



Season 3 | Episode Four | Shifting Gears

Katie Perkins, Student: I think we're going... I think we're rolling...

(Music Open)

Perkins: My name is Katie Perkins, I'm 21-years-old, I'm from Brenham Texas and my favorite blue bell flavor is banana pudding. I was feeling a lot of anxiety.

Jack Water Lady: 'I was so anxious, I woke up 3 or 4 times in the middle of the night' (:12)

Lindsay Dube, Student: I would be lying if I said that I wasn't anxious for the next 7 days of riding.

Jakob Conrad, Student: I'm feeling good, a lot of my nervousness turned into, you know... excited energy. I'm ready to get pedaling.

Dube: It's going to be 150 miles of comradery, 150 miles of teamwork. We are arguably doing the coolest class that Texas Tech has to offer and I'm channeling that nervousness into gratefulness and trying to be really present.

Justin Keene, Associate Professor: And I hope that you remember if nothing else that the little voice inside your head that tells you that you can't do stuff is a liar.

Taylor Peters, Host: DUSTY WHITE AND GRAY ROCKS CLUTTER THE PATHS THAT WIND AND TWIST THROUGH THE BRUSHY AND OVERGROWN EARTH. AN EXPANSIVE SKYLINE ENVELOPES THE WILDERNESS BENEATH. THE STREAMING ORANGE SUN PAINTS IT A RICH, WARM HUE DRESSED WITH SHADES OF PINK AS IT DIPS BENEATH THE SOUTHERN NEW MEXICO HORIZON. THE MONUMENTAL LOOP IS BEAUTIFUL AND WILD. AND SOON, SMALL DOTS WILL SLOWLY COURSE THROUGH THE TRAILS LIKE BLOOD IN A VEIN- HERE FOR ONE WEEK. ONE WEEK OF ADVENTURE.

Peters: THIS IS EPISODE FOUR- SHIFTING GEARS.

(Pushing bike down the hall)

Peters: THE HALLS INSIDE THE COLLEGE OF MEDIA AND COMMUNICATION ARE EMPTY. IT'S NEAR THE END OF THE FALL SEMESTER.

(Clicking)

Peters: JEROD FOSTER GLIDES DOWN THE HALL ASTRIDE HIS BIKE.

(Chattering)

Peters: 20 YOUNG PEOPLE FILE INSIDE A CLASSROOM FOR THE FIRST UNOFFICIAL GATHERING OF ADVENTURE MEDIA 2023.

Jerod Foster, Professor of Practice: But I'm glad we could do it this way because Taylor and Justin and then there's Thomas back there. You see them. They're not students.

Peters: NO... MOST DEFINITELY NOT STUDENTS... BY THE WAY, JUSTIN, WHO JEROD IS REFERRING TO THERE, IS A PHOTOGRAPHER IN MY OFFICE. THIS WILL BE HIS 5TH ADVENTURE MEDIA TRIP.

Foster: This is where we are going, I'll shoot it to you straight. Up until the point where I rode the Colorado trail, at least the southern side or parts of the Colorado trail, it had been the hardest thing I had ever done on a bike, I know I'm painting you a really good picture here for ya'll.

Peters: YOU MIGHT HAVE HEARD OF THIS CLASS OFFERED BY COMC. IT'S DIFFERENT... IT'S UNIQUE. IT'S SO ORIGINAL, IN FACT, THAT THE CLASS AND ITS INFLUENCER STATUS PROFESSOR HAVE GENERATED MASSIVE ATTENTION IN THE WORLD OF BIKEPACKING. IT WAS CREATED IN 2017 BY JEROD AND ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR JUSTIN KEENE.

(Jerod talking to students)

Peters: ADVENTURE MEDIA... IT'S EXACTLY HOW IT SOUNDS. THIS HONORS CREDITED CLASS IS DESIGNED TO TAKE STUDENTS OUTSIDE THE CLASSROOM IN THE MOST PRACTICAL, LITERAL WAY POSSIBLE. BIKING ALONG TRAILS ACROSS THE SOUTHWEST, DOCUMENTING THE JOURNEY THROUGH PHOTO AND VIDEO.

