

PermacultureinPractice

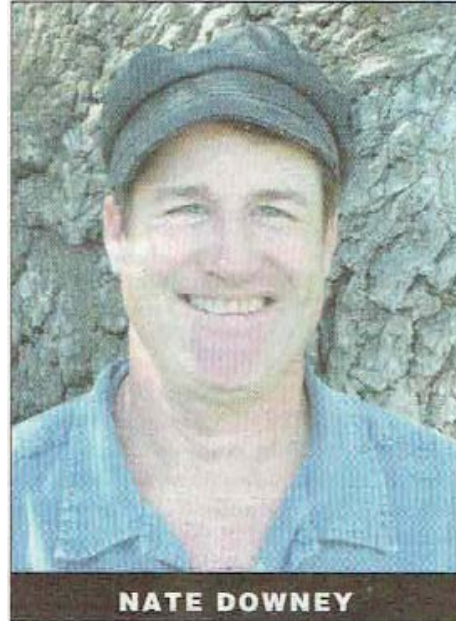
Tangled up in blue skies

*Early one mornin' the sun was shinin',
I was packin' a bag,
Wond'rin' if I had gone nuts
Or if I'd get jet lag.
I was heading to Atlanta
By bike and then by train
Next I'd take a shuttle bus
To a Sunport aero plane.
From the airport down in Georgia,
I'd take a commuter rail
And walk a few blocks over
To my conference's hotel.
(Just to make a sale?)*

Never has there been a job more-tangled in a web of hypocrisy than that of the modern-day “green author.” We proudly spout out loud about whatever it is we do, but don’t be fooled. Every one of us is on tour, and this means air travel. My book isn’t even out yet, and I’ve already chalked up an ungodly 1,200 pounds of carbon emission thanks to a four-flight cross-continental round trip. In eight airborne hours, I’d created literally 100 times the pollution than the average earthling generates in the same amount of time.

This is why I decided to bring my new bike. It folds up in a suitcase and eliminates car rental. Fortunately, the American Rainwater Catchment Systems Association had its act together and this year located its conference within walking distance of public transportation. However, with the weekend rainwater-systems-installer’s certification course, the three-day conference, and a day for travel, I would be gone six days, a long time without wheels and my favorite form of exercise.

At \$595 for the fold-up bicycle and \$270 for its airplane-compatible suitcase, I can’t say cycling saves money over renting a car, but over the long term it just might. Figuring in the 10 bucks spent at www.railrunner.com and the 65 smackers the airline charged me for loading my bike, my own private odyssey cost me 75 greenbacks. Had I rented a car, I could have spent two times as much. Given at least \$25 a day for car, gasoline, and parking (both at the Sunport and the hotel), renting would have cost about \$150 for the six-day trip. This means it will take approximately 11.5 similar trips for my bike to pay for itself.



Making it all make sense in terms of my carbon karma is another story because this amount of air travel alone translates into about a dozen tons of carbon to offset. Some would call this a daunting task for my little book rooted in sustainability, but if a water-harvesting revolution is in the air maybe I shouldn’t feel so tangled up in blue after all.

Perhaps the best reason to bike revolves around the experience itself. Seeing, hearing, smelling, and feeling a place while packed inside a climate-controlled car just doesn’t compare to the exhilaration of cycling through an unfamiliar neighborhood full of fragrant flowers, chirping birds, and happy smiles from strangers.

parts. Wastewater harvesting applies everything from the mulched basins of basic greywater recycling to the biology, chemistry, and physics involved in the latest Sludgehammer technology.

*.Nate Downey (424-4444, www.santafepermaculture.com) is president of Santa Fe Permaculture, a locally owned landscape-design firm. His first book, *Harvest the Rain*, is scheduled to be published this year by Sunstone Press.*