

mountain bike

for the adventure

Vol. 1, No. 5



Single Tracking

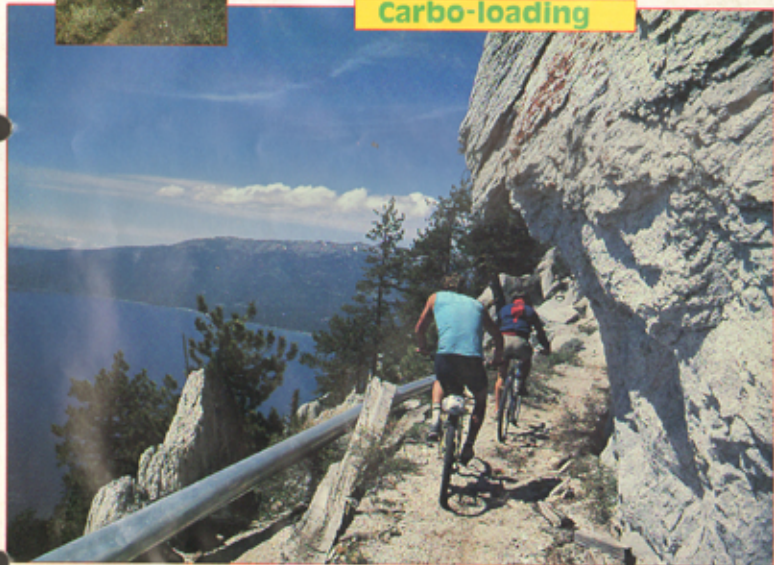
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mountain bike

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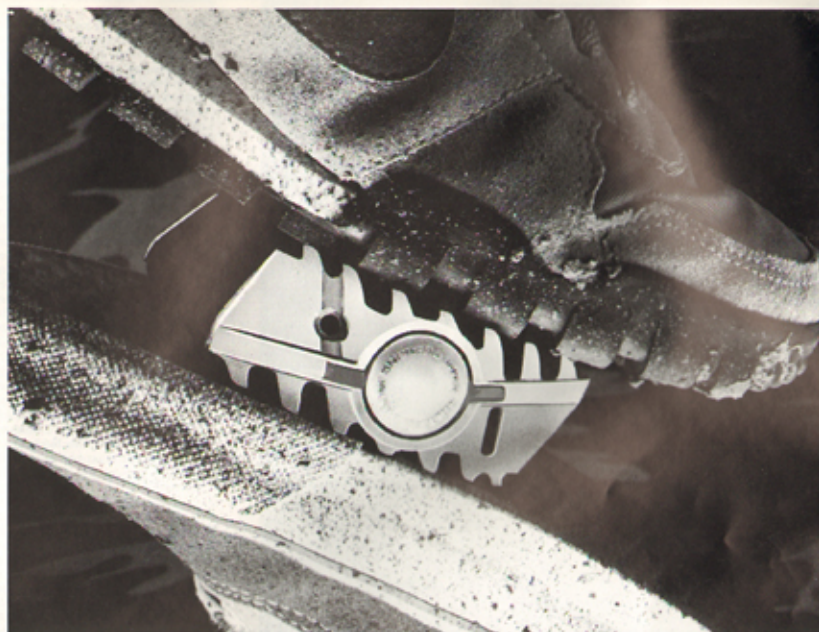
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Cycling above Lake Tahoe, California
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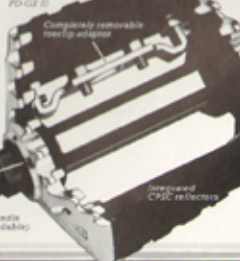
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Editor's Note

by Hank Barlow



Why shouldn't bikes be allowed there?

As Gary Sprung so clearly points out in his article on the Sierra Club, bikes are not so mechanically simple as ski bindings, camping equipment, even high tech hiking shoes. Not only that, as other readers have pointed out in letters, there are even historical precedents for bikes in the wilderness.

But all that is really beside the point. My objection to the Sierra Club is their grouping of mountain bikes with ORVs. This is one of the most illogical and unreasonable ideas I've heard in some time. Are they next going to group kayakers with jet boats and hang gliders with helicopters. Come to think of it, evidently they already have since hang gliders are also banned from wilderness areas. I have no idea what their rationale for that is.

Associating bikes with ORVs is a clear proof of the Sierra Club's lack of knowledge on what a mountain bike's limitations and impacts really are. Their justification of bike's being banned from any trails built for use by foot or horse traffic is so far off the wall that I'm left speechless. Hey, we're not talking wilderness anymore; we're talking all National Forest and BLM lands.

Every time I start mellowing in my attitude towards the Sierra Club, they come out with something like that. People write me letters saying I shouldn't offend the Sierra Club, that wilderness is more important than mountain bikers' rights, that I shouldn't drive a wedge between environmentalists and bikers. I'm not creating the division. They

are and very actively so and it's time mountain bikers stand up to them and let them know that their thinking is bereft of any intelligent reasoning.

In Ms Reid's letter, she presents so called evidence from Santa Barbara County trail maintenance volunteers of mountain bike's causing damage to the trails. It seems bikes have been wearing the edges of trails in the attempts to negotiate hairpins. They're probably right. Hairpins can be difficult to get around with a bike. That's why most bikers get off and walk the bike around. But not everybody does. But then not every hiker stays on the trail either. I've been hiking in the backcountry for twenty years and I don't believe I have ever seen a switchback trail that doesn't have shortcuts worn by countless hikers who cut corners. They cut the corners because vibram soled boots enable them to do so. Yet does the Sierra Club raise a hue and cry about banning vibram boots from the backcountry? Of course not.

I won't even begin to get into the problems horses cause. She also uses as evidence of bikers' misuse of the wilderness excerpts from a some NORBA article about bikers "bashing" through a stream in a valley where deer browse. Ms Reid asks "Are the stream, watercress, and deer unaffected by 'the bash through the creek' on the way up and down?"

She's got to be kidding. When was the last time anyone saw a deer in the wild simply stand there when bikers passed by? I live in the midst of mountains filled with deer and elk and believe it or not, and no doubt Ms Reid won't, I've seen far more of them when on my bike than I ever did on foot. And they definitely weren't as afraid of me on the bike as they were of me on foot. And is she also suggesting that the tires of a bike damage a stream more than the vibram soles of hiking boots? Her logic, assuming there is any, escapes me.

Finally she uses the exuberance mountain bikers experience when riding in the backcountry as further evidence of their misuse of the wilderness. The Sierra Club acknowledges the family outing and quiet touring possibilities of mountain biking. I guess that means only families are allowed in the wilderness and only if they're quiet.

What about the Boy Scouts. More than once I've been run off a trail by a troop of boisterous lads bounding down a trail, hollering at the top of their lungs. Should we write them off as some sort of Neo-Nazi Right Wing Lunatic Youth Group and ban them from the backcountry? After two years as a scout master, I know they're simply kids full of enthusiasm.

Perhaps Ms Reid's idea of a wilderness experience is to sit quietly while contemplating the marvels of who knows what, but I too love being in the wilderness and often express that through boisterous behavior. I've been known to yell out of sheer exuberance in the midst of struggling up difficult rock climbs, run trails as fast as I can for the same reason, and to even laugh uproariously at my good fortune at finding an exceptionally beautiful campsite. To my thinking, exuberance and backcountry experiences go hand in hand. Hell, that's what I head out of town and into the backcountry in the first place. My goodness, I've even been known on more than one occasion to pack a bottle of wine or six pack of beer with me. But then I've also been to know to

sit quietly in the backcountry and contemplate who knows what and maybe even write poetry.

I'm afraid Ms Reid is far too enthusiastic a supporter of the Big Brother mentality for me. It's (the Sierra Club's) policy is directed to allow these uses, under the watchful eye of a public lands manager." Quite frankly, being away from "watchful eyes" is much of my motivation and no doubt many others' motivation in heading into the backcountry.

Ms Reid further writes: "Your editorial, on the other hand, is directed to ridicule rather than understand our moderate stand." No, I didn't ridicule their "moderate stand." Their own reasoning does that quite nicely with no help from me because their position isn't moderate at all, it strikes me as uniformed and an emotional knee-jerk response devoid of any logic.

No doubt I will again be taken to task for my use of such strong words. But such use of the English language is appropriate. Had the Sierra Club limited their opposition to bikes in the wilderness, I would have let it ride. I have no interest in weakening our wilderness protection. But no, the Sierra Club wants to ban bikes from all trails on all government lands, require written permission from land owners to be in the biker's possession, and to require all mountain bikes to be licensed by the Federal Government.

I have to admit that those letter writers who have suggested that mountain bikers become active in the Sierra Club is probably a more effective answer than telling them to take a long hike off a high cliff, Sierra cups and all. Gary Sprung's excellent article and commentary strongly reinforce this. And based on Ms Reid's letter, obviously the Sierra Club needs all the mental help they can get. Their thinking currently isn't too inspired. They're becoming as bad as the government they were supposed to protect the backcountry from.

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Performance and Carbohydrates



A delightful display of carbohydrates: a conscientious athlete's primary food source

by Theresa Bradford

There's a certain passion experienced when riding mountain bikes over rugged terrain. There's the freedom to remove ourselves from civilization, to be dependent only on ourselves to find the strength to crank up ascents and the guts and technique to complete a tricky downhill. But when those guts start to falter and your strength diminishes, you may have to face the fact that you've flat run out of gas. Perhaps next time you should pay more attention to what went in those guts.

We should never compromise the quality of the fuel we put in our bodies. Preferred fuels for endurance are the carbohydrates you've probably heard so much about. But what kinds of carbohydrates are best?

There are two classes of carbohydrates. First are the refined carbohydrates found in sweets, pastries, chips, high-sugared grains, cereals, etc. These provide you with "empty calories" with very little nutrition or fuel. Don't bother with these; they're worthless.

The second class of carbohydrates are the complex carbohydrates, 60-75% of an athlete's diet should consist of these. Eat as much in the way of fruits, vegetables, whole grain breads, cereals, pastas, rice, potatoes,

beans and legumes as you can get your hands on. This is your body's primary fuel source. This is where your energy and vitality come from. Take advantage of it!

Carbohydrate loading has become a hot issue for endurance athletes. It is a diet and exercise regimen entailing supersaturating the involved muscles with carbohydrate fuel. The intent is to improve competitive performance as well as post performance recovery time. The technique was first developed in Sweden in 1967 by two physiologists, Per-Olof Astrand and Mark Hulman. It's based on the fact that muscles use protein and fatty acids for fuel only to a limited extent. The main fuel for muscle exertion, and almost exclusively for extended exertion, is the carbohydrate called glycogen. Enzymes within the muscle cells are under the hormonal control of insulin. These enzymes bind to glucose, the sugar circulating within our bloodstream, and, by combining many small glucose molecules, convert it to another sugar form, glycogen. Glycogen is then placed in storage for cell usage upon demand. When the body needs fuel, the glycogen is quickly converted to glucose which becomes immediately available

for the cell's energy release system.

Carbloading traditionally required seven days prior to an endurance event. A week before the event, the athlete exercises to exhaustion, using up all glycogen stores within the muscle cells and liver. During the next three days, the athlete exists on a high protein, high-fat diet with carbohydrate intake minimized. This is the "depletion" (starvation) phase of the program. Vigorous exercise is maintained during this portion. This, coupled with carbohydrate depletion, insures the muscle glycogen stores are adequately depleted.

A high-carbohydrate diet is used to supersaturate the muscles with glycogen during the last three days. Training is kept to a minimum in this last phase to keep the glycogen in storage until the big event.

The reality of traditional carbloading regimens is less favorable than lab results indicate. Many athletes have a difficult time with the starvation portion of the program and experience difficulties in digestion of heavy proteins and fats (i.e. meats and dairy products). The heavy training during this phase can also be painful and only maintained with great reluctance. The

resulting low blood sugar can also contribute to lightheadedness and post-exercise fatigue.

Studies conducted in the late 1970's at Ball State University in Indiana found that during the carbohydrate-loading regimen, those who skip the depletion phase of the program were able to store almost as much muscle glycogen as those who followed the traditional regimen. Consequently the updated recommendation deletes the starvation phase.

Recommendations are as follows: a week prior to the event, exercise to exhaustion to insure that your muscles are adequately depleted of glycogen and be sure you're eating a diet rich in carbohydrates. The last three days, just prior to the event, increase your carbohydrate intake to 6-7 grams per kilogram body weight (2.2 lbs.). Only rest and very light exercise are allowed in this final stage to insure the glycogen remains in storage for the big event.

Don't forget the importance of potassium in your diet. It's essential for maintaining proper electrolyte balances within your body during training. Fortunately complex carbohydrates are also excellent sources of Potassium. Drink lots of water. Water is stored in the muscle tissues along with glycogen. Prevention of tissue dehydration is essential for superior performance and is an integral factor in effective carbohydrate loading.

Studies indicate that carbohydrate loading is only effective when the event being prepared for is 90 min. to 2 hours in length. For shorter events or recreational sports, the glycogen stores which are created from carbloading generally remain unused. Thus, a balanced diet consisting of a amount of complex carbohydrates will allow you enough glycogen to perform well, ride longer and harder, and suffer less post exercise fatigue. After any long, hard workout, your tissues will be depleted of glycogen so maintenance of a high-carbohydrate diet plus rest will get you back in shape quickly.

Carbloading is not for everyone. It is contraindicated for those with metabolic disorders such as blood sugar problems or diabetes.

If you are not presently on a well-balanced, whole-food diet, carbohydrate loading is definitely not the way to start and will not work optimally for you. Over the next two to three months, transform your diet to include 60-75% complex carbohydrates with the remaining percent consisting of quality fats, (i.e. avocados, uncooked oils, and low fat dairy products) and good protein sources such as soy products and lean meats, (i.e. fish and poultry). If you are going to compete in a one and a half to two hour event, try the modified carbloading plan skipping the starvation, depletion phase. If your athletic event is less than one and a half hours, don't bother carbloading per say. Just make sure you maintain a high-complex carbo diet daily.

Remember, if you compromise your primary fuel source with excessive fats, proteins, and refined carbohydrates, not only your energy output be depleted, your performance and post performance recovery time will suffer as well. The most important thing to realize is that every individual is different, so find what works best for you.

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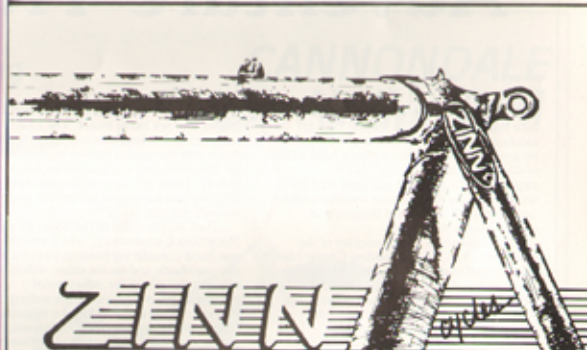
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Mountain Bikes As Tools of Therapy



Adventure Trails

by Gary Sprung

Has anger ever driven you into a long bike ride to blow off the steam? Ever felt the exhilaration of the first moments of fresh air on a ride in the mountains after a hard week of cooped-up life in the city? Such experiences taught psychologists and social workers in Los Angeles that mountain bikes can be tools of emotional therapy and environmental education.

The Adventure Trails program of the Hollywood YMCA Counseling Center has now treated over one thousand troubled or disadvantaged inner-city youths to the delights of riding trails in the nearby Santa Monica Mountains. The success of the program is proving to sceptical environmentalists that bicycles can safely provide transport through environmentally sensitive areas, and further their goals of nature awareness.

Adventure Trails is the brain child of psychologists Kevin Fox and Larry Shaw who both love mountain bikes and seek alternative, non-traditional methods of counseling. Their effort began, said Shaw, when one day they brought a mountain bike to the West Hollywood Opportunity School which services youngsters with academic or behavioral problems. The kids loved it.

So Shaw and Fox got the local Kiwanis Club and the County of Los Angeles to spring for six bikes. Raleigh Cycle Company of America provided them at cost. Rides on

the bicycles served as rewards for good grades and not being truant. The bike program led at least one youngster to a move into the regular school system.

The next step was a camp for kids with cancer. There the counsellors saw how bicycles could promote self-growth and rational risk-taking.

Then they learned of the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy, which was on the one hand considering banning bicycles from the parklands and on the other, soliciting requests for grants for educational programs. After a difficult grant-writing process, Shaw and Fox faced a negative recommendation from the Conservancy staff and a board of directors set eleven to one against them.

That one vote on their side, from board member Carole Stevens, was crucial. She argued that mountain bikes are here to stay, so the board should accept them and turn them into a positive element of mountain recreation. The votes swung slowly after many people spoke in support... ten - two... a split... finally a majority.

The \$19,260 grant was matched dollar for dollar by the Olympic Torch Relay Fund and Adventure Trails was in business. Raleigh donated another 16 bikes.

The program is open mainly to inner city youth ages twelve to seventeen and their families, with particular emphasis on those

who would otherwise be denied the opportunity to enjoy the serenity and excitement of the outdoors. Many of the clients come by way of reference from the city's social services department, various medical clinics and counselling centers, and the police/justice system. More "normal" or middle-class participants have included the Boy Scouts of America and the Sierra Club. All services and equipment are provided without charge. The riders need bring only a lunch, proper clothing, and at least two adult leaders from their organization.

Each ride begins with a lecture on the ethics of bicycling and respect for the environment. The program relies on a code of ethics derived directly from the NORBA Offroad Cyclists Club. (Adventure Trails is a member of NORBA and Sierra Club.) Each rider must then sign a contract acknowledging that he or she understands the code and will abide by it.

Along the way, talks on botany, geology, history and such complement the escape from noise and asphalt. But the cardiovascular effort may be the key feature of this re-creation.

"Riding together teaches them how to interact socially. They all face the same big same frustrations, then share the same success getting up and over," said Fox, the program's director. That experience leads, in psychology parlance, to "bonding", he

explained. The program is credited with developing other positive attributes like pride, self-esteem and a sense of responsibility for the use of valuable property—\$350 bicycles.

