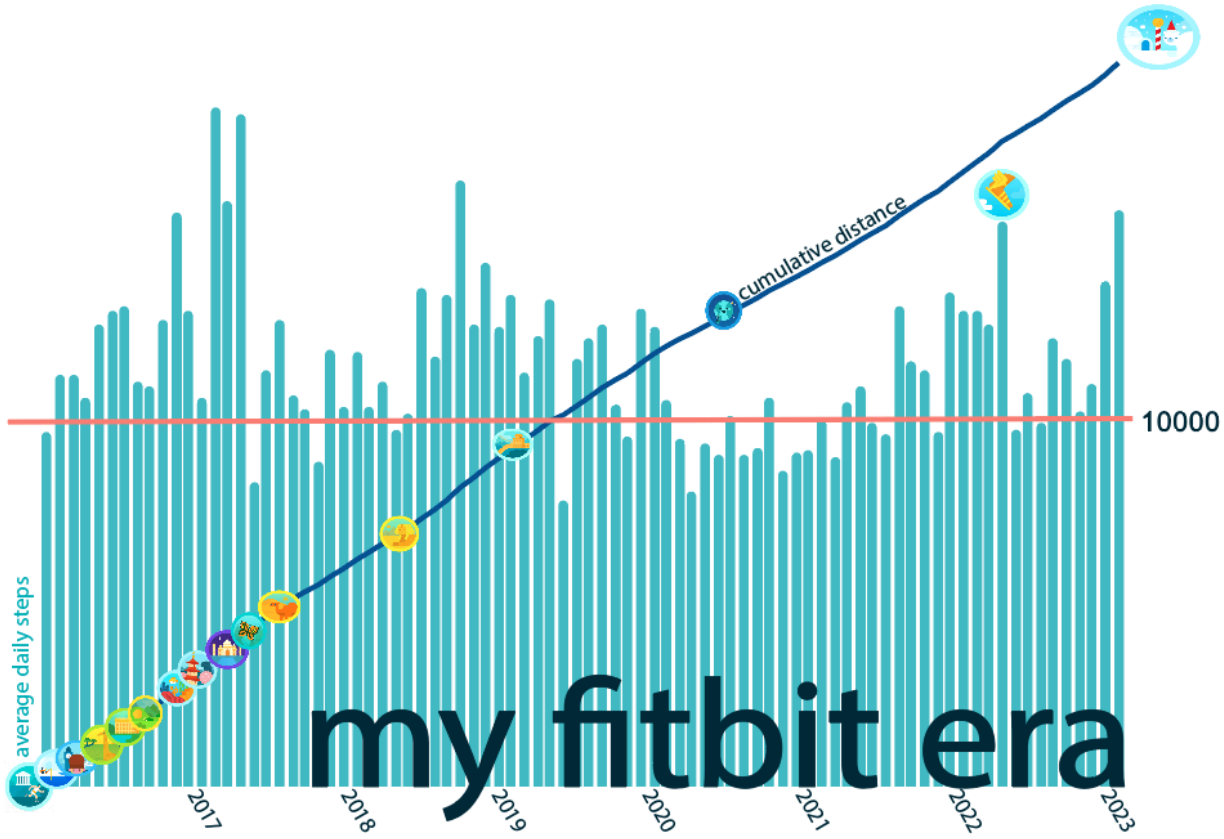
Loren Lee
Prof. Eric Field
SARC 5400: Data Visualization
16 February 2023

Assignment 2: Me, graphically



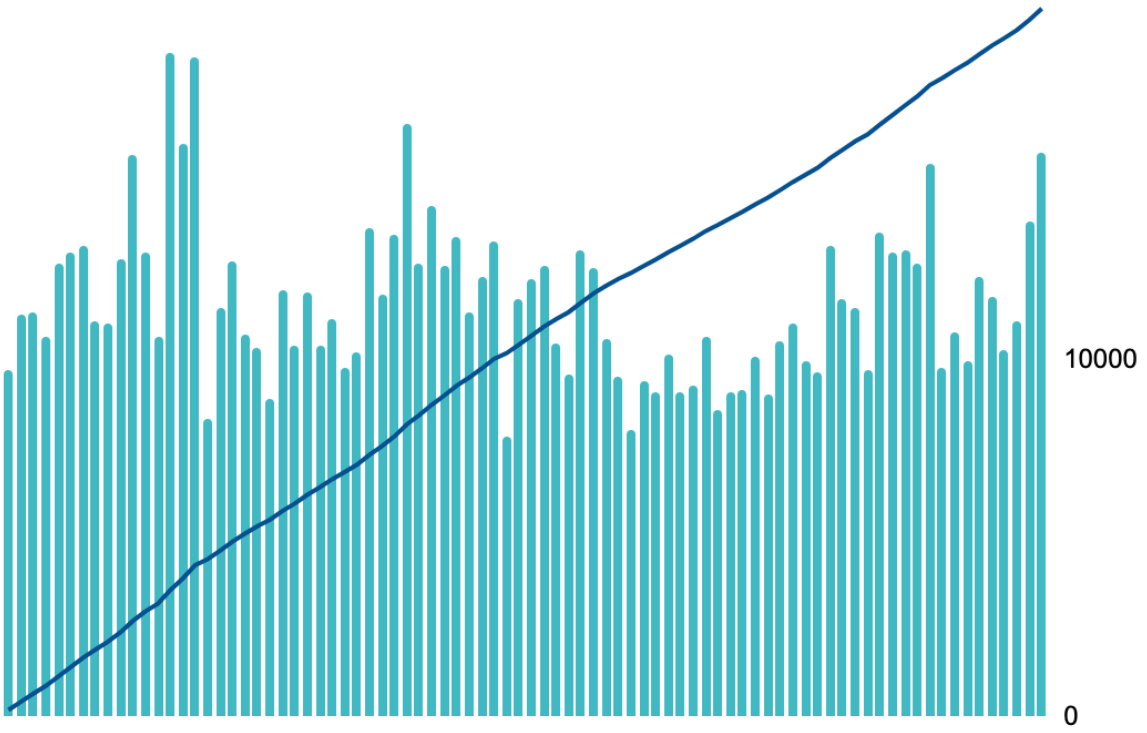
My inspiration for my "Me, graphically" assignment — my fitbit step count data — may seem a bit basic, but for the past seven years (since March 2016), I have been religious about wearing my fitbit every single day with only a few exceptions (e.g. attending weddings, accidentally running my fitbit through the wash, forgetting my charger on vacation). This obsession over the years has given me some insight into my general health, but it has also been a fun way to gamify my movement goals and stay competitive with myself. With this visualization, I was interested in seeing if I could find trends in my step count, and as I considered the data, I found myself feeling nostalgic for periods of my life that I can see reflected in my fitbit data. For instance, the initial spike in my graphic reflects my move to France where I taught English for a year. The next bump occurrs when I moved to Virginia and got a dog. Then, there is a prolonged dip in my average step count during the COVID-19 lockdown. This dip really surprised me considering I was still walking my dog everyday, and it shows me how important my daily steps that I accumulate while on my commute to Grounds really are. You can see me emerging from pandemic lockdown mode at the end of my graphic where my average daily steps jump back up again.

