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Life histories and bicycles. Telling your life through an object

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This paper analyses a number of individuals' life-biography through the bicycle as material object and through the ability to ride it. It is based on material generated within the documentation project *Bicycles and bicyclists: yesterday, today, tomorrow* run by the Folklife Archives, and especially on responses to an open-ended questionnaire about cycling which has been distributed to the archive's network of regular informants. This diverse group, consisting of people of different ages and occupations living in various parts of Sweden, turned out to include all kinds of cyclists: reluctant practitioners who hardly ever use the bike, everyday cyclists who transport themselves as well as groceries and children in all kind of weathers, as well as passionate riders participating in races. When describing experiences and emotions associated with cycling, the questionnaire respondents often relate them to specific events in their lives, for example, taking the bike to the grocery store marking a significant move to a new geographic location. Some significant recurring themes are analysed from a life-cycle perspective. Furthermore, the use of open-ended questionnaires to regular informants, a well-established method among Scandinavian cultural history archives, and in use by the Folklife Archives since 1932, is discussed as a source for interpreting and analysing individual life histories.

Charlotte Hagström is Associate Professor in Ethnology and archivist at the Folklife Archive, Lund University, Sweden. She is currently working with *Bicycle freedom*, a research project focusing on cultural aspects of bicycling. Other research interests include personal names and identity, life cycle rituals and digital gaming.