



Ben Grannis, 26, from Ridgefield, Conn., pauses at the summit of McKenzie Pass in the Cascade Range in central Oregon. Grannis embarked on a 10,000-mile bike ride around the country last August to raise awareness about distracted driving and support Massachusetts-based Textless Live More.

Pedaling his message

Conn. cyclist is riding 10,000 miles to raise awareness about distracted driving

BY KARI BODNARCHUK | GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

Neither bears, blizzards, nor bad drivers has kept Ben Grannis from cycling across the country. Grannis, 26, from Ridgefield, Conn., set off on a journey last summer to bike more than 10,000 miles from Provincetown to Washington state, down the West Coast to the Mexican border, and then along a southern route to Florida and back home again. His goals: to raise awareness about distracted driving and money to support the cause.

An average of nine people died every day in the United States due to distracted drivers in 2019, according to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration.

"Being on the road is a huge risk, particularly for cyclists, and it only takes a tiny error in judgment to alter someone's life," says Grannis.

Grannis was trying to decide his next step after graduating from Ohio's Kenyan College in 2017 and spending summers working as a leader for Williamstown-based Overland, an organization that runs epic teen adventure

‘I think we are all guilty of distracted driving. It’s kind of a tough thing to stop, but to have conversations about it and have it in the forefront of people’s brains is important.’

BEN GRANNIS

trips worldwide. He grew up listening to stories about his dad's cross-country trip in 1977 with Adventure Cycling, one of the country's premiere bike-touring companies. Then he heard about Merritt Levitan, an 18-year-old from Massachusetts who was killed on a cross-country bike trip when a distracted driver ran into her and several members of her group. Levitan's family and friends launched Textless Live More to help tackle the problem of drivers multitasking and not paying attention while on the road. The organization has chapters nationwide that run events at high schools to raise awareness of distracted driving and digital wellness.

Grannis decided to do his own epic bike

trip — solo and for a cause.

"I think we are all guilty of distracted driving," says Grannis. "It's kind of a tough thing to stop, but to have conversations about it and have it in the forefront of people's brains is important."

Grannis launched Eyes Up Ride, a fundraiser to support Textless Live More, and mapped out a 10,000-mile route.

"I had never done more than 3,000 miles on a bike in my life," he says.

Grannis bought a Kona gravel bike and loaded it up with camping gear, two sets of clothes, a water purifier, rain gear, and snacks — from cookies and protein bars to Velveeta biscuits. He set off on Aug. 21 last year and

covered about 5,220 miles in three months, pedaling through 15 states as he made his way to the Pacific. He talked to people about distracted driving along the way — in Denny's or Subway, where he often stopped for lunch (Subway sometimes offers bikers free sandwiches); with hosts through Warm Showers, whose members across the country offer rides, accommodation, and assistance for bikers; and at other random spots. (I met Grannis, by chance, at the Douglas Peace Arch at the US-Canada border in Washington state where he had stopped for a quick photo.)

Grannis eats about 4,000 calories a day, starting with a breakfast of oatmeal or biscuits with peanut butter and ending, if he's lucky, with a home-cooked dish offered by friends new or old. Out of the 85 nights on the road during the first leg of his trip, Grannis spent 14 nights in a hotel, 14 nights with hosts he found through Warm Showers, 21 nights sleeping in a tent, and 36 nights staying with people he knows or with friends of friends.

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Something new for travelers is popping up all over

By Jon Marcus
GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

NASHVILLE — Bill Caywood is chatting with some customers when one remembers that it's time to feed the parking meter. So Caywood reaches under the counter and hands him a fistful of quarters.

If giving money away sounds like a curious way to run a business, Caywood could be forgiven. He's an artist first. Running a store is new to him.

Known for his popular “Nashville Looks Good on You” murals all over town, Caywood said his fans suggested he sell Nashville-themed merchandise.



Pop-up shops are surging in tourist destinations, offering unique goods far more interesting than what's available in kitschy tourist outlets.

So now he's opened nashTN, a few blocks from the tumult of

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Can you dig it? Here's what's happening in Herkimer, N.Y.

