



# **There Used To Be A Guy... But He Died: and other discoveries on a bike-ride across Nebraska**

*Alan Wilkinson*

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The sun blazes down on Main Street. The little old feller sitting outside the barber-shop hears a dry rhythmic squeaking and sees the stranger riding into town. On a bicycle. The stranger lowers himself to the ground, grimacing. The old feller pauses, cigarette between his lips and a match in his hand. He pushes his hat back on his head, wondering what kinda darned fool is out in this heat. The stranger asks, 'Any idea where I can get this fixed?' The old feller strikes the match on his boot-heel. Lights his cigarette. 'We-ell,' he says, and inhales deeply, 'there used to be a feller.' He lets the smoke out in a long slow plume. 'But he died.' For British travel writer Alan Wilkinson there's only one way to get to know a place, and that's the hard way. Here the author of *The Red House On The Niobrara* recalls his 630-mile trip across Nebraska on a borrowed bicycle. Heading west from the banks of the Missouri river, he makes for the Wyoming line and the state's highest point, 5,426 feet above sea level. It's an elemental experience as he's broiled by a September heatwave, stopped dead in his tracks by a 55 mph wind, scarified by flying dirt, then chased by dogs and rescued by a cowboy. Along the way he considers the history of this Great Plains state, and his reasons for being drawn to it.

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