

Bikepacker

JOE MCGILL

Teenage bikepacker **Joe** set up his own online cycling shop during the pandemic. **Dave Barter** tells his story

We've heard many stories of positive action taken during the pandemic – elderly fundraisers, community-spirited actions, and new challenges attacked and completed. But have you heard the one about an entrepreneurial young lad with Asperger's syndrome who set up his own shop in a quest to fill a gap in the online cycling marketplace?

Joe's bikepacking shop is the result of a cycling expedition. The 17-year-old owner and Cycling UK member, Joe McGill, was given a set of toothpaste tablets by a friend to take on a trip. "I thought they were brilliant", he says. "Everyone's taking dried food but nobody thinks to take dried toothpaste. I thought to myself: I can sell these".

Joe and his mother Bridget are accomplished bikepackers, no strangers to long rides in the British wilds and further afield such as Spain, France and the USA. These trips fuelled Joe with ideas for product lines that would complement his investment in dried toothpaste. A loan from the bank of Mum allowed him to buy 10,000 units. Joe's bikepacking shop, Weirdos on Bikes, was born.

A few sleepless nights ensued as Joe and Bridget contemplated the risk they had taken. "What happens if we can't sell any of them?" she worried. But Joe had an idea: he created 'bundles', packaging up his toothpaste with a brush, a tablet holder, and a lightweight deodorant product they'd used on their trips.

Joe quickly taught himself web development, and with Bridget's help navigated the complexities of setting up online payment, which is especially difficult when account providers will not deal with those under 18. He then set about marketing his site, posting on bikepacking and other cycling forums to drum up business. As a result his mini-empire has begun to expand, thanks to a loyal customer base spreading the word.

The shop now stocks 43 product lines, with more being added all of the time. Joe runs the entire operation, from sourcing new products to packaging each with a handwritten 'Thank you'. Ethics drive product selection: Joe seeks to buy as close to home as possible and minimise



Top: Joe's idea for the shop came from a cycling expedition
Below: Joe with some of the items his online shop sells

Photos: Bridget McGill

plastic and packaging. Ideally he'd buy everything from Scotland, where his shop is based. But in order to be competitive he's had to spread his net wider nationally and internationally.

When asked if they are profitable, Bridget confirms that her loan is starting to be paid back. Joe is using his remaining profits to invest further in new lines for the shop. He's determined to grow his business.

The pandemic and the recent loss of his father meant that Joe needed a focus to help deal with the grief and restrictions. The genesis of his bikepacking shop gave him just that. "I started the shop to earn a bit of money to go towards a deposit for a flat," he says. "But now it's evolving". He's wondering if he can grow it to the stature of some of the better known online retailers. The ambition is certainly there.

Joe and Bridget are a close-knit team. The shop is the result of an incredibly supportive relationship that's emerged from a terrible set of circumstances. We've always known that bikes are one of the greatest tonics for mental health. Joe's set to add bike shops to that list. ●

Joe's shop

Joe sells a wide range of products focused upon bikepacking, from toothpaste tablets to lightweight shelters and emergency derailleur hangers. At the moment shipping is to the United Kingdom only, and costs just 99p no matter how many items you buy.



More Info

Joe's shop is part of his website, *Weirdos on Bikes*, which also includes his bikepacking blog:

weirdosonbikes.com/shop