**By Diane Bair
and Pamela Wright**
GLOBE CORRESPONDENTS

Hi-ho, hi-ho! It's off to the diamond mines we go! Unlike the Disney version, there are no pint-size companions named Sneezy, Bashful, and Doc. But if you like getting dirty, sweaty — and, maybe, lucky — this is the activity for you.

"It's fun to be outdoors and bang on rocks — it's a great stress reliever," says Victor Suon, assistant manager of operations at Herkimer Diamond Mines KOA Resort (www.herkimerdiamond.com) in Herkimer, N.Y. Finding a Herkimer diamond — so-called because Herkimer

County is the only place in the world where these naturally-faceted quartz crystals occur — takes some doing. “Look for dolomite limestone,” Suon advised, the porous material among the piles of gray rock. “Then look inside the vugs (holes). That is where the diamonds are.” The mine provides sledgehammers and chisels, or you can bring your own. No dark tunnels here; the mine is above ground, with ladders for whacking and rocky piles with sparkly bits to sift through.

Everything you find, you keep. "Everybody leaves with something," Suon says. Staffers appraise every find. The largest diamond cluster unearthed here

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Interesting finds in Herkimer

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was 17 inches long, but the most perfect crystals are usually less than a half-inch long. Turning those sparkly bits into wearable pieces is a popular pursuit here (the mine offers jewelry-making classes.) “You’re finding something 500 million years old from Mother Nature and making something unique. That’s the magic of it,” says Herkimer Diamond Mines owner Renee Scialdo Shevat.

Herkimer diamonds are not as valuable as compacted-carbon diamonds, or rubies, but they’re more valuable than amethysts, according to gemologists. Amateur prospectors from all over the world come there to try their luck. Folks into fossils show up looking for stromatolite. The mine sells baggies studded with diamonds and gemstones for sluicing (kids love this), plus geology exhibits and a trading post filled with gems from around the world. It’s a rock-hound’s dream. “We’re out in the middle of nowhere, but people from all over the world find us,” says Suon, who is originally from Lynn.

Where the heck is Herkimer? About four hours from Boston, it is set in the Mohawk Valley of central New York, situated between Albany and Utica. Unlike the touristy zones of the Finger Lakes, the Catskills, and the Adirondacks, it’s easy to overlook this area of small towns and rolling hillsides dotted with dairy farms — although it hasn’t been overlooked by companies like Chobani Yogurt, which source much of their milk here. Often, travelers combine a visit with a trip to nearby Cooperstown. (Herkimer diamonds + baseball diamonds!)

If you go road-tripping to Herkimer and only dig for diamonds, you’re just scratching the surface when it comes to outdoor fun. Cruise the Erie Canal, float in a river, bunk in a cabin, eat chicken riggies and Utica greens, and — *ta dah!* —discover a distant relative of New



DIANE BAIR FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

Hampshire’s gone-but-not-forgotten Old Man of the Mountain. Here are a few more gems to unearth when you visit this diamond-in-the-rough.

Same day, different rocks

“Butts up!” “Butts up!” our companion hollered. This wasn’t some sort of booty-enhancing fitness class. Nope, we were bouncing along in a rubber tube along the West Canada Creek, lifting our behinds to avoid bumping bottoms on boulders as we navigated the riffles. So. Much. Fun! The action took place across the street from the mine, alongside the camping zone of the KOA resort. One of only 12 KOA “resorts,” this place is Family Fun Central, with tubing, a swimming pool, fishing, dining, and of course camping — lots of RVs, a smattering of tents, cabins, and lodges. Kids are everywhere, riding bikes, in the playgrounds, and lugging tubes to Splash Alley (a.k.a. the creek) for float trips. With so much included, the ability to cook meals onsite, and rates that start at around 50 bucks per night for a tent site on weekends, no wonder this place fills up. Cabins and lodges range from \$120 to \$350 (higher on holiday weekends). There are also a couple of nice B&Bs in the area, if that’s more your jam.

Navigating the Erie Canal

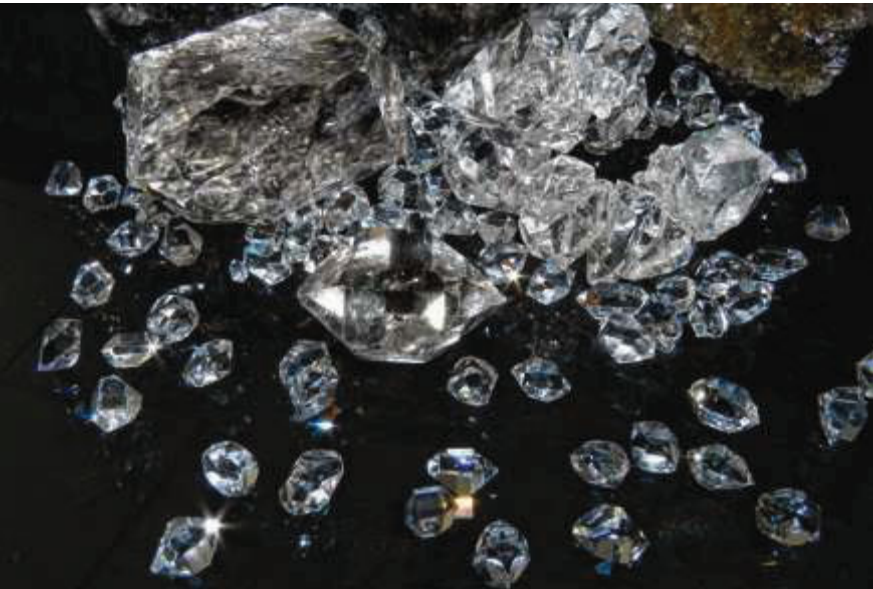
Did you know there have been three Erie canals? History buffs, and those who just like a boat cruise, should con-



DIANE BAIR FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

Top: Victor Suon demonstrates how to find a Herkimer diamond; examples of the naturally faceted 500 million-year-old crystals from New York’s Herkimer County. Above: Scott Tranter is chef/owner of Crazy Otto’s Empire Diner.

sider a ride on Lil’ Diamond II (\$25 adults; www.eriecanalcruises.com), a 50-foot passenger boat, on the Erie Canal. Lasting 90 minutes, the narrated cruise features a trip through Lock 18, a “liquid elevator” — it’s an odd sensation to feel the water drop by 2.5 million gallons in five minutes. Spend a few minutes at the Visitor’s Center, Gems Along the Mohawk, a showcase for locally-made products. (You’ll have to forgive



HERKIMER DIAMOND MINES

them for stocking Yankees sweat shirts.)

Along the canal, you’ll notice cyclists biking on a waterside path. That would be the 750-mile Empire State Trail, the longest state-maintained multi-use trail in the nation. (The section that runs east-west from Albany to Buffalo is known as the Erie Canalway Trail; www.eriecanalway.org.) Cool, eh? Currently, there are no bike rentals nearby, so you’ll have to BYOB if you want to add this to your trip.

Dig into this

You’re in for an active trip, so you’ll need some solid refueling. Eating local means lots of cheese in dairy country; they even have a cheese trail that spans four counties. Other must-tries: chicken riggies, a local pasta dish with rigatoni, chicken, and hot or sweet peppers in a spicy cream and tomato sauce; and Utica greens, an Italian-American dish made of sauteed greens, garlic, hot peppers, parmesan and pecorino Romano cheese, prosciutto and bread crumbs. You can sample both, and a stuffed Utica greens pizza, at the Miner’s Table at Herkimer Diamond Mines KOA Resort (www.minerstable.com).

The most famous place to eat in Herkimer (and definitely the liveliest) is Crazy Otto’s Empire Diner (www.crazy-ottosemperiediner.com), downtown. This award-winning, family-owned diner (“best diner in New York State”) has reached icon status with claims to fame like making the world’s largest omelet,

and chef/owner Scott Tranter’s local cooking show. Come with an appetite — portions are huge — and don’t miss their fabulous stuffed blueberry French toast. (There’s even a local connection; Tranter is a Massachusetts guy and attended culinary arts school in Quincy.)

We had another amazing meal at the Canal Side Restaurant & Inn (www.canalsideinn.com) in Little Falls, about 19 minutes from Herkimer. (Little Falls is home to a series of drops and rapids on the Mohawk River.) Chef John Luciano is a Bostonian (his CV includes Au-jourd’hui and Mistral) with a vibrant presence. His French-meets-American menu (dinner only) is just as exuberant. Highlights include a swoon-worthy osso buco and the best lobster ravioli we’ve ever had.

And if you’re missing the Old Man of the Mountain, arrive in Little Falls before dinner and head to Moss Island National Natural Landmark, set between the Mohawk River and the Erie Canal. The site features a network of hiking trails, and ancient igneous rock cliffs prized by rock climbers and geologists. Head away from Lock 17, with the rock walls on your right, to see Profile Rock, with a face that looks like the Old Man’s little brother.

Yep, more rocks! For information on the region, visit www.herkimercountychamber.com.

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Pop-up shops surging in trendy destinations

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hipster neighborhood called the Gulch, in a vacant space in the same building as the Gibson Guitar flagship store and museum.

It’s part of a surge of pop-up shops in trendy destinations, filling empty storefronts left behind by the retail carnage of the pandemic and offering unique goods far more interesting than what’s available in kitschy tourist outlets, often created by local artists and entrepreneurs.

A bearded graphic designer manning the register in a black knit cap with the nashTN logo, Caywood is surrounded by neat stacks of branded coffee mugs, drink cozies, T-shirts, sweat shirts, and tumblers, many produced by local printers and embroiderers; even the screen-printed shopping bags make good souvenirs.

It’s a comparatively easy way to have a retail presence where people can see, touch, and feel these things, said Caywood, who also offers his merchandise online. After all, he said, “It’s a weird time to be taking out loans for a brick-and-mortar store.”

That’s one of the things that’s driving the pop-up craze. So is encouragement from tourist boards and civic leaders anxious to fill the gaps in streetscapes where permanent retail businesses have closed.

“Pretty much every city has called,” said “vacancy management expert” Andrew Martineau, who helps them fill those gaps with pop-up shops.

Even in Nashville, where the number of visitors is already exceeding pre-pandemic levels, dark windows overlook stretches of sidewalk. The iconic Ernest Tubb Record Shop was the latest to announce that it will close.

“A closed storefront sends a signal of a lagging economy or that this is not a vibrant place,” said Lauren Skinner Beitel-spacher, an associate professor of marketing at Babson College and an expert in retail and entrepreneurship.

Some 12,200 retail stores were shuttered in 2020 alone, according to the commercial real estate firm CoStar, leaving behind a record 149 million square feet of vacant space. Another 40,000 to 50,000 are projected by UBS to shut down within the next five years. In some cities, the results are easy to see; retail vacancy rates in some parts of Manhattan have reached as high as 30 percent, the Real Estate Board of New York says.

And “if there are dark spaces,” Martineau said, “people turn around.” But keeping the lights on isn’t the

only thing driving the rush to pop-ups.

Many people during the pandemic resolved to indulge their inner creativity, often by making things to sell; doing it in a pop-up space can minimize their risk.

“COVID has certainly forced a lot of people to make the side hustle into the premier hustle,” said Martineau, a former shopping center marketing director and now cofounder and managing partner of Zero Empty Spaces, which connects artists with empty storefronts they can rent. “By the spaces being filled with local creators, you’re providing opportunities for people to come in and support that business.”

The average cost to open a pop-up is \$2,000, versus \$98,000 for a permanent brick-and-mortar store, and takes 12 days rather than two months, according to the consulting firm Storefront, which also helps people find and rent space. And the payoff per square foot is nearly four times higher, or \$1,230 versus \$341.

Even large existing retailers are resorting to pop-ups as a low-risk way to test new markets “and show people what the experience is,” said Libby Callaway, principal and CEO of the communications firm The Callaway, which helps big companies do this.

Callaway, too, is based in Nashville, which has attracted pop-ups by Hermes, Goop, and others.

This also accelerated during the pandemic, when brands were desperate to stay connected with their customers, who often moved away to work remotely. Some New York stores “followed people to the Hamptons,” for example, said Melissa Gonzalez, CEO and founder of The Lion’sesque Group and author of “The Pop-up Paradigm: How Brands Build Human Connection in a Digital Age.”

That’s continued with new traveling pop-ups that move to tourist destinations during their high seasons, such as the Poppy Caravan, a fashion and design pop-up that goes to Nantucket in the summer, Palm Beach, Fla., in the winter, and other points between.

Pop-ups also respond to the changed mind-set of consumers who are tired of the limitations of online shopping and the monotonous inventories of big chains.

“These experiences offer something different than the mall or the big box store,” Callaway said.

They’re especially popular with coveted young consumers. The highest awareness of pop-ups is among people ages 18 to 25, the consulting company Vend has found.



JASON KEMPIN/GETTY IMAGES/FILE



As stores like Nashville’s iconic Ernest Tubb Record Shop (top) have closed, many empty storefronts have attracted pop-up shops (above).

“Consumers are still interested in that touch-and-feel aspect of shopping, and the things you can get in these pop-ups you can’t always find online,” said Martineau.

Where once people engaged in showrooming — checking out an item in a brick-and-mortar store, then buying it online — now the opposite is happening, said Carina Donoso, senior director of retail experience and incubation at Boston-based WS Development, one of many real estate owners welcoming pop-up shops.

“There’s a huge trend of being able to explore products online and buy them in person,” said Donoso — and of just enjoying “the unexpected surprises and delights that people are excited to see.”

It’s that uniqueness that makes pop-ups particularly appealing to travelers.

“When you go away, you want to get something that feels authentic and unique,” Gonzalez said. “People when they travel like to think that they discovered something no one else has discovered before,” added Babson’s Beitel-spacher. “Nobody wants to say, ‘I got it at the tourist shop.’” Now the travel industry is getting into the game. Pop-

ups are popping up at festivals and in airports, which also lost retail tenants during COVID. Some hotels are hosting pop-ups, too. Cliff House Maine holds “Makers Markets” with pop-ups by local businesses selling everything from chocolates to candles.

Destinations are even setting up pop-ups to promote themselves. The South Dakota Department of Tourism opened a pop-up in a high-end shopping mall in Dallas, Visit Texas created a pop-up in Santa Monica, Calif., and Visit California ran a pop-up on Fifth Avenue in New York, with a California redwood treehouse, surfboards, California rolls, and guacamole snacks. Callaway took a Nashville-themed pop-up called Greetings from Nashville to New York and Charleston, S.C.

Bill Caywood said that what he most likes about his pop-up shop is meeting the people — Nashville visitors and locals — who like his work.

“It’s not about the apparel or even selling stuff. It’s about fully engaging the community,” he said. “That’s what makes a city cool, is the people.”

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He’s hoping his long ride opens eyes

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What does he think about while biking for hours on end? Nothing too profound, he says — maybe what type of protein bar he’ll eat next, or about when he’ll reach the top of the hill he’s climbing or what the downhill on the other side will be like, or what he’s going to eat for his next meal. He sometimes listens to podcasts, the news, or even a little music after lunch, but always with his phone on the handlebars so he can still hear everything around him.

He’s had a few close calls — narrow roads with big trucks — but the scariest experiences so far came when he was camping alone in Colorado and a bear came right by his tent, grunting and shaking the earth as it made its way down to and splashed into a pond, and on a snowy mountain pass in Utah, when temperatures dipped into the teens and he faced white-out conditions.

Grannis took a break for the holidays and then resumed his trip down the West Coast, starting where he left off in Raymond, Wash. Knee issues and a crack in his steel bike frame forced him to take another break in February. This month, with his healed knee and fixed bike, he will resume his journey where he left off — in Miranda, Calif.

After completing his leg down the West Coast, Grannis will bike east to Jacksonville, Fla., and then turn north for his final leg back home to Connecticut.

“I certainly encourage people to join me at any point along the way if their schedule allows for it,” he says. “It would be super awesome if it works out.” Follow Grannis on Strava (Benjamin Grannis) or Instagram (@eyesupride) to track his route or jump in and keep him company during the ride. Or consider supporting the trip, which Grannis is funding himself (go to www.eyesupride/support).

Think of Grannis next time you reach for your phone while driving — or, better yet, enable Do Not Disturb (or Focus on an iPhone) and your phone will automatically detect when you’re moving in a car and pause all notifications (you can indicate if you’re a passenger to disable it). That way bikers like Grannis just have to worry about bears and blizzards rather than distracted drivers.

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