their small operations.

Once the National Guard came to help in 2021, they gave 10,000 shots throughout the county, which means two-thirds to three-quarters of vaccinations were given by the National Guard.

"It was kind of a hurdle but it ended up being a really great thing," he said.

Cowan said the whole process still had a fair amount of island flair.

"Ivan Rice, who has a whale-watching business, was taking National Guard soldiers from island to island on his boat, then getting on a school bus that we borrowed from the Orcas School District," he laughed. "Then when we arrived at the Orcas Center, the director there had organized volunteer musicians to play pleasant music in the vaccine clinics. It was just a cool island thing. It was pretty neat."

Cowan said that despite the issues with winter storms and ferry schedules making it difficult for the National Guard to get out to the islands, they loved interacting with the community, which he thinks also gave them the motivation to return. The community showed

SEE VACCINES, PAGE 7

Decatur residents continue to search for mail delivery solutions

BY SIENNA BOUCHER
Staff reporter

Some Decatur Island residents have been expressing concern over changes that have been made to their mail system put in place by the Decatur Shores Community Association.

Decatur is not served by the state ferry system. The first post office was established in 1891 and remained until 1969. Since then a one-drop postal system in a small shed was instituted and mail was delivered by boat and plane via a contracted employee, not a postal service worker. Now, items are no longer delivered to the island free of charge. Instead, an annual fee has been instituted. Otherwise, packages and letters are kept at the post office in Anacortes.

Bruce Robertson, who handles communication for the DSCA, wrote in an email to Decatur residents, "DSCA has provided the

facility for receiving mail and packages as a free service for many years. In the last few years, particularly with the dramatic increase in packages, it has become burdensome to the association, so while it continues to be committed to hosting the service, DSCA can no longer provide it at no cost."

Robertson told the Journal, "Well, the thing is, it's not our responsibility. What we were offering was facilities that we have and the use of the facilities and people that didn't want to take up our offer, had a choice to figure out what they wanted to do."

The choices that Robertson referred to were listed to Decatur residents in an email from Robertson on Oct. 2. The DSCA is asking residents who are non-DSCA members to pay an annual fee of \$75 in order to use their mailboxes. Members of the DSCA are

SEE DECATUR, PAGE 7

OUTDOORS FROM 1

among others. Beginning their trek at 11,000 feet in Colorado's San Juan Mountains, the Gropps carried 25- to 30-pound backpacks which included all gear, varying amounts of water and six days' worth of food.

packets and butter powder to try to get enough protein, Mary shared a grocery store practice of looking at nutrition labels for the highest calories per ounce. "Fritos are the way to go! They have lots of salt and lots of fat. We put them in our dinner," she cheerfully disclosed. Some days, the couple was

hiking up 3,000 feet, down 2,000 feet, averaging about 15 miles per day. "Nothing prepares you to go several miles at 11,000 feet except doing it," Mary said. "There would be these traverses that were along really skinny trails with big drop-offs. That, for me with acrophobia, was really difficult. That was my mental game, just like you and the trucks on the highway," she tells Bredouw.

Steve shared, "There were many memorable places we camped but one vivid memory was in the southern San Juan Mountains just north of the Colorado and New Mexico border. Up early, long before daylight on a deeply cold morning, we took a wrong turn and ended up in a huge open parkland, everything covered in frost, the full moon low in the sky, a cold weak sun just coming over the edge of the world. Several huge bull elk with enormous racks of antlers were standing at the edge of the trees, calling out to attract a mate for the fall rut. It seemed such a magic moment, part of an ancient pattern of life, one we felt so very truly fortunate to witness."

Commonly known on Orcas as "Coach" for his work as the wrestling and football coach at the high school, Dahl approaches many of his physical pursuits with a pure attitude. His strengths are witnessed in both his celebratory nature and a lifelong history of sports playing, marathon running, supported and unsupported bike touring and hiking. At 74, Dahl qualifies as a senior cyclist, although intuitively he wouldn't describe himself as such.