Fox hopes to eventually institute a second stage of Adventure Trails that will provide a rather opposite bicycling experience. The Olympic Torch Relay Fund grant opens a door to the velodrome track left over from the 1984 summer Olympics. One Adventure Trails guide/counsellor, Don Denegal, is a licensed velodrome racer. They hope they could develop youngsters into Olympic caliber racers and members of the U.S. team.

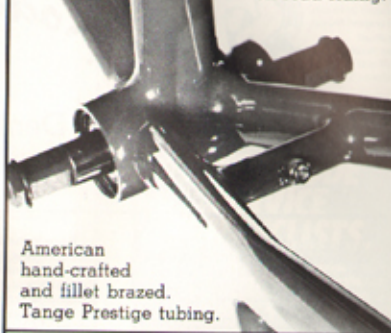
Besides proving the value of this new all-terrain technology, the Adventure Trails program is benefiting mountain bicyclists in a political way. The bike ban proposal was dropped. A committee of the local Sierra Club is sponsoring several outings. (That's the same chapter which initiated the national organization's recent classification of mountain bikes as "off road vehicles".) The chairman of that committee said he is relatively unconcerned about Adventure Trails because most environmental damage is caused by individual riders, not organized groups.

Fox hopes the program will be a prototype for more of the same and sees a basic necessity for such organized education. The growth of mountain biking causes increasing potential for conflicts with other users of mountain trails. With more programs like Adventure Trails, perhaps such problems might never happen.

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Off the Road

by Dennis Coello

Welcome to the first of my "Off The Road" columns. I've written for Mountain Bie Magazine before but now have the opportunity to create - if you will - a kind of "delayed-action" correspondence with our magazine's readers. Why delayed? Because of the mandatory lead time to create, publish, and mail out each issue. In other words, you might write to me in response to an early spring article; our kindly editor will spend a few days tracking me down (I sped roughly six months per year on the road), then mail your letter to a post office in a town along my route. My response - given space availability - will then take a couple weeks to write and a couple months (magazine lead time again) to appear.

In short, please be patient. And please write. I don't have all the answers, of course, but I have muddled my way through some twenty-one years of touring, and can suggest solutions to the problems I've encountered.

March is a muddy month in the low country, given to chilling rains and cold, wet winds which whip about and through you. High in the Rockies, Old Man Winter's grip holds fast. Thick-furred, hibernating bears, somehow recording the passage of time, come groggily awake. But mountain air is still too cold, and, with a yawn, the bear trips his mental snooze alarm for another month of sleep.

With humans, March is a month of hope. Icicles drip, days are noticeably longer, a friend reports he's seen a robin. Cabin fever has reached its peak, and bikers - from Manhattan to Mount Ranier - are aching to be out.

Well, let your fancy run wild. You've nearly weathered one more winter; spring is almost here. If you're the hardy sort and can handle mud and snow, this is the month to tour. Dirt roads and trails are empty of all but animals, off-season prices make hotels and good restaurants a more affordable pleasure, and even resort town inhabitants haven't donned their thick-skin suits of

Keep in mind that cycling in general - and mountain bike touring in particular - is an art, not a science. No matter how technical the equipment, the man or woman in the saddle is far more important than the mount beneath. So we will disagree at times on preferred frame geometry, components, panniers and camping gear. But neither of us will be wrong in this preference. I'd like, therefore, to hear not only that we disagree, but why we do. It should make for interesting discussions.

Finally, I'd planned this time to give you a short tale of how I started touring, why I stayed with it over all other recreation sports, and why I do almost all my touring now by mountain bike. Such a column, I figured, might interest you in giving it a try. But that can come later. This time - as spring draws near - the season and some touring shots should be enough to start you longing for the road.

tourist times.

For the rest of us - who fight cabin fever annually with outstretched snaps, trip plans and group meetings with tourmates - I offer the following words and photographs. Perhaps they will serve to suggest alternatives to rides you've taken in the past, provide ideas for new areas to pedal, and offer the hope that there is life after February.

Deserts

Early spring and late fall are the times I prefer to tour in such areas. The obvious reason is that temperatures are not extreme, allowing more pleasant cycling than in other seasons. Not so obvious are the resultant benefits of greater touring - range on each resupply of water, the amazingly brilliant color of cactus in bloom, an increase in daylight activity of animals who - during summer's heat - leave their abodes only in the cool of night.

I strongly suggest the use of tire liners in



Dennis Coello, after 10,000 miles per year of bike touring, he has plenty of useful information

Even the rolling flat grasslands of the midwest are inviting for touring

desert regions, to avoid punctures from cactus needles. Always carry a snakebite kit (no matter the season), a water purifier and/or purification tablets, appropriate clothing and lotions for protection from the sun (even in winter) and for warmth during the night, and detailed maps with correct information on water holes and resupply points (consult rangers and local residents; do not assume all towns on a map are good for at least food and water, as ghost towns - especially near desert regions - are common.)

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while deep within the woods one has a final taste of winter. Contrast - an ingredient necessary to remind us we're alive - is for me one of the most enjoyable aspects of cycle touring. And at no time is the contrast greater than at the change of seasons.

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Bare trees and cold nights in camp in

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There's no telling what sort of attention your adventures will attract

Dennis Coello



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Off the Road

by Dennis Coello

Welcome to the first of my "Off The Road" columns. I've written for Mountain Bike Magazine before but now have the opportunity to create - if you will - a kind of "delayed action" correspondence with our magazine's readers. Why delayed? Because of the mandatory lead-time to create, publish, and mail out each issue. In other words, you might write to me in response to an early spring article; our kindly editor will spend a few days tracking me down (I speed roughly six months per year on the road), then mail your letter to a post office in a town along my route. My response - given space availability - will then take a couple weeks to write and a couple months (magazine lead-time again) to appear.

In short, please be patient. And please write. I don't have all the answers, of course, but I have muddled my way through some twenty-one years of touring, and can suggest solutions to the problems I've encountered.

March is a muddy month in the low country, given to chilling rains and cold, wet winds which whip about and through you. High in the Rockies, Old Man Winter's grip holds fast. Thick furred, hibernating bears, somehow recording the passage of time, come groggily awake. But mountain air is still too cold, and, with a yawn, the bear rings his mental snooze alarm for another month of sleep.

With humans, March is a month of hope. Icicles drip, days are noticeably longer, a friend reports he's seen a robin. Cabin fever has reached its peak, and bikers - from Manhattan to Mount Rainier - are aching to be out.

Well, let your fancy run wild. You've nearly weathered one more winter; spring is almost here. If you're the hardy sort and can handle mud and snow, this is the month to tour. Dirt roads and trails are empty of all but animals, off-season prices make hotels and good restaurants a more affordable pleasure, and even resort town inhabitants haven't donned their thick skin suits of

Keep in mind that cycling in general - and mountain bike touring in particular - is an art, not a science. No matter how technical the equipment, the man or woman in the saddle is far more important than the mount beneath. So we will disagree at times on preferred frame geometry, components, panniers and camping gear. But neither of us will be wrong in this preference. I'd like, therefore, to hear not only that we disagree, but why we do. It should make for interesting discussions.

Finally, I'd planned this time to give you a short tale of how I started touring, why I've stayed with it over all other recreation sports, and why I do almost all my touring now by mountain bike. Such a column, I figured, might interest you in giving it a try. But that can come later. This time - as spring draws near - the season and some touring shots should be enough to start you longing for the road.

tourist times.

For the rest of us - who fight cabin fever annually with outstretched maps, trip plans and group meetings with tourmates - I offer the following words and photographs. Perhaps they will serve to suggest alternatives to rides you've taken in the past, provide ideas for new areas to pedal, and offer the hope that there is life after February.

Deserts

Early spring and late fall are the times I prefer to tour in such areas. The obvious reason is that temperatures are not extreme, allowing more pleasant cycling than in other seasons. Not so obvious are the resultant benefits of greater touring range on each resupply of water, the amazingly brilliant color of cactus in bloom, an increase in daylight activity of animals who - during summer's heat - leave their abodes only in the cool of night.

I strongly suggest the use of tire liners in



Dennis Coello, after 10,000 miles per year of bike touring, he has plenty of useful information

Even the rolling flat grasslands of the midwest are inviting for touring

desert regions, to avoid punctures from cactus needles. Always carry a snakebite kit (no matter the season), a water purifier and/or purification tablets, appropriate clothing and lotions for protection from the sun (even in winter) and for sunburn during the night, and detailed maps with correct information on water holes and resupply points (consult rangers and local residents; do not assume all towns on a map are good for at least food and water, as ghost towns - especially near desert regions - are common.)

I'm sometimes in such distant areas that a bike breakdown could cause real problems in getting out alive. Pack the necessary tools and parts to deal with troubles which could stop you cold - blowouts, chain breaks, et cetera. (Does this sound like melodrama to you? Think for a moment of the distance you traverse in a day's cycling, even off road. Then consider how much extra water you'd require to walk that far. Combine ignorance of conditions with overconfidence and you can turn a weekend tour into your longest - and last - ride.)

I normally carry a spare tire (2.125 inch size) as well as an extra tube, patch kit and pump. In this way I have the option of a larger tire for increased rear wheel traction in loose sand and snow. I begin all tours with the smaller 1.75" or 1.9" road/trail tires, those designed for speed on pavement and good traction off-road, through center-rib or lug arrangement and a high end air pressure range of between sixty-five and eighty p.s.i.

Eastern Woodlands

Early spring is a wonderful time for cycling these areas as suns, south facing slopes take on the first hint of greenery while deep within the woods one has a faint taste of winter. Contrast - an ingredient necessary to remind us we're alive - is for me one of the most enjoyable aspects of cycle touring. And, at no time is the contrast greater than at the change of seasons.

I find I have to push my bike up steep Ozark hills when snow still covers wet, slippery oak leaves, and fenders are a must to keep mud on trails from clogging up my brakes. But I don't feel "defeated" at such times; it's just a forced opportunity to enjoy the signs a bit more slowly.

Bare trees and cold nights in camp in

eastern woods bring to me a pleasant melancholy (especially when alone), and reading Hawthorne by the fire - my lower half tucked snug inside a warm sleeping bag - is pure pleasure.

Western Mountains

White aspen and deep evergreen combine in spring to give a heady, thin-air taste of higher regions, far different than that which comes from winter skiing and late summer or fall rides. Animals seem to me more curious at this time, and my best photographs of fat marmots, mountain goats, wide-eyed deer and rascous magpies come in the early months.

Be sure to have both warm weather and foul weather gear, and a tent to protect you from cold rain and strong winds. Late snow can bring on very muddy roads at lower elevations and these can sap one's strength and greatly increase travel time. Extra food and water - no matter the terrain or season - is always worth its weight. In the high country, the weight of food, protective clothing, a warm sleeping bag and tent (together necessary to ward off hypothermia) should be measured not in ounces, but in heartbeats.

Remember that where one travels is only one consideration in touring; how one does it (fast/slow, solo/group...) and what is emphasized depends upon the individual. In future columns I'll talk about my hunting, fishing, insect collection and photographic rides, and those designed purely for exploration. I'll discuss how I prefer to carry guns, game, fly rods, butterfly nets and cameras. Mountain bikes are great fun to ride, but they're also tremendous tools for almost all one's hobbies.

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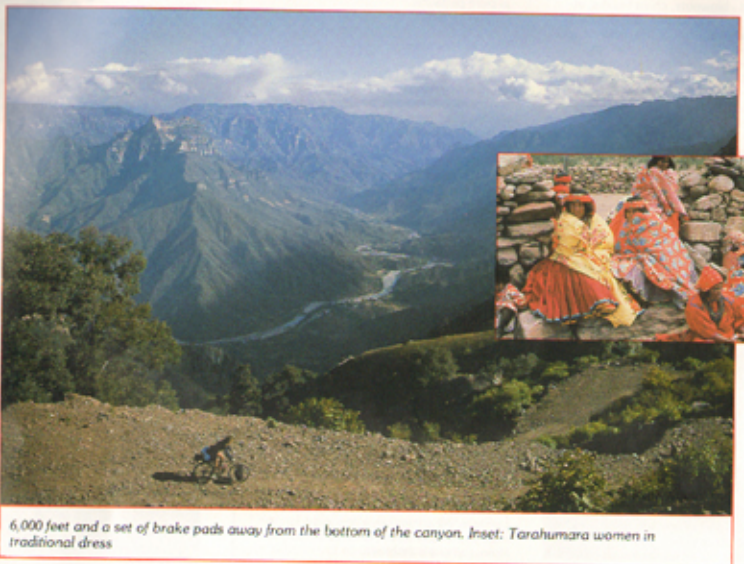


Foto L. Verplancken

6,000 feet and a set of brake pads away from the bottom of the canyon. Inset: Tarahumara women in traditional dress

by Eliane Wissocq

In our last issue, we carried the first part of this journey from Mexico City to Veracruz. Here we have the 2nd leg of the journey which explores the Barranca del Cobre with its colorful Tarahumara Indians and striking scenery.

Mexico: Part II

During a recent cycling tour from Mexico City to Vera Cruz, we rode almost entirely on roads of one kind or another. Modern civilization, though dramatically different than what we're used to in the U.S., was never far away. That wasn't the case in the Barranca del Cobre (Copper Canyon).

Copper Canyon, in Chihuahua State, is one in a series of spectacular canyons gouged out of the western Sierra Madre plateaus. The canyons' total length is 900 miles, four times longer than the Grand Canyon. The plateaus' average elevation is 6,500 feet with the canyon floors as much as 6,000 feet lower. Adding to the area's aura are peaks rising to over 10,000 feet.

Access to Copper Canyon is via the recently completed "El Ferrocarril Chihuahua al Pacifico" between Ojinaga (across the border from Presidio, Texas) and Topolobampo on the Gulf of California. The section through the Barranca is arguably the most incredible railroad in the world and the pride of Mexico. It's an engineering masterpiece that took nearly a century to complete, a project American engineers claimed was impossible. The Mexicans were told by countless experts that attempting to do so was folly. Nevertheless, they persisted and successfully forced the route through.

Copper canyon is also home to the Tarahumara Indians, best known for their unbelievable running, an ability the Mexican government attempted to capitalize on during the 1976 Olympics held in Mexico City. They recruited a young Indian runner for the marathon. Unfortunately for Mexico, twenty-six miles isn't even a decent warmup for a Tarahumara. Typical Tarahumara races

cover 170 or so miles over some of the wildest, most rugged terrain found in North America. They also like to kick along a small, wooden ball while running.

Our Copper Canyon adventure began in Creel, a small railroad town on the edge of the canyon and surrounded by rolling hills covered with pine-trees and rock pinnacles. We arrived there after a seven-hour train ride from Chihuahua. Creel is the normal jump off for exploring the Barrancas. Though it's slowly turned into a tourist town since completion of the railroad in 1961, it's still refreshingly low key and inexpensive. Restaurants offer a complete meal for as little as a dollar while hotel room prices range from fifty cents per person (no water) to a dollar and a half (hot shower) or, for those desiring luxury, as much as eight dollars per person.

Next to the train-station is the Tarahumara Mission where we headed for information. A few Tarahumara women were standing by the door. All were wearing traditional, fully gathered, brightly colored skirts. I was wearing shorts. They stared at my legs so intently that as soon as we arrived at our hotel room, I put jeans on.

We had four maps of the area. The topographic map showed a small village, Tejaban, in the bottom of a canyon. Two of the other maps didn't mention the village while the fourth showed it at a completely different place. Finding our way wouldn't be easy.

We were told at the Mission that many of the towns and villages listed on maps were really only groups of houses. Nevertheless, they said we should be able to find some

food in a few of the tiny villages. We were also told the trails would be steep and very rocky. We decided not to overload the panniers and took along food for only two days.

From Creel, we rode twenty miles over a gravelled road to Casazare. Casazare consisted of a few houses, a church, and a boarding school. The only "store" offered the basic "3 C's": coca, cigarettes, and cookies, and little else. From Casazare, we had to find a trail described as narrow, steep, and rocky.

To further lighten our load, we left a few more things with the school teacher. He also told us about a nearby waterfall. We decided to ride to it before heading on to Tejaban. The scenic trail wound up and down through trees, traversing a few rocky, rocky sections and crossing small streams and was delightful to ride.

Back on the main road the next day, the first challenge was to find the trail to Tejaban. When we would ask an Indian for directions, instead of words such as right, left, or straight ahead, the answer would always be: over there! accompanied with a vague gesture of the hand. So we looked over there.

The turn was evidently past a house. We tried one. We caught up with a Mexican on a horse and asked if we were on the right trail. We were. Progress over the steep and rocky trail was slow and it kept dividing, constantly forcing us to choose between right or left.

We had been biking for several hours, averaging maybe three miles per hour, and hadn't met a soul to ask if we were still on

The Equipment



One question we've been constantly asked was what kind of equipment did we use. Everything was straight forward and readily available. Most impressive of all was that we had zero problems with any of it during the entire trip.

Keith rode a Mountain Klein, I a Moots. Both of us are short and in the past, we've had problems getting bikes small enough to fit us correctly. Keith's was a 19-inch frame with a short reach stem. His fit was perfect. I had a 16-inch Moots. Getting used to it took a day or so but once I'd made the adjustment, I couldn't have been more comfortable.

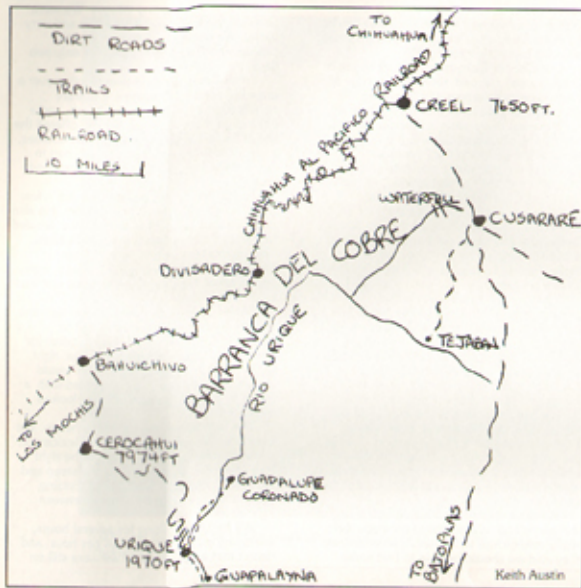
The Moots had a longer wheelbase than Keith's Klein and was definitely a softer riding bike. That probably had much to do with the comfort. I've never ridden down hills so fast. Keith's bike was stiffer and was an amazing climber. He seemed to go up anything. But that stiffness also made it somewhat rougher riding than the Moots during fast downhill. But he also said that it was smoother than anything else he'd ever ridden before.

