EXPLORING THE COUNTRY AT 10 MPH



The Cycling Adventures of Ellen and Jeff DeGange

Erie Canal, Florida C2C, GAP/C&O, OTET, KATY,
Greenbrier River

We met in 2012 with a mutual interest in mountain biking, kayaking, and a general love for the outdoors

We married in 2015 and quickly expanded our cycling activities to include longer distance day rides on gravel and paved trails:

- North Augusta Greenway (5 miles)
- Augusta Canal (6 miles)
- Beaufort Spanish Moss Trail (10 miles)
- Columbia 3-Rivers Greenway (15+ miles)
- Greenville Swamp Rabbit Trail (23 miles)
- Atlanta Silver Comet (95+ miles)





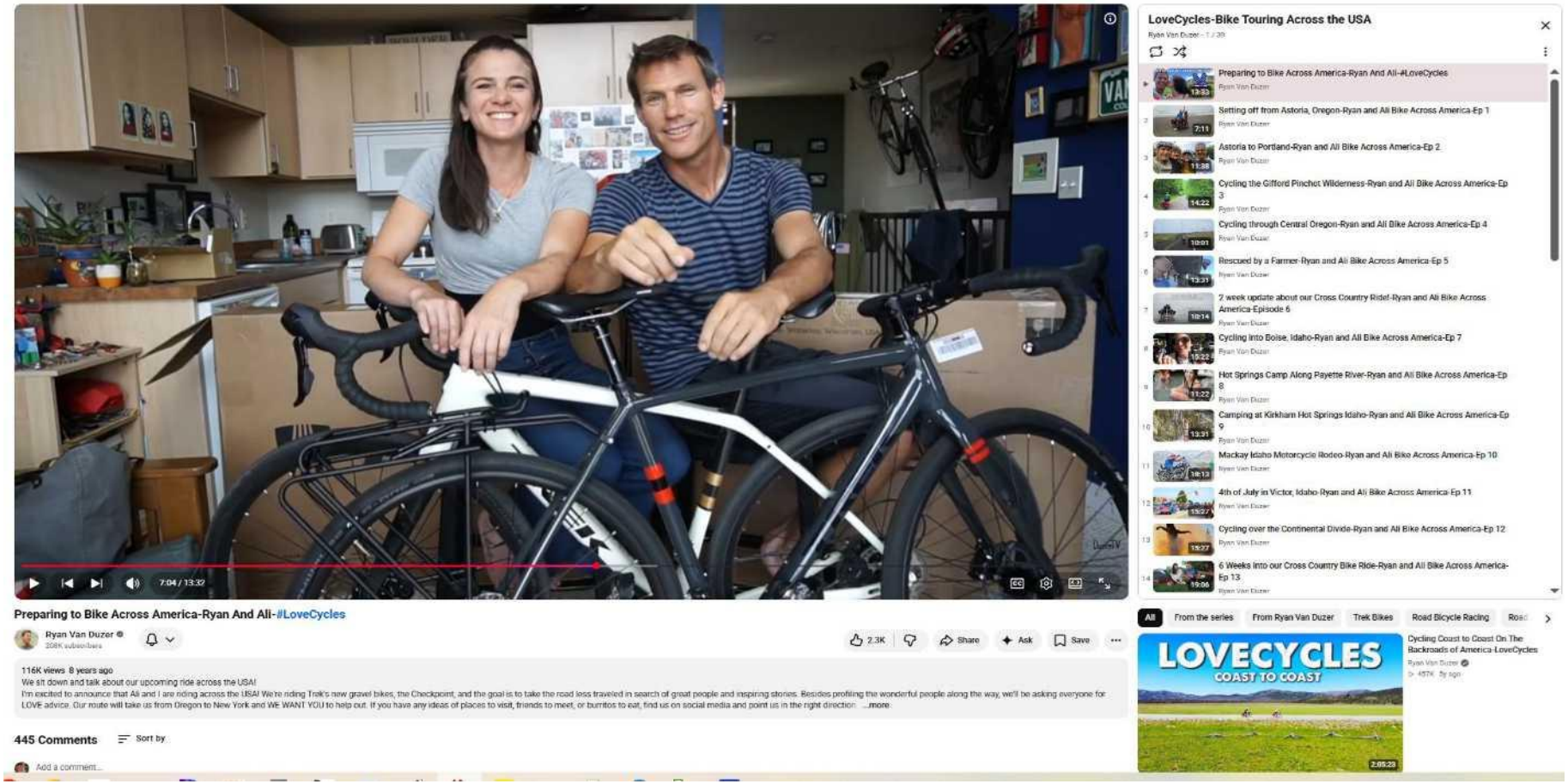






...and then we looked on YouTube...

Ryan Van Duzer - LOVECYCLES



Cycling with his girlfriend Ali from the Oregon Pacific Coast to New York City, over 3000 miles

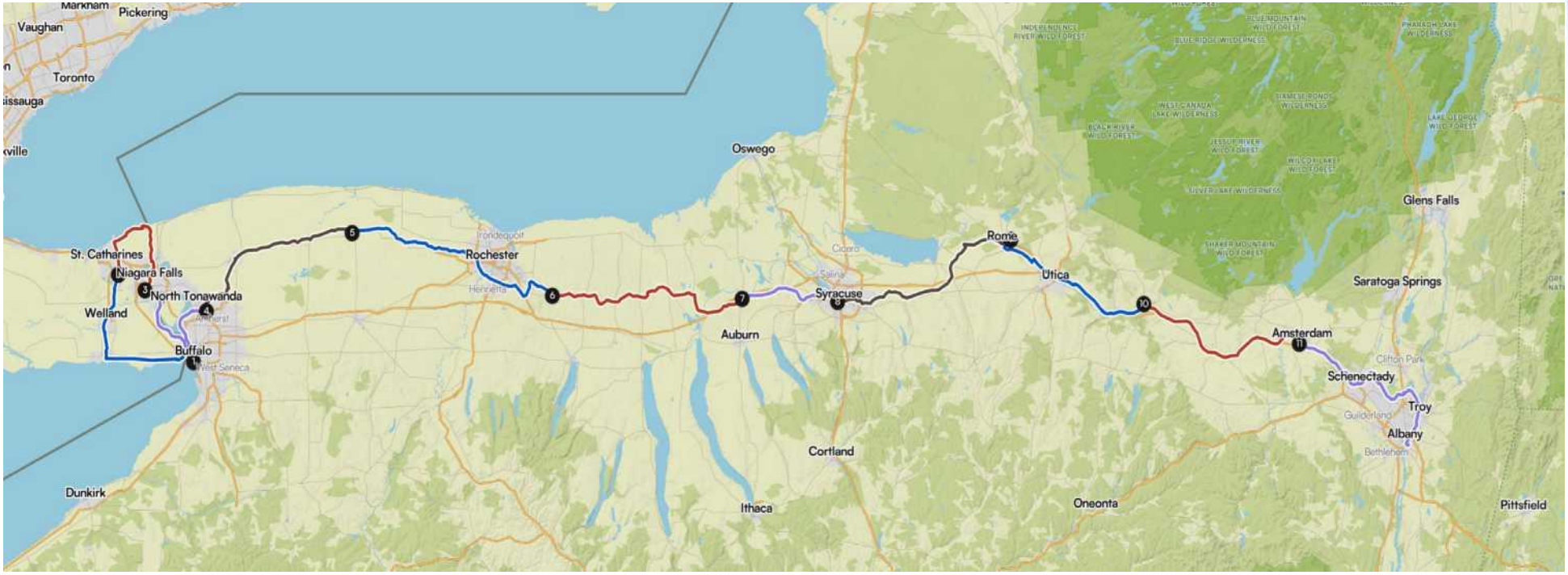
We have to do an overnight trip!