On this particular trip, from July to September 2021, Dahl pedaled from Roosville, Montana to Antelope Wells, New Mexico. 2,600 miles over 160,000 feet of gain traversing the Great Divide Mountain Bike Route with Adventure Cycling's van-supported team and eight strangers-turned-companions. For reference, that amount of

gain is equivalent to bicycling up Mt. Rainier thirteen times. "It's like in my rules of life: Rule 5 is PFA: Pay F*** Attention to what's going on around you, especially when you're in the brush. When you're dealing with the hard stuff, like how do I compensate if my footfalls, or what line am I going to ride, or what's up ahead?" Dahl said. "I've run 50-mile races in Patagonia that I thought was just so beautiful. Then, I'm in the French and Italian alps and I'm thinking, 'Oh God, this is so beautiful.' Then I'm in Colorado this summer, up in those high mountains and I'm experiencing that same awestruck feeling. You go around a corner and it's like going through a portal and you're in a whole other beautiful area. That's your reward."

Over the course of six weeks, Dahl navigated summertime forest fires, steep inclines, 60 miles of singletrack trails, as well as an introduction to cooking tofu, a "crazy Dutch farmer who had 17 flats" and the fear of being eaten by bears in the night while peeing. He says on his night to cook for the group, his specialty was grilled cheese sandwiches with apricot jam and tomatoes.

In response to Bredouw's preference for what he calls "credit card camping," Dahl said, "Sixty-five days sleeping in the dirt. You're riding up there on gravel roads with rocks, and then you get down into New Mexico and there are goat heads everywhere, vines coming out looking for the sun. I told everyone, 'We're all going to Mexico and the rest of it is bullshit.' You deal with it. If you're always pissed off, you shouldn't be there."

If anything, these supreme journeys became prime opportunities to "put shingles on the character house" as Bredouw's wife Anne calls it. To see about accomplishing long-sought-after goals. To be surprised. To get out and go. To have fun. And perhaps, as the song by Waylon Jennings and Willie Nelson posits, to answer the

question: "Does old age and treachery always overcome youth and skill?" What does it mean to be a senior cyclist or hiker? Does it feel like more than simply having to calculate one's age when asked?

Dahl says it's nothing overtly remarkable beyond a sharpening of one's smarts. He says tours like this one simply "sounded like fun" and proved to be so, marked by both nature's beauty and the kindness of others, shown in the form of thumbs up or cheers from motorcyclists, unexpected pies and BLT from strangers, a ride from a Blackfoot deputy in a pickup truck on a hot day, an offer to drive sixty-pound panniers up Logan Pass in Glacier National Park, or a passerby stopping to refill water.

All four agree: years of experience can provide riders with a mindful awareness of their limitations that allows them to compensate for potential age-related handicaps. Once you're on the road, the considerations of age are just something you deal with, such as packing specific medications, wellness investments in the form of a hotel room or massage, or preparing for the first week to be a tough adjustment.

Moreover, though, there was a ubiquitous appreciation for the use of humor and being forced to slow down — a recurring theme for older riders. Slow is smooth and smooth is fast: Dahl was the oldest rider on his tour and "always the last one into camp."

"We had this one stretch where we're going through all this sagebrush and creosote brush and we got kind of off the trail, and we had to go over and under all these barbed wire fences. We're commando crawling — we called it Medicare Boot Camp," Mary shares, laughing. "It gave us something to laugh about."

Sings Willie Nelson towards the end of the song, "...Old bull says young bull, let's just ease on adown and love 'em all."

In the land of 10,000 lakes,

1,000 miles into the trip and after days of what he calls "having my head on a swivel" on Highway 2, Bredouw realized he needed to make an adjustment. He made the difficult decision to abandon the tour.

"I was exhausted from being on guard all the time," he said. "Emotionally, it was a mixed bag — on one hand, I had ridden a thousand miles fully loaded and didn't regret my decision to terminate in Minnesota over safety concerns; but on the other, I was disappointed that I didn't complete the bike ride that I'd been planning for a decade."

He rented a truck, bought a luxurious third T-shirt and told Schuh he would support him the rest of the way to the Atlantic.

These sorts of adventures are the kind of personal challenges and rewards that might not occur at all if not seized with urgency for someone over 65. When asked about motivations, Steve shared how a climbing injury as a teenager influenced his mode of thinking for the rest of his life.

"Ever since then, life has been dessert. I realized at that age you just have to go for it. Nothing is guaranteed. If you want to do something you better just get on it because it could all be over in a snap," he said.

Mary, who celebrated her 65th birthday on the trail, was clear: to simply be in wild places with the wild things.

