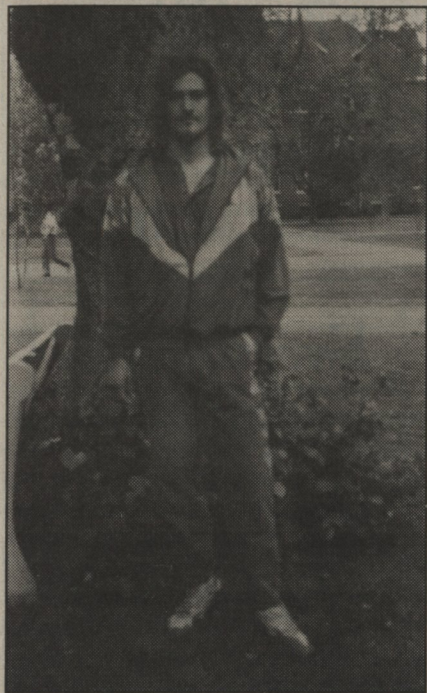


From Alaska to Argentina

An Italian adventurer sees the world on his bicycle



BY SEAN MCQUAID

MASSIMO OSTROUSKA IS AN IMPOSING figure: tall, athletic, long-haired and sun-bronzed. The good-humoured Italian looks

like he just stepped out of a beer commercial; however, Ostrouska's activities are much more ambitious. The 25-year old cyclist is currently in the midst of a bicycle trip from Alaska to Argentina, with plenty of sightseeing along the way.

It's the sightseeing that briefly brought Ostrouska to PEI, where he boarded with UPEI professor Charles Blouin. After reaching Vancouver Ostrouska decided he might as well travel cross-country and see Canada in its entirety while he was in the neighbourhood. He will then bike, walk and hitch-hike back westward before resuming his bicycle trip to Argentina.

Ostrouska's parents were born in an Italian region of what became Yugoslavia after World War II, and later moved to Italy itself to preserve their culture. Ostrouska himself grew up in Italy, where, in his words, he had everything: a good job as an electrician, an apartment, a car, and a girlfriend. Why, then, did he recently sell everything he owned, quit his job, and set out to travel the Americas on a bicycle?

"I felt old," Ostrouska says. "It felt like I finished my life. In that situation, you can live until you die." Tired of his comfortable but empty existence, Ostrouska decided he wanted an adventure while he was still young enough to have one. So, in June, he travelled to Prudeau

Bay, Alaska, and began his journey to the southernmost city of Argentina.

"Travelling is the best way to learn about the world," he maintains, citing his acquisition of a variety of languages (including some English) as proof. He loves to learn about the people and culture of a given region, and insists that to do this you must live among them and interact with them, even if only for a short time. "The most beautiful thing is to live with the people, to talk to them, to understand them." It is this cultural curiosity that takes him on side-trips, like the one to Atlantic Canada.

"I wanted to see [eastern Canada] because it's the part that is richest in history," he says, pointing out how the first settlers of North America came here and that Canada was founded in the east.

Ostrouska partially attributes his wanderlust to Italian culture: "We don't move as much as [North Americans] do. I lived for 24 years in the same place." Consequently, Ostrouska hopes to travel as much as possible and absorb as much culture as he can.

In Alaska, for instance, he lived among hunters and learned their skills. "They have to work for survival," he marvels. He is fascinated by peoples in harsh environments,

but says his favourite locales are the cities, "because they have a lot of girls." Man does not live by cultural enrichment alone, after all.

An entirely different kind of city prompted Ostrouska's American odyssey: the ancient Incan city of Macchupicchu, discovered in 1911 and visited by Ostrouska on a lonely moonlit night during his first major trip outside Italy. This exotic, near-mystical experience was unlike anything Ostrouska had ever known before, and inspired him to see the world.

Similarly, his encounters with the continent's natives inspired him to see the people of the world. The people of Latin America were the first people he met in the Americas, and he was amazed at how different their life was from his, and yet so contented. "They are poor, they have nothing, but they are happy to live."

Ostrouska hopes to find similar fulfillment in his new nomadic lifestyle, living on the road with only his bicycle, tent, sleeping bag, camp stove and clothing. After his trip he plans to work, and perhaps write a book about his travels. Regardless, he expects to be a different person at his journey's end: more experienced "and maybe more wise. I hope."

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