Peters: THIS YEAR, THEY ARE SHOOTING A DOCUSERIES ABOUT THEIR EXPERIENCE ON THE MONUMENTAL LOOP, AND IF YOU KNOW ANYTHING ABOUT BIKEPACKING, YOU KNOW THIS IS ONE OF THE COUNTRY'S PREMIER ROUTES. IN FULL, IT'S 250 MILES OF ROCKS, AND SAND, MOUNTAIN CLIMBS AND THORNY

SINGLETRACK. AND THIS GROUP WILL DO A LITTLE MORE THAN HALF OF IT- THE HARDEST PARTS, THROUGH SOUTHERN NEW MEXICO. AND IT'S NOT FOR THE FAINT OF HEART.

(Bike crashing)

Dube: Woahhhh! Ahhhh! Oh my gosh, I ramped it! Sorry guys... that was crazy.

(Music Open)

(Talking)

Peters: IN THIS FIRST FORMAL MEETING, WE SPEND SOME TIME GOING AROUND THE ROOM INTRODUCING OURSELVES... WE'RE ALL REALLY DIFFERENT.

A LOT OF THESE STUDENTS ARE IN THE COLLEGE... LIKE KATIE PERKINS. EVERYONE CALLS HER KP. SHE AND HER CLASSMATE COLE ARE REALLY IMPORTANT IN THIS EPISODE... BOTH ARE TAKING THIS CLASS FOR THE SECOND TIME...

IT'S A DIVERSE COLLECTION OF COLLEGE STUDENTS, LIKE DANIELLA RODRIGUEZ- YOU MIGHT HAVE SEEN HER IN THE MOST RECENT SEASON OF 1883... I'M NOT KIDDING... AND KEELY MCMILLAN, WHO IN 2021 TOOK HOME THE NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIP AS PART OF THE AD TEAM... AD, AS IN ADVERTISING. EVEN NON-TRADITIONAL STUDENTS LIKE JACK KARIKA... HE'S BEEN A PARAMEDIC, A FIREFIGHTER, A TRIATHLETE... AND NOW A SURVIVOR OF ADVENTURE MEDIA.

SO, LIKE I SAID, FROM VARIOUS PLACES, DIFFERENT MAJORS, DIFFERENT LIFE EXPERIENCES. ALL ARE LOOKING FOR A CHALLENGE... AND SOME KNOW THAT A TRIP LIKE THIS HOLDS A MUCH DEEPER MEANING. FOR ONE YOUNG LADY- IF DOCTORS HAVE ALREADY TOLD HER THAT LIFE WILL BE AN UPHILL BATTLE, WHY NOT CLIMB IT ON A BIKE?

(Music close)

Keely McMillan, Student: Hi, my name is Keely and this is our first day... I am super excited about what we're going to see... I think the climb today is going to be pretty difficult but I'm actually feeling really good and positive about it. I'm excited to work with my team...

Peters: THE GROUP JUST FINISHED BREAKFAST AT A LOCAL SPOT CALLED THE PEPPER POT.

Emma Montgomery, Student: It's so good, I want to cry it's so good!

Peters: THEY'VE NAMED THEMSELVES THE CHILE CHASERS- HATCH, NEW MEXICO, WHERE THE ROUTE BEGINS, IS THE CHILE CAPITAL OF THE WORLD.

Slim Whitlock, Mayor of Hatch, New Mexico: You've got to come when they're roasting green chilis, it's a smell you'll never forget.

Peters: SLIM WHITLOCK GREW UP IN HATCH AND IN 2021 HE BECAME THE MAYOR OF HIS HOMETOWN. HE OWNS A LOCAL GROCERY STORE AND LETS THE GROUP KEEP THEIR VANS PARKED THERE FOR THE WEEK.

NATS What's up Jackie! Hi, how are you?

Peters: OUTSIDE IN THE PARKING LOT, BIKES ARE BEING UNLOADED, TIRES CHECKED, WATER BOTTLES TOPPED OFF.

Perkins: One thing I know is that, and it's one thing that Dr. Keene preaches, is that you can't handle what's thrown at you, but you can handle your reaction to it. There's some country music playing, I see some chiles down the street and we are about to head into probably the hardest day of the trip.

Peters: KP IS A SENIOR, SHE GRADUATES IN DECEMBER 2023. SHE'S A GIFTED PHOTOGRAPHER, A LOVER OF THE OUTDOORS, A SCIENTIST- SHE DOES RESEARCH THROUGH THE TRUE SCHOLARS PROGRAM AT TECH... SHE HAS STUDIED ABROAD TWICE- IN ICELAND AND SOUTH AFRICA, MADE THE GREAT PLAINS HER CLASSROOM AND PARTICIPATED IN FIELD WORK AT THE JUNCTION CAMPUS. SO, SHE HAS REALLY TAKEN ADVANTAGE OF HER YEARS AS A STUDENT. SHE FEELS GOOD ABOUT THIS YEAR, FOR ADVENTURE MEDIA ROUND TWO. SHE'S READY FOR THIS, THE HARDEST ROUTE THAT ADVENTURE MEDIA HAS EVER DONE.