To test our tolerance for a long-distance ride, we planned a 4-day loop between DC and Harpers Ferry which stitched together several trails.



At the end of the 132 mile loop we were hooked!

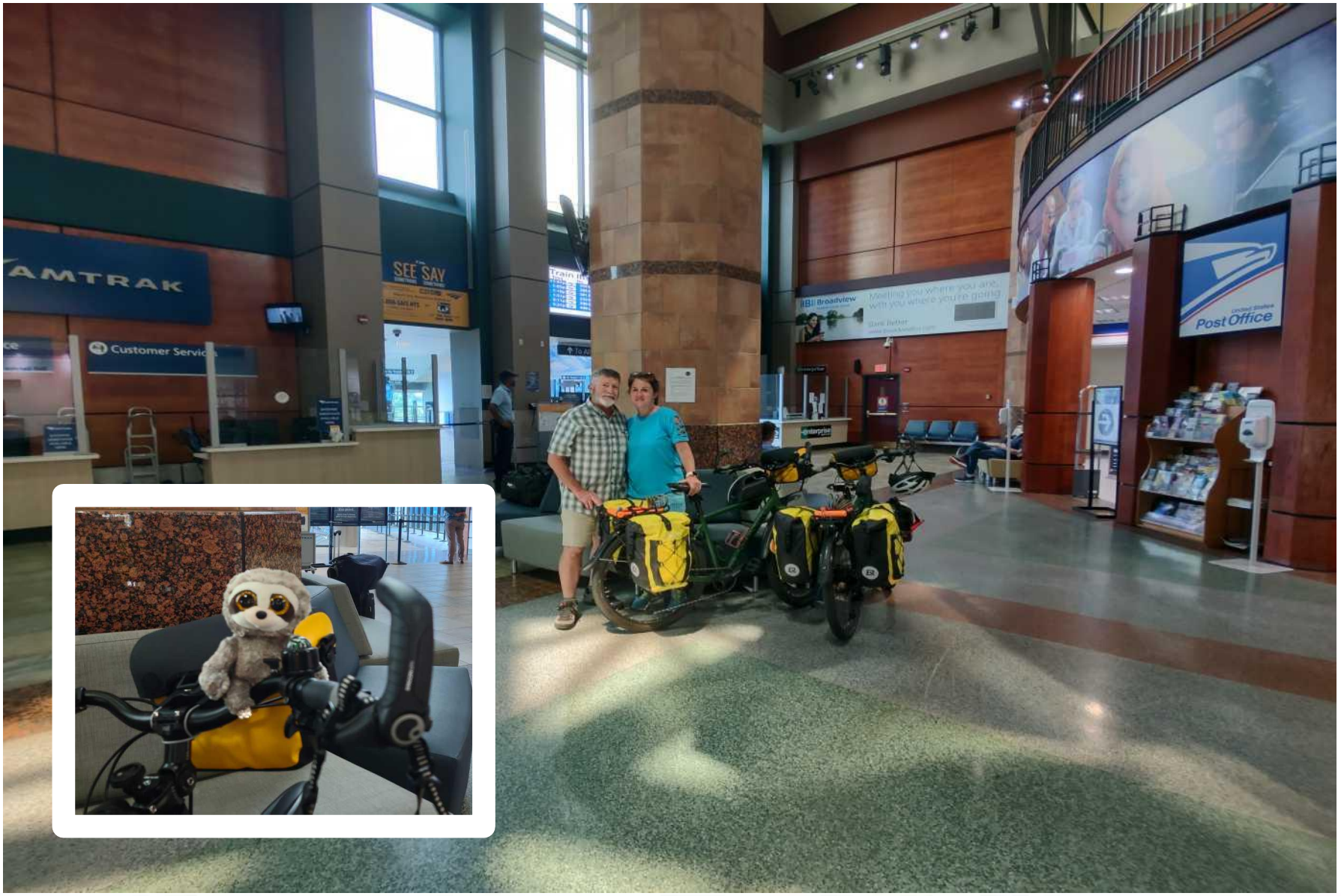
After retiring in June 2023 we set our sites on the 365 mile Erie Canal Trail in New York



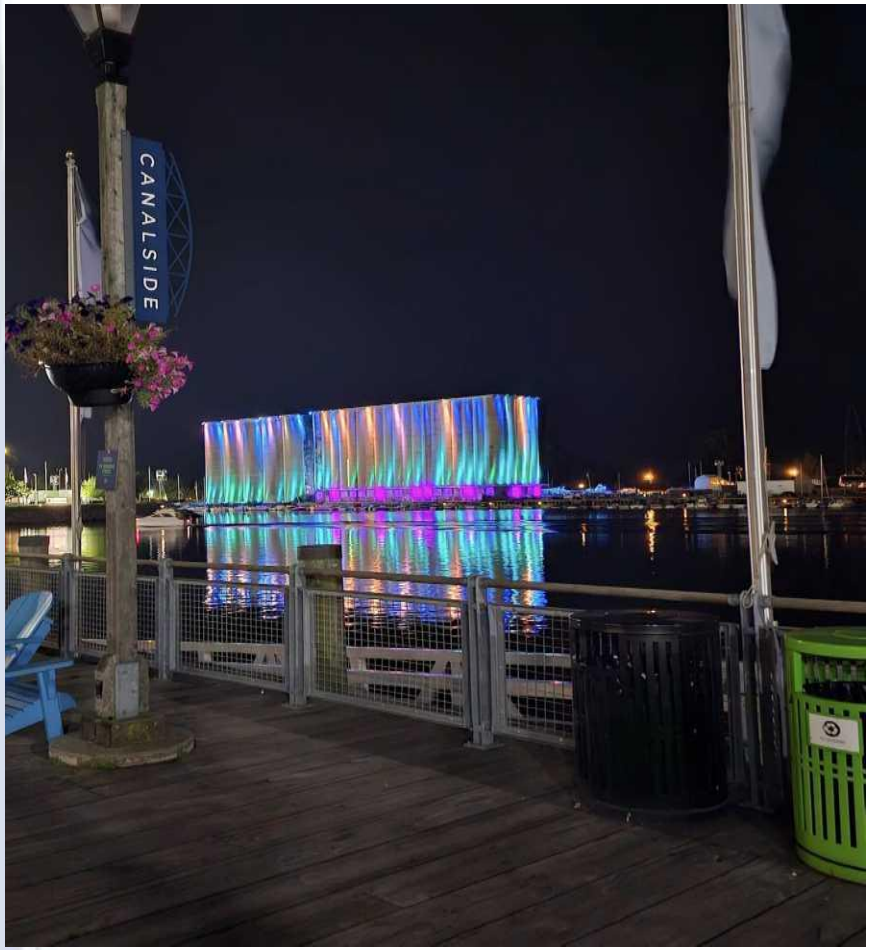
… and decided to add an 85 mile loop in Canada to visit Niagara Falls!

