



Photo Credit: Ken Francis

A person with long dark hair, wearing a pink shirt, is holding a wooden sign with both hands. The sign has the words "WARMSHOWERS" and "BICYCLISTS WELCOME" carved into it in a bold, blocky font. The sign is made of light-colored wood and has a decorative scalloped edge. The person's face is partially visible above the sign, and their hands are visible at the bottom corners of the sign.

**WARMSHOWERS
BICYCLISTS WELCOME**

2022

**WARMSHOWERS.ORG
FOUNDATION**

ANNUAL REPORT



PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

At last we seem to have a year that has been relatively free from global disruption and our touring community has been out on the road in force again. We have forged on with our journey to improve our platform to facilitate our adventurous tours exploring the world and linking with our generous hosts.

Our diverse Board has remained focused on delivering on our primary functions, in particular by providing the very best technology and media to support our community.

Our biggest challenge was finding the resources to not only become sustainable into the future but to update our website from Drupal 6 and, in the process, improve the connectivity and access to the platform. We have achieved this, and we are currently in the final beta testing phase of our new website, based on Drupal 8, which will give us the ability to improve and upgrade going forward continually. Whilst on the surface it sounds simple to change from one platform of Drupal to another it essentially means starting from scratch and involves enormous cost. My thanks to all of those who have made this possible, especially to Tahverlee and Michele, those on our board who have spent countless hours on the RFP, analysis, and rollout phases, external advisors Simon and Matt, and Renegade, our new web provider.

Our three-year strategic plan set in motion in 2021 has been achieved in less than two years and now leaves us open to moving forward on our major initiative, which is to open up the world for our touring cyclists to a much greater number of hosts right across the globe. This will be the focus of the next three years. As reported last time, we will be prioritizing where we grow to deliver an effective and well-developed network supported by our new tech platform. If you are not already following Warmshowers' social media channels, now is the time. Join our private Facebook group and tag us in your photos on Instagram so we can share. It's a great way to follow the adventures of our users and stay connected. My thanks to our hard-working band of volunteers who sit on the Board, contribute to committee initiatives and support our outstanding Executive Director, Tahverlee, and our Admin Ninja, Michele.

It's been a tricky couple of years, starting with the organization's technology facing redundancy, a balance sheet that would not support replacing it, increasingly unsustainable annual income to fund even basic operational costs, a board that was not diverse, and a structure that was fragile. And over the period, we also faced great uncertainty with the dark clouds of COVID-19 hovering over us. With your help, we have overcome all of these issues and now we are in a great place to be able to support our touring cyclists and our hosts – this is why we are here, and we will stay on mission!

This is my last year as board president. Alberto Rosso, based in Italy, will take over as president in the New Year. I wish him and the incoming Board of 2024 all success going forward.

LANCE BICKFORD

Board President

STRATEGIC AREAS OF FOCUS

1

USER EXPERIENCE

The User Experience area of focus entails four core objectives. Firstly, it involves the seamless implementation of technology upgrades to enhance the overall user experience on the platform. Secondly, conducting a comprehensive after-action review of the Request for Proposal (RFP) process and vendor selection ensures that future decisions regarding technology acquisitions are well-informed and aligned with user needs. Thirdly, leveraging technology to foster deeper engagement with hosts aims to create more meaningful interactions and connections within the community. Lastly, the organization is committed to removing barriers to technology adoption by ensuring that system information is accurate and up-to-date and by expanding the array of tools available for users to enhance their overall experience and participation. We strive to provide users with an optimized and enriching platform and community.

2

STAFF CAPACITY

The Staff Capacity area of focus centers on three pivotal areas. Firstly, conducting a comprehensive needs assessment is paramount to identify the skills and functions required to achieve our goals effectively. Secondly, evaluating potential opportunities for outsourcing certain functions aims to enhance our efficiency and effectiveness. Lastly, the focus lies on developing a forward-looking staff structure and sharing roles to optimize productivity and synergy among team members.