Perkins: And we are off, ah! Okay, first 8 miles on pavement, then we have the hardest climb of probably the whole trip... Good thing it's on the first day.

Cole Rohrbach, Student: I'm here with Dani but this is just a personal vlog for the moment...

Peters: THAT'S COLE...HE ALSO GRADUATES THIS DECEMBER WITH A DUAL DEGREE IN ARCHITECTURE AND GENERAL BUSINESS. COLE IS SPLIT RIGHT DOWN THE MIDDLE- HALF OF HIM HAS DREAMS OF BECOMING A DOCUMENTARY FILMMAKER FOR NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC, WHILE THE OTHER HALF SAYS HE'D LIKE TO OWN HIS OWN ARCHITECTURE BUSINESS SOMEDAY. HE'S A CREATIVE IN THE TRUEST FORM OF THE WORD. YOU'LL HEAR COLE AND KP A LOT IN THIS EPISODE, THEY'RE OUR STUDENT COLLABORATORS AND THE REASON THIS EPISODE EVEN EXISTS.

Rohrbach: We are probably at the last stop before we hit the tough stuff. I don't know if you can see in the background, but that big hill, that's what we're climbing. This is, this is crunch time, this is the time to refuel, this is the time to get your head in the game. It's gonna be fun, I'm excited! We finally get to see this thing, everyone has been hyping it up all year. All everybody can talk about is White Gap, I don't even know what comes after white gap except for like long rides!

(Music)

McMillan: Oh my god. It's a beautiful day.. A beautiful day to ride a mountain bike.
Jacqueline Holliday, Student: I've definitely fallen... I don't know how many times but I'm good with falls now.

Montgomery: I've just gotten in my head about it and then I get down it and I'm like, 'Oh that wasn't that bad, was it?' But when I am up there I'm like, like just now, I was in tears about it.
Rohrbach: My confidence in this is not good, I will be honest. So, little nervous about that.

(Music)

Perkins: We are in peak sunset now, but the sun just barely dipped below the mountains we were on and it cast this golden light over all of us... just feeling immensely grateful to be here and immensely grateful that I go to a university that offers these kinds of opportunities because when am I ever going to feel like that sitting in a lecture hall?

Rohrbach: Whenever we were getting to the very top of White Gap, we just timed it so perfectly to where the light was just pouring over the top of the mountain peaks and it was lighting up the little like prairie grass that we had, and everyone had a nice yellow glow to it. That may have been one of the prettiest landscapes I've seen in my entire life.

Perkins: That was one of the most magical moments I've ever had outdoors...

Dube: Not to be super horribly cheesy but I think this is going to be the adventure of a lifetime. I think I'm gonna come back changed, I just don't know how yet.

Peters: THAT'S LINDSAY DUBE- SHE GRADUATED IN MAY WITH A DUAL DEGREE IN AG COMMUNICATIONS AND CREATIVE MEDIA INDUSTRIES.

Dube: So, I'm excited to see, to find parts of myself that I might not know where they are right now.

Olivia Raymond: I love everybody I'm doing it with. This group is just stellar because I feel like we are all just such hard workers, and not complainers. We are all doers.

Shaylin Romero Jimenez, Student: My favorite part so far... I think I'll have to agree with Liv, the people here are just great. I realized that my like, head is my worst enemy at times, especially when biking. Because sometimes it's just kinda like, just gotta keep going, just gotta keep pedaling.

Peters: DAYS ONE AND TWO BLEND TOGETHER IN A BLUR OF SORE LEGS AND LUNGS, DUST-FILLED EYES AND MOUTHS AND SWEATY HIGH 5'S. SO FAR, THEY'VE MADE IT THROUGH WHITE GAP, AND MULTIPLE TERRAIN CHANGES, THEY'VE EXPERIENCED PETROGLYPHS AND CRUISED DOWN THE CHIHUAHUAN DESERT. THEY WATCHED THE SUN SET NEAR PICACHO PEAK AT THE EDGE OF THE MESILLA VALLEY. THE ADRENALINE THEY STARTED THE TRIP WITH WOULD SUSTAIN THEM THROUGH THE FIRST 48 HOURS AND 50 MILES.

