David Mozer of the International Bicycle Fund and Bicycle Africa believes in the transformative power of the bicycle

by Dan D’Ambrosio

David Mozer has a hard time getting people to sign up for his tours to Africa. Bicycle Africa, the company he founded in 1983 together with the International Bicycle Fund (IBF), was designed to be the for-profit fundraising arm of the nonprofit IBF, which Mozer has used to spread the word of the good bicycles can do in the world.

“The purpose of the International Bicycle Fund is to promote sustainable transportation and cultural understanding worldwide,” Mozer said in a recent interview.

Mozer attributes the difficulties of signing bicyclists up for his African adventures to a variety of factors, including what may be his own shortcomings as a promoter, but believes that these are mostly out of his control.

“It struggles,” Mozer said of Bicycle Africa. “The Bush era was not good for his control. But believes that these are mostly out of his control.

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“Granted people must be selective about where they go. However, there are more choices than one can manage to get to,” Mozer writes. “The violence associated with Africa is tragic, but it is also isolated to specific geographical pockets.”

And disease? There are a number of serious ones, Mozer says, but the chance of contracting them is miniscule.

“Of diseases with higher infection rates, to being safe by being current on your immunizations: tetanus–diphtheria, polo, and measles are pretty routine.”

The myth of pollution holds that the water is unsafe in Africa.

“Generally, Africa is less industrial and uses few or no chemicals in their agricultural methods,” Mozer writes. “The ground-water in Africa can be as safe or safer than that in industrialized countries.”

Not only that, he says, but in the past 20 years there has been a “massive effort” to develop water resources, thanks to the World Health Organization and other aid organizations in the United States, Canada, and the Scandinavian countries.

Mozer goes on to cover myths of sanitation, pestilence, famine, AIDS, climate, hygiene, civilization, and suicide, the last of which has to do with the way Africans drive, leading to the belief that in Africa bicycling is suicidal, goes the belief.

“The endless stream of negative images of Africa is amazing,” Mozer writes in his conclusion. “Even as I finish this article, I have a hunch that many readers will find one more reason for not considering Africa. Whatever it is, I suspect it’s not as serious as they imagine. Year in and year out, I go, I have fun, and I return. I have seen people from nine to 75 years old do the same.”

Mozer, 57, has been a self-described bicycle activist since junior high school in Seattle, where he grew up and still lives. His introduction to Africa was through the Peace Corps in 1975, when he was assigned to Liberia. Mozer had thought he might be sent to South America, but was just as happy to go to Africa.

“I took my bicycle with me, which was unheard of in 1975,” Mozer said. “Not much bicycle touring was going on at that time. I was happy to go to Africa.
point — anywhere. If you wanted pan- 
iers, you found somebody in the UK to get 
you canvas saddlebags.”

Graduating from Evergreen State 
College with a nontraditional bachelor’s 
degree that covered history, economics, 
and “behavioral stuff,” as well as biology, 
math, science, and teacher training, Mozer 
taught math and science in a middle school 
in a Liberian village called Gorbée, a trad-
ning center.

The second year, Mozer was in Fisebu, 
where he was more involved in developing 
curriculum, and traveling back and forth 
to villages in roadless areas to help them 
make their schools more effective and effi-
cient. When he was done at one school, 
the administration would send him off to 
the next school with a group of students 
to guide him.

“I'd grown up in western Washington. I 
threw my cards to the wind and the 
administration’s determination from 
motorcycles to shoe leather. He hitchhiked 
across Europe to Austria, Germany, and 
the Netherlands before finding 
his way to the UK for a flight back home 
the U.S. In Italy and the Netherlands, he 
was able to borrow bikes from friends, see-
ing for the first time in the Netherlands 
how it was possible to have an entirely 
separate infrastructure just for bikes.

Back in the States, Mozer applied 
where he started a master’s program in 
U.S. ambassador to help villages through-

In January 1978, Mozer completed his 
three-year tour with the Peace Corps and 
left for his own “serpentine exploration” of 
West Africa. His bike had served him well 
while working for the Peace Corps, but 
for this adventure — from Ivory Coast to 
Nigeria, Cameroon, Chad, Niger, and across 
the Sahara to Algeria and Tunisia, then on 
to Malta for a boat to Italy — Mozer relied 
relied on various forms of local ground transpor-
tation, from motorcycles to shoe leather.

The journey is 
the objective. 
Not the end.

The perfectly coordinated rubber compound 
provides speed, durability and grip. Front 
and side wall doubly protected. Redline 
eaione arthg and aren’t wear fibers. Thal 
are available in their suggested CUSE/BSN is the road replacem.

Marathon is the high tech 
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Marathon is the high tech 
center. 
1. Vaya Ti
2. Balsa
3. Explore
The Explore is a purpose-built bike 
designed to get you there.

Bike shown: Vaya Ti 
For the perfect road, 
...bikes to Cuba.”

Today Mozer is beginning to organize 
tours in his own backyard, a “cultural” 
tour, for example, from Seattle to Victoria. 
He tries to bring his own belief that the 
bike is a means and not an end — a 
means to “education, knowledge and expe-
rience, clean living, and sustainability” — 
to his tours. IBBF and Bicycle Africa are extensions of 
his personality, says Mozer, which never 
causenumber harm and never made 
much money.

“I could be realistic, maybe to a fault,” 
says. 

Dave D’Ambrosio is a staff writer for the Burlington 
Free Press in Burlington, Vermont, and a former editor of 
Adventure Cyclist magazine.