For Bredouw, biking and hiking were a departure from his early cerebral life as a musician and offered a chance for him to prove to himself he could do it.

"I generally feel more secure about who I am when I've done something remarkable or that pushes my expectations," he says.

Perhaps the most remarkable advantage elder adventurers have is a better grasp on the gospel that travel is about the journey, not the destination. If the wind's not in your sails, why wait to tack?

**Roses Bids Farewell,
Welcomes New Owners!**

Very dear friends and neighbors,

Joni and I would like to announce that as of November 30th, the old fire station building that Roses Bakery Cafe inhabited over these past years in Eastsound has new owners. Erin Gainey and Philip Kramer of Deer Harbor will be embarking on their new enterprise in the new year, and we are eager to watch its unfoldment. We welcome them into the business community, and look forward to becoming their good customers!

Also at this time we would like to let you know that we have been deeply touched by the recent outpouring of gratitude, love, and fond memories that have been shared regarding what Roses has meant to you over these past 30 years. It could not have existed without your wonderful support! We share these warm memories with you.

Finally, Joni and I would like to share our deepest gratitude to the many wonderful workers who made Roses what it was, baking the great breads and desserts, cooking the delicious dishes, maintaining a welcoming environment, helping you to stock your larder, and prepare for your special occasions. Thank you, dear Roses crew!!!

Sincerely,

Joni and John Trumbull

LeafGuard is the permanent, clog-free gutter solution!*

Get it. And forget it. *Guaranteed not to clog for as long as you own your home, or we will clean your gutters for free



QUALITY TESTED

GOOD HOUSEKEEPING

Since 1909

LIMITED WARRANTY - please.com for details

- LIFETIME NO-CLOG WARRANTY
- MADE ONSITE SPECIFICALLY FOR YOUR HOME
- THE ONLY ONE-PIECE SEAMLESS DEBRIS SHEDDING GUTTER SYSTEM.
- SCRATCHGUARD® PAINT FINISH

LeafGuard

Get it. And forget it.

360-339-6319

Call Today for Your FREE Estimate!

END OF THE YEARSALE!

75% OFF LABOR!

PLUS

\$50 RESTAURANT GIFT CARD

(SEE BELOW)

WITH IN-HOUSE ESTIMATE AND GUTTER INSPECTION!

**Offer does not include cost of material. Discount applied by representative at time of contract execution. Offer ends 12/31/2021. All participants who attend an estimated 60-90 minute in-home product consultation will receive a \$50 gift card. No purchase necessary. Retail value is \$50. Offer Sponsored by LeafGuard Holdings, Inc. Limit one gift card per household. LeafGuard procures, sells and installs seamless gutter protection. This offer is valid for homeowners over 18 years of age. If married or have a life partner, both cohabitating persons must attend and complete presentation together. Participants must have a valid photo ID, understand English, and be legally able to enter into a contract. The following persons are not eligible for this offer: employees of LeafGuard or affiliated companies or entities, their immediate family members, previous participants in a LeafGuard in-home consultation within the past 12 months and all current and former LeafGuard customers. Promotion may not be extended, transferred, or substituted except that LeafGuard may substitute a gift card of equal or greater value if it deems it necessary. Gift card and terms and conditions (https://www.usarden.com/gift-cards/terms-and-conditions) of such gift cards will be mailed to the participant via first class US Mail within 21 days of receipt of promotion form provided at consultation. Not valid in conjunction with any other promotion or discount of any kind. Offer not sponsored or promoted by Darden Restaurants and is subject to change without notice prior to reservation. Offer ends 12/31/2021. LeafGuard operates as LeafGuard of Seattle in Washington under license number LEAFGB21HC.



May the light from the lighthouse warm your hearts this Holiday Season.





"We look forward to your next visit to Patos Island and its Lighthouse when we open for the season in May 2022!"

Catch Patton,
KOPL Board President 2022-24

If you would like to become a member of KOPL and help us preserve the lighthouse and the environmental quality of the Island, or Volunteer, or wish to donate funds to sustain our mission, that's great! Visit our website for all you will need to make it happen. Thank you!

KEEPERS OF THE PATOS LIGHT

www.keepersofthepatoslight.org

PO Box 1967, Eastsound, WA 98245