My first struggle in pulling this graphic together was collecting the data I wanted. The fitbit website is not particularly user friendly when it comes to exporting your data. It only allows you to export chunks of 31 days worth of data at once, so instead of exporting from fitbit,

I just recorded my monthly averages manually in a spreadsheet. Then, I color coated the step counts so that I could quickly get a sense of any possible trends. (I found that generally my performance dips the most in July and December, which I imagine is due to being out of school and dealing with extremes in the weather.) In this spreadsheet, I also added some annotations describing events that may have impacted my daily average, and I noted when I earned the various fitbit achievement badges for lifetime distance. Here's a screengrab of that spreadsheet:

Month	Year	Average Steps	Selected Badges Earned	Lifestyle Changes/Milestones	Total cumulative steps
March	2016	9713		Fitbit acquired for birthday March 26th	296246.5
April	2016	11288	Marathon - 26mi (Apr 2) & Penguin March - 70mi (Apr 12)		640530.5
May	2016	11307	London Underground - 250mi (May 16)	Graduated from UTK MS	985394
June	2016	10653			1310310.5
July	2016	12688	Serengeti - 500mi (July 10)	TAPIF	1697294.5
August	2016	13036	Italy - 736mi (Aug 18)	TAPIF	2094892.5
September	2016	13192		TAPIF	2497248.5
October	2016	11117	New Zealand - 990mi (Oct 10)	TAPIF	2836317
November	2016	10995		TAPIF	3171664.5
December	2016	12802		TAPIF	3562125.5
January	2017	15740	Great Barrier Reef - 1600mi (Jan 29)	TAPIF	4042195.5
February	2017	13010		TAPIF	4439000.5
March	2017	10635	Japan - 1869mi (Mar 25)	TAPIF	4763368
April	2017	18626	India - 1997mi (Apr 9)	TAPIF	5331461
May	2017	16067		TAPIF	5821504.5
June	2017	18457	Monarch Migration - 2500mi (Jun 20)		6384443
July	2017	8329		Moved to VA -- Played Skyrim at home alone	6638477.5
August	2017	11436			6987275.5
September	2017	12786	Sahara - 2983mi (Sept 20)	Teaching in Richmond	7377248.5
October	2017	10744		Teaching in Richmond	7704940.5

Then, I had some trouble figuring out how I could best represent both my daily step count averages and a trend line of my lifetime distance, but I was able to build this basic chart which I then imported into Adobe Illustrator to play around with:



I wanted to try and achieve a clean look while also presenting information that would make sense to the viewer, so for my final graphic, I did choose to add years to the x-axis as well as labels for the y-axis and the cumulative distance line. One thing that I think my graphic still doesn't convey well is the right sense of scale. My daily step count averages are mostly all around the recommended 10,000 benchmark, but my cumulative number of steps (represented by the diagonal navy line) goes up to nearly 30 million steps in total!

One aspect of my fitbit obsession that I wanted to convey as well is my insane chasing after the last fitbit badge I have left to earn: the "Pole to Pole" badge for walking 12,430 miles in total. To communicate this, I've added the images for all the cumulative distance badges at points in time along the line that I earned them. From how they are staggered across the line, one can see how the fitbit badges are set up to motivate users with frequent rewards early on and much more delayed achievements as you continue to wear your fitbit and rack up steps. Another badge I've included and that I was eager to earn was the "Olympian Sandal" badge for walking at least 100,000 steps in a single day, which I managed to do last year in May. It took me 17 hours of nearly continuous movement, but I did it! Honestly, I think my "Me, graphically" project tells the story of a girl with an unhealthy obsession with tracking her steps to earn meaningless badges for no good reason, but when reflecting on the trends in the data, I found satisfaction in thinking about how far my body has moved in the past seven years and how my fitbit has been with me all along counting away. Once I finally earn the "Pole to Pole" badge — the only badge I've yet to earn — I've decided that it's time to move on from my fitbit era and get an Apple Watch… so that I can earn new badges!!