

Kirk Wieneke: Fast, Far and High

Kirk Wieneke of Thomas Lane says he “likes being outdoors and being physical.” But his way of “being physical” is not what most of us could imagine, much less consider doing.

Take for instance his trip to Patagonia last year, where he hiked the desolate land and kayaked up waterways created by melting glaciers. Earlier this year he hiked the torturously steep Bright Angel Trail in the Grand Canyon. This coming August, he will fly to Vietnam and bicycle from Saigon to Hanoi, then fly to Kilimanjaro, Tanzania, where he will hike to the top of the fabled Mount Kilimanjaro (at least three days round trip). But that’s not all. Are you dizzy yet? From there he will meet his sister, her husband, brother and several friends for a safari through the Serengeti during the annual southward migration of millions of zebras, wildebeest, giraffes, elephants and more. Expect Kirk to spot all the “big five” animals, which include lions, leopards, Cape buffalo and rhinos in addition to elephants. That trip will end in Morocco, where he will see the Atlas Mountains stretching out from Marrakech and the ancient medina, or bazaar, in

Fez, with its narrow, covered alleyways and snake charmers outside.

Always challenging himself, Kirk celebrated his 63rd birthday this year by completing a tandem free-fall sky dive! He did the same thing on his 62nd birthday and has actually completed five jumps overall.



Kirk’s tandem free-fall on his birthday. Kirk is the one without a helmet.

Scary Moments

And of course, after adventures like these, Kirk often comes back with a story or two of a near miss or crisis.

One was the tussle with Russian border guards on a train crossing from Mongolia into Russia. This was during a three-month trip in summer 2017, when he started out alone in Hawaii, then flew to Korea and Hong Kong, where he met up with a cycling group for a bicycle tour of South China. But that wasn’t all. He then took a train from Beijing to Mongolia, across Eastern Russia on the Trans-Siberian Railway, spotting reindeer, Siberian antelope and camels. That is where he ran into trouble. The Mongolian guards let the train cross the border into Russia without incident. But not the Russian guards on the other side. Not only did they hold up the train, opening the suitcases of foreigners and unleashing a drug sniffing dog, but one guard held what

looked like a pistol to Kirk's forehead and pulled the trigger. It turned out that it was a device to measure body temperature, but that fact wasn't revealed until afterward. Finally allowed to continue their journey, the group went on to Moscow for five days, St. Petersburg for three, and Norway, where he hiked fjords and climbed on mountain glaciers. Still he didn't stop, flying to England to connect with his



Kirk surfing in Hawaii.

sister and her husband at their home there so they could continue to Spain together. The trio bicycled through northern Spain, even cycling on part of the famed Camino de Santiago pilgrimage route.

Still another occurred while canoeing with a group on the Zambezi River in Zambia in 2011.

Suddenly a hippo that had been sleeping on the river bank charged the canoes. "The guide took a paddle and bopped him on the head," recalls Kirk. "Thankfully he slunk away."

Wanderlust of Long Standing

Where does Kirk get his wanderlust and love of adventure? "I have always been athletic," he says, "and I traveled most of my adult life." Formerly the Operations Manager for Emerson Electric, he traveled for work on every continent except Antarctica. The company has 150,000 employees in 125 countries, and he visited many of the corporate offices, fueling his love of travel. His parents bought the Quail Forest villa he now lives in in the 1980s, and Kirk grew to love Florida. Moving to Quail Forest full-time nine years ago, he retired from Emerson in 2015 and has hardly stopped moving since. "If I am here for 30 days, I get wanderlust."

If he is not planning an extensive trip, he satisfies the itch to get moving by doing the Ironman (70.3 miles) in Arizona, the St. Anthony's Triathlon or local sprint triathlons. On June 2, he'll engage in a one-mile, open water competitive swim off Madeira Beach. Last spring he took



Kirk hiking above a glacier in Patagonia.

fourth place in his age group in the Tarpon Springs Triathlon and first place in the Memorial Day 5K run in Oldsmar. In March of this year, he participated in the Skyway Bridge Inaugural Run, a 6.2 mile race that benefitted veterans' families. He was awestruck, he says, when he got to the highest elevation and looked down at the water below.

Generally Kirk runs 6 to 8 miles two or three times a week, often before daybreak, cycles 30 to 50 miles several times a week on his 18-year-old TREK racing bike, and can often be found in the Quail Forest pool. "I have to be outdoors every day."

What's next for Kirk? "I'd love to hike and bicycle in New Zealand," he says, "and return to China. There is a lot of that country that I haven't seen yet."