(Riding)

(Music)

Peters: THEY PULLED INTO CAMP AND SET UP FOR ANOTHER NIGHT BENEATH THE STAR FILLED SKY. BY THE TIME THEY WAKE UP ON DAY THREE, THE TRIP IS STARTING TO WEAR. ON EMOTIONS, ON LEGS, ON TIRES. NEW CHALLENGES WILL SOON PRESENT THEMSELVES TO THIS GROUP OF DUSTY DESERT RIDERS. WE'LL TELL YOU ABOUT THOSE RIGHT AFTER THE BREAK.

Christina Adejokun, Student: The Legacy I want to leave is that, though you're here for an education, find what you love doing but make sure that what you're doing is not only impacting yourself but impacting our university in a positive light. I have a love for my community. I have a love for my friends. I have a love for being an African American individual. My name is Christina Adejokun and From Here, It's Possible.

Hannah Hudgens, Student: Where do I clip this?...

Perkins: On your little, yeah just right there. So just introduce yourself, tell me a little bit about your journey so far and today especially.

Hudgens: Just kinda talking to myself?

Perkins: Yeah, kinda. Just like reflecting on the day.

Hudgens: My name is Hannah Hudgens and I'm a sophomore at Texas Tech University. I've been involved in several of the immersive learning programs that Tech offers with Jerod Foster- I've done the Junction Maymester, that was my first little experience last summer. You're good Dani! We'll walk.

Hudgens: I can't describe the amount of joy and just bliss, honestly, that comes from challenging yourself in beautiful places. Whenever I wake up in the morning, there's a sense of drive and a sense of accomplishment that happens there. Right now, I'm biking and have several miles to go doing some uphill and downhill stretches and it's a little rocky and I'm holding on for dear life, baby! And the hiking begins.

Justin Keene, Associate Professor: The class has gained enough momentum that every year, it keeps making...

Peters: JUSTIN KEENE HAS BEEN AT TEXAS TECH SINCE 2013 HE'S A BIKE ENTHUSIAST, A MUSICIAN, A SOCCER FAN. HE'S ALSO A DAD OF 5. KEENE, AS THE STUDENTS REFER TO HIM, IS A NATURAL ENCOURAGER, HE'S A VOICE OF REASON, HE'S PERSPECTIVE WHEN DAYS ARE LONG.

Perkins: Why do you continue to bring students out into the field year after year?

Keene: Part of it is, I think the experience is so unique and it's such a special thing that we get to do this. Students, you know, they graduate... Students have this really incredible experience, and then we've got this new crop that I think deserves the opportunity to push themselves and try hard things.

Perkins: What's the biggest thing that you hope students take away from adventure media?

Keene: That they're capable of a lot more than they think they are. I don't care if they ever bike pack again. I don't care if they become these avid mountain bikers or something... but I want them to push themselves to do hard stuff, whatever that looks like for them. And to trust themselves that they are going to be capable of doing things in life that, on its face, looks kind of impossible. Right? And that doesn't have to be outdoors based, it doesn't have to be biking – it could be facing a cancer diagnosis, it could be really, really hard stuff at work or life. I just want them to know that they are capable of so much more and uh, this class is just as much about empowering students to be the best version of themselves as it is about teaching them to create media in the outdoors.

Raymond: Okay, my name is Olivia Raymond, Umm and I've had a rough day. My tire blew out about halfway through our day, right before hitting... oooh sand... were walking... my tire blew out right when we hit pavement getting into the outskirts of Las Cruces.

I've had a lot of bad mental moments today. It kinda got me a little riled up, just a little in my head and quiet and I shed a few tears... but I'm thankful for Keene, he noticed I wasn't doing okay and we talked it out. He helped me feel a little bit better about it.

Peters: AFTER THE LAST FLAT TIRE, NUMBER FOUR OR FIVE ON THE DAY THEY HAD TO PULL OFF AND LOOK TO CONNAD FOR THE FIX... HE'S A BIKE MECHANIC AND MASTERS STUDENT IN HUMAN SCIENCES. HE USED DUCT TAPE, RUBBING ALCOHOL AND SOME ELBOW GREASE TO TRANSITION LIV'S BACK TIRE TO TUBELESS IN A GAS STATION PARKING LOT. IT TOOK TWO HOURS, PUTTING THIS GROUP VERY BEHIND SCHEDULE.

Röhrbach: Well... It is officially 5:00 and we are still in Las Cruces. The odds of us making it to our campsite are getting slimmer and slimmer.

