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Prior to his spinal cord injury in 2001, Jake O'Connor had never skied. Five years later he was boarding a plane for a ski trip to Argentina with a small group from the Adaptive Sports Center. He had never been out of the country before.

“It was the coolest thing I've ever done in my life,” says O'Connor. They visited Bariloche and San Martin, and while the skiing was epic, the trip was about so much more than skiing. “Two weeks in a foreign land took me out of my comfort zone, experiencing travel with less-than-ideal conditions for wheelchair accessibility. The trip made me more independent, and I was already pretty independent.”

Independence is a topic that comes up a lot when talking with Jake. In fact, his journey into handcycling was born out of a fierce desire to be able to do things on his own and take the road less traveled. He began as a road handcyclist and had been training for the Paralympics when he turned his attention to a relatively new adaptive sport, off-road handcycling.

Of all the adaptive sports, Jake says mountain biking provides the most independence. “I don't have to rely on anyone else. Unlike skiing where you rely on a chairlift, with biking you don’t need anyone's help.” It also allows him to experience more solitude on trails and really get out there.

Jake eventually started making his own bikes and in 2008 he founded ReActive Adaptations. Today his company manufactures six bike models with a new release coming soon called the Expedition, which allows him to carry 30 pounds of gear and his two-year-old daughter on multi-day camping trips, seeing where old, abandoned roads will take him.

The Adaptive Sports Center enhances the quality of life of people with disabilities through exceptional outdoor adventure activities. Based in Mt. Crested Butte, Colorado, our programs are inclusive to families and friends, empower our participants in their daily lives and have a positive enduring effect on self-efficacy, health, independence and overall well-being.

For more information, visit adaptivesports.org.