August/September 2023

We drove to Albany NY and took AMTRAK to Buffalo with our new mascot, Dally!



We had some time to explore the Buffalo Waterfront near our hotel and meet some locals

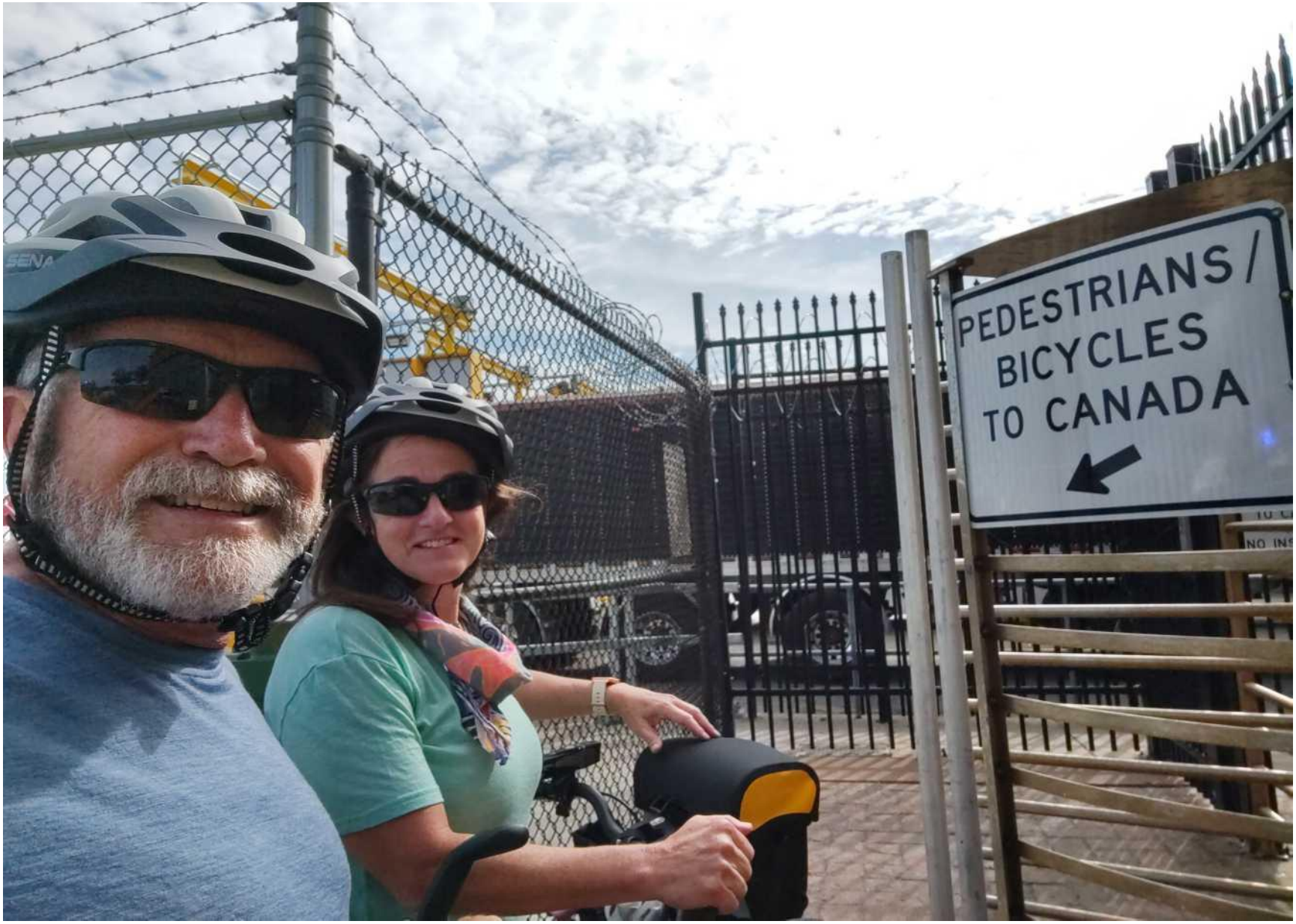




Erie Canal Trail Mile Marker 0 was across the street from our hotel!



We were amazed how easy it was to leave the US



Crossing the Peace Bridge into Canada



First order of business in Canada, take pictures of seagulls with Buffalo in the background



The Welland Canal Trail wasn't particularly scenic, but the size and volume of the shipping traffic was impressive!



We loved watching the bridges open for the cargo ships



Our first night's stay was at the “Inn at Lock 7”. The view of the working locks was awesome!



Southbound entrance to Locks 4, 5, 6 & 7 at Thorold, Ontario
“Where the ships climb the mountains”



On Day 2 we left the Welland Canal behind and caught our first glimpse of Lake Ontario



At Niagara-on-the-Lake the trail turned south to follow the Niagara River to the Falls



Arrived at Niagara Falls... in the rain









Heading south from Niagara Falls along the Niagara River Parkway Trail



Back in the US we met up with the Erie Canal Trail in Tonawanda, NY



The trail wanders between the original “Old Canal Towpath” and the newer, active “Barge Canal”

Long stretches of packed gravel along the Barge Canal



Brockport, NY
One of many small towns along the canal that provide food and hotels for trail users



Rochester, NY
Erie Canal crossing the Genesee River



There are many examples of murals, trail art, and historical displays telling the history, good and bad, of the Erie Canal




THE CANAL LAW
#169 • Speed and meeting of boats and preference in passing.
• No float shall move in any canal faster than at the rate of four miles an hour without a permission in writing from superintendent of public works: except that upon any of the enlarged canals, a boat may move at a rate of speed not exceeding six miles an hour, to be fixed by the superintendent of public works.
• The master of a float meeting another float, shall turn to the right, so as to be wholly on the right side of the center of the canal.
• When a boat used chiefly for the conveyance of persons overtakes any other float not used chiefly for that purpose, the master of the latter shall give up to the former every practicable facility for passing and if necessary shall stop until the former has fully passed.
• Every master or boatman violating any provision at this section shall for each offense forfeit to the state the sum of ten dollars.
Jordan Aqueduct
DAWN JORDAN
Based on a painting by Edward L. Henry
DAWN JORDAN

Towpath Travelers



The power team of drivers and mules were an integral part of the success of the Erie Canal. The strength of mules and the youth of drivers allowed for an affordable way to transport goods.