Peters: BY THE TIME THEY FIND CAMP, THEY'RE EXHAUSTED AND SPENT. THEY RODE THE LAST FEW MILES IN THE DARK AFTER RUNNING OUT OF DAYLIGHT. THE NIGHTLY HAPPY CRAPPY IS A QUICK ONE, EVERYONE IS EAGER TO SET UP CAMP AND TUCK IN FOR THE NIGHT.

Perkins: Night of day 3. Me and Lindsay Dube are climbing into our tent for the night... In our nightly debrief the general consensus was, 'this was a long day, it felt like 10 days in one.'

Dube: And I knew that the next like 10 or 11 miles was gonna just be up and down and up and down and climbing and sandy and man, I was trying so hard, to keep it together. Like so hard. And we got to a point where I was like, I can't explain it. Like, visibly just trying to, like, take a breath and compose myself and it just boiled over for me. But I, you know... I'm not a crier typically. Not that there's anything wrong with I crying, I just- that's just not normally me. And so, I think crying is a really uncomfortable place, a really vulnerable place to be. I didn't want to cry on this trip. Not because of a hard day, like I can do hard things.

Peters: LINDSAY COMES FROM A LONG LINE OF FIGHTERS. MUSCULAR DYSTROPHY IS A GENETIC DISEASE THAT KEEPS YOUR MUSCLES FROM REGENERATING. IT'S PASSED FROM MOTHER TO SON, FROM FATHER TO DAUGHTER. SHE WAS 19 WHEN SHE GOT THE FORMAL DIAGNOSIS, HER SOPHOMORE YEAR OF COLLEGE.

Dube: I'm just really, really proud of myself. And I know that there will be a day where I cannot do this because I've seen it eat away at my family's physical freedom because it's a genetic thing. So, being able to do this now, I'm just really grateful for the body that I have today and that I was able to make it.

Foster: We are too.

Peters: EVERYONE WHO KNOWS LINDSAY KNOWS THAT SHE ISN'T HELD BACK FROM ANYTHING, ESPECIALLY THIS DISEASE. THIS TRIP MAKES PEOPLE VULNERABLE. IT'S ARGUABLY THE MOST IMPORTANT PART OF THE CLASS. THE PEOPLE. THE COMMUNITY. LINDSAY AND THE STUDENTS OF THIS CLASS WILL SAY THAT RELATIONSHIPS BUILT IN THE SANDY MOUNTAINS WILL OUTLIVE THIS WEEK, WILL OUTLIVE THIS EXPERIENCE.

(Music Close)

Perkins: Day 4 is kicking off; we are officially in the Organ Mountain-Desert Peaks Monument, and we've got a day of single track waiting for us. The biggest challenge of today is that we filled up water in Las Cruces about 15 miles ago and there is no water until tomorrow afternoon, so we are pretty loaded down... (fade out)

Dube: The stuff we hit after lunch, I think, was like a different level. Not because of its difficulty but because so many factors were playing into it because we were carrying a lot more stuff because we are about to be out of water for the next day and a half...

Jack Karika, Student: What the hell are we going to do without water in the middle of the desert?

Dube: Jack, why are you so stressed about water? Do you not have the capacity?

Karika: 2 liters. And I've been drinking 4 liters a day.

Dube: Okay, that would have me a little stressed too.

Jack Water Lady: We met this nice lady... I asked her if there was a local tap and she said we could use her faucet. And by faucet, she meant her front yard hose...

McMillian: Alrighty, Lets go ride some bikes, let's go ride some bikes. Let's goooo, lets goooo ooooh lets go ride some bikes. Wooahoo!

Peters: KEELY IS A TRUE LIGHT ON THIS TRIP- SHE EMBODIES POSITIVITY EVEN ON THE MOST GRUELING DAYS.

Peters: SHE SINGS TO HERSELF; MADE UP WORDS TO A SONG SHE CREATES AS SHE NAVIGATES THE ROUGHLY 17 MILES OF SINGLE TRACK THAT DAY FOUR FEATURES.

(Singing)

Hudgens: What's your reaction to what you're about to do?

Montgomery: Ummm.. I'm really scared...

Peters: FROM THE TOP OF A NEARBY CLIFF, EMMA MONTGOMERY WATCHES HER CLASSMATE JAKOB WIND HIS WAY THROUGH THE PATH THAT SHE'S ABOUT TO GO DOWN HERSELF.

Montgomery: I don't love a big descent. That looks bad, oh my god!