To carry our gear, we used Kangaroo panniers front and rear mounted on Blackburn racks, low riders in the front. They easily swallowed our gear, kept

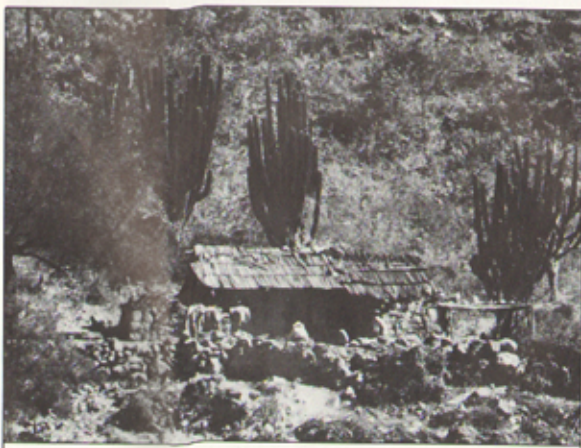
everything dry and free of dust, and held up beautifully. The only problem we had with them was a small securing velcro strap on the rear panniers. Because of its placement, it could slowly vibrate loose, resulting in a bag falling off. Once we discovered the problem, all we did was check it twice a day and that took care of that.

The tent was a Sierra Designs Clip Flashlight with alcove. It was the lightest two-man tent either of us had ever seen. But even better than the weight was the ease with which it went up. The poles form an exoskeleton and the tent simply clipped onto it. Even with heavy gloves, erecting the tent was a snap.

I was very surprised to discover that the loaded panniers stabilized the bikes' performance. Even on rough terrain, the packs were never a problem and never adversely affected the handling. The additional weight made low gearing a must. Fortunately we had installed 24-inch granny chain rings before the trip. They enabled us to ride up almost all the hills along the trip, except for one major exception where our gear was hauled up in a car.



Keith Austin



Typical Adobe house surrounded by candelabra cacti

Keith Austin

the right trail. Every time we went up a ridge I thought on the other side would be the village. Instead, we would see another ridge.

We stopped, perplexed, in front of yet another fork. We heard noises, like kids' voices, somewhere higher up. We finally spotted two young boys herding a bunch of goats ahead of us. Just before we reached them, they started running, afraid of us. We followed them to a farm where men and women were working in a cornfield. We were on the right trail. They also said Tejabán was still far away. But we had no idea what their concept of far was. We continued biking to the top of yet another ridge.

We were starting to wonder if we could make it to the village and back in the two days we had allotted when we saw a family coming our way. The man wasn't wearing traditional Tarahumara costume but we knew they were Tarahumara because he was walking along in sandals made of sections of old tire and leather straps and kicking a wooden ball.

During their races, which can last as long as seventy-two hours, there's a steady forward progression of the same wooden ball, which they kick by placing their toes under it. Women also have races but instead of kicking the ball, they toss it with a stick.

He told us Tejabán was two hours away. Like other Indians we met later, he didn't seem to envy any other way of traveling than by foot. When in Mexican villages or towns, we would be surrounded by curious locals asking questions about the bikes and us. But we could suddenly appear on an isolated Tarahumara rancho from an almost impassible trail and the Indians' facial expressions would reveal absolutely no sign of surprise.

A few minutes later, a young boy ran by us, followed by another family. Both the man and the boy were kicking balls. We asked how far Tejabán was. One said five hours, another said eight kilometers, another said forty kilometers. Our quandary increased. We unfolded the topo map and reconsidered our priorities. We only had a week left before we had to be back in the states.

We had two choices: continue on until we arrived at the bottom of the canyon or return to Creel and take the train to Bahuchivo from where we knew a dirt road went all the way to the village of Urique in the deepest part of the canyons. From Urique, we could explore the canyon on our bikes. That meant two more days on the train and less biking but more scenery and less chance of futilely spending days traversing ridges. Our maps were useless in the canyon's labyrinth. Besides, from Bahuchivo to the canyon's rim should be a beautiful ride with a spectacular downhill to Urique. We returned to the school in Cusarere that same afternoon, put the panniers back on the bikes, camped out past Cusarere, and rode to Creel the next morning to catch the train to Bahuchivo.

Three trains a day pass through the canyons. The most desirable is the "Mista" since it traverses the canyons in daylight. We had to take the "Mista" because of our bikes; it's the only one with a freight car

where we could put them. The "Mista" is slower than the others but fortunately still arrives in daylight at a spectacular canyon overlook called Divisadero. More photographs of the canyon's magnificent vistas are shot from Divisadero than from anywhere else along the line. A fifteen-minute stop is standard so tourists can enjoy the breath-taking views. We stared into the depths and attempted to picture what it would be like to cycle through the rugged country but to no avail. The scale was too vast.

We arrived in Bahuchivo at night and opted for a hotel room. We awoke psyched up and excited to at last be starting our cycling adventure into the canyon. Most of our gear we left with the train station manager before riding out of town. Nine miles of fairly smooth but hilly dirt road later, we arrived in Cercoahuil, or at least near it. The center of town and the Tarahumara mission were some distance away down in a valley and we'd missed the turn. It didn't matter. We were impatient to get to the canyon.

After another nine miles of more hills, we arrived in the tiny village of Casa Arthuro. We had gained about three thousand feet since Bahuchivo. A man told us "from here, it's downhill for twenty or thirty miles." Another one said: "it's downhill for 50 miles." If it was all downhill from there on, no doubt the canyon rim was around the corner!

The downhill lasted for one mile. Then we started climbing up four miles of steep switchbacks. The clouds crowding the hills let loose. Discouragement flooded my mind as rapidly as the rain soaked our clothes. I despaired of ever seeing the canyon. Only the knowledge that somewhere ahead lay the canyon kept me going. Keith pointed at the next hill and thought it was the highest point. If he was right, the rim was only a few minutes away. Rain was still falling. Would we be able to see anything? We reached the top and there was our answer: thick clouds filled the canyon.

We decided to wait for as long as it took for the sky to clear. We sat down and stared into a surging wall of gray. Faint lines became distinguishable through the mists and as quickly were lost. Then the rain stopped. Slowly, individually, the clouds lifted. Green slopes, trees, and walls of green and rock appeared. Soon the bottom of a valley was visible. A few minutes later we were presented with one of the world's most beautiful vistas, accompanied by a brilliantly purple and green rainbow. The canyon's immensity was beyond words. Now I knew why it had taken so long to see it, why we had struggled so: such a sight had to be deserved!

Our descent down twelve miles of rocky, steep, and dangerous switchbacks began. The more we discovered of this road, the less we wanted to think about biking back up it. We had to stop five times just to rest our hands cramping from squeezing the brake levers. Shrieks, always by a spring, were numerous. For good reason, that's a road where all the protection you can get is needed! It's also the only road to the village of Urique.

On the trail to Tejabán



Keith Austin

Traveling with a Bike

You cannot keep your bike with you, you have to put it on the freight car. We did it many times and we always got our bikes back even when we had to leave them on a different train that would arrive at our destination a day after us. The only things we were missing were dust caps and a water bottle cage.

First make sure your particular train has a freight car. You must buy your ticket first and then register the bike to "El Express". That's when you might have to deal with schedule conflicts between the freight office, who will ask you to bring your bike an hour in advance, and the ticket window, which might open only ten minutes before the train leaves, or simply not open at all if they are sold out.

Check both schedules the day before and plan accordingly. You'd better run fast if you arrive at your destination late in the evening. By the time you find the freight office, the employee might have left already and you'll have to come back the next day at 8 am or later to pick up your bike. Tough luck if you have another train to catch at 7 am in a different train station. That happened to us in Chihuahua.

In situations like this, the answer is to speak Spanish. Talk to every employee in the train station until you find someone who has the key to the office and accepts responsibility to give you the bike although it is not his job. This requires luck, patience, and perseverance because you might have to talk to ten different people.

If you're going to spend one or more nights on a train, the safest way and sometimes the only way to get a bedroom is to buy your ticket at least one day in advance, which you can only purchase from your station of departure. There are three choices:

*Cama baja or cama alta (lower or upper bunk)

*Camarin (roomette with one bed) for 1 or 2 persons

*Alcova (bedroom with two beds) for 2 to 4 persons

If you can't get a bedroom from the start, the alternative is to buy a ticket for "Especial" where you'll get a comfortable seat that reclines. From there, you'll have access to the dining car and to the "Dormitorio" where you'll be able to check if there is a vacant bed every time people get off the train.

First and Second classes can be miserable when crowded.

Other tips:

Water: Although some people can drink the water in Mexico and not get sick, generally it isn't safe because there is no way of knowing which water you can drink and which you can't. We drank it in some places and felt fine; we drank it in other places and got sick. An easy and efficient way of purifying the water is to add chlorine tablets. If you want, you can then filter it to get rid of the chlorine taste but carrying a filter means considerable additional weight on a biking trip.

If you get sick with the commonly called "Tourista," buy some "Parasin S" at any pharmacy and you'll feel better no longer than four hours later.

Finding your way: When asking about a road or a trail, don't ask if it is rideable; the answer will be "no" most of the time. Instead, ask for a good description of the road and make your own judgement. Don't hesitate to ask at least three different people.

Maps: In Mexico City, you'll find any kind of map, including topographic, at Insurgentes Sur #795. (Monday thru Friday)

Our arrival in Urique was amazing, somewhat like the circus arriving in town. Everybody was smiling at us as if they had been waiting for us and were glad to see us. Kids pushed us up and down the street. The village was charming, its single cobbled street was clean and bordered with blossoming trees. Every morning, the cobblestones were swept clean by ladies.

Urique's residents know that living in such a site, where no matter which direction you look are enchanting vistas and where the climate is ideal, is a gift, even if the price is isolation. Keith and I looked at each other and almost in unison said "It's a shame to stay here only one day!" Deciding to catch a ride back up instead of spending one or two days struggling up on our bikes, took only half a second. That way we could spend more time exploring the canyon.

There are three cheap hotels (with cold showers) and two restaurants in town. We chose Casa Margarita for dinner. The owner was intent to do all she could to please us. She prepared a great meal that cost less

than a dollar a piece and when she said "see you tomorrow for breakfast", we felt like we had to go back or she would worry about the quality of her food or service. The night was beautiful with pink clouds moving softly above the peaks. The fading light cast dancing shadows across the forested slopes. Only the river song broke the silence of this dominant atmosphere. I felt like I was listening to a Vivaldi Symphony. We slept on a sandy beach by the river on the edge of town where we even found a tap with running water.

We breakfasted at Margarita's the next morning and she gave us some burritos for the day. We were riding toward Guapalayna, a small village downstream from Urique, when, three miles down the canyon, the road stopped. Workers were building a road through to Guapalayna with only shovels and crowbars. We left our bikes with the workers and started hiking. Past Guapalayna, we followed goat trails down the canyon then into side canyons. We followed the river bed when it was dry,



Hi tech mountain bikes in rural Mexico

jumping over boulders where the river formed small cascades in places.

The next day, we went upstream to Guadalupe Coronado. The trails weren't suitable for bikes and after a couple miles, we left them at someone's home. We arrived in the village after several hours of hiking under a hot sun, sometimes along sandy beaches, sometimes on a steep, narrow, rocky trail through dense vegetation of trees and giant candelabra cacti. The village seemed lost in the middle of nowhere. Although the trail ended there and all we could see were a few houses, an old church, and a boarding school, we learned from the teacher that about three hundred and sixty people live in the area and that the school housed fifty to eighty children. We were astounded when he asked: "What did you do with your bikes?"

Information travelled faster than we did. We found a better route for the return, a narrow horse trail. We arrived back in Urique just in time to meet a man delivering

beer and sodas. He was leaving in a few minutes. We caught a ride in the back of his truck to Bahuchivo. On the way up, the driver stopped by a shrine to light a candle and a couple of more times because of mechanical problems. Keith's bicycle tool kit became very helpful and he invited us to stay over at his house that night.

In another day and half, we would be back in the states. Leaving the canyons after only a week was like leaving the table of a wonderful meal after the appetizer. We would have to return. We also came to the conclusion that the best way to explore these isolated rancheros would be to drive a car as far as the roads go, bike all day from there, returning at night to the car where we would leave the gear. Our encounters with Tarahumaras had also been too brief and we wanted to learn more of these fascinating and resourceful people. Their knowledge of botany, zoology, atmospheric phenomena, and astronomy is astounding. We were hooked. A return was mandatory.

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The moving clouds added a special drama to the view from Panorama Point

I'm lucky. I have a friend who owns a mountain bike and a four-wheel drive truck and likes to take both into distant, untamed lands. His name is Casey and last spring, he invited another mountain biker and me to load our bikes into his truck for an adventure deep into the heart of southeastern Utah's desert outback: the Maze District of Canyonlands National Park.

A Park Service brochure ranks the Maze as "one of the most remote and inaccessible regions in the United States". Unlike the more popular Needles District, the Maze has no paved roads and is visited by few. Only a relative handful of horseback riders, hikers, and those with durable, high traction vehicles like Casey's truck ever see it.

The safari began in our home state of Colorado where most of the high country cycling trails were still snow-covered even though it was technically spring. A few days before, I had gone for a ride wearing longjohns, leg-warmers, and a pile jacket. The trip to Utah was a welcome opportunity for some lightweight, warm weather touring.

Before leaving civilization completely, we stopped at the boating village of Hite on Lake Powell to fill the spare gas tank and collect driftwood from the lake shore for our campfires. Wood gathering would be illegal once we entered Canyonlands National Park.

From Hite, we slow-bounced and wove for forty-five miles as Casey delicately maneuvered the truck along a tedious jeep road. Our bikes were unfortunately packed in such a way that the hassle of getting them out to ride was too much so we missed out on some excellent cycling terrain.

But I had plenty of time during the long drive into the Maze District to wonder what it would be like to try the same trip using only bikes without the support of the ungainly truck. Carrying all our camping gear plus enough water to survive the desert sun would definitely have taken some of the fun out of the ride. Besides, one of the most valuable aids to survival on any desert trip - the beer cooler - would have to be left behind. These thoughts made the steel confines of the truck more bearable. But I did notice a small spring marked on the topographic map near the halfway point about a mile south of our route. Assuming the spring was permanent, it could make an unsupported bike tour feasible. Perhaps next year.

We finally made camp about a mile from the Colorado River amid a score of hundred foot sandstone spires collectively called the Doll House. No time was wasted in freeing our bikes.

Our first ride was to the Land of Standing Rocks. Our sense of enchantment was aroused when we drove through the area about five miles up the road. That first part of the road back out of the Doll House wasn't a good choice for our introduction to desert cycling. It might have been a suitable workout for an Olympic sprint cyclist but for us, it was a serious grunt in an unfamiliar medium - thick quartz sand. The columns and mesas were slowly disintegrating into piles of loose sand as if to relieve their



Circling the Maze

Photos and Story by Frank Staub

ancestral beginnings on a Mesozoic beach. The force needed to pedal through these barriers even in my granny gear was enough to make me worry about dislocating my middle-aged knees. I'll take a Rocky Mountain headwind any day over that sand.

After about three miles of grinding effort, we reached solid rock and learned an important lesson about desert cycling: find out about the road surface in advance (preferably from another mountain biker) unless you don't mind pushing.

The sun was low when we reached the Land of Standing Rocks - a fine time to be in canyon country. The deep red color of the Chimney, the Plug, the Wall, Lizard Rock, and Standing Rock itself was definitely worth the effort required to get there. The sandstone bedrock we rode on made it seem almost like a giant, natural parking lot designed for doing figure eights in the middle of the wilderness. The vegetation was sparse so we could get off the trail in many places with no feelings of guilt. (Solid bedrock is virtually immune to bicycle tires.) Much of the ground surface is commonly called slickrock. Though it's fairly smooth, it's far from slick. In fact, the traction we experienced was exhilarating.

Our first visit to the Land of Standing Rocks was cut short as the sun touched the horizon. Our twilight return through the thick sand to our camp was easier because of the downhill. The evening was spent identifying constellations and counting shooting stars seen between the towers of the Doll House.

The next morning we hiked the one mile trail down to Spanish Bottom and the Colorado River. By leaving the bikes at camp, we obeyed the National Park Service

Rule banning bicycles on hiking trails. But we didn't mind. The trail was too steep and tightly curved for riding. A highlight of the hike was a limestone layer of fossil shells midway down the trail.

Spanish Bottom had a sentimental value for all of us since we'd camped there during boat trips in years gone by. We sat on the shore of the southwest's mightiest river and listened to the thundering of rapids in Cataract Canyon less than a mile downstream. The sounds and lazily lying in the hot sun made my mind drift back to past adventures I'd had in the canyons.

We moved camp that afternoon to a point near Chimney Rock in the Land of Standing Rocks to take advantage of the excellent riding there and to search for a route into the Maze.

The Maze is what the name implies - a labyrinthine network of steep canyons. It stretched out in front of us to the north from the Land of Standing Rocks in a six-hundred foot deep eroded depression. We tried to look into its depths but the canyon walls were too close together to see the bottom. Was it sandy? Was it ridable? Was there a way in?

We couldn't find one. We discussed driving north to the Maze Overlook where a trail led to the bottom but decided there wasn't enough time on this trip.

We did find some curious pieces of flint that suggested the chips left by Indians making arrowheads. Casey, an amateur student of the ancient Anasazi who lived here over a thousand years ago, was certain we had found Indian relics. Warren and I were skeptical. Surely, we thought, these were just naturally occurring pieces of flint washed up during a flash flood. But Casey

was positive and claimed that if he searched long enough, he'd find a complete arrowhead.