3

GOVERNANCE

The Governance area of focus encompasses several areas. Firstly, it involves defining the specific skills, talents, and diversity required to strengthen the effectiveness of the Board. Secondly, active recruitment efforts are undertaken to appoint new Board members who can fill the identified gaps in skills, talents, and diversity. Thirdly, continuous professional development opportunities are provided to the Board members, ensuring their ongoing growth in governance expertise. Additionally, the organization diligently addresses any accessibility challenges that may hinder the Board's effectiveness, such as time zones, language, and availability. Regular 1:1 meetings between the Board Chair and members foster open communication and alignment of objectives. As well as regular communication between the board and Executive Director. We also focus on cultivating social engagement opportunities to foster a cohesive and collaborative Board environment. The organization aims to elevate Governance and values-based leadership through concerted efforts. In 2022, the board of directors met 12 times, held 42 committee meetings and 21 executive leadership meetings. The directors collectively donated 750+ volunteer hours to maintain strategic and governance oversight.

4

STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS

The Strategic Partnerships area of focus revolves around key considerations. Firstly, the organization evaluates the ideal balance between nurturing existing partnerships and forging new collaborations to maximize impact. Secondly, defining the concept of globalization for Warmshowers becomes crucial in charting the organization's path forward. Lastly, a growth plan is meticulously developed, firmly anchored on the goals related to globalization, as we seek to expand our reach and impact through strategic partnerships. By focusing on these aspects, Warmshowers aims to forge meaningful and impactful alliances to help realize its global engagement and community growth vision.



EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE

It remains a deep and joyful opportunity to continue to serve the amazing community at Warmshowers. We remain focused on providing top-notch technology as a result of your valuable insight through surveys and user feedback. We are committed to launching a new platform that streamlines your journey from accessing your profile to connecting with hosts or cyclists.

As a host myself (and a daily cyclist), I am always delighted to host cyclists and feel the world getting smaller through the connections we make. One of the most profound experiences I recently had was with two cyclists. I learned about the fear they experienced before embarking on their first cycling trip, both individually and as a pair. Heading into the unknown on their inaugural cycle tour and encountering their initial experiences with Warmshowers was quite remarkable.

It was an amazing revelation to find out that I was their first Warmshowers host. Hearing their stories about how they managed their fears and came together to embark on this journey was deeply inspiring. I am grateful for every opportunity to connect with each and every one of you.

A LOOK BEHIND THE SCENES: our small but mighty team of expert technology service providers, administrative support, and a dedicated volunteer board of directors meet weekly, monthly, and often daily to review the status of our current technology and the future of what is to come. Daily, we review upwards of eight thousand emails exchanged between you and users to ensure communication is flowing, review all new user accounts to ensure we are removing bot accounts, respond to your questions and requests for support, check on the status of our data security, as well as review all feedback left between users and forum posts to ensure they are in alignment with guidelines.

On top of that, we curate story sharing on our podcast and social media and create monthly newsletters to keep you informed. All while navigating international privacy updates and governance. You can rest assured that there are real humans behind Warmshowers focused on creating a sustainable organization that we all passionately enjoy being a part of.

GRASSROOTS: We know the grassroots creation of this organization still remains deeply woven into the fabric of who we are collectively. Yet, with growth comes the need for systems and increased capacity to foster this growth and remain committed to where we begin. This is a delicate balance that we never lose sight of.

GROWTH: Thanks to you, we continue to grow at a resounding speed. We are seeing close to a 50% increase in new user registrations compared to the last two years. We remain focused on ensuring all new and long-term users have access to the best technology and experience possible. As we build and plan for our new technology, we've included videos, training, more detailed answers to the most commonly asked questions, an improved feedback system, and easy-to-access profiles so you can update changes to your plans.

LOOKING AHEAD: By far, the most common feedback we've received in my tenure is increased access to available hosts across the globe. To support this majority request, we will dive deeper into Global Development to create the structure for increasing hosting. This will be the organization's future – a deeper connection with communities and partners to expand our reach, a journey we are very excited to embark on following the launch of our new technology. Stay tuned for more information on how you can get involved in future global planning.

As a non-profit organization, our goal is to carry out our mission while keeping an eye on emerging global issues and ensuring we are able to respond quickly when the need arises.