Foster: Hang on cowboy!

Justin Rex: Did you fall in a cactus?

Conrad: Yeah... (louder)

Montgomery: That doesn't make me feel any better.

Conrad: She got me good!

(Cheering)

Good Job, Jakob! You okay?

Perkins: Oh no!

Peters: KP'S CAMERA WAS ROLLING AS JAKOB PULLS OUT A THORN ABOUT AN INCH LONG FROM HIS SHIN. RED BLOOD BLOSSOMING FROM THE FRESH WOUND MIXING WITH THE TAN COLORED SAND COATING HIS LEG.

Conrad: Holy Sh*t.

Montgomery: This is really fun for me, single track is really fun because it is challenging. But when you can't do it and when you feel too scared to do it, it's like why am I even here?

Hudgens: But you did it...

Montgomery: But I did it.

Hudgens: Shake and bake baby.

Montgomery: Shake and bake.

Peters: DAY FOUR IS WHEN SHAYLIN HITS HER STRIDE. BEING FROM NEW YORK, SHE ADMITS THAT BEFORE PREPARING FOR THIS TRIP HER KNOWLEDGE ABOUT BIKEPACKING WAS NEXT TO NOTHING.

Romero Jimenez: My happy was that today such was a fun time, I loved the single track I felt like I was killing it today. I made it up most of the hills I thought I could make it up one and I tried the ones that I couldn't, I still made it like a pretty decent way... very proud of myself today.

Peters: THEY PULL INTO CAMP AS THE SKY IS IGNITED- BLASTS OF ORANGE AND PINK AND RED FROM THE SUNSET SLOWLY EASING INTO TONES OF COOL BLUE.

Foster: I mean, I've never seen a group gel like this ever in these in these moments. And we've had some really great cohesive groups. But this year's group as a whole, uh, was, was a true family. And, you know, it was like it was like watching a state championship basketball team, you know, support each other out there on the, on the court.

(Closing tent zipper)

(Raining and wind)

Hudgens: Good morning, it's 12:40 somethin and as you can tell it is raining. We just woke up frantically because our clothes were airing out outside our tent.. So I went and pulled them and got some extra things out of our frame...

(Music open)

Conrad: Honestly, with how the sky looks right now you would never have known that it was raining until you look down at the ground where all of our tent pads were and it is just blatantly obvious that something went horribly wrong last night. Yeah, I

think God was looking at all of our footage and decided, 'you know what, they didn't have enough conflict.' I was told there was a 10% chance and whoever told me that, there's a 10% chance they're catching these hands. Because I am freezing.

Perkins: After a couple of miles downhill to a truck stop, we've got a much needed refuel before we start of day 5 strong.

Hudgens: Real quick, what did you eat?

Dawson Hataway, Student: I had 4 uncrustables, a banana, I had a honey bun, I had a jimmy deans sausage, egg, cheese, biscuit, gravy bowl, a red bull and a chocolate milk and a banana. Unless I already said a banana. Somewhere north of 1500 calories.

(Music Close)

Matt Mason, Cocreator of the Monumental Loop: Am I looking here?

Montgomery: You're looking at me...

Peters: THIS IS MATT MASON. SELF-PROCLAIMED DESERT ROAMER AND STAY AT HOME DAD. HE ALSO CREATED THE MONUMENTAL LOOP IN 2009. HE JOINED THE CLASS FOR THE FIRST COUPLE OF DAYS.

Mason: So, I had the idea to piece together a hike, you know, what would become the Monumental Loop. And I tried to do it and it was just so sandy and it was so far between the mountains that I didn't enjoy it at all.

Peters: AFTER A FEW YEARS, IT WOULD EVOLVE INTO THE PREMIER ROUTE THAT IT IS TODAY. WHILE IT'S POPULAR AMONG FELLOW BIKERS, MATT SAYS HIS DREAM IS FOR THIS TO BECOME A THING THE LOCALS TREASURE.

Mason: I sort of think this is what everybody needs. You know what I mean? We have all these problems as a society, and I think they are all sort of rooted back to we've lost our connection with nature. That's my belief. My goal for the loop would be like, my big win would be like if a high school group or if some like kids who grew up here, you know, they go out on the weekends... if they ride some of the loop to like have fun on the weekends. To me that would be a success.

(Riding)

(Cheering)

Mason: I mean really, we were just going down this road and I was behind everybody and I'm, like, I felt, like, overwhelmed with just like hope for the future. I'm like, these kids are killing it! I just feel super hopeful, you know.