I was on my bike before dawn the next morning, riding back down the sand trap road to the Doll House to retrieve a spare set of tires left at our first camp. I'd placed them under the truck to keep them out of the sun so naturally they were left behind when we drove off. I was mad at myself for being so stupid but as I approached the Doll House and watched the sun rise between its spires and flood the desert with light, the mistake seemed more like a blessing. Pedaling through the sand had warmed me up in spite of the chilly morning air. My muscles were pumped and I was forty-five miles from the nearest pavement. Life was beautiful.

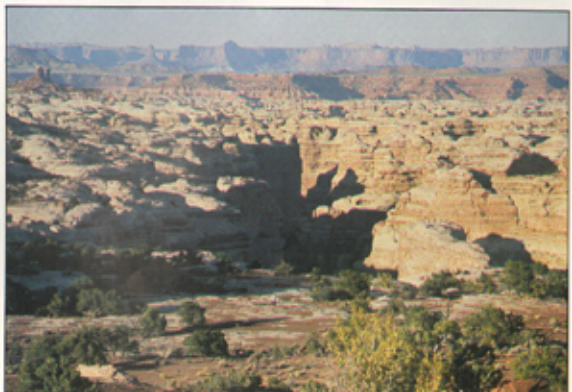
I returned to our camp by Chimney Rock just in time for breakfast with Casey and Warren. The day was off to a good start.

We loaded up the truck after eating and headed for the Flint Trail, a notorious jeep road ascending the high Orange Cliffs to the west. We met two men and two young boys coasting down mountain bikes rented from Rim Cyclery in Moab. It was lucky they ran into us. Their journey back up the Flint

Sunrise and sunset in the desert dramatically heightens atmosphere

One of the more solid sections of the road near the Doll's House

We rode and hiked around the edge of the Maze but failed to find a way in



Trail was still ahead of them and they were already almost out of water. Two more rules of desert cycling are: one water bottle isn't enough and don't let an easy descent on a canyon road seduce you into going too far - there aren't any phones out here.

During our slow ascent up the Orange Cliffs on the Flint Trail, we wondered if the group whose water bottles we had just filled would make it up this steep, winding jeep road before dark. Pushing a bicycle to the top would be a test of even the most well-conditioned athlete.

The view from our third campsite at Lands End above the Orange Cliffs was spectacular. We were on a thin isthmus of a thousand foot high plateau covered with

pygmy forests of piñon pine and juniper. To the west we could see the Henry Mountains across the Dirty Devil River. To the east were the lofty Manti La Sois. Between us and the La Sal Range were our three districts of Canyonlands National Park: the Maze, the Needles, and Island in the Sky. Excellent mountain biking was rumored to be available along the White Rim Trail below Island in the Sky - yet another reason to return.

Warren and I enjoyed the view and a brew while sitting on lawn chairs carried by the trusty truck. Casey was off searching for arrowheads and came up with the find of the trip - a real, unmistakable arrowhead. He'd found it right in our camp. But there was something funny about it. Its main plain was

distinctly curved to one side. We joked that perhaps the Anasazi used curved arrows to shoot around boulders without being seen.

It was late afternoon but there was still time for a ride. Warren went north to explore the Lands End high point and the head of Happy Canyon while Casey and I pedaled south. In several places, the road was gully-gorged and covered with piles of loose rock. Apparently there had been some severe flooding. But how? We were far from a drainage bottom. Where could so much water have come from on this high plateau? Another secret of the desert.

Casey and I didn't get very far on that ride. Not because of the road. Our bikes were well suited to that challenge. But because Casey kept stopping at every rock fragment that looked like an arrowhead and I got lost with my camera in a Kodachrome fantasy.

On our last day in Canyonlands, we drove north on top of the plateau to the turn-off for Panorama Point. We parked the truck and cycled out to the overlook on the kind of road I lived for - slightly rolling with enough technical spots to make it interesting but not so many that I couldn't maintain some speed.

The view was, once again, breath-taking. Clouds added a special drama by shading the sun from certain parts of the vista while spotlighting others. The juxtaposition of light and shadow shifted constantly, presenting ever-changing compositions for my wide angle lens. I took a seat on the best rock in the house to watch the show and didn't get up until I'd finished an entire thirty-six exposure role of film.

Although roads such as the one out to Panorama Point are my first choice for backcountry cycling, I was eager to try some more slickrock like the natural parking lot of the Land of Standing Rocks. Casey and Warren agreed and so we made our last Utah stop the Slickrock Bike Trail in Moab.

We'd heard innumerable tales about this trail, each and every one obviously exaggerated. But we thought we'd find out for ourselves. We were wrong. The tales didn't begin to adequately describe its qualities. Except for a few sand patches, the entire ten-mile trail (and two mile practice loop) crosses barren, sandstone hills. The trail was originally designed for motorcycles but judging from the register, bicyclists seemed to be the most frequent users. Our "wilderness" experience was marred somewhat by the line of closely spaced white stripes painted on the rock to mark the trail but amid the constant sandstone swells, it was our only means of finding our way back to the track.

Warren observed that "whoever made this trail must have had a sense of humor." There were some places where the white paint marked a route that was beyond our abilities. But since we were on slickrock, wide detours from the trail were O.K. as long as we didn't run over the primitive rock-eating lichens. These crusty plants grow only a few millimeters each decade. We were also careful to stay on the trail through the short patches of sand supporting the vegetation needed by desert animals.

I wondered how many people could ride the entire Slickrock Trail without losing their balance and putting a foot down. Certainly the three of us couldn't. But it was as worthy a goal as any to justify a trip back to southeastern Utah in the future.

MBM explores more on The Sierra Club

by Gary Sprung

I. Horses and Skiers Don't Belong In The Wilderness

Horses and Skiers should be banned from the wilderness.

The Wilderness Act says so. Congress tells us that it wants to protect some lands from harm by designating them wilderness. Yet it allows cows and horses which tramp on the land and would not live there naturally. We humans brought those beasts into nature's garden of North America. Those critters belong in Europe where they came from. They scare away our elk, our deer, our bighorn sheep, and our mountain goats. They stole the land from our wolves and bears.

Horses eat the land. Typically, they lounge about chewing on backwoods meadows after carrying their owners' heavy gear into the wilderness. They love the jummy wildflowers.

Back on the trail, the horses start emitting these large green globules of smelly stuff. Plop, plop, all over the trail. Plo, plo, the hooves scoop it up and spread it around.

Yuk, Yuk, complain the hikers following behind.

Uh-oh, watch out! Here comes a mud puddle.

No problem, horses have long legs. Into the mud they sink deep holes. Riders stay clean and dry. Hikers have to detour onto the adjacent plant life.

The trail climbs up steeply above timberline. Nifty, those horseshoe hooves, they sure do get traction. They just cut right into that soil and hollow out a neat little groove in the center...a good path for running water. Gets kinda muddy for the hikers, though.

Time to give those horses a rest, they're acting skittish. Here comes the hikers. Better give a wide clearance, those walkers wouldn't want to get locked.

It's wintertime...time to get out those elegant marvels of transportation, our skis. We glide along on a white, soft carpet, not even touching the land. Noisiness, no one sees us. We see no one. No animal. Just clouds and trees and mountains and snow. It's ethereal, totally in touch with raw nature. We spiritually, tour into pristine backcountry. Affecting naught, receiving much.

It's these fiberglass skis, cordura/foam backpacks, Gore-tex coats and polypropylene underwear which let us travel in comfort in so wild a place. We bring along

petroleum in a concise little stove to stay warm and fed. Our food is condensed to offer powerful nutrition in a lightweight package. The super-plastic shovels can carve us a simple, effective shelter. Transceivers add insurance to our life.

Skiing exercises our muscles totally, beyond any other sport. It's tops in aerobics and uses every muscle with diversity and variety as we fight gravity then use it to delight in the terrain.

Is this mechanical transport? If so, we're not supposed to be here in the winter wilderness.

These means of our transportation are 1986 high-tech. Six thousand years ago we traveled on wood we carefully carved ourselves. Now we use fiberglass, aluminum, steel, kevlar and foam manufactured in complicated machinery. The designer has carefully conceived the function to cut into snow for turns and stops or to glide along with minimal friction. The new plastics go much faster than wood.

There's a strong advantage between the skier's camber. The springing action keeps the grip wax off the snow while we glide. After a kick, it pushes upward for better forward momentum. Often we can cross the land more quickly and with less effort than summertime hiking. We move faster than snowshoes by adding skins for the uphill than skidding down on glide wax.

"Mechanical," says the 1964 College Edition of Webster's New World Dictionary, means "having to do with machinery or tools; produced or operated by machinery or a mechanism." "Machine" means a lot of things. At the top of Webster's list is an archaic use: "the human or animal frame." Next is "a vehicle operated mechanically; specifically, an automobile." Then comes the clincher: a machine is "a structure consisting of a framework and various fixed and moving parts, for doing some kind of work."

So the 1964 Wilderness Act bans skis from wilderness because they're mechanical machines. A ski is both a framework and a moving part. The binding is a mechanism which holds in place a rigid but flexible tool of travel, the boot. The system provides a definite mechanical advantage.

What about snowshoes and saddles? Are they mechanical? Since some people once called the human body a machine, we probably should exclude people totally from at least some wild places.

Clearly, mountain bicycles, wheelchairs, hand gliders, and the Gossamer Albatross

are mechanical. What about vibram soles and cordura/foam/aluminum backpacks? How should we draw the line? None of the above use petroleum or electricity for power. All that's needed is a bunch of muscles.

Snowshoes, saddles and Vibram soles all have a framework. Snowshoe bindings and saddle stirrups move. Soles bind in just the right place; grip by cutting the soil slightly.

Splitting hairs is probably not what Congress intended in 1964. Congress included nothing about mountain bikes and hang gliders in 1964 because they had not yet been invented. Skis and saddles were obviously to be allowed, because people had moved through wilderness with them for so long. Should bicycles be banned because they are new?

Or because they have some measurable (but not yet measured) impact on the land? Hang gliders have zero land impact, yet many believe that form of transport should be banned from wilderness.

The ban is philosophical, not environmental. Or is it just emotional? Where is the reasoning?

There's plenty of room for argument on this issue. That's why it's so interesting. It's also profound, because it provokes thought on the basic question, "What is wilderness?"

II. The News

The Sierra Club in May, 1985, issued a new national policy which defines mountain bicycles as an off-road vehicle (ORV) in essentially the same class as motorcycles, snowmobiles, dune buggies, and all terrain vehicles. The policy expands the environmental issue of mountain bikes from one of just wilderness management to a broader question of overall public lands management.

As an ORV, mountain bikes are deemed "objectionable in most areas because of the introduction of another product of technology whose consequences have not been fully understood," the policy reads.

The Sierra Club then issues a policy recommendation: ORVs "should be presumed to be detrimental to land resources and human safety." ORV operators on private lands must obtain written permission from the landowner and have that permission in their possession. ORV operators on private lands must obtain written permission from the landowner and have that permission in their possession.



Viewing down the trail to Spanish Boulder, Colorado



Cycling on the natural parking lot surface of the Land of Standing Rocks

Sierra Club Controversy

ORVs must be licensed with the fee paying for repair of the environmental damage and for patrol and law enforcement.

Most frightening to mountain bicyclists is the policy's idea that bicycles should be excluded not just from designated wilderness, but also from "de facto wilderness and trails built for use by foot or horse traffic."

The policy recognizes the difference between bicycles and motorized ORVs in matters such as pollution and noise, but in most cases it treats both kinds of machines as identical.

Sally Reid, the national board member who introduced and pushed the policy, told Mountain Bike Magazine that the policy has its roots in three basic concerns: 1) damage to the trails, 2) hazard to other users, and 3) a less defined problem or "aesthetic intrusion and a need to get away from a hoard of bicyclists traveling along at great speed."

Reid describes MBM Editor Barlow's editorial on the Club policy (August-September, 1985 issue) as a "hysterical public lashing." She cites a NORBA News article which she believes glorifies the mischievous aspects of mountain bicycles and illustrates their potential for environmental destruction. She notes that one trail maintenance volunteer in Santa Barbara County has observed erosion damage from bicycles. In December's California Magazine, she found an article on "Sulicycling" which gets hot and

heavy on the "rad...guts...killer instinct...adrenal outdoor high" aspect of the sport.

Reid wrote that the Club "acknowledges the family outing and quiet touring possibilities of mountain biking," but she told MBM in a phone interview, "I live in the country and I hike trails a lot. I have never seen these lovely little groups...riding along serenely."

She, herself, has never ridden a mountain bicycle. "I might even like to have one, I think they're great." She asserted she does not need to ride one to see how they're used, to see that they are misused.

Reid's letter says that land managers of public lands ought to act on a "case by case basis" and designate trails that may be used by bicycles without damage to the resource or danger to other users. Yet the Club policy is national, applying everywhere. It presumes the machines are bad, excludes them from foot and horse trails. (What other kinds of trails are there?)

The club also reaffirmed its support of the 1964 Wilderness Act's prohibition of "mechanized modes of transport" from entry to designated wilderness.

MBM pointed out to Reid that horses at the land, damage trails, and can scare and even harm hikers; that bicyclists must carry less gear than hikers; and that modern hiking shoes and backpacks enable hikers to cover far more ground than before. We also asked how a bicycle can facilitate "illegal hunting?"

"Hunting can be easier through use of a bicycle cart," she replied. As to the other arguments, those are "not relevant" and are "picky" according to Reid.

The Sierra Club policy is not an example of a board of directors out of touch with its members. Reid explained that the policy began with a few people in the Club who had long worked on ORV policy. It then went to their Regional Conservation Committees all over the nation. Those committees are made up of hard-working volunteers who represent a cross-section of the Club's members. Many of the committees passed the policy unanimously. Then a forum of the Regional Vice presidents (also volunteers) passed the policy. Then it passed the Club's National Public Lands Committee. The board finally affirmed an idea which probably represents the views of a majority of Club members.

The Club will use the policy as a basis for public input to hearings and to communicate with public land managers, Reid explained.

Mountain Bikes an ORV? The idea insults me. It's not that I believe motorized recreationalists have no place on public lands, and it's not that I don't understand

III. Commentary: The Sierra Club Is Avoiding The Deeper Questions

Mountain Bikes an ORV? The idea insults me.

It's not that I believe motorized recreationalists have no place on public lands, and it's not that I don't understand

Sierra Club Controversy

that a mountain bicycle is a vehicle that travels off roads. It's just that the acronym "ORV" has a negative connotation in my mind. It connects to the idea that Americans love their cars too much, that the internal combustion engine has invaded our recreation as much as it has invaded our land.

I know the fun of owning a small pickup truck and driving it all over America's West. I especially know the pleasure of carrying recreation gear for Anne and I to use for fun on the steps of the drive. But car travel is my transportation—hardly the time I look forward to. I can never connect with a place enough to make good photographs while in my truck. In a motor vehicle, I don't touch the land.

The same goes for chairlifts at downhill ski areas. I'd rather be skiing than riding the chair. That's why backcountry or track skiing is better than ski areas. The uphill and the tough exercise is as fun as the downhill.

We mountain bicyclists love aerobic exercise. We love the strain on our muscles. Some of us also like the risk to our bodies. I suspect that aerobic muscle strain is not so loved by most motorized recreationalists. But they do share our enjoyment of risk.

I disdain recklessness. Whether motorized or not, our recreation must be considerate of the land resources and carefully alert to other people and animals. And plants.

I wish the hikers who disdain us would

realize how mechanical they are and how close our interests are to theirs. We dislike cow dung on trails at least as much as they do!

I am an active advocate of wilderness preservation. I believe it's more important than my bike riding. Most of the people I ride with feel the same.

Some trails in some wilderness areas are in the Gates of the Arctic or other places that are truly wild. Nor in crowded spots like Yosemite or Maroon Lake of the Maroon Bells/Snowmass Wilderness near Aspen. But the Maroon Wilderness does have a few trails that are excellent for biking.

The Sierra Club's position is full of logical inconsistencies. It's clear that skis, especially ski bindings, are mechanical and thus, by their logic, should be excluded from wilderness. The Club recognizes that horses have a huge impact, but has not advocated banning them from parks and wilderness.

A 1978 article in Yosemite Nature Notes estimated that a horse impacts wet areas between 10 and 100 times as much as a human.

"In fragile wet meadows, all it takes is 2 or 3 animals to get a trail under way...backpackers, avoiding loose soil, rutted trails, or manure, then walk along the margins of these trails, widening them or creating new trails."

The article adds that stock grazing can result in elimination of plant species in favor

of other species, often non-native. Stock grazing is considered detrimental by the Yosemite researchers but they don't know how much grazing constitutes overgrazing. ("Stock Use in the Yosemite Backcountry," by James Sano and Alexander Moad)

So, just like ORVs, the consequences of horses have not been fully studied or understood.

The Club advocates licensing of bicyclists and a law requiring that they obtain and carry written permission from owners when operating on private land. Why should such restrictions not apply to hikers?

Sally Reid's dismissal of the logical holes in the Sierra Club's attempt to obscure the fact that the Club was acting more emotionally than rationally. The Club is really acting as a lobby for particular kinds of recreationalists—of whom have learned the new delights of mountain bicycles, so their expectations of the wilderness differ from ours.

I started out as a hiker, runner, and backpacker in my enjoyment of public lands. I soon extended that into skiing, bicycling, and boating. Motors don't provide my recreation.

Motors are the difference on the continuum of mechanization. Motors are where the wilderness prohibition should apply absolutely. Since the beginning of the Wilderness Act, the U.S. Forest Service defined "mechanized" as non-motorized.

Motors also provide the line of

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Sierra Club Controversy

demarcation between mountain bicycles and ORVs. Mountain bikes create no air or noise pollution.

On grounds of wildness or safety or land impact, only hikers should be allowed in some places. Other places can accommodate bicycles and horses, but not motors. Motors are okay in some spots which can withstand their power.

In very special places, like grizzly bear habitat, no one should be allowed at all.

Again, there's a continuum of wildness. Wilderness is a political tool with which we draw a line on the spectrum. It's a line full of compromise without clear meaning. The meaning can change with time.

The Sierra Club is making a mistake in its wilderness politics strategy. By calling mountain bikes ORVs, the Sierra Club risks alienating the rapidly growing numbers of mountain bicyclists. Mountain bike sales, though still a fairly small fraction of total bicycle sales, are the fastest growing segment of the industry. Already some mountain bicyclists are opposing wilderness designations.