As one of (many) committed members of our internal team behind the scenes, I remain dedicated to our ongoing growth and evolution as we continue to be the leading organization for touring cyclists and hosts. We will continue to evolve alongside you.

TAHVERLEE ANGLEN

Executive Director

Board of Directors



Lucy Binfield
Canada



Remi Laurent
Canada



Harjan van Dam
Holland



Alberto Rosso
Italy



Jerry Kopack
USA



Peter Gerard
USA



Bruce Squire
USA



Priyanka Dalal
India



Lance Bickford (Chair)
New Zealand



A Special Thank You

We would like to extend our heartfelt gratitude to Bruce, a dedicated and exceptional board member who has served our organization with humor and grace since January 2017.

Bruce's legal advice, invaluable contributions, and tireless efforts as a board member and Chair of the Trust & Safety Committee have greatly influenced the growth of our community.

As Bruce embarks on a new chapter in his life, we extend our warmest wishes to him and his wife for a healthy and fulfilling future filled with lots of cycle touring!

We asked Bruce to share some thoughts with us on his many years of service.

“

“My favorite part of board work has been getting to know Tahverlee, Michele, and other board members. I think we really have a special and diverse group of people, all with a sincere devotion to our mission. I'm so impressed with the talent and skills we have as a group.

The trust and safety work is rewarding as I feel we are working to protect our members. I've seen a lot of positive changes in the past 6 six years, but I'm really looking forward to seeing what the new website brings. Our future is exciting and bright.

On a non-board level, I get excited every time I hear from a member requesting a stay with my wife and me. I get to experience tours vicariously when I host cyclists, see their bikes and equipment, and hear their stories. When they leave, I'm always tempted to load up my bike and take off with them to be a part of their adventure.”

Thank you, Bruce, for your many hours of volunteer service to the Warmshowers board.

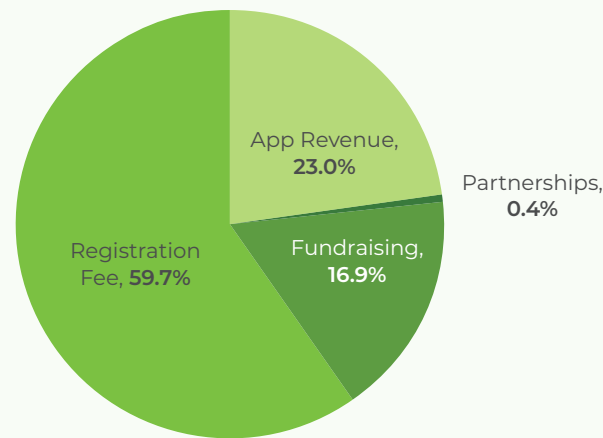
FINANCIAL DATA

In 2022, our primary focus was increasing our resources, including revenue and staff support, to launch our new website. We diligently conducted numerous surveys and collected user feedback to identify the primary areas of user requests. Additionally, we integrated advanced technology to ensure ease of use for both cyclists and hosts.

Thanks to your invaluable support, we will continue to focus on our mission and serve this beloved community. Warmshowers.org Foundation's financial reports are reported and tracked monthly with an outside accounting agency and overseen by the board treasurer. Our annual tax returns are prepared and presented to the board through a certified Colorado accountant.

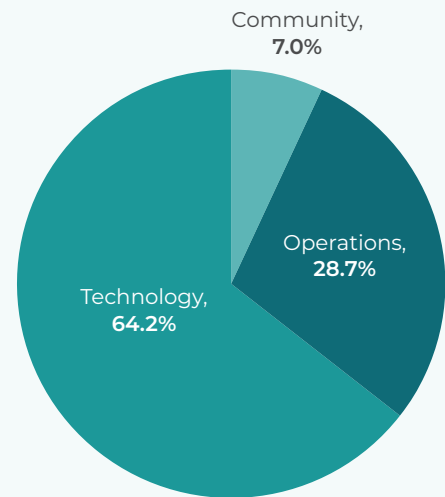
SOURCE OF FUNDS

Our revenue primarily came from new user one-time registration fees and increased mobile app downloads. We are pleased in being able to achieve sustainability through a single lifetime administrative fee for new users and minimal app fees as an optional upgrade for users. Fundraising continues to be a crucial part of our operations, with regular donations and our annual bike giveaway fundraiser. We extend our heartfelt gratitude to all the contributors who generously support us annually and monthly and those who participate in the bike giveaway. Your donations play a pivotal role in keeping our community connected.