Painting by E. L. Henry c. 1826

A Guiding Hand

On the Erie Canal, drivers were used to ride or walk with the mule team towing boats. They carefully guided mules through bridges and variations along the path. Some older men were drivers, but typically drivers were young boys or girls. Families on the canal often had their young children work as drivers because it was cheaper than hiring someone.



Duped into Delinquency

Sometimes young orphans and homeless boys were hired as drivers on the Erie Canal. They were promised a good wage of $10-$12 per month, which is about $1,000-$1,500 today. Often these wages were not paid at the end of the season, forcing drivers to beg and steal in order to survive the winter. As a result, many boys spent the off-season in the warmth of a jail cell. Refuge houses were established to save these orphans from a life of crime.



Better than Horsepower

Mules were the most common towing animals on the Erie Canal. With the combined size of a horse and endurance of a donkey, these animals were born for the canal. Teams of three mules were usually used to pull larger boats. Boat owners said that although mules were stubborn, they would not allow themselves to be overworked into sickness like horses. Their smaller hooves make them more surefooted getting on and off boats and traveling over rugged terrain.

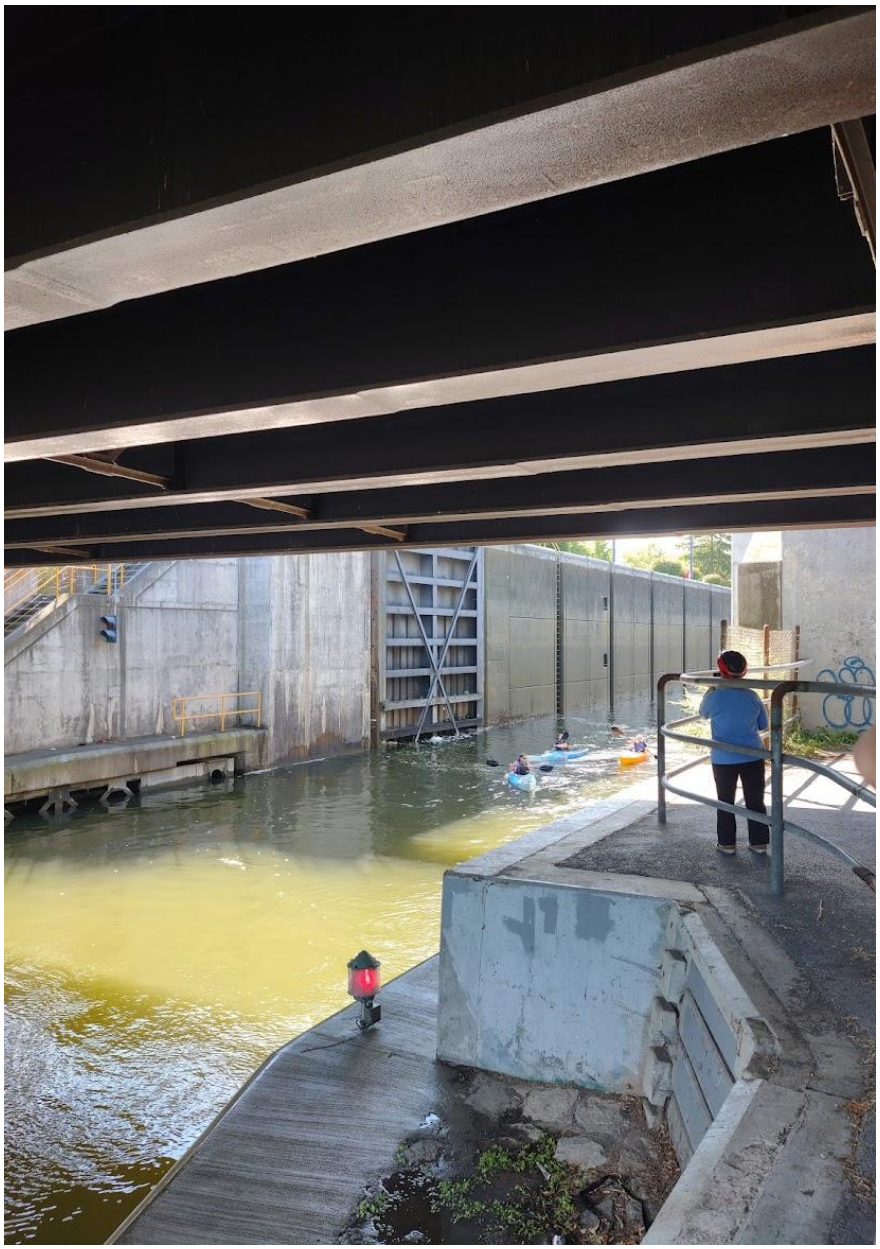
Images courtesy of Chittenango Landing Canal Boat Museu

Jonesville, NY converted their portion of the Old Erie Canal into a town park

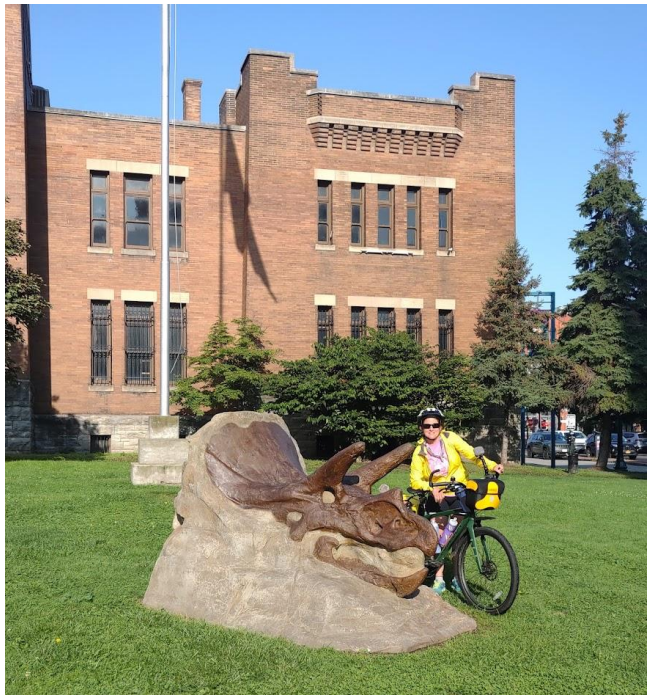


The Erie Canal locks operate for vessels of any size, even kayaks









Syracuse NY
a big city with a small town feel

…and great BBQ!