(Music Open)

Perkins: T-minus 3 miles until we're at the end of it. The sun is going down. The sky is on fire! There's a rainbow! I'm very happy to be on this journey, I'm happy to share it all with you listening at home. If you could be here... you'd see the sky on fire with pinks and purples and blues, the remnants of a thunderstorm that passed us long ago and will probably come back around for us in the night. A lot of gratitude that this is the life I get to live, that this is an opportunity I get to have at Texas Tech, and that I get to share it with so many amazing people, and that classes like this have changed the course of my life....

Perkins: Is this it you guys?

(Cheering)

Dube: My happy is riding those last five miles in together... like we all grouped up and decided to do that. I think that was really, really important.

Rohrbach: I was kind of in the really good rhythm where I didn't really have to worry about shooting. I had this like really cool, like I'm gonna call it a cyclist high I don't know, it was like an out of body experience.... The only thing I had to basically feel my way through it was just the bike itself, and you kind of start to become one with the machine beneath you and everything that's going around.

Higgins: A lot of Happy's though, I really enjoyed riding up the incline for forever it felt like. But I like that like slow steady climbs where you're just kinda coasting the whole way. Coasting is the wrong word, pushing like hell but you know what I mean. I hope when our kid grows up, they're half as awesome as all of y'all are.

Peters: DAY 5 COMES TO A CLOSE ON A SENTIMENTAL NOTE- IN A RUSH OF ACCOMPLISHMENT AND PRIDE, EXHAUSTED BODIES CATCHING A SECOND WIND OF APPRECIATION- FOR EACH OTHER, THE EARTH AROUND THEM AND THE STRENGTH FROM WITHIN. THE FINAL REST STOP AT KILLBORN HOLE IS STILL 25 MILES FROM THE PICKUP SPOT- A BONUS RIDE BACK TO TOWN THAT THEY'LL START THE NEXT MORNING.

(Music Close)

Rodriguez: I can't believe we rode the monumental loop... and we met Matt Mason. And we're about to eat good!

Peters: IT'S AROUND LUNCHTIME ON FRIDAY, MARCH 17TH... AND THEY CAN NOW ALL SAY THAT ADVENTURE MEDIA 2023 IS IN THE BOOKS.

(Talking and cheering)

Peters: THEY CELEBRATE TOGETHER AND RELAX ON THE CURB OUTSIDE A SPOT THEY'VE SELECTED FOR LUNCH.

Keene: Hey I'm not Jared, and I'm not super philosophical about stuff, I'm just kind of raw emotion but I'm proud of you guys. Like, this was hard. This was 175 miles of just grit. And so, this is a week that I hope you guys remember for a really long time. And I hope that you remember if nothing else that the little voice inside your head that tells you that you can't do stuff is a liar.

Peters: SINCE 2017, ADVENTURE MEDIA HAS FOUND A WAY TO BRING PRACTICAL LEARNING EXPERIENCES TO STUDENTS IN A REAL-WORLD WAY. IT'S A COURSE THAT'S INSPIRED FACULTY - WANTING TO GIVE THEIR STUDENTS AN EXPERIENCE OUTSIDE A TRADITIONAL CLASSROOM. IT'S ALSO A COURSE THAT'S CHANGED THE TRAJECTORY OF STUDENTS' CAREERS - INTRODUCING THEM TO INDIVIDUALS LIKE MATT MASON, WHO YOU MET EARLIER. AND BRANDON WEAVER WHO WORK AND LIVE IN THE WORLD OF OUTDOOR SPORTS.

Brandon Weaver, writer: Without Adventure Media and restarting riding, I think I would be lost.

(Music open)

Peters: HE'S A FREELANCE WRITER. MOSTLY DOING WORK FOR OUTDOOR RECREATION MAGAZINES.

Weaver: I was living in Colorado at the time and I'm a native Texan. I was Texas-sick, so to get to come back to my beloved Big Bend and spend it with some of the most exceptional young people that I'd ever met at the time, it changed my life.

Peters: WEAVER MADE HIS FIRST GUEST APPEARANCE WITH THE CLASS IN 2019 AFTER COLLABORATING WITH JEROD FOSTER ON A BIKEPACKING ARTICLE THE SEASON PRIOR. HE'S BEEN A PART OF EVERY ONE SINCE.