Mountain bikes are introducing people to a new ease of access to public lands. They could function much as do Sierra Club trips. The Club ought to have mountain bike trips. Such trips could promote the same kind of wildlands ethics for bicyclists as Club's hiking trips give to novice backpackers... minimum impact camping, how to be a good wilderness citizen...and spiritual enlightenment. Mountain bike trips could promote love of nature.

The idea is not new. Adventure Trails in Los Angeles invented it. Sierra club members have ridden on the program.

Maybe the Club's emotional reaction to mountain bikes is because they just can't handle getting passed on the trail. More likely, they instinctively fear the problems that have occurred with motorized vehicles.

Philosophical issues of land aesthetics and ethics and the political strategies for preservation ought to be paramount. Erosion and user conflicts from mountain

bikes are still minimal. The Club ought to take a more thorough and cool-headed look at the questions raised by mountain bicyclists.



IV. What You Can Do: Advice to Mountain Bicyclists

Much of the opposition to mountain bicycling on foot and horse trails may come from the rough, reckless image portrayed in some accounts of riding. Opposition also comes from hikers' distasteful encounters with inconsiderate bicyclists.

Bicyclists need to promote a positive image of their recreation. They need to work to prove to hikers they should be allies. The opposite situation, of hikers and mountain bicyclists as enemies, would be a tragedy and a sure loss for bicycling.

Actions speak louder than words so the top priority is to observe the NORBA Code of Ethics. Race organizers should keep it in mind while designing their courses.

Bicyclists should be sensitive to the land. Just because a bicyclist can ride down a stream bed is no excuse for doing so. (There are places, though, where it probably does no damage-like water running on bare rock.)

Then, Sierra Club Director Sally Reid has a good point. Should magazines incite and promote a macho, reckless attitude about bicycling? So what if you get all muddy, unruly, and out of breath. It's one thing to write about how good that feels, quite another to popularize a tough guy image.

The media image of bicyclists could determine in a few years the acceptance of mountain bikes by the public. Riders and manufacturers do not want any of the connotations carried in the motorcycle gang phenomena.

Mountain bicyclists also face the problem of a public which does not understand the machine and the experience. At least some part of the opposition to bikes in wilderness comes from people who do not expect to see bicycles there, who react negatively because of associations with motorcycles. Many who've never ridden a mountain bike have little idea of its limitations, of how little power it has compared to motors. They cannot know its possibilities for wilderness experiences.

This problem is declining as more people buy mountain bikes. Mountain bikers can make it go away even faster by turning new people on to the sport. Take a friend-or an enemy-along for a ride.

In the political arena, bicyclists should not stand for the ORV categorization. But need this difference of opinion turn into a bitter dispute?

Opposition by bicyclists to wilderness designations will not solve the problem. Most polls find the American public solidly in support of wilderness preservation, so bicyclists could be standing on the wrong side of the fence.

The best way to change the Sierra Club and other environmental groups is from within. The Club, unlike most political organizations, is highly democratic. Club members who enjoy mountain bikes should speak out and write to the board of directors. That may be a good reason for opponents of the policy to join the Club. Gain a voice!

Environmental and public land managers have acted in a knee-jerk manner in regulating mountain bikes. They have avoided the deeper questions this new recreation invokes. The issue needs more discussion and thought.

It's up to bicyclists to push the issue.

Mountain Bike Profile

Gary Fisher

by Sandy Fails



If Gary Fisher's lifelong bicycle obsession hadn't brought him into Marin County's "ballooner" scene in the '70s, mountain biking today might still be an obscure idiosyncratic hobby. Instead, mountain biking has become a broad-based, rapidly growing sport and Gary Fisher has turned from a hippie bike bum to an ambitious businessman.

Marin County individualists had for years been dragging old one-speed Schwinn Excelsiors out of junk heaps and into their garage workshops, some for the sake of nostalgia, some for cheap transportation, some for hair-raising rides down the steep and bumpy trails on Mt. Tamalpais. But longtime mountain bike fan, builder, and racer Joe Breeze credits Fisher and partner Charlie Kelly with making the fat tire bicycle "mainstream." The two took the mountain bike concept and design to bicycle industry trade shows, and, with frame builder Tom Ritchey, formed a shoe-string company to make, sell and market fat tire bikes.

"Without those two going into business and making the bikes available, the whole mountain biking thing might very well not exist today," Breeze said.

When the Ritchey/Kelly/Fisher threesome dissolved in disputes and anger, Fisher took the heavily indebted business, did a lot of scrambling, and gradually turned Fisher Mountain Bikes into a \$5 million/year company that sold 3,000 bikes last year.

The fledgling industry influenced Fisher as much as he influenced fat tire bicycling. Fisher previously "had no interest in holding a job for very long. I just wanted to ride my bike." He spent years working part time in bike shops while training and racing successfully as a Category One road racer. After high school, he did his "Haight-Ashbury stint", produced a psychedelic light show, and grew his hair to pony tail length.

Today, Fisher's hair is short on the sides and disappearing quickly on top. He works at his attractive shop/office six days a week, ten hours a day, and talks avidly about employee benefits, dealers and suppliers, innovations and testing, advertising and marketing. He and his wife of two years, Stella, spend time dining out, attending cultural events in nearby San Francisco, and visiting with family. In April, parenting a newborn will top the list. He now squeezes his bike rides into his work schedule instead of vice versa.

"A lot of people say, 'I can't believe what a change' but it feels really natural to me. I understand what I was doing then and I don't feel bad about it. I'm not saying I'm any better now. It's just a different set of rules, another part of my life. I plan to continue to change all the time."

One fact hasn't changed and probably won't. He's still in his element in riding clothes and toeclips. His antidote for stress:

"I take my bike, hammer myself for a few hours, go home, drink a beer, and fall asleep."

The antidote comes in handy. Now that mountain bikes have become a profitable business, all the major bike manufacturers are trying to make in-roads, putting small companies such as Fisher's into a constant race to maintain their market positions. Orchestrating internal business changes, constantly improving the bicycles, and keeping tabs on the marketplace takes its toll.

"It's a son of a bitch to keep it all going. But it's like racing a bike-I'm into it."

Bikes have dominated Fisher's life since he was a skinny, 12-year-old riding in an oversized jersey with the Belmont Bicycle Club in San Francisco.

"They didn't know whether to make me a club member or a club mascot," he said. At 88 pounds, adolescent Fisher was easily outdistanced on the flats and descents but blew away his fellow riders on the climbs. He quickly learned pack etiquette and racing strategy; at age fourteen, he was racing seriously while working part time in a San Mateo bike shop.

Fisher spent years riding hundreds of miles per week and eventually rose to top regional racer. But the ultimate goal, an Olympic berth, remained elusive.

He placed in the top ten hundreds of times but only won a few races in 12 or 13 years," former partner Charlie Kelly said.

"He was hard to drop but he didn't have the killer instinct."

Fisher's only break with cycling came soon after high school when he moved to San Francisco's Haight-Ashbury and produced a light show with some friends. The motivation was "primarily altruistic." Ten people often worked day and night on the show, splitting a \$160 payment per show for their hours of work. Fisher recalls those days with affection and still has fantasies of reviving the light show. But before long, training and racing again demanded his full attention after he went on a few casual rides with friends and found himself "dying like a rat."

By his late 20s, Fisher realized the road racing team managers "wanted teens they could push around" and his competitive days were ending. He worked briefly as a bike mechanic for the National Team but the excitement of actively racing lured him back. Then a fall in a crucial race left him with a cracked skull, blood in his spinal column, and plenty of time to think. He was confined to a bed in a fetal position. His ruminations led to two changes. First, after trusting his safety to other bike mechanics with such negative results, he "became infatuated with doing my own work."

Secondly, he decided to take a more aggressive attitude toward his life. "I thought, 'I don't do enough, I don't try enough. I'm only going through this lifetime once.' It sort of changed my life. I decided to



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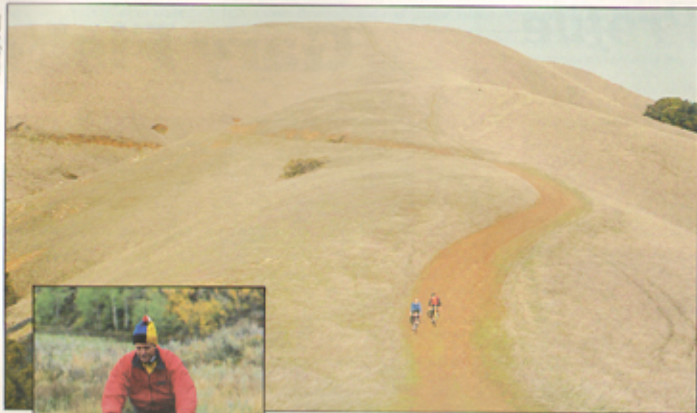
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A piece of the rolling hills in Marin County that keeps Fisher (inset) still on his bike as the company grows



Sandy Fink

Frank Staub

go for it."

Fisher had sporadically dabbled in mountain biking as a leisure time hobby. He was one of only a few mainstream cyclists to ride mountain bikes in the early days and he was unrelenting for the first two years he raced off road. But beside his racing savvy and sheer physical ability, he brought to mountain cycling years of bicycle mechanics knowledge.

"Gary probably knows more in his head about bicycle components than just about anybody," Kelly said. "The guy's been immersed in it since he was 14."

Working part-time at a bike shop, Fisher became "the parts source for the boys" as they experimented Dr. Frankenstein-fashion, modifying old balloons with "bizarro" contraptions. Fisher bought his first Schwinn Excelsior for fifty cents; the second cost \$35.

"At first, it was a real casual pastime. Nobody wanted to sink a lot of money into it," Fisher said.

In 1974, the 50-plus pound Schwinn Excelsior was the bike of choice. By 1977 bikes were "down" to 36-38 pounds. As the bikes were evolving from retrofit antiques to much more expensive handmade and customized bikes, Fisher was becoming "more serious about things-period."

"I realized this [mountain biking] had incredible potential," he said.

John Finley Scott, who had fashioned a nine-speed "woody" bike in 1953, loaned Fisher and associates \$13,000 to produce some mountain bikes and the business was born.

Billy describes the birth of the business, then called Ritchey Mountain Bikes: "Gary and I each put in a couple of hundred dollars and Tom (Ritchey) fronted the frames. We had to sell the bikes and get the money in order to buy the components to put them together."

Financial and philosophical disputes broke up the partnership. Fisher took over a business that was \$80,000 in debt and turned it around. He credits the success to his emphasis on service and having the "correct product," effective advertising presentations, and consultation and help from business savvy family members. The business has doubled its volume each year for the past two years.

Today, life is hectic but satisfying for Fisher. Kelly describes him as a man who likes to "juggle 22 things at once." Fisher admits he doesn't "know whether I'm wearing myself out or not, but I'd be bored otherwise."

"I like the place the business is in now," Fisher said. It's not too big where decisions are based entirely on marketing, but it's big enough that we can go to the best bicycle makers in the world and get prices that are

competitive."

Fisher sees as one of his company's strengths the steady communication with customers, dealers and manufacturers. Feedback from bike riders, dealers, and his own employees, who test ride the bikes constantly, keeps the bikes improving and tailored to the market.

Associates agree Fisher is a good communicator, able to sell others on an idea after he has conceptualized it. His employees add that Fisher is a sharp businessman who "gets what he wants—one way or another."

"He's not really an easy guy to work for," said one employee. "He's very demanding and not the most patient guy. He's really driven towards success of the business and improving the bikes. The level of intensity around here is really high. But it has to be to get things done. It's a competitive business—we have to be pushing hard."

"Gary's a pretty good guy—he's definitely after a certain thing. He's in a very different position now—he has a lot of things riding on this."

As Fisher's life has changed, so has the mountain bike scene in Marin County. When only a few mountain bikers rode the extensive trails and fire roads in the area, they had complete freedom. Now, with hundreds of fat tire cyclists in Marin, officials have prohibited bicycles in some of the finest areas. The original ballooners will get together to ride and socialize, race and talk theory, but "there are secrets being kept" now that many of the people make their livings off the bicycles, Fisher said.

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KOOL-STOP'S NEW "BIG TAIL" DESIGN ATB BRAKE PAD

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The Sand, the Sun, and the Surf of Padre Island, Texas

by Kitty Dennison



A light breeze, just strong enough to encourage wearing a windbreaker, blew out of the east. The coals of a driftwood fire occasionally burst into tiny spurts of flames. We wiggled deeper into seats carved in the sand and toasted our fortune with glasses of good wine. This was "it". Life couldn't get much better than what we had at that moment: fresh fish (caught within the hour), fresh vegetables (bought at a roadside stand), rich pumpkin-riche bread (out of a baker's oven that morning), a fire glowing in a hole we'd scratched out of the sand, and a full moon delicately balanced on the horizon. Before us was the Gulf of Mexico. Behind us, on the other side of the sand dune we snuggled against, was a narrow wilderness of marshes and grass covered dunes and beyond that was Laguna Madre and the Intercoastal Waterway from Brownsville to Galveston, Texas.

We lay back against the sand and drank wine and watched the moon move across the sky as if pulled by a string like a child's toy boat. Our voices softly floated on the damp air and we talked and quietly laughed like we used to years ago when we were courting. Our son's barely perceptible breathing mingled with the sounds of surf rolling back and forth across the sands. A fog crept in off the gulf, muting what few sounds there were and obscuring the moon behind a swirling veil. When we finally fell asleep, neither of us knew. The transition passed unseen.

We awoke in the morning to a sun weakly burning through the fog. We looked questioningly at each other, wondering if the night's magic had been brushed aside by the day's arrival. It hadn't. After a leisurely breakfast that seemed to consist of more playing in the sand than anything else, we loaded up our bike cart and continued our exploration of Padre Island. Unlike the fog that eventually lost its tug-of-war with the sun, the time warp we'd slipped into stayed with us.

We were on vacation, free from the stresses of business, making payments, arranging baby sitters, elbowing our way through throngs of Christmas shoppers. My

husband and I had said no to all that. This year we'd send everyone Christmas cards and politely turn down all invitations to parties. Instead, we headed south to the Texas coast and Padre Island, a place we knew nothing about except for scraps of information picked up over the years from friends who had been there or who had friends who had been there.

All we knew was that the island is a National Seashore with a remarkably long stretch of what was reputed to be a wonderful beach. We headed off with visions of sun-bathing on the beach, diving in for a quick dip now and then, and gleefully cycling down the beach.

Those few times when we'd cycled in sand before had been minor disasters. The tires bogged down and we had to hop off and push the bikes, bemoaning their stubborn refusal to ride over the sand. But that had been in soft, wind-blown, desert sand. Padre Island's beaches were packed hard and drivable. We loaded up our mountain bikes and headed south, all the time fervently hoping the sand would be as firm as we'd been told. I kept having visions of miles and miles of perfect white beach stretching into the distance with hardly a soul in sight and our being stuck in the sand. Discovering that the beach lived up to everything we'd been told was greeted with an enormous sigh of relief. Even the bike cart our son would ride in zipped over the sand effortlessly.

Padre Island is the longest of a chain of narrow strips of sand paralleling the Texas coast from Galveston to Brownsville. A

slight gap separates Padre Island from South Padre Island. The nearest cities are Corpus Christi at the north end of Padre Island and Brownsville at the south end of South Padre Island. Most of Padre Island is undeveloped and protected by its National Seashore classification. South Padre is also relatively undeveloped but not protected; its isolation is partially responsible for the lack of development. Powerful hurricanes that periodically sweep the islands have no doubt been even more effective in discouraging developers.

The islands' popularity is greatest during the summer. Winter is the off-season. It's also considered by many the best time to visit. People are few and, more importantly, bug populations, especially mosquitoes, are small and sporadic because of the colder temperatures. The weather can get cold but freezing temperatures are unusual. Winter day temperatures in the sixties, even into the seventies, are more typical.

The beach is open to cars and the idea of sharing it with them at first made us somewhat apprehensive. I was afraid they would destroy the spell that we've always found inherent to beaches. They didn't. Maybe they would in the summer when crowds are surging over the beach. But while we were there, traffic was light and quickly became an accepted part of where we were. During the week, you can pretty much plan on having the beach to yourself. I suppose we might have enjoyed our stay even more if cars were banned from the beach but I have to grudgingly admit we

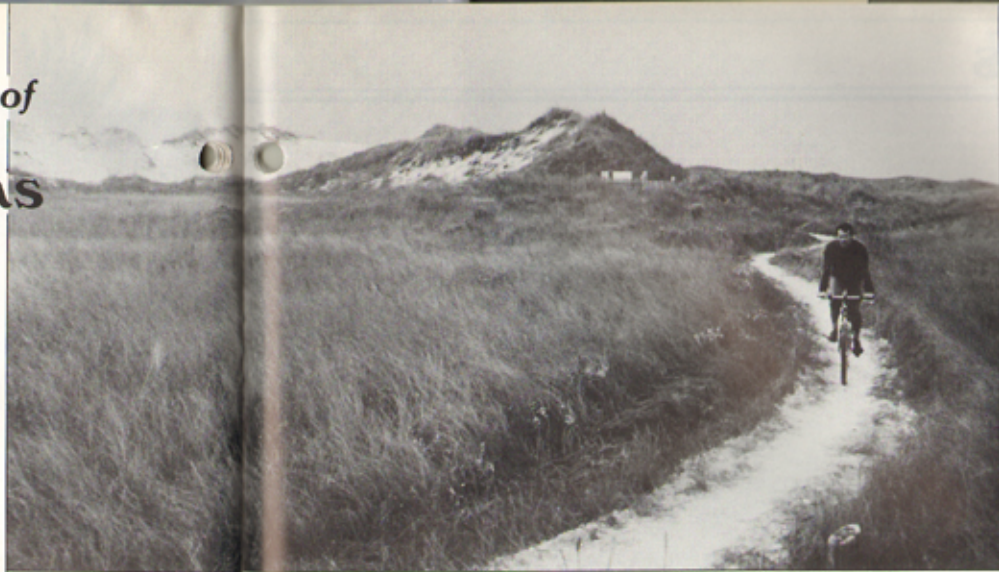
really didn't mind their momentary intrusions into our world.