Cohoes Falls NY - Mohawk River
2nd largest falls in New York



Only 5 miles to Albany... and our car!



Arriving at our car in the AMTRAK parking lot



RIDE SUMMARY

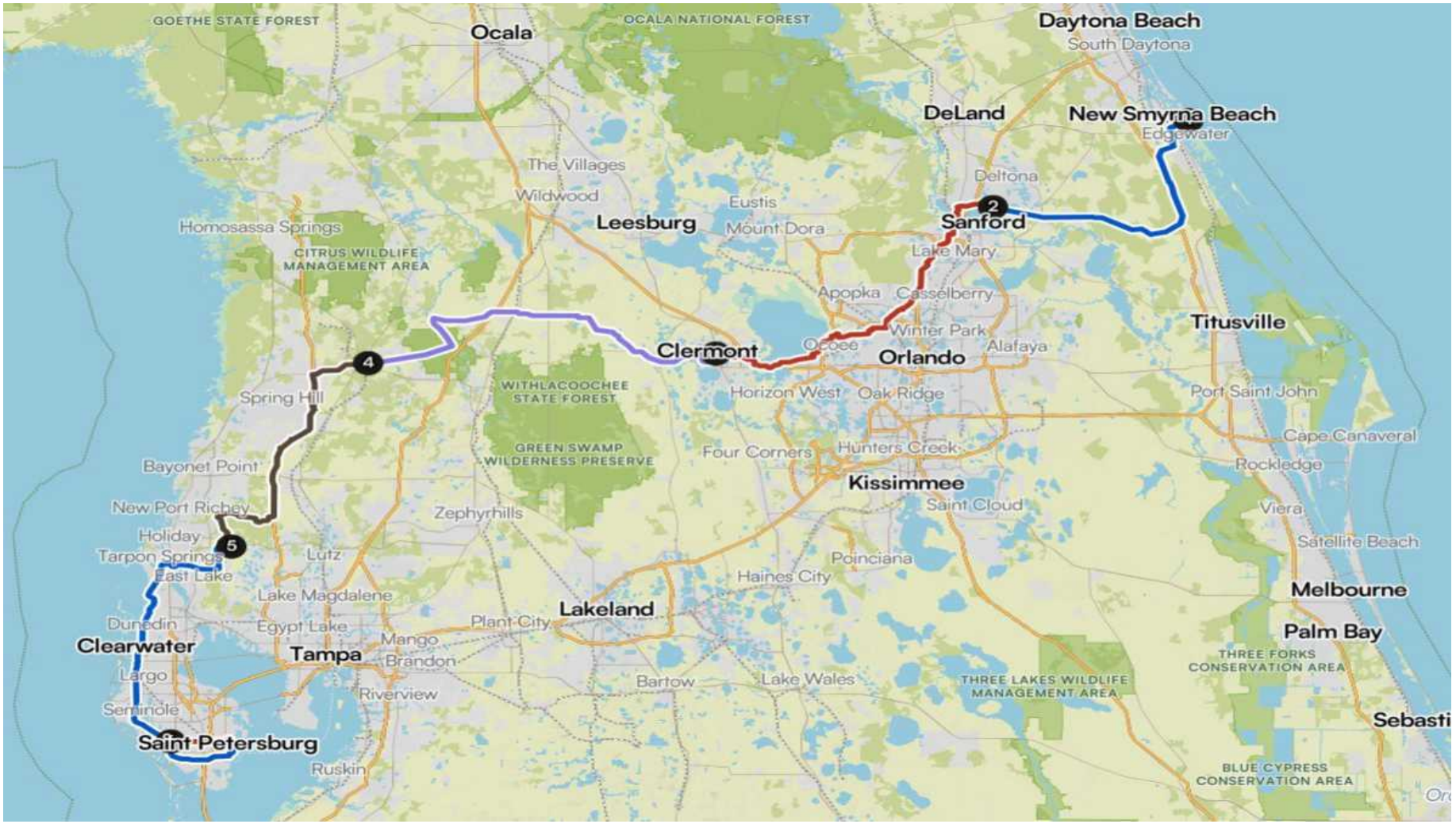
What we liked:

- The AMTRAK ride between Albany and Buffalo
- The varied scenery
- The shuttle buses in Niagara Falls
- Historical displays along the route
- Small towns along the route with friendly people and great restaurants
- Syracuse NY
- The animals along the Old Erie Canal towpath

What we didn't like:

- Road sections due to gaps in the trail
- The end of our ride… we wanted to keep going!

Florida Coast-to-Coast Trail (C2C)
5 days, 220 miles



February 2024

New Smyrna Beach has an Old Florida vibe. We stayed in the Seahorse Inn before an early morning start



New Smyrna Beach Start



Crossing the Intracoastal Waterway



The “C2C Tin Man” is a quirky example of Trail Art



Green Sulfur Springs was next door to our first night Airbnb, complete with resident alligator