Weaver: It's has been this, this motivating thing that every year I do, I meet all these young creators and collaborators and... just the most talented, hard-working young people that I've ever met. Even when I was young.
(Laughing)

Rohrbach: It's a, it's a weird feeling, that after all that, after the culmination of it we're just going to go back now.

Peters: COLE CAN TESTIFY THAT TAKING THIS CLASS A SECOND TIME IS TRANSFORMATIVE. HIS FIRST TIME AROUND WAS IN 2020, SO HE DIDN'T GET THE FULL EXPERIENCE LIKE HE DID ON THE MONUMENTAL LOOP.

Rohrbach: Life's about to resume. I'm about to have to turn on my phone again for the first time in 5 days and I'm kinda scared for that. I'm about to get blown up by notifications or something.... This was a once in a lifetime experience, I'm lucky to say that I was a part of it.

(Music)

Peters: THIS IS THE NIGHT WHERE IT ALL HITS HOME. HOW MUCH THEY LEARNED, HOW MUCH THEY GREW, HOW MUCH THEY'VE CHANGED. JEROD TAKES SOME TIME TO HAVE A SHORT AWARDS CEREMONY SO TO SPEAK... TO CELEBRATE SOME OF THE HIGH POINTS OF THE TRIP.

Foster: For the deuce takers, it's Dawson... (cheering) that, that one is a really really hard one. But Dawson always kept the team together, you were always super cheerful, um you were extremely positive. And that's the whole class, you were also extremely productive, y'all's team was very productive. You were always on it.

(Cheering)

Foster: They took on an extra job... now part of their being in the class again was to work with Comms and Marketing, unfortunately Taylor couldn't make it, so they were Taylor.

Peters: THAT'S KP AND COLE HE'S TALKING ABOUT HERE- JEROD GAVE THEM ADDITIONAL WELL-DESERVED CREDIT FOR THEIR STORYTELLING OF THIS TRIP.

Foster: We talked about it today, as we are slogging along, we talked about how everybody did something that we were like so impressed with. I mean, Emma's climbing was really, really cool to watch. Right? Right. Shaylin like really, really digging the downhill, just the single track in general. Right.

Weaver: The upmost respect to each and every single one of you, it was an honor to ride next to you. I did saddle-talk with everybody... These classes mean everything to me, and it fills me up, inspires me to be a better rider and be a better creator.

(Music)

Raymond: I don't think that I could have come out here on my own, like on my own will without you guys and do what we just did.

Conrad: I think it's really cool that you know, Matt is a demigod in the bikepacking world, and you know, Dr. Foster is unbelievably famous in the bikepacking world... We were really out here bikepacking the Monumental Loop and it's just really, really incredible that we got transplanted into this community that was so accepting of us as complete newbies with also people that are really figureheads for the community.

Perkins: We're going to be faced with challenges for the rest of our lives and just knowing that, you know we all had the courage to take that step and to build our comfort zones a little more... and knowing that one day we might not be able to do that, and just really be able to cherish these moments now is probably the coolest thing.

(Music)

Peters: KP SAYS THE CLASS HAS TAUGHT HER THAT OFTEN TIMES, WE DON'T GIVE OURSELVES ENOUGH CREDIT. THAT THE DEPTH OF OUR ABILITIES IS MORE EXPANSIVE THAN WE CAN EVEN KNOW. LIKE THE PATH OF THE MONUMENTAL LOOP, LIFE IS FILLED WITH THORNS... WITH SAND AND ROCKS THAT ARE EASY TO GET STUCK IN. BUT YOU ONLY REALLY FAIL WHEN YOU GIVE UP. WE TELL OURSELVES THAT BOUNDARIES ARE WHERE OUR LIMITS LIE, BUT THE TRUTH IS... THAT MAYBE IT'S WHERE OUR STORY BEGINS. THAT WHEN YOU MEET YOUR BOUNDARY AND DISCOVER YOU CAN GO BEYOND IT, *THAT* UNKNOWN PLACE IS WHERE WE FIND OUR TRUE STRENGTH.

(Music Close)

Peters: FEARLESS IS PRODUCED BY THE TEXAS TECH OFFICE OF COMMUNICATIONS AND MARKETING. IT'S HOSTED AND WRITTEN BY ME, TAYLOR PETERS, AND THIS EPISODE IS CO-PRODUCED BY KATIE PERKINS AND COLE ROHRBACH. SPECIAL HELP FROM ALLISON HIRTH. THOMAS BOYD IS OUR AUDIO ENGINEER- HE DOES OUR SOUND DESIGN AND EDITS THIS PODCAST.

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