OPERATING EXPENSES

Our most significant operational expense remains technology. Adapting to changes in international privacy laws, handling periodic cyber-attacks, maintaining our current site, and managing mobile apps as a small non-profit organization contribute to the bulk of our technology expenses. Nevertheless, we consider this a small price to pay to safeguard your data and maintain the relevance of our technology in an ever-changing environment with rapid advancements. Our team comprises two paid staff members, several technology consultants, graphic designers, social media advisors, content writers, video editors and producers, and legal support to ensure data privacy, governance, and compliance. Despite being a small team of global staff, contract service providers, and volunteers, our passion and commitment remain unwavering.



TRUST, SAFETY & RISK

At Warmshowers, user safety and well-being are our top priorities. Our dedicated Trust, Safety, & Risk Committee is committed to promptly addressing user reports and complaints related to safety, security, and code of conduct matters. Through a well-defined and standardized process, the committee diligently reviews all concerns, makes informed decisions, and communicates the outcomes to our users.

To ensure a safe and respectful community environment, our committee takes a proactive approach, enforcing a strict one-strike policy against any form of disparaging, harassing, threatening, or harmful behavior between users or towards our volunteers and staff. We firmly believe that maintaining a positive and inclusive atmosphere is vital for fostering meaningful connections between hosts and cyclists.

While such incidents are rare, we take any violation of our policies very seriously. Our commitment to enforcing these guidelines ensures that all members can enjoy their experience on our platform without compromising their safety or well-being.

Moreover, we continuously strive to enhance our safety measures and have expanded the committee's responsibilities to include a yearly risk assessment of all aspects of our organization. We leverage advanced technology to complement our efforts in maintaining a secure and reliable platform for our community.

We are proud that the vast majority of interactions between hosts and cyclists are positive and rewarding, which has contributed to the continued growth and thriving of Warmshowers. We are grateful to our dedicated community members for fostering a supportive environment where like-minded individuals can connect and share their passion for cycling and travel.

Here are a few Do's and Do Not's that will help our community keep making positive connections.

- DO promptly respond to any hosting requests.
 - Effective communication between guests and hosts is essential, and both parties should promptly inform each other about any changes to their plans. If you find yourself needing to cancel previously arranged arrangements, kindly communicate this to the other party as soon as possible.
- DO NOT be shy about communicating your expectations as a host or as a guest.
 - Guests are encouraged to communicate any significant hosting considerations that are relevant to them. For instance, if a guest has allergies to cats or prefers not to be around large dogs, it's important for them to include such details in their profile to ensure a comfortable and enjoyable experience for everyone involved.
 - Hosts should include any restrictions they have in their profile. For instance, if they do not accommodate guests arriving after dark or require guests to depart by a specific time the next day. Open and honest communication regarding these guidelines can greatly contribute to avoiding any potential discomfort or awkward situations.
 - Communicate your needs openly and honestly
- DO use common sense and trust your instincts. You are ultimately responsible for your own safety.
- DO NOT be afraid to move on if you feel unsafe for any reason.
- DO provide honest feedback about guests and hosts.
- DO report any safety concerns about other users to Warmshowers.

COMMITTEES

People Make the Warmshowers Community Strong



TECHNOLOGY

Based on ongoing user feedback and extensive surveys, we have embarked on a massive project to completely rebuild our technology platform. After an exhaustive RFP process, in early 2022, the Board of Directors selected vendors to build a new web platform and new mobile apps. Work has been underway on a complete rewrite of our web application and apps, ensuring huge leaps forward in user experience and reliability. We are excited to be introducing the most requested improvements - a revamped calendar-based hosting request system, star reviews, simpler profiles, and more. The new platform will also allow us to build future enhancements at a faster pace. This rebuild has been a significant investment and is core to Warmshowers.org Foundation's long-term sustainability. We are ensuring there will be no data loss as well as top-notch security throughout the transition, and anticipate launching the new platform and apps by the end of 2023.