Day 2, leaving wild Florida and heading into Orlando



Dedicated trail bridge over I-4



Impressive Orlando bike tunnels under busy intersections



Trail Art in Orlando



Night 2 at the Lake Minneola Inn



Memorial “Spirit Tree” with hundreds of windchimes





New paved trail through the Starkey Wilderness Preserve native Florida landscape



Trail Art on the Pinellas Trail in Tarpon Springs



Approaching Clearwater



No bikes allowed on the beach



End of the day, end of the trip



RIDE SUMMARY

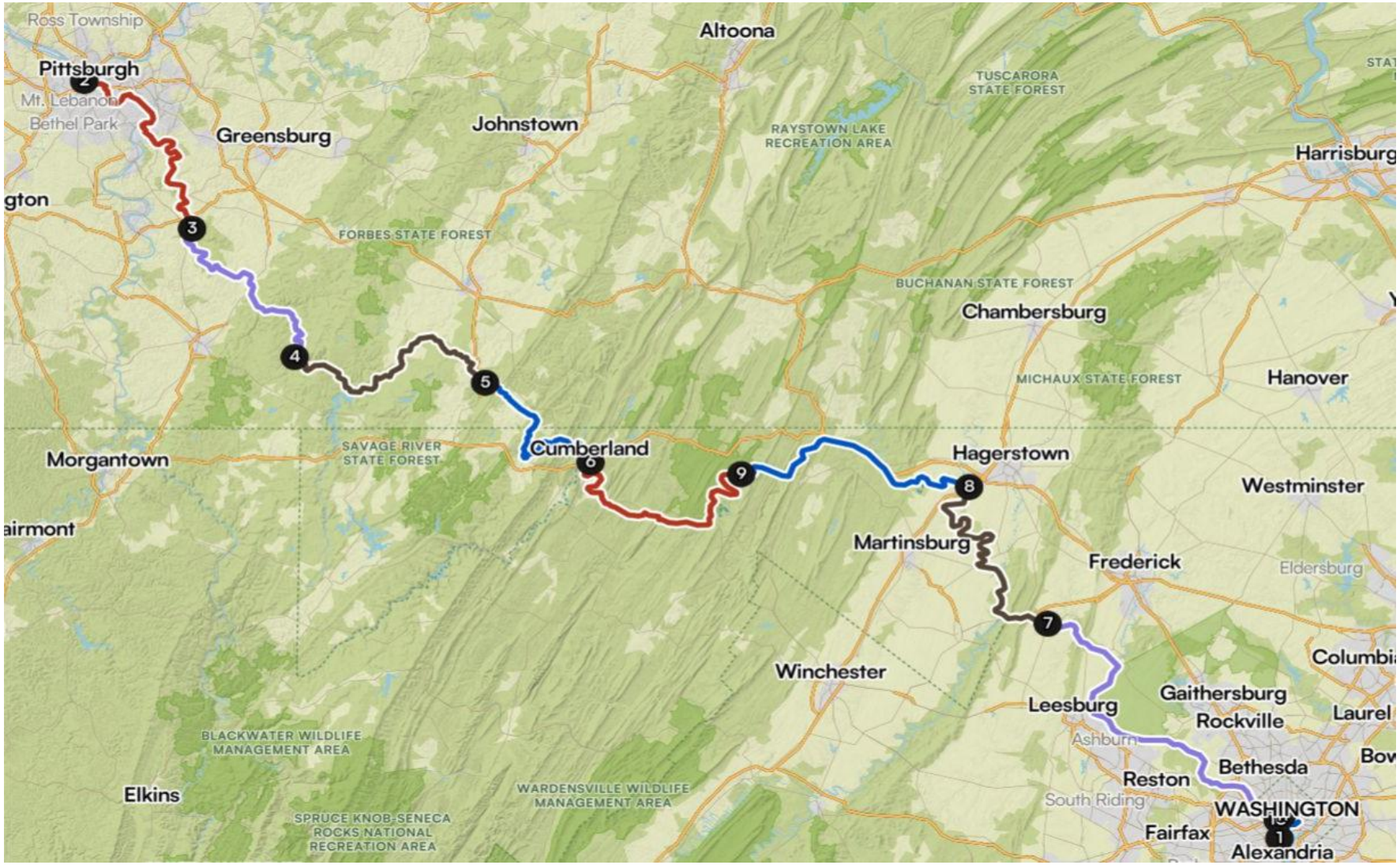
What we liked:

- The Florida weather in February
- Friendly hosts at the Seahorse Inn
- The trail art
- The bicycle infrastructure through Orlando
- The Starkey Wilderness Area
- The animals along the way

What we didn't like:

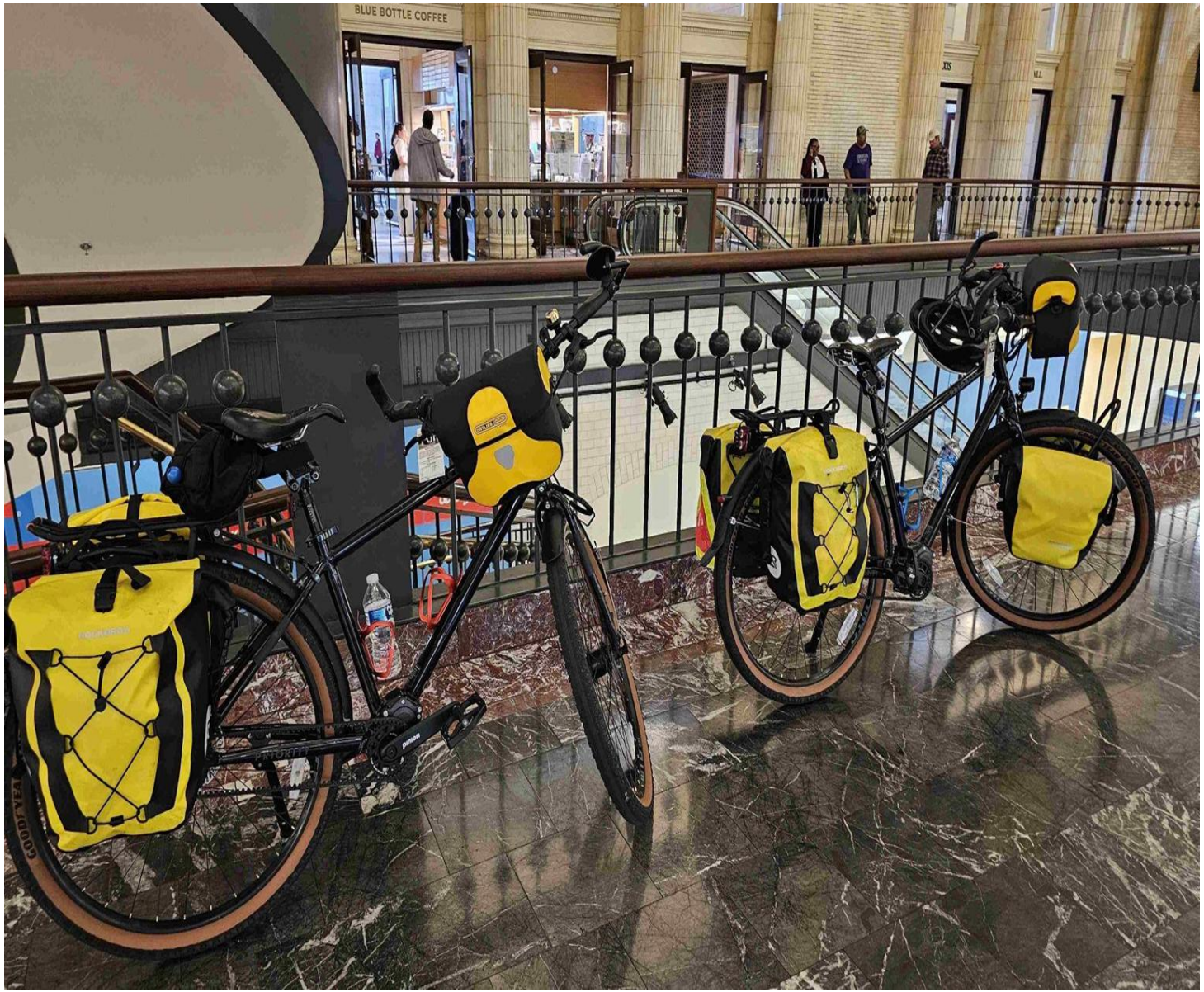
- The 28 miles of highway riding required to bridge a gap in the trail network
- The traffic noise on sections of the trail

