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# Librarian and family join 'car society'

Local History

By LOU McDERMOTT

Four new inhabitants of Yakima think nothing of bicycling across the Mojave Desert.

But after trying to "see America first" via bicycle, they are convinced cross-country cyclists haven't a chance on today's highways. The highways belong to the motor car, hands down.

The family of four gave up pedalling, bought railroad tickets and checked their bikes. They sold their two five-speed French bikes in Galveston, Tex.

Cycling across the Mojave Desert perhaps was the sanest, easiest part of the trip of Mr. and Mrs. Edwin C. Miller, 33, his wife, Mary, and two sons, Kevin 5, and Brian 4, formerly of Portland and now living at 1509 S. 4th Ave. Miller is new consultant to community libraries at Yakima Valley Regional Library.

Miller had built a sailboat in Portland while he was catalog librarian at Portland Community College. He planned to retire and take his family where ever the sailboat could travel.

Pedal-masters were Miller and his wife. The boys were perched each behind a parent, cushioned on bedding and clothing packs strapped onto the back of the bikes. They learned to sleep sitting up and hanging on as the bikes travelled from Modesto toward Mohave.

"We had a change of clothing apiece, two sets for the boys,



NEWCOMERS — The Edwin C. Miller family gave up nationwide bicycling in favor of a small bus. The boys are

and we stopped at laundromats to wash the spares," said Mrs. Miller.

They found people who drive cars have no idea — from a bicyclist's point of view — what the terrain ahead really is like.

"Following directions from people along the way turned out as risky as anything we did," she said. "What's easy and flat to a motorist, to a bicyclist can be quite another matter." Their best advice came near Eses when a state patrolman stopped them — and directed them to an old highway — where one day they had 58 miles of coasting downhill from Amboy into Needles.

They hadn't really set out to bicycle across the Mohave Desert. They found themselves following an old railroad spur, enroute to the ghost town of Calico, Calif. Crossing the Barstow Marine Supply Depot grounds, military policemen wanted to send them back where they came from.

"We talked them into letting us go on, promising we wouldn't come back that way," said Miller. "Then we learned the only way down was across the desert."

Aching legs soon became seasoned cycling legs, and little Brian found how not to fall off the back of his mother's bike

Brian, 4, standing, and Kevin, 5, "In a car society, you may as well sell your bicycle," said Miller.

when weariness overtook him. Like bicycling nomads, they camped out when necessary and stayed at motels when they were available.

Near Eses, they had to ration their water "because I forgot to fill the half-gallon jug at our last stop," said Mrs. Miller. "I learned to wash dishes with a thimbleful of water there."

After the roads in Arizona proved "terrible bicycle trails" and the motoring population seemed oblivious to a family on bike wheels, they packed the bikes aboard a train and travelled eastward on rails.

"We arrived with \$4.25 to our names in Galveston just before the Christmas weekend," said Miller. "Our education in how to sleep and feed a family of four on \$2.50 was learned. I sold our bikes on Christmas Day. We were rich again with \$50."

Money was at that moment in the post office awaiting them but the holiday weekend made them "weekend paupers," he said.

They had attempted to pedal through East Texas, toward the Louisiana line, before landing in Galveston but the "muggy climate" was too much. After selling the bicycles, they went by train to San Antonio, thence to El Paso, searching for just the right economical car to get them back to Portland.

"For \$250 we found a Volkswagen bus — and we're still driving it after moving to Yakima," said Miller. "America is a car society, and we've joined it."

Mrs. Miller and the two boys still hanker, however, to again own bicycles. They love the memory of those cycling days, desert air and all.