Campsites were wherever we wanted. From the Visitor's Center to the break between the two islands is sixty-five miles: sixty-five miles of uninterrupted sand and uninterrupted campsites and uninterrupted quiet; sixty-five miles of peddling with the ocean on one side, dunes and marshes on the other. We'd pedal along, never worrying about getting anywhere by any set time.

The cycling was superb though unvaried. All there really is is the beach. The surface is firm, even hard, most of the time. Without the cart, we'd fly along in our biggest gears. With it, we used the middle middle chaining but never the granny ring.

We just idled our way south, constantly slowing to a crawl to scan the beach for sand dollars and assorted shells. I couldn't pass up a pretty shell. Before long, my bulging pockets resembled the cheeks of a chipmunk gathering nuts to hoard for the winter. It wasn't until the end of the first day that I finally accepted that there was no end to the shells. I didn't have to stop and pick up every single one I saw. But I never did tire of poking along, staring at the sand and watching for shells, every now and then picking up just one more particularly attractive shell.

Or we'd stop and watch the surf fishermen. There really wasn't much action to watch. They'd cast out into the waves, set the rod into a holder stuck in the sand, then sit back in lawn chairs, drink beer, and listen to the radio or just chat. Our son never



While many residents leave Texas for their vacations, MBM discovers yet another reason to pack the bikes up and head south to this last state.



missed a chance to ask innumerable questions, usually repeated to every fisherman we stopped near. That's how we got our dinners. Invariably we'd be offered a fish or two.

I've never been interested in fishing, even the fly fishing my husband so loves. But something about those fishers contentedly staring into the ocean caught my fancy. Perhaps it was the mesmerizing effect of the waves rolling in and out, sandpipers darting

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Bikes



DAKAR, about \$800

DIAMOND BACK APEX, about \$520



ZINN, about \$1,600

CANNONDALE SM 600, about \$700



Diamond Back Apex

If you haven't been down to your local bike dealers lately, you're in for a surprise when you do stop by. Prices are dropping. Mountain bikes are becoming amazingly competitive. The Diamond Back Apex is an excellent example of the better and better buys available for buyers. Suggested retail price is \$520. For that, you'll get a Suntour XC rear brake, Shimano Deore cantilever front brake, Shimano Biopace chainrings, Shimano Deore XT derailleurs, Shimano shifters, Dia-compe brake levers, Cinchloc fork, sealed hubs, Araya RM 25 rims, and Suntour XC pedals. Plus the frame is light welded out of Tange Infinity butted tubing. All that for \$520?

But WSI, designers and importers of the Diamond Back bike line, isn't satisfied. They've already started upgrading the bike. They're changing to Araya RM 20 rims and probably quick releases on the wheels, or at least on the front wheel.

That alone is an impressive package but the bottom line with any bike is how does it ride. The geometry is fairly conservative, almost exactly the same as Fisher MountainBike's Excilibur race bikes. A 68-degree head tube is combined with a 73-degree seat tube, 17.5-inch chain stays, and a 43.25-inch wheelbase. Naturally the handling is also almost the same as the Fisher.

The bike is light and rides light. The short chain stays put the rider's weight over the rear wheel for superb traction while the shallow head angle eats up downhill. But as always, every design compromise has its pluses and minuses. The negative side of the 68-degree head angle becomes immediately apparent at slow speeds and climbing. The front wheel has a tendency to flop from direction to direction rather than turning in a smooth radius. When climbing, especially when out of the saddle, the bike is tended to zig up the hill in response to the rider's powerful weight transfers from pedal to pedal.

But just like the Fisher, the bike was also extremely stable during fast downhills. Smoothness is another hallmark of shallow heads for the fork tends to eat up bumps rather than passing them through to the rider. So it's something you'll have to decide for yourself. There are plenty of riders out there who much prefer shallow head angles over the steeper head angles made popular by bikes like the Specialized Team Stumpjumper. Diamond Back is in good company. Fat Chance, Fisher MountainBikes, and Ritchey are three manufacturers who've remained confident the shallow head provides a superior ride. And based on Joe Murray's success racing for Gary Fisher, Diamond Back certainly picked out a proven design to base their geometry on.

The Apex also had one neat trick that is unique to their bike. Instead of using a typical chain guard on the chain stay to protect the paint, they've braced on holders for three spare spools. You may never need to square spoke but they weigh nothing, protect the paint, and if you do end up needing one, you've got it.

The bike also is currently coming through with two sets of handlebars. The first is a high rise design that makes the bike into more of a town cruiser than a performance model. The second has less rise and

accentuates the racier feel of the bike. An even fatter bar was preferred by most of the riders.

For \$520, it's quite a bike. It's one you can race on, tour on (front and rear rack braze-ons are standard), or just have fun on. The performance level is high enough that you may easily find yourself satisfied for years with this bike no matter how quickly your riding abilities improve. That's a lot to ask from a bike for this low a price.

The fork is the most critical part of a bicycle. Just the thought of it snapping is enough to send a ripple of fear coursing through the body. Sometimes, in the midst of a rapid descent, consider the consequences of a fork snapping and you'll no doubt notice that you've unconsciously slowed down.

A fork is made up of several components. There are definite differences in how various forks are built and how they look and perform. Traditional forks use a fork crown, a cast piece of blocky looking steel with sockets for the blades to fit into and a hole through the middle for the steerer tube.

These pieces are fitted to close tolerances and joined using heat and bronze or silver. Bronze welding or brazing requires less heat than welding with steel rods and therefore less damaging to light, or small diameter tubing. Silver soldering is an even lower temperature process but requires a precision fit. Silver soldering has no strength in tension therefore a certain amount of tube overlap must be present. Silvered forks and frames must have jugs or a sleeve fit.

Conventional fork crowns have a sharp transition from the blade to the square casting. I feel this is not a good situation, particularly when the fork is loaded laterally. Rigidity in this direction aids control when running the tire along an edge or sidehill. This almost ninety-degree transition is also a point of stress concentration. I feel that a tubular crown better diffuses this stress. The steerer and blade are connected by a two-inch or more radius bend rather than a 90-degree angle.

An ovalized tubular crown, the Type I, was developed by Charlie Cunningham at fit heavy duty road blades and allows the builder to cut approximately two inches off the blade small end of the blade. The resulting blade is therefore thicker and consequently stronger throughout its length. A similar tubular crown, the Type II, is used to fit a one-inch double butted top tube cut in half to form two fork blades. This fork style appears to have no offset because the blades form a straight line from steerer to dropouts. More typical forks have raked or curved blades that start in line with the steerer tube and gradually bend forward to provide the offset required for stability. The straight blade's offset is designed into the crown/steerer junction.

DAKAR

Cycles, USA is one amongst many importers and distributors of bikes and equipment. But unlike almost every other one, they weren't content to simply pick up whatever was available. Instead, they designed their own mountain bike, located and then contracted with Japanese frame builders who could produce the level of quality they desired, and finally chose a

combination of components they felt would produce a superb performance bike for substantially less money than offered by other companies.

Did they succeed is the obvious question. It's also a question whose subjective nature guarantees the starting of arguments whenever one bike is compared to another. Regular readers of Mountain Bike Magazine already know that we never compare bikes precisely because the subject is far too subjective and personal. But what we can say about the Dakar is that as far as the design objectives of Cycles, USA is concerned, the bike definitely fills the bill.

The name alone tends to set it off. Dakar is the capital of the Republic of Senegal and, according to Cycles, USA, "labeled jewel of the African continent, final stop in the grueling Paris to Dakar off road race." And for those with Mountain Bike Magazine, the name does in fact conjure up images of far off lands though in fact, Dakar is reputed to be a city of slums, thieves, and whores according to friends who have traveled there. Ah well, so much for romantic myths. We still like the name.

The frame is constructed out of triple-butted Tange chromoly tubing and beautifully brazed instead of fit welded. Tig welding leaves a relatively crude finish appearance while brazing provides a smooth flowing look of brazing. Whether one is superior to the other is a moot point best left to the engineers to argue. They're both strong and both work. But there's no denying the exceptional look of brazing and it's something that is normally only found on more expensive custom bikes. We have never seen it on any bike under \$1,100 so far. The Dakar sells for about \$800, an impressive price for a bike of this quality and with all the extras that are included.

The geometry is well proven and fairly neutral. Seventy degree parallel angles, 18.25 inch chain stays, 42.25 wheelbase (size tested was 20-inch, wheel base varies with sizes), and a 12-inch bottom bracket. Though not exceptional, it works well. The chain stays are a bit longer than might be expected on a bike with that short a wheelbase and a competition label attached to it but it's for good reason that they're that long. Their intention was to build a bike that could be raced on and raced well but could also be toured on with fully loaded front and rear panniers. Since few riders only race or only tour, their objective makes sense. In fact, the great advantage of mountain bikes over road bikes has always been their versatility and the Dakar perfectly demonstrates that quality.

The only time the design compromised the bike's performance was when climbing. Those longer chain stays reduce the rear wheel's bite, resulting in the saddle pedaling to maintain traction. But that was the only fault anyone found with the bike and quite frankly, it was minimal. On all but the steepest terrain, the bike climbing was excellent.

Components are pretty standard for the industry and all of the best quality. Suntour XC brakes front and rear with Magura brake levers, Shimano Deore XT derailleurs and shifters, Shimano Biopace chainrings, Suntour Cyclone sealed hubs, Araya RM 25 super hard anodized rims, 14-gauge stainless steel spokes, Grab-On grips, Suntour XC stem with Nitro alloy bars, ISCA Tornado

saddle, etc.

What really makes the bike stand out are the extras: a Nagasa frame fit pump out with special mounts for it behind the seat tube, a Hite Rite seat locating spring, carrying strap, double water bottle bosses, chain hanger, and two sets of tires - one for street use and one for off road. The paint job is a rich Ferrari red.

Everyone was unanimous in saying they felt that a bike of this quality ought to be equipped with quick release hubs, lighter pedals with toe clips, and narrower, lighter rims. In fact, everyone was quite vocal in seeing the lack of those only because the Dakar in every other respect is an outstanding bike. But again, those are strictly personal preferences. Not everyone likes quick releases for fear they're not as strong, the same is true of the narrower rims, while toe clips are only just beginning to be fully accepted by the general off-road riding public.

All in all, the Dakar appears to be an excellent value, well designed, and beautifully crafted with fine performance for racing, touring, or just cruising around.

Cannondale SM 600

Cannondale has done more to bring aluminum tubing into cyclists' consciousness than any other large manufacturer. Their oversized aluminum tubing made a dramatic impact with the introduction of their excellent road racing and touring bikes followed shortly thereafter with the SM 600 mountain bike.

As if the fat tubes themselves weren't enough to attract attention to the bike, Cannondale elected to use a 24-inch rear wheel. That rear wheel has also been a point of controversy amongst off-road cyclists; whether justified or not is moot.

Cannondale claims the smaller wheel provides superior traction for climbing and cornering. It also enables them to keep the frame length shorter since they're built out of oversized tubing. The Cannondale's 18-inch stays are no longer considered exceptionally short. Mountain bikes have evolved over the years and wheelbases and chain stays have been getting dramatically shorter, 17 to 17.5-inch stays are becoming almost standard on high performance bikes.

The 44-inch wheelbase isn't short anymore either, nor when one compares more bikes are sporting 42 or 43-inch wheelbases. But what's far more important than the dimensions is the balance, how the rider's weight is distributed between front and rear. Relatively long chainstays don't necessarily mean poor climbing. The Moocs with its fairly long wheelbase is graphic evidence of that; it climbs superbly. So does the Cannondale, especially when in the saddle.

In fact, Cannondale specifically designed the bike with its 73.5-degree seat tube for in-the-saddle pedaling. That angle places the rider in the ideal position relative to the cranks for maximum pedaling efficiency. The bike fairly scoots up hills. The 69.5-degree head tube angle is a compromise between climbing and descending. Cannondale SM 600's around. If you ever talk to one, don't be surprised by their enthusiasm for their bike. I haven't found one yet who doesn't believe it's the best buy on the market.

For those who prefer 26-inch tires front and rear, the bike is also available with a 26-inch rear wheel. They added an inch to the chainstays to make room for the bigger wheel. I suspect that additional inch makes for a dramatically different bike. Cannondale says it's meant for those who will spend far more time on the road than off.

On the trail, the bike is nimble and smooth and generally fun to ride. No one was honestly able to tell whether the bike had a smaller rear wheel or not despite any preconceived notions they may have held about it. The only other complaints were typical of all bike tests, individual preferences for component changes. The number one complaint was the rising handlebar. Everyone felt that combined with the Suntour XC stem, the rise relative to the saddle position was excessive and that a narrow, flat bar would have fully exploited the bike's handling potential. And as usual with the majority of bikes we test, everyone wished it had quick release hubs and pedals such as the Suntour MP 1000 with toe clips instead of the ubiquitous Suntour XC pedals.

The only other complaint concerned the 24-inch rear wheel but not because of its performance. The two different sized wheels seemed to have different sized frame tubes, a minor inconvenience, and more importantly, limit the selection of rims available. Aluminum's great advantage is weight but the 24-inch wheel precludes the use of a narrower rim such as the Specialized Saturne. Tire selection is also limited so tires like the Ground Controls and IRC X-1 Racers can't be used.

As for the fat tubes themselves, selection is top-of-the-line, mostly Suntour XC. Hubs, derailleurs, shifters, pedals, brakes, freewheel, and stem are all Suntour XC. The cranks are Sugino triple (28-36-44).

The saddle is the ever popular Avocet Touring I. The front fork is Tange chromoly and the rims Sun Metal aluminum with stainless steel 14 gauge spokes. The frame appears fairly standard with the 13/16/21/26/30 freehub but when combined with the 24-inch rear wheel, in fact is quite low. Everyone appreciated the low gearing for climbing but wanted more inches on the top end.

For about \$700, the Cannondale is a pretty good buy. The competition in that price range has certainly intensified recently but for those who appreciate aluminum, the Cannondale is an excellent opportunity, quite a bit less expensive than most other aluminum mountain bikes. And there's no denying that aluminum has recognizable qualities over steel. It's smoother and stronger with less weight. The Cannondale isn't dramatically lighter than steel bikes but it doesn't require many changes to substantially lighten the bike more than it already is. Cannondale's objective was strength and reliability, not just light weight.

Consequently the bike is heavier than might be expected from an aluminum bike. But it's still lighter than most steel bikes. And you definitely won't have to worry about breaking it. It's bomb-proof. No wonder there are so many owners of Cannondale SM 600's around. If you ever talk to one, don't be surprised by their enthusiasm for their bike. I haven't found one yet who doesn't believe it's the best buy on the market.

For those who prefer 26-inch tires front

and rear, the bike is also available with a 26-inch rear wheel. They added an inch to the chainstays to make room for the bigger wheel. I suspect that additional inch makes for a dramatically different bike. Cannondale says it's meant for those who will spend far more time on the road than off.

ZINN

If you're short, finding a mountain bike that fits you correctly can be difficult. Too often, the shorter rider ends up with a bike that's a smaller version of the larger sizes but something is invariably lost in the transition. The smaller bikes' top tube are often the same length as those used for larger bikes or the handlebar reach is too long or the wheelbase, the same as a bigger bike's, is too long. The rider ends up stretched out over the bike or climbing traction is lost because of poor weight distribution. The best solution, though costly, is a custom mountain bike.

Leonard Zinn is best known for his road racing bikes. That and a team of women racers who have achieved a high level of success racing on his bikes. But he also builds custom mountain bikes whose geometry varies with the bike's size. Our test bike belonged to his wife, Sonya, a highly competitive Colorado road racer. She's five foot five and used to high performance bikes. Leonard designed hers accordingly. In fact, it looks at first glance more like a road bike than a mountain bike.

Columbus tubing, a 75.5-degree seat tube, 40-inch wheelbase, and 14.5-inch chainstays set it more apart from road bikes than mountain bikes. But offsetting those are the 69.5-degree head angle, high bottom bracket (almost 12 inches), knobby tires, and flat handlebars and it immediately becomes clear this is no road bike. But it could be. Throw on some drop bars and skinny tires and this is one mountain bike that will fly down the road.

As can be expected from a custom built bike frame, the workmanship is excellent. The frame is rugged and shows the attention to detail people expect in a Zinn. Component selections are pretty standard, Shimano and Suntour, with the exception of the Modolo cantilever brakes. These were the first off-road brakes we'd used in some time that weren't either Shimano, Suntour, and to a lesser extent DiaCompe. They worked beautifully. In fact, some thought the pads were exceptional. The brakes were originally designed for cyclocross but certainly should be of interest to any mountain bikers. As with any custom bike, the components are pretty much up to the purchaser to choose. They're not only who you want to a custom bike builder. It's the frame and design that they have to offer.

The test bike was set up for Sonya according to her wants. What she wanted was a fast, agile, and fairly stiff frame. The 40-inch wheelbase is the shortest we've seen yet on a mountain bike but then this is a pretty small bike. The chainstays are also the shortest as we've seen yet. They only draw in its back rack of room. You can't run anything wider than a 1.75 tire on the rear. But then some riders and builders such

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Mark Slate

Forks



Mark Slate, along with Steve Potts, builds Steve Potts and Swift Mountain Bikes. He is also a partner with Steve Potts and Charlie Cunningham in Wilderness Trail Bikes Components.

variety of reasons. Among those are market acceptance (the roller-cam is still widely misunderstood), importance of proper stud placement, lability, and just plain disbelief that they're any better. Roller-cams have a very valid place on a frame and I feel an equally valid place on a fork. And that certainly isn't to say that there is anything wrong with cantilevers. There isn't. I simply feel that the roller-cam is superior.

Editor's note: Beyond the question of the relative braking power of cantilevers versus roller-cams, I might also add that in terms of backcountry travel, it makes sense to me to run the same brake front and rear simply because you'll always have spare parts if one brake gets broken. You'll at least be able to cobble together one brake where you want it.

We've also heard numerous arguments that cantilevers are easier to adjust and maintain than roller-cams. We've ridden a lot of bikes with various brake set-ups and have found that all brakes require periodic adjustments and all of them can be a pain in the butt.