MARKETING AND COMMUNICATIONS

Annually, we strategize internal and external communications and content aligning with the organization's overarching goals. This collaborative plan involves the entire team and focuses on delivering vital updates, incorporating technological advancements, and showcasing the incredible stories within our vibrant community.



GOVERNANCE

On an annual basis, the board of directors comes together to assess training possibilities for volunteer directors, actively engage in community outreach to attract potential board applicants, stay abreast of state and federal guidelines, and leverage valuable insights from users, staff, and volunteers. These inputs serve as a foundation for strategic planning sessions and comprehensive onboarding programs designed to support all new volunteers and directors joining the organization.



FINANCE

As a registered 501(c)(3) non-profit organization based in Colorado, our topmost priorities encompass ensuring financial viability and fulfilling fiduciary duties. We maintain meticulous monthly reviews and reporting to the board of directors, meticulously handle tax returns, implement necessary bylaw updates, and adhere to all compliance reporting obligations for donors. These measures collectively reinforce our commitment to responsible financial management and regulatory compliance.



GLOBAL DEVELOPMENT

As Warmshowers sets its sights on the future and endeavors to expand its global reach, the inception of the Global Development Committee marks a significant step towards establishing a robust long-term strategy for deeper community engagement. Though the committee is in its early stages, it is firmly committed to creating ample opportunities for our users to actively participate in local and country-wide initiatives. By fostering meaningful involvement, we aim to strengthen our connections and enrich the experiences of our community members worldwide.

KEEPING IN TOUCH

Warmshowers.org Forums

The Warmshowers forums serve as a vibrant communication hub, fostering discussions among our users on diverse topics such as their travel experiences, hosting adventures, optimal routes, and recommended equipment. This invaluable resource benefits countless individuals, whether they are actively traveling or planning their journeys.

- ✓ **Looking for hosting, a travel partner, or route and country information?**
Post in the [Planning Your Next Trip](#) forum.
- ✓ **Do you have a blog, YouTube channel, or media resources to share with our users?**
Post links and information in the [Share Your Blog and Videos Here](#) forum.
- ✓ **Have equipment to sell, looking to buy, or need resources for the best equipment to meet your needs?**
Post in the [Equipment, Resources, and For Sale](#) forum.

Host and Guest Feedback

Feedback plays a vital role in the Warmshowers community, empowering others to make well-informed decisions. It's a simple process when leaving feedback for an exceptional host or guest. However, in instances where your experience may not have been ideal, we encourage you to reframe your comments with politeness and tact. Your safety and well-being are of utmost importance to us.

- ✓ **Guests:** instead of saying, “The house was overrun with cats and smelled like urine.”, consider saying, “My host had several indoor pets, which made it almost impossible for me to be inside as I had an allergic reaction.”
- ✓ **Hosts:** instead of saying, “After agreeing on a departure time, my guest slept in and made me late for work.”, consider saying, “Our guest had great difficulty leaving in the morning at the discussed time.”

If you ever feel unsafe, harassed, or deceived, please don't hesitate to use the **"CONTACT US"** button on our website to report the member to our Trust, Safety & Risk Committee, enabling us to take appropriate action. We value open and honest feedback, especially when conveyed kindly, as it greatly contributes to our community's thriving and nurturing environment. Together, we can ensure that Warmshowers remains a positive and rewarding platform for all its members.



WARMSHOWERS.ORG FACEBOOK GROUP

Welcome to the Warmshowers.org Facebook group, a wonderful space designed for our community to share their exciting adventures, announcements, stories, and celebrations! This private group is open to all Warmshowers users, providing a warm and supportive environment for meaningful interactions.

If you haven't joined yet, we invite you to become a member of our vibrant community by visiting Warmshowers.org on Facebook and answering three simple membership questions. Upon doing so, you'll be automatically approved, and we look forward to having you as part of our growing community of passionate travelers and hosts!

DO:

- Share your trip experiences, challenges, and celebrations with the community.
- Include lots of pictures in your post! The community loves to see your smiling face and where you have been.
- Hosts, please tell us about your amazing guests, where they are from, and where they're headed next.
- Ask the community for equipment recommendations, what to pack, sites to see, and routes to take

DON'T:

- Include any outside links or YouTube links in your post. Create the post without the links, and once approved, you can add the link in the comments.
- Post requests looking for hosts along your route. Please use the "Planning your Next Trip" forum on the website for all host searches.
- Post cycling equipment for sale or looking for equipment to buy. Please use our website's "Equipment, Resources and For Sale" forum.
- Post technical questions or problems accessing the website or mobile app. Please report those issues directly on the website using the Contact Us button or the Report an Issue button in the app



Photo Credit: Matt Davidson



Photo Credit: Alberto Rosso

BIKE LIFE PODCAST



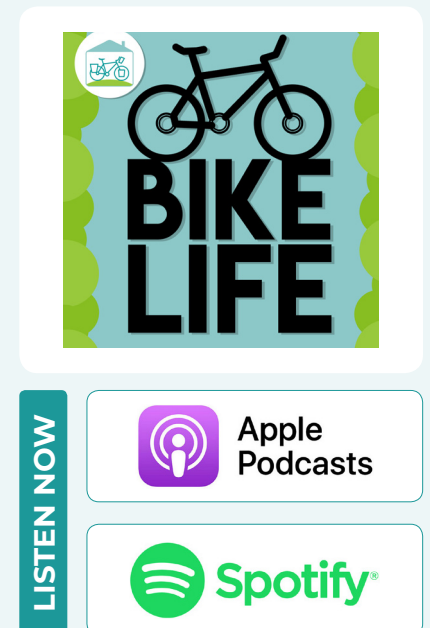
Bike Life Podcast reaches listeners in over 75 countries around the globe and counting.

Join host Tahverlee as she brings the stories of touring cyclists and hosts from our incredible community to life. Share knowledge, experiences, charitable tours undertaken, personal goals reached, and unforgettable challenges overcome.

From its inception in May 2020 through December 2022, Bike Life has been downloaded 99,318 times and consistently ranks among the top podcasts of its kind. From Family Bonding with The Gillis Family to Biking for the Future with the cycling granny Dorothee Hildebrandt to a Healing Journey with Anthony Butcher, the stories of our community will truly inspire you.

You can find the Bike Life Podcast on Apple, Spotify, or your favorite listening app.

Join us on this unforgettable journey!





STORIES FROM THE ROAD

A Community for Hope

Contributed by Elsa Lagache

I've stopped counting the number of miles I've been riding.

My objective was to make a solo cross-country trip biking from New York City to San Francisco while working (not easy to take three months off the grid); I didn't care about piling up miles. I would have never thought I would be able to go that fast and climb that high, though. It took me 44 days straight to go from New York City to Denver without a single day off.

It was a dream to visit Colorado and combine bike and hiking (hiding my bike and pannier while hiking!). The family I stayed with in Denver took me on a hike in Evergreen. Nicole manages to hike with her 12-month-old daughter every week. She even cooked vegan for the entire family when I arrived on my first night. I cannot believe that people I don't know are cooking vegan for me when it's challenging to get my friends and family to do so (love you all). I just love how open this community is.

The same happened in Lafayette, IN. Deborah and Basil hosted me; they aren't cyclists but love hosting via Warmshowers! How cute is that! We gardened together; we harvested tomatoes, chilies, coriander seeds (to make pesto), zucchini, and sunflower seeds. It was just so special to do that with Deborah and talk for hours, with an herbal tea in our hands, before going to bed. Deborah even offered me a hat she got from her last trip to Alaska!!

I never leave a house without something to eat, some homemade muffins from Richard, fresh veggies from the garden, dehydrated apples and nutritional yeast from Maria, Sunflower butter from Nicole and Robert...so many gifts, too much love.

Every time I had a challenging day, I had the amazing support of the Warmshowers community. I remember a 5-hour bike ride between Idaho Springs and Keystone, Colorado; while on this huge uphill called Loveland (11,990 feet/3,654m), Maria texted me, "Hi Elsa. How is your ride going? Will you make it tonight? If it starts getting dark and you need a lift, I can come to get you, Maria" So I texted back that everything was « ok » (I was dying!). That I should be able to make it, and she replied, "Ok. Safe on the downhill. It is a hazmat road for truckers. We have a lovely vegan dinner waiting for you." Warmshowers is just a fantastic community; Maria definitely helped me go the extra mile on that summit.

Most of us bikers have already experienced how hard it can sometimes be, and therefore we are capable of giving so much to help others. When I show up, I notice people's smiles and warm welcome. When I enter their home, I feel like I'm a member of their family. I loved it when John, located in Kokomo, IN, told me he wanted to prove to his parents it was possible to bike everywhere and not own a car!

I travel light. I have two panniers; none of them are fully packed. I'm a minimalist and a zero-waste person (did I mention I'm also vegan!). I often describe myself as an environmental activist. And I love the idea of being able to travel for 3 to 4 months with so few things. We just don't need much. I'm trying not to buy any cold-weather clothes, technical clothes we call them. After Denver, some friends gave me two long sleeve tee shirts and a pair of socks (I only wear second-hand clothes), and I have to admit they are pretty useful because I can just put multiple layers on (half of the content of 1 pannier, ha!).

I did survive cold weather even though I experienced -22°C between Colorado and Utah. I cannot thank Calvin enough, who offered me to stay an extra night in his lovely place because it was too cold to ride a bike in these conditions, and the following day was supposed to be even colder!

I bike in the middle of a global pandemic, and even though the situation got better when I started in September 2020, it's not ideal. Many shops are closed, the occupancy is limited, and it requires more effort from everyone. I tested negative for covid before going on this trip to ensure I wouldn't spread the virus, of course.. That being said, it's just amazing how trusting people have been.

I'm vegan because I'm very concerned about the well-being of humans, animals, and our amazing planet. Riding through Colorado, I could see all these wildfires; it was so heartbreaking! I cried so much seeing these acres burning. I also cry for joy, realizing how beautiful our planet is. I'm also witnessing the terrible impact of our monoculture system! I mean, how much corn do we see all around in the US? I'm hopeful that, together, we can make this world a better place to live in for everyone, seeing how generous people can be and realizing that we are all capable of extraordinary actions.

In Steamboat, I stayed with Richard and Sarah. I love cooking for my hosts; that's my way of giving back, so I sent a text to Richard asking if there were ingredients they didn't like before buying anything. Richard responded, "Hi. It's just me; Sarah got called to a fire. Whatever you whip up will be wonderful. Thx." Sarah was called on to fight the wildfire raging in the region and wouldn't be home for two weeks.

There are so many people out there really fighting to secure us all a better present and future. I want to thank all of you for your amazing efforts!

HOST'S CORNER



SLAP THE WALL

Contributed by:
Chuck and Susan Atkinson

Susan and I have been involved with Warmshowers for almost 11 years. Prior to hosting here in Shkoder, Albania, on an annual basis, we never hosted more than 3-10 guests.

We consider ourselves ex-pats. In 2010, we flew with our recumbent trikes to this side of the pond from the USA and started pedaling. We spent our first 3+ years pedaling year-round. When winter approached in year 4, we made the decision not to pedal in the colder months. We also made the decision to share our apartment hosting with this awesome community of bicycle travelers, Warmshowers. We settled here in Shkoder, Albania, finding a one-bedroom apartment with enough room for hosting.

When we opened our apartment for hosting, we were unaware of the volume of folks who route themselves from the European continent down the Balkan coast, headed to Greece, and to places between Greece and eastern Asia. And alternatively, those folks routing themselves from central and eastern Asia to continental Europe.

Most of the long-distance cycle travelers choose to pedal through the Balkans during the winter months, avoiding pedaling a second winter when near/in the “-stan” countries in central Asia. The weather along the Balkan coast, between the first week in November thru the middle/end of March, is very wet, with cool to cold temperatures, and heavy winds and wind gusts (known as (Bora Winds)), which can bring chilling lower temperatures.

For folks pedaling south along the Adriatic coastline towards Greece, Dubrovnik, Croatia, is the last large city before Shkoder, a distance of about 180 km from our apartment. In the winter, it can take 7-12 days to cover that distance because of the weather. Those pedaling from Greece north into Albania are pedaling about 350 km of the same wet, windy, and cool to cold temperatures but do not engage with the activity of the strong Bora Winds mentioned above. Coming from either direction to Shkoder, folks arrive at our apartment pretty much emotionally and physically spent from dealing with the weather they have been facing over the last couple of weeks.

It is this group of bicycle travelers Susan and I open our apartment to, allowing them to emotionally and physically recover from their winter experience of the past week or two in the Balkans and prepare for the next phase of their adventure. If we host more than 3 guests, we turn our apartment into a hostel. We want our guests to relax while here and (when ready) tend to whatever needs they have so they leave feeling refreshed and ready to move. While with us, some may need to connect via the Internet and/or snail mail to family, friends, and others. Some may need to spend time on route planning. All are so happy to find there is a washing machine for them to use and a place to hang their tent and gear to dry out. All also find time to hear and share the stories and adventures of others staying here. They are also thrilled to have access to our kitchen, using it to cook meals containing fresh vegetables. It is common to find a couple of cooks in the kitchen, preparing delicious meals to share with everyone.

Our apartment rests over our garage, a garage we use to store the bicycles of our guests. Hugging the garage walls is an inside stairway leading up to the front door of our apartment. Two years ago, we decided to ask our guests to put their hand print on the wall leading up to our apartment, referring to this as asking them to “Slap the wall.” Next to their handprint, we ask them to write their name, their home country, and the day's date. We decided on doing this instead of offering a guest book for them to sign as guest books are not looked at as much, and the hand prints would surely get a new arrival's attention while climbing the stairs to our apartment. As we get more and more “Wall Slams” on the walls, Wall Slams showing the information of previous guests, the more we find new arrivals recognizing the names of others they have met on their travels in the Balkans. We had one guest recognize the name of someone they know who lives in the same city in France this guest lives in. We had one traveler recognize a name on the wall of a person he met earlier this summer in Iceland. As can be seen, some folks are rather creative with their “Wall Slams.” There are 3 footprints on the walls and 3 dog paw prints.

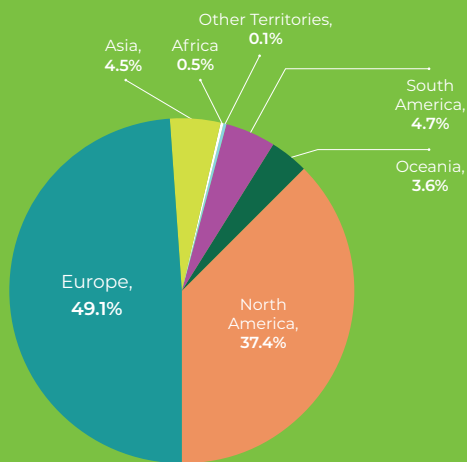
We really enjoy watching the bonding develop as new guests arrive. There is always a curiosity as to where each guest started from, what will or might be their final destination, and what was the motivation to travel such a long distance. Then, the conversations graduate to where the others have been on their journey, what they have learned on their journey, and what routes they are thinking of taking on this journey. On several occasions, guests have adjusted their plans and departed here with other guests as a group that didn't exist 2, 3, or 4 days ago. We find out later they wind up pedaling together for a couple of days or longer. I know of a few of those newly formed groups whose members are still in contact with each other.

In short, opening our home to Warmshowers travelers has been an experience for both Susan and me that we will never forget. The friends we have made through hosting are so special, and to be able to keep in touch with so many of them over these years always gives us a warm fuzzy feeling.

Photo Credit: Nadine Mueller



JOIN THE RIDE



www.warmshowers.org



@Warmshowers_org

OUR VALUES



We are a community that **VALUES** inclusivity and diversity and do not discriminate based on gender, orientation, location, religion, or race. We treat each other in a welcoming and respectful manner. We are passionate about cycling and supporting each other. We do the right thing.

OUR VISION



We envision a future where everyone, everywhere, views Warmshowers as **THE** community for connecting touring cyclists and those who host them, making millions of connections possible.

OUR MISSION



To facilitate and promote safe, free reciprocal hospitality for the worldwide touring bicycle community.