The Great Allegheny Passage rail-trail and the Chesapeake and Ohio towpath (GAP/C&O)

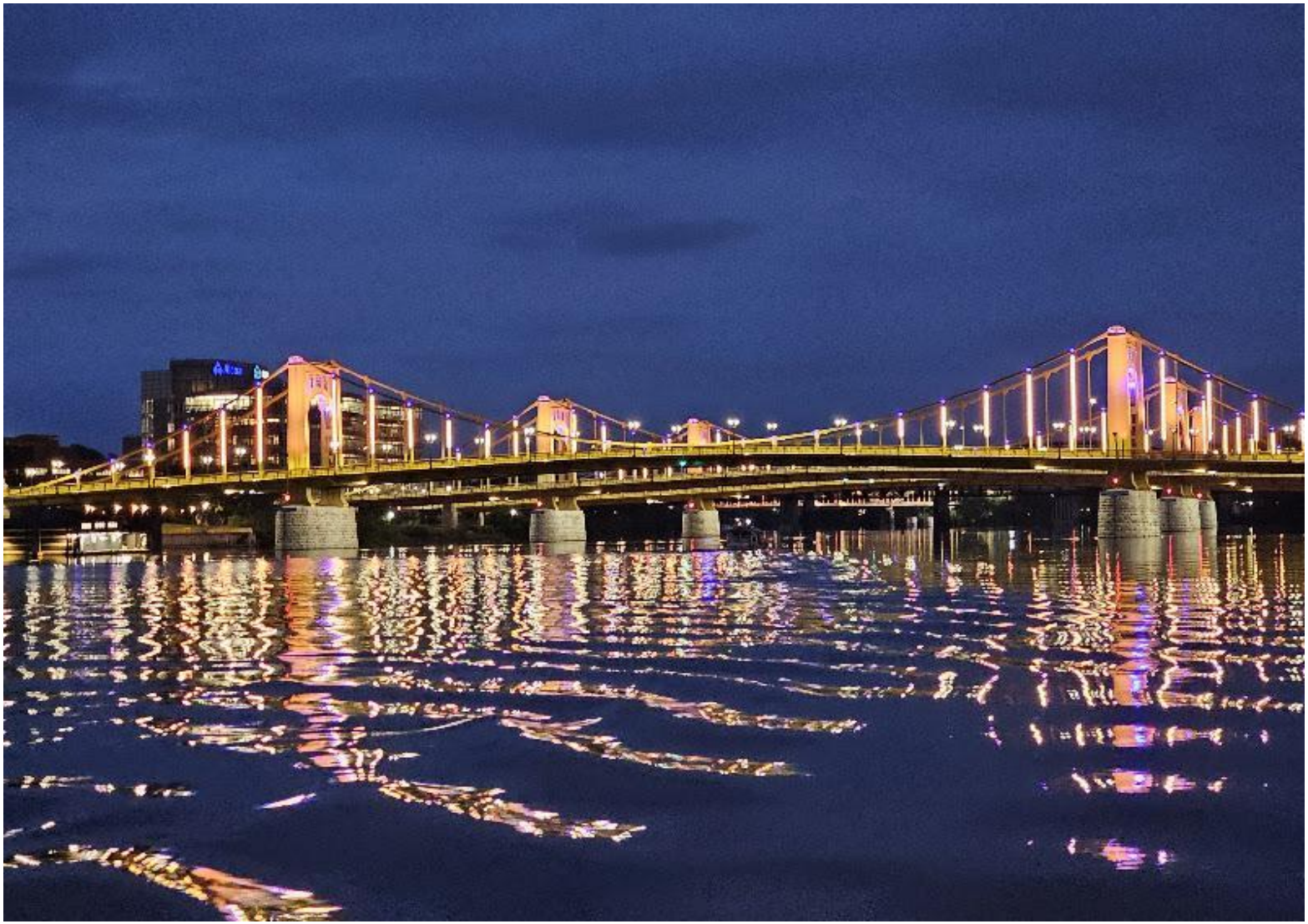


8 days, 335 miles – May 2024

We parked near National Airport and rode ~6 miles to DC's Union Station



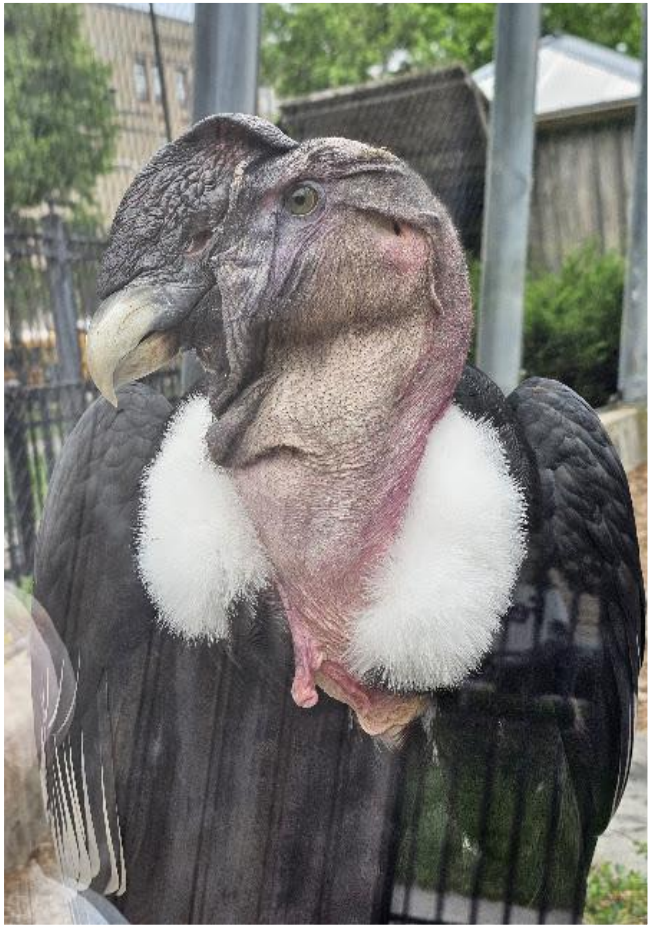
AMTRAK arrives in Pittsburgh at midnight, so we booked 2 nights and decided to explore the town before we hit the trail



We had to visit one of Ellen's bucket list items...



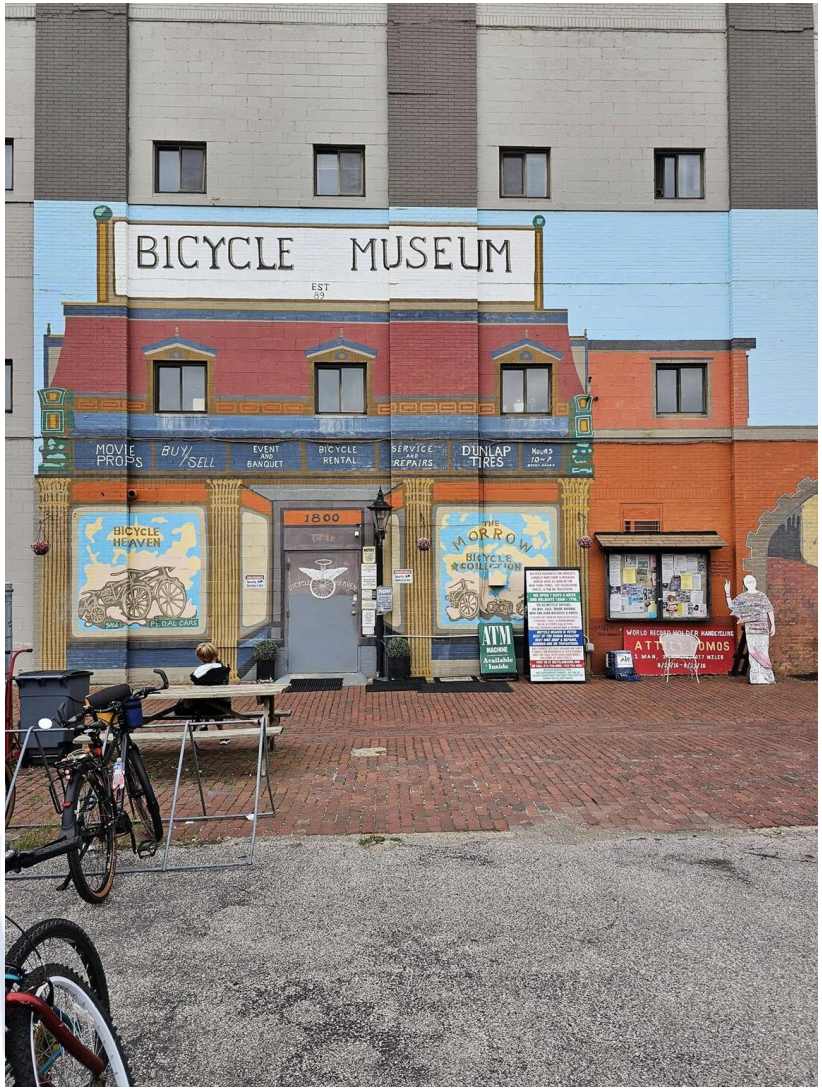






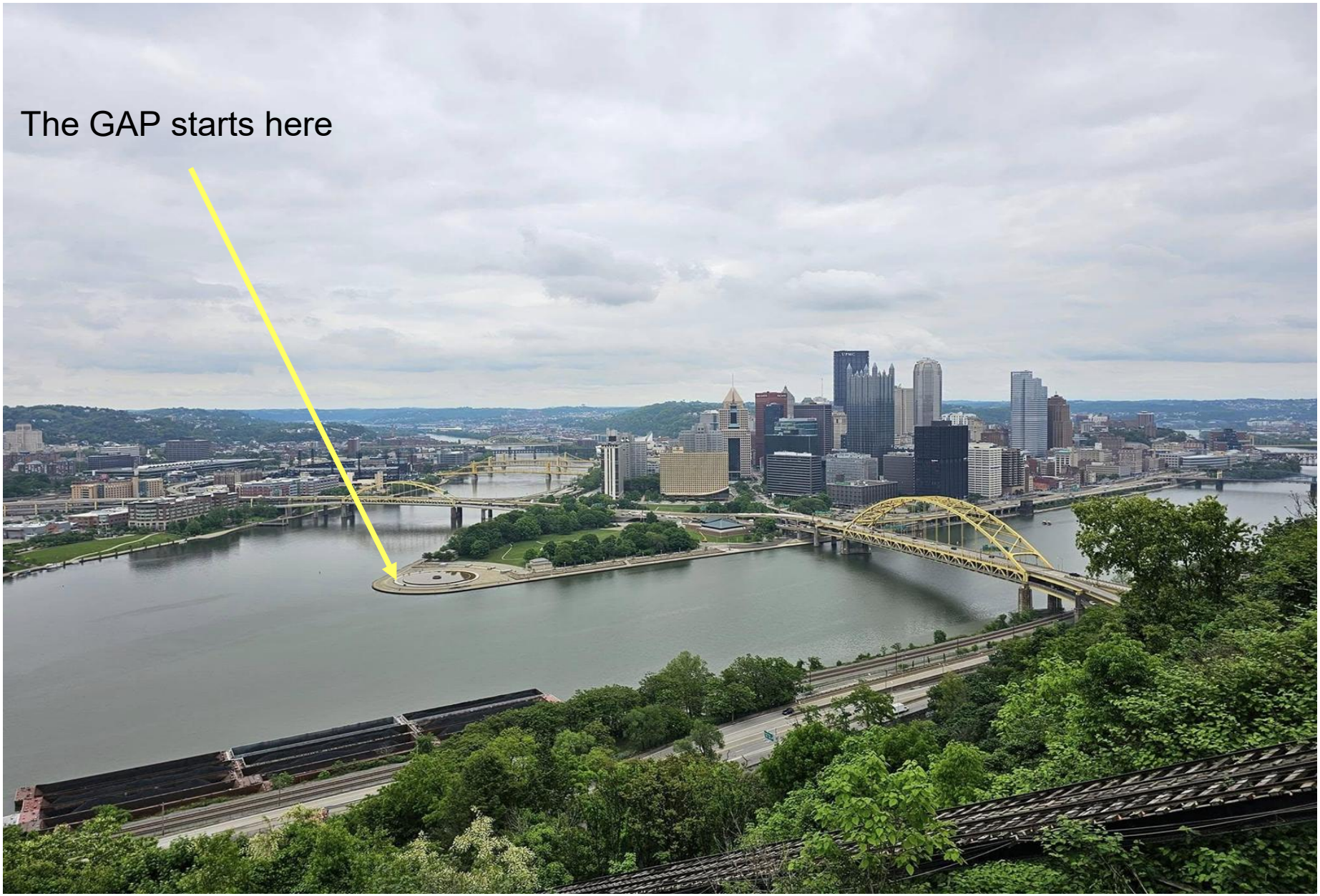


While exploring Pittsburgh, we discovered this quirky bicycle museum/shop. Over 20,000 bikes on display






K&L GATES


The GAP starts here


POINT OF CONFLUENCE

Homeless camp at the start of our ride



Hot Metal Bridge over the Monongahela River
Built to transport molten metal bottle cars from the blast furnaces to the rolling mills



The industrial areas ran for about 20 miles south of Pittsburgh



The “Mailbox Formation” created by weathering in the sandstone



Our first night Airbnb, the site of an old locomotive turntable and depot



Approaching Ohiopyle PA



Falls Market Inn, Ohiopyle



Ohiopyle Falls