We've also found that a brake's efficiency is critically dependent upon the brake pads. The best braking bike we've tested was the Mantis XCR with roller-cams front and rear. The rear brake was on the seat stays, not under the chain stays as is most commonly seen. His stud placement may have been more precise than others but if so, we couldn't tell by looking. The only difference was the brake pads, an early Soutour pad with a herringbone design. Their braking power was incredible. One finger braking down the steepest hills.

We've since ridden a Swift, designed and built by Mark Slate and Steve Potts, equipped with Soutour roller-cams. It too had the herringbone pads and the braking action was superb. We've not experienced that incredible braking with any other Soutour roller-cam brake. We can only assume that the pads are the cause. If you have an opportunity to pick up some herringbone pads, don't hesitate. Grab them. You may discover the kind of braking you were led to expect from the brakes.

Padre continued from pg 31

along the water's edge, that so caught me. Whatever it was, if I ever return to Padre, and I plan to, I may have to take along some surf fishing gear - especially the lawn chair - and talk someone into teaching me how to sit and fish.

Or else we'd just stop and hang out along the dunes' fringes. But paradoxically, that was also the source of the only discordant note of the trip. The dunes are closed to vehicles but not to storm waves. Those waves deposit surprising amounts of trash in the dunes. I've always heard the seas are man's ultimate garbage dump but never before had I so fully understood that as I did at Padre Island.

There were also signs at the Visitor's Center warning visitor's not to approach any 55-gallon drums seen on the beach. They may be filled with toxic substances capable of killing if you only get close! It's times like that that I have to wonder just exactly how enlightened our civilization really is. But we never came upon any such presents and evidently they're quite rare. But occasionally one will wash up on the beach so the warning is justified. And as long as we stayed between the water and the first line of dunes, we saw no trash.

That band of sea-wet sand was a vacationing wonderland. We couldn't get enough of it. By the third day, on our return leg back up the beach, we were completely caught up in the rhythm of the beach. We never covered very many miles though every night found us comfortably tired. Without a doubt, we spent as much time stopping and playing in the sand as we did riding. Rod loved it. Never before had he had so much fun on any of our adventures. He was perfectly happy in the car, probably because he knew we were willing to stop anytime he wanted. There was never a worry about finding an appropriate place to hang out with him. Every place filed the bill.

Most surprising of all to me was that I never once missed being at home for Christmas. I didn't miss the tree we always have, the displays of Christmas lights on neighborhood homes, the parties and feasts, none of it. Our Padre Island adventure was one of the best holidays I'd ever had. It was so good, I suspect we'll have to do it again next year. But next time, all of us want to spend even more time along that coast. We barely even scratched the surface of places to explore.

We made a far too brief stop at Ananas National Wildlife Refuge, winter home of the few whooping cranes left in the world. We crossed the entrance to the refuge and immediately there was a small doe standing along the road. We stopped and she approached the car, obviously expecting a handout. Rod was entranced. He'd never seen a wild deer so close. We'd probably still be sitting there had he had his way.

Then there's South Padre Island, a place many claim is even better than Padre Island. The water is said to be warmer and cleaner and the beaches whiter. My husband and I also keep pouring over maps of the mainland across from the island and imagining all the trails and dirt roads we're sure are lurking in the midst of the map's blank spots. The entire Padre Islands environs are now firmly established on our list of adventure destinations.

continued from page 35

as Ross Shafer of Salsa Bikes prefer running a 1.75 IRC X-1 Racer on the back with a Specialized Ground Control on the front. Their theory is that it's the front where maximum ground hugging traction is needed for cornering so that's where they put the Ground Control. The 1.75 tire is lighter and accelerates easier so they're willing to sacrifice some cornering traction in favor of the lighter weight and shorter chain stays. That's not how Sonya's bike was set up but then that was before the introduction of the Ground Control.

Her bike had one idiosyncratic twist that none of the test riders were too thrilled about, high rise handlebars. They turned what was a very fast bike into a beach cruiser. But there was an excellent reason why they were on the bike. Sonya was pregnant and the upright position was more comfortable for her. Changing the bars to a flat model instantly changed the bike's nature. There was no denying its race orientation then.

Traction was superb on even the steepest hills. Single tracking was equally facile due to that short wheelbase. Dodging around obstacles took only a thought, especially after replacing the handlebars. And the shallow front end gave the bike the flexibility

needed for downhill.

But there was a slight price riders had to pay for the bike's quickness and climbing ability. The ride could be a bit rough. The steep seat tube and short stays seemed to transmit more shock than relaxed seat angles. But that may be a necessary compromise. A shallower angle wouldn't have placed the rider in the desired position over the cranks for optimum pedaling efficiency while longer stays would have reduced the bike's climbing traction and thrown off the rider's weight distribution between front and rear wheel. The latter is the most important element of a bike's fit and that's where shorter riders are too often left out. Which is why the custom built frame can be the best solution for those who can't seem to find a properly proportioned bike for their size.

Leonard is certainly familiar with that problem. He stands six foot four so has experienced the same problems though on the other end of the scale. Consequently his bikes are carefully thought out and designed accordingly. But they're not cheap, approximately \$1,600 depending upon how they're set up. (Zinn Cycles, 735 Silverberry Court, Lafayette, CO, 80026)

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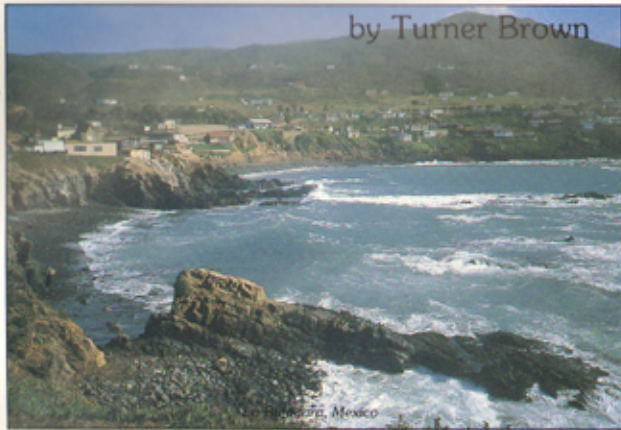
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Mixing the desert and the ocean in:

Baja California

by Turner Brown



A coastline like this is enticing enough, but throw in the mystique of a foreign country and some great riding...

Crossing the border into Tijuana instantly changed our perspective of living. Everything was different: architecture (if that word can be used to describe what is often a melange of shanties), streets, stores, clothing, even the smell of the air. The environment had an almost overpowering earthiness completely foreign to the antiseptic and carefully controlled world we in the states are so used to. Nothing could be taken for granted, even little things like eating.

Forget instant gratification at a McDonald's or Burger King. The Mexican equivalent is the ubiquitous push cart vendor that most Americans steer well clear for fear of being struck down with the Tortilla Two-Step. Probably with good reason. Even if the food is perfectly safe to eat, the dramatic change in flavor and ingredients can be enough to send an American's intestines into chaotic jumping jacks. The same thing happens to Mexican tourists in the states.

The further the U.S. receded in the rear view mirror, the stronger the sense of

freedom and adventure that swept over us. That was exactly what we needed and wanted. I couldn't get enough of looking at all the sights and people. The first Mexican road sign started me dredging up Spanish unused in fifteen years.

But Tijuana wasn't what we were after and we passed through without stopping and headed south into Baja California. We turned onto the Toll Road to Ensenada, coughed up thirty-five cents American to the attendant, and were on our way. The sprawling city of Tijuana was left behind as immediately as it had been entered. Unlike the U.S. where cities are surrounded by waves of suburbs reaching out into the surrounding countryside like the tentacles of an octopus, the limits of Mexican cities are exactly that, the end. There's no more. Just empty land.

The coast line stretched out before us. A light fog filtered the sun's light, adding a mystical air to the images. A calm sea gently surged against the rugged shoreline, battering it with beautifully curling waves of

blue green water. In the distance, perched on the horizon, was the blurred lines of an island. A trawler slowly passed north through the channel.

We pulled off the Toll Road at the first town we arrived at and stopped at a liquor store. Our mouths watered at the thought of being able to buy good Mexican beer in any liquor store for bargain prices. We grabbed a six pack of Bohemia out of a cooler and walked up to the counter.

"Cuanto?"
"Twelve hundred pesos. Two dollars and sixty-five cents American."
"Great! Let's go!"

It wasn't until we got out to the car that it dawned on me the beer was cold. Every one I'd ever spoken too who had spent any time in Mexico says forget drinking cold beer. It's not available. Neither is ice. Plus the guy spoke English. There I was trying to figure out how to talk to him in Spanish and all ready to switch pesos into dollars with my wrist watch/calculator and he's got it wired. He had a calculator on the counter and had

punched in the numbers as soon as I closed the cooler.

We were on a roll, even the four-lane highway was divided. I'd been all set to worry about crazy Mexican drivers but instead, there we were cruising down as scenic a highway as I'd ever driven, no traffic to speak of, and a seventy mile-an-hour speed limit! We were cruising!

We just didn't know where we were cruising to. But that didn't matter, especially once we'd crossed the border. Being on the road was enough. We'd picked up bits and pieces of information about Baja from a variety of sources, none overly specific but all inspiring. As it turned out, it was just as well we didn't have a specific destination in mind. All the places we'd been told about either didn't exist or we couldn't find them or they weren't exactly what we had been led to believe they would be. But we hadn't discovered that yet. All we knew was the road was wide open in front of us and the beer was cold and good.

Once we entered the Toll Road, there was no escape. Between the Toll Road and the coast was the old highway, a narrow, two-lane affair twisting from village to village with innumerable overlooks and beaches to turn off to. All were inaccessible to us. We were locked on the Toll Road.

The sun was setting and our stomachs were rapidly getting hungry. We started eyeballing restaurants along the coast but all we could do was look longingly out the window at them. There was never an exit near-by. We thought about returning back up the coast to one restaurant in particular after finally exiting the Toll Road in a small town but the thought of reversing our direction didn't seem right. All I wanted to do was move ahead, further into Baja California, find a place to camp, and ride.

We stayed on the old highway on the assumption mere villages and restaurants would appear just as they had ever since we'd left Tijuana. But a quarter of a mile later, the road crossed under the Toll Road to follow a valley away from the coast. We assumed the road would loop back down the opposite side of the valley to the coast. It didn't.

The sun set and the sky went black. The road twisted deeper into the hills, crossed an unseen river, then began a winding climb out of the valley. No lights shone anywhere. Electricity is still a rare commodity in much of Mexico. We had no idea where we were and only a vague suspicion we were still headed south towards Ensenada.

The road stopped climbing and shot across a high plain then dropped down what almost seemed a mirror image of what we had just climbed. As suddenly as we had left it, we were back at the Toll Road. To the right was a Toll Station, to the left were the blazing lights of Ensenada.

Looking down to the lighthouse for a possible descent route

A perfect single track complete with view



We drove into town in search of food. We spotted a seafood restaurant, Valentino's, and parked. We asked if our bikers would be safe on top of the car while we ate. They said no and told us to park it behind the restaurant next to the kitchen. The food was superb and topped off with an excellent Cabernet from the local winery, Santo Tomas. We then headed north up the Toll Road to find a place to camp. We spotted a track leading off towards the coast and followed it to a flat field above a cliff. Below was the ocean. Waves crashed on the rocks below. It was wonderful music to our tired ears.

Ensenada sits on the inside curve of a large bay whose southern boundary is a sweeping curve of beaches ending in a peninsula. A road from Ensenada to the village of La Bufadora on the ocean side of the peninsula crosses over just below a prominent hill. After studying a map of Baja, I decided to explore that hill the next day. There had to be rideable trails in the midst of the map's blank spots.

Lady luck was still around. A jeep road took off from the paved road and climbed the mountain. The track was rough, slightly rocky in places, and covered with a coarse granitic sand. Traction was marginal on the steeper sections. Before long, I found myself in hot competition with the hill. I was determined to ride the entire distance. Doing so entailed attempting a few of the steeper sections multiple times before finally throwing in the towel and pushing the bike up.

No matter. Views from the summit made up for any frustration. I might have developed. There at my feet was the entire

Bahia de Todos Santos. Stacked up one after another for as far as I could see were range upon range of rugged mountains with Ensenada sprawled at their base next to the bay. Well below me and to the north was the tip of the peninsula, a rocky point jutting out into the ocean towards an even rockier looking island a mile or so off shore. A small lighthouse stood on the very point of the peninsula.

I walked around the summit and stared down in every direction. Finally I spotted on the western slopes what I was looking for, a trail contouring around the mountain. There was also a clearly discernible trail following the shore from the lighthouse back towards La Bufadora. I headed back down the way I'd come up until I found what I hoped was the trail I'd seen from above. The riding was excellent on a relatively smooth jeep track. The further I rode, the more spectacular became the views. Flowers poked out of the top of cactus and out of rocks where it seemed nothing could live. My favorite was a cactus with a single stalk taller than a person and topped with what I assumed were orange/yellow flowers. They dotted the mountains' western slopes that fell precipitously to the ocean a thousand feet below.

After a short flat section leading to a small saddle between the mountain's main bulk and a minor sub-peak, the trail appeared to end. I pressed on further and sure enough, the trail continued. But it was no longer rideable. It had clearly been built by man for it zigged down the mountainside but disintegrated and lack of maintenance had let it erode to the point that it was impossible to ride. Especially with all the cactus plants

closing in on the trail. I debated continuing on. I was by myself and far from any other people and on a trail that was obviously rarely traveled. I had no idea if the trail continued on or whether I'd get to the base of the mountain a thousand feet below and discover I had to walk all the way back up with the bike on my shoulder and right rapidly approaching. But there was also the trail I spotted from above that appeared to lead from the lighthouse back to La Bufadora. Obviously somebody had to maintain the lighthouse so assuming the lower trail was in good shape didn't seem unreasonable. I decided to press on. After all, that was why I'd come to Mexico, for an adventure. The others were no doubt contentedly drinking beers in La Bufadora and in no hurry so there was no reason to return.

The trail remained unrideable for most of the descent. It eventually leveled off somewhat on a rocky ridge that it proceeded to follow towards the lighthouse. Every time I thought that at last the trail was rideable, I'd round a bush and be confronted with cactus barring the path, at least to the passage of a bicycle. Finally I decided to cut cross-country to find the other trail I'd seen from above with the hope that it was in better shape. By the time I eventually located it, my legs were bleeding messes from encounters with highly defensive cactus. But it was worth it. The other trail was a definite improvement.

About then I spotted workmen painting the lighthouse. I could also see their recent tracks in the trail and was sure the trail would lead me back to La Bufadora with no problem. I could also hear seals barking

somewhere off the coast. I was stoked again and picked up my pace out to the point. Except the cactus also increased and once again I was carrying the bike more than riding it. My frustration increased because the trail was perfect for riding except for this one variety of cactus with very broad leaves ending in long, sharp daggers. They continually crowded the trail, making even walking on it difficult, much less riding. I kept thinking how a few people armed with machetes could in a matter of hours groom the trail for superb riding.

The painters looked up when I arrived at the end and stared in obvious fascination mixed with amusement. Who was this gringo riding a bike and how had he gotten there? They spoke no English but we were able to communicate on a pretty basic level with my crippled Spanish. I told them I came down the mountain on the old trail and they looked at me like I was crazy. I had to agree with them. It wasn't a trip I wanted to repeat. I then asked them which was the best trail back and they pointed at the one I'd intersected.

The day was getting late so after watching the seals for a few moments, I took off back down the trail. I still had to carry the bike for awhile but then the vegetation opened up and I found myself flying along on a narrow single track, dodging various bushes and cactus, and generally having a wonderful time.

Then the trail hit the slopes plunging down from the mountain's summit and my pace slowed appreciatively, almost as much because of the unbelievable views as the difficulty of the trail. There I was, pedaling along a smooth single-track clinging to the slopes while below me were inlets of deep blue-green water framed by jagged, black rocks. Never had I cycled, or even hiked for that matter, in a more spectacular and beautiful setting. The surging ocean battered the rocks, sending plumes of spray high into the air. I wanted to linger but the setting sun and an unknown trail kept me moving on.

I was riding about half the time and carrying the bike the other half but it didn't matter. I was enjoying myself so much that I would have been happy if I'd had to carry it all the way. At one point, the trail all but disappeared and I had to clamber over rocks with the bike but then just as suddenly, the trail was once again superb and I made good time.

I arrived back in La Bufadora just before sunset. I was physically spent yet equally exhilarated. My legs ached from the cactus attacks. It felt as if they had some toxic juice they injected me with every time I scratched myself on one. I walked down to the water and washed in the salt water hoping that would make them feel better. It didn't. But the beer I promptly consumed did. It was the perfect end to a superb mountain biking adventure. I was content. I sat back in a lawn chair and watched the sun sink into the ocean and remembered that incredible trail. I didn't even mind having to return to the next day to go back to work. I'd had a wonderful adventure and even more importantly, had discovered a mountain biking paradise.



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Single Tracking

It was on a single-track that I was introduced to mountain biking. A friend, who later became my wife, talked me into it. She borrowed a revamped, two-speed clunker for me and promptly took off out of town via an abandoned railroad grade that led to a footpath. Her turn onto the trail was accompanied with an off-hand remark about the probability of my crashing during the ride.



by Hank Barlow

At the time, I had no idea why she would say such a thing. It's not as if riding a bicycle is difficult, especially with years of hard, fast road riding under my belt. There was no way that heavy, cumbersome, fat-tired bike was going to present any notable difficulty. But then for that matter, I didn't even understand her enthusiasm for what she was calling mountain biking.

A glimmer of understanding began to glow during the ride out on the old railroad track. Cruising along astride that slow but comfortable clunker wasn't bike riding as I knew it but it was fun though I really couldn't see myself getting too hopped up about the sport.

Then we hit the single track. Kimberly quickly built up a lead while I struggled to keep the bike on the trail. Before I knew it, I was caught up in the riding. All my concentration was focused on maintaining control of the bike, staying on the track, and especially on not falling. The bike proved to be surprisingly agile.

Innumerable foot dabs and awkward, hopping dismounts later, we reached the far end of the trail. I was stoked. The condensing altitude I'd started with was left far behind amongst the rocks and cow pies the bike and I had wobbled past, over, and through. I'd been hooked and was ready for more.

Rather than return to town via the same trail, we elected to take the dirt road back down the valley in order to stop at a lake for a swim. The hard packed road brought out all that was wrong with the clunker. The road was for the most part flat. Yet no matter how frantic I pedaled, my wheels

seemed caught in molasses. I wanted to fly while the bike acted as if we were out for a ride with the boulevard and tea set. That was the beginning of my single-tracking addiction. I am now one of those who, when they think of mountain biking, think of single-tracking.

Single-tracking is cycling on trails, whether a hiking trail or a game path makes no difference as long as the trail is no wider than from the outside of one pedal to the outside of the other. Single tracking is riding where vehicles can't go. It encompasses everything that makes mountain biking the incredible sport that it is, that separates it from road riding, running, even wind surfing. Single-tracking is closer to rock climbing and backcountry powder skiing than bicycling.

Precisely what it is about single tracking that so attracts and addicts mountain bikers is difficult to pin down. For me, it's the adventure, the setting, the dancing on the edge, and the inherent quietude.

Speeds are slow but then speed is relative, relative to the nearness of rocks and tree trunks and the unknown. Smoking off a high pass down a smooth, paved highway with a fast road bike beneath me hasn't anything close to the excitement of darting through a forest of Aspens on a narrow single-track despite the 50 mph speed on the highway versus the trail's 5 or 10 mph speed.

Single trackers are confronted with unrelenting and complex problems. The spinning wheels' gyroscopic effect no longer make up for a rider's unsteadiness. Speed's



David Carrazza

are too slow. Toss in the inconsistent trail surface, bouncing over rocks, exposed roots, and fallen branches, hopping the bike over small logs, and the very narrowness of the trail itself and the result is a mind absorbing challenge.

But don't equate this with the classic "no pain, no gain" thought wave. Single-tracking's challenge doesn't mean it isn't fun. Nor are all single tracks difficult to ride. One of Gary Fisher's, of Fisher MountainBikes, favorite rides is a trail in Humboldt Redwoods State Park in northern California, the Avenue of the Giants. The trail follows a valley for some ten miles to the summit of Grasshopper Peak where it then dives back down into what Gary describes as a vegetable tunnel before arriving in the land of the dinosaurs. Redwoods tower overhead, their branches a hundred feet above, and form a canopy of green like the roof of some giant, undefined outdoor atrium. The ancient soil is soft and silent beneath the fat tires yet paradoxically generates competing desires to one moment bend low over the bars and fly down the trail at top speed; the next to dawdle along, upright on the saddle, staring in mute awe at the surrounding magnificence.

The trail's width, smoothness, and gentle nature typical of highly developed park trails really disqualifies it as hard-core single-tracking but not for having fun. Single-tracks are more typically like a trail I once stumbled upon high in the mountains. I'd sweated up hill after hill, spinning away madly in my lowest gear, carefully balanced in a low crouch to maintain traction. I'd followed a jeep road that turned into a single track leading higher and higher through the woods. Attempting to ride up every hill without a dismount absorbed all of my attention. It was a totally macho effort, me against the mountain and gravity. I wrung minor victories out of what were really inconsequential moments while despairing if I'd ever pedal up other sections.

The climb ended at a junction. A marginal trail led to the right. My macho frame of mind immediately focused on it as another challenge to throw myself against.

The trail traversed a steep hillside, scrambled over exposed rock ledges, and rounded a corner. Suddenly, unexpectedly, before me lay an absolutely gorgeous, smooth dirt trail contouring along the mountain side into a basin of wild flowers. I

visually followed its track for as far as I could until it disappeared into woods over the hill away. Like a cool ocean breeze on a hot, muggy afternoon, that sight swept away my aggressive attitude. I doted along the track like a swallow playing amongst currents of air sweeping a cliff face.

I followed the trail for mile after mile, sometimes twisting through woods, more often in meadows of waving grasses. No longer was I on my small chain ring for the trail's smoothness let me fly. Yet the narrowness and the rough terrain it traversed demanded focused attention. I could only catch quick glimpses of the spectacular views around me. But that was enough.

I rode a wave of exhilaration like a board sailor surfing waves with no end. Psychological momentum carried me up every intervening hill as if they didn't exist while the downhill disappeared beneath my spinning tires in a flash of frozen time.

Single-tracking tests every skill a mountain biker has. Route finding, gear shifting, bike handling, sensing the unknown, and sheer power are all demanded. There's another trail I know of that slices through a forest of deciduous trees. Rocks, fallen limbs, and sustained climbs dominate. My arms become exhausted from pulling on the handlebars to force the bike through the myriad obstacles. There's never a time when I can relax other than by stopping and leaning on a nearby tree. I doubt my speed ever exceeds 5 mph during that first hour. Yet this is one of my favorite rides.

Why? Because of the high I experience from pushing myself to the limit. I have yet to clean the entire distance. I've come so close but every passage always seems at least one dab. In a way, I'm glad. I know that challenge is always there. Then again, just because I do clean that first section, there's no guarantee I'll be able to repeat it. Besides, that's only half the trail.

After a long, flatish section past a dry marsh where I'm on my biggest gears and hammering, there's this innocuous hill the trail shoots up. It doesn't look too steep and the trail is rockless. But the track is particularly narrow, the dirt surface loose, and the slope a lot steeper than it appears. I can only pedal up by coming out of the saddle. But unless I do so just right, I'll immediately spin the rear wheel and stop. The distance is long enough that sustaining

the effort required to get up is aerobic.

I've attempted that hill more times than I can count. Only once have I made it up, almost. That was only after failing the first attempt and returning to the bottom to try again. I dredged up enough strength to push the cranks over that one more time the crucial move required. I'd made it! The slope eased and from there to the top was a snap. Except my muscles were spent and before reaching the top, on a slope that is normally taken in a bigger gear, I came to a halt. I could go no further. I was beat. Beat but exhilarated.

That hill still sits there, unclimbed by me. Despite the failures, I always look forward to tackling it. I attack with everything I've got, measure my success by incremental movements further up the hill, and pedal away from it feeling wonderful. If the trail were wide enough that I didn't have to worry about maintaining an absolutely straight line up the trail, getting up would be a snap. I could weave about, concentrating on putting all my power into the cranks, not worrying about where the front wheel was pointed. As it is, the slightest deviation means instant failure.

But that's only half the story. Everything that's climbed must be descended and therein lies a completely different challenge. Single-tracking can be easy enough at slow speeds; there's plenty of time to gauge your distance and see where the trail is going next. But pick up the pace and all of a sudden things start happening at an amazingly rapid pace. The ride turns into a series of lightning quick reactions.

Those slight twists and turns in the trail that at slow speeds are inconsequential become major obstructions. Blow the turn and you'll be bashing through the trees. If rocks are lurking in the brush, you're in trouble. There's no margin for error when flying through single-track turns. There is only one line, the trail itself. You're either on it or you're not. If not, you're off the trail, hanging on for all your worth.

But when you're on your bike and tuned in, a rhythm takes over that carries you along. Riding becomes effortless. It's like running before the wind with a spinaker stuffed full of air. Conscious thinking and the passage of time are suspended. There's only one line, the trail itself, and the trail is yours.

I know of another trail that dips and sweeps around trees like a skier's track. I lean into one turn, ducking past branches, then smoothly shift my weight and dive into the next as if each is dependant upon the other for its existence. I have yet to ride that section without laughing out loud. But in order to ride that trail, first I must ride for well over an hour, much of that sustained, hard climbing. And after riding for all that time, the section itself only lasts a few minutes, then it's over. If those few minutes of glorious riding were the only reason for pumping up those hills, it wouldn't be worth the effort. And therein lies the secret of single-tracking.

Like rock climbing, the purpose isn't to get to the top. If it was, why choose the most difficult, and perhaps even doubtful, route. Especially if afterwards, all you do is walk back down the back side. So too with single tracking. The difficulties inherent to most single-tracks are voluntarily, eagerly

chosen. No one forces me to attempt riding up those long hills or bounce through rock fields with no foot dabs, no one forces me to fly over a trail so fast that the slightest error in judgement will send me crashing through the woods. I search for such challenges. They define the art of living: the journey, not the arrival.

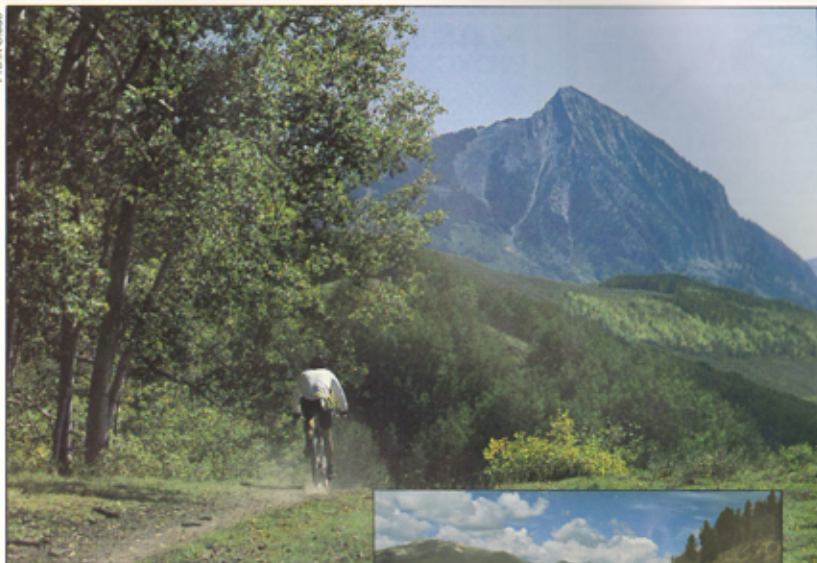
Single-tracking compresses into a finite period of time the entirety of my life. There's no tomorrow, no yesterday, no planning, not even any dreaming. There is only that moment. The intensity required blots out all distractions. Afterwards, I'm refreshed, and

rejuvenated. I return to the "real world" ready to once again rein in the fray. Single-tracking is my way to blow out all the cobwebs and junk that tend to collect and block my thinking after too much worry about jobs, etc.

I don't pretend to know exactly what takes place during these rides. All I do know is that they make me feel great. I return once again in love with living. Unfortunately that feeling rarely lasts for long but then, I always know those trails are out there awaiting me.

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Frank Staub



Single-tracking in and around Crested Butte, Co is the epitome of mountain biking. Shown here is the Smith Hill descent and (inset) the area near Grant's Lake



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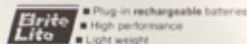
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Clothing

PATAGONIA

Patagonia doesn't currently make any clothing specifically for cyclists. That doesn't mean their goods aren't of use for mountain bikers. Quite the contrary. Mountain biking is simply one more method of exploring the backcountry. Patagonia is well known for outdoor clothing that's practical and durable. Those qualities are exactly what mountain bikers require.

Mountain bikes enable us to get deep into the backcountry in very little time. That also means exposure to potential sudden afternoon thunderstorms. A t-shirt and shorts are inadequate in such conditions. That's when it's time to whip out the pile jacket and windbreaker.

Patagonia is the company that made pile jackets almost de rigueur for anyone who has any pretensions at all of being an outdoorsman. They've since replaced pile with Synthella, another synthetic with basically the same qualities as pile. Its seams

softer and warmer than their older pile jackets and compacts well so it's easy to carry along on rides.

But it's not wind proof. That's where Patagonia's Featherweight Shell Pullover comes in. It's a lightweight anorak made out of 1.5 ounce ripstop nylon that's been treated for water resistance. The shell is wind resistant, keeps you dry in fog, mist, or light rain, and is so light and compact that carrying it along is never a problem. It's plenty roomy enough for comfort and it's quickly become a favorite for backcountry riders.

Blue Puma

Blue Puma is a small company specializing in clothing for water sports, especially river running. While their gear

wasn't designed for cyclists, that doesn't mean it can't be used. We tried out their "Baseline" jacket and pants in the coated nylon version with good success. The jacket has a full length zip for ventilation. Everyone appreciated that when pedaling up long hills in the rain when lots of heat was generated. But the inside still got damp. The suit is also available in GoreTex. Hopefully that will take care of that problem in most conditions.

The pants definitely weren't designed for cycling. You need some kind of strap to wrap around the cuff to keep them from getting caught. But if you want to stay dry in a heavy rain, this suit will do exactly that. It has lots of room so it's great for multi-day touring. A lot of clothing designed specifically for cycling isn't particularly comfortable when you're not cycling. The Blue Puma "Baseline" suit works quite adequately for cycling and is superb for other uses, such as keeping you completely dry while hanging out at camp waiting for the rains to stop. If you're a skier, you'll also find it excellent for those powder mornings.

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Clothing

Pearl Izumi

Regular readers of Mountain Bike Magazine have seen Pearl Izumi before in these pages. We featured one of their striking skin suits in the August/September issue. That suit was great for a fine day in the summer. But what happens if the weather closes down and you're miles from town? Or what about if you enjoy cycling in cooler weather?

Pearl Izumi has you covered for that, too. They produce an excellent foul weather suit designed specifically for bikers. The pants are a relatively snug fitting pattern made out of Gore-Tex. They're not as sleek looking as four-way stretch tight but they do the job of keeping you warm and dry while looking pretty sharp at the same time. The only complaint anyone was able to come up with was the lack of a drawstring around the waist.

The matching jacket is made out of Entrant, another fabric similar to Gore-Tex that is waterproof yet breathable. The jacket has a long tail in back to provide excellent protection precisely where jackets normally leave cyclists exposed. The jacket fit beautifully in all positions on the bikes.

Ah, but did they really keep us dry when it was wet. Affirmative. But what about sweat? Didn't we get wet then? No, we sure didn't. In fact, a few of the testers were rather skeptical about the materials but all returned satisfied with the performance. And that was in some humid, slightly warm conditions too. The suit did exactly what it was designed to do. It's also light and compact enough that carrying it along is so easy that it will almost always be included.

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Letters to the Editor

Your hysterical public lashing of the Sierra Club (Editor's Note, August-September 1985) indicates that you did not read the policies passed by the Board of Directors in May 1985 as carefully as you might have. Yes, the Board did pass a resolution which states that the Club supports the exclusion of all vehicles, including mountain bikes, from congressionally and state designated wilderness areas. That is the will that the Club puts between use of mountain bicycles and a resource that it considers sacrosanct. No bicycles in Wilderness — as simple as that.

Where the policy about which you ranted becomes less specific is on other public lands — not just forest lands, but national parks and preserves and monuments, Bureau of Land Management lands, state parks and recreation areas, even local parks. What our policy says here, in fact, is that land managers should determine where bicycles may be used off-road, designating trails that may be used by vehicle without damage to the resource or danger to other users. The Club inputs management decisions on a case by case basis, using these standards as guidelines.

The conflicts between the purported peaceful use of the mountain bicycle and the use to which it is often put is exemplified by NORBA, the organization which you urge people to join instead of the Sierra Club. On the last page of every issue of NORBA NEWS is the Off-Road Cyclists Code, which states in part, "Control your speed... Approach switchbacks and turns in anticipation of someone around the bend." But inside each issue are dramatic stories glorifying the macho aspects of mountain bicycles—the ultimate challenge for a human-powered machine—as in the May 1985 issue, p.7, "...a steep switch-back descent in the valley below...The valley is a home for deer...We bash through a creek and notice cross growing in the clear water. A spring must be near...Realized, it's time to turn back to the trailhead, finishing up with a break-neck (nearly literally) race down the 3/4 mile of 'primo' trail to the spring-fed lake... Are the streams, watercourses and deer unaffected by 'the bash through the creek' on the way up and down?"

One of our Santa Barbara County trail maintenance volunteers verifies our concerns about trail damage: "...it became readily apparent that the trail was suffering erosion damage because of the use of mountain bicycles. At every bend in the trail, bicycle tracks swerved toward the downhill edge of the trail leaving ruts in the rain-softened soil because of the locking of brakes. These tracks showed signs of rain run-off damage as the water had run directly down these tracks...At the sharp switchbacks, bicycle tracks again became deep ruts because of the locking of wheels since a bicycle's center of gravity in these sharp turns, they simply cut across the switchbacks causing further damage. It was necessary for us to rebuild several of these switchbacks because of this damage."

For further examples of use that is destructive to the resource and dangerous

to other users, see CALIFORNIA MAGAZINE, December 1985, p. 74-79: "Suzycling—in mountain biking you just lock your brakes and pedal harder," by Carter Coleman. "Mountain biking is a fraud sport"—short for radical-like hang gliding, surfing and rock-climbing a mode of locomotion that pits guts, strength and agility against the elements...You have to master up that kind of killer instinct...Others wear wildly into the grass...But over the rear tire, seat tight between thighs, chest low over the frame and arms cocked for frontal impact...It's great fun...Except mountainbikers can descend extremely steep terrain faster than motocyclists, and now they're going faster than ever before...Finally, on a corner, I lock both brakes, skid sideways, tumble over the bars and lie prostrate in the dirt. A spectator revives me with a cold beer, which I chug for my nerves before jumping back on the bike...I stumble away from my bike, dirty, drenched, punch-drunk but euphoric; mountain biking is nothing if not an adrenal outlet, high 5. A major difference between mountain biking and the other sports mentioned is the impact on the land resource and the danger to the non-biking users of that resource.

The Sierra Club acknowledges the family outing and quiet touring possibilities of mountain biking. It's policy is directed to allow these uses, under the watchful eye of a public lands' manager. Your editorial, on the other hand, is directed to ridicule rather than understand our moderate stand. The peaceful side of the sport is not the aspect that forced the Sierra Club to adopt a policy proposing guidelines for corrective action. Had there not been widespread abuse of public land and disregard of NORBA Code of Ethics, there would have been no need for a mountain bicycle policy outside Wilderness.

Sally Reid,
Director, Sierra Club

See Editor's note.

Greetings,

I needed to write because even though I feel you have the BEST bicycling publication on the market, I also feel you're missing a BIG part of the people who make up the mountain bike movement. The SPORT class rider, the guy who has little time to train but gives his all when the pack leaves the start. The common man or woman who dreams of Crested Butte and a new Ibis Mountain bike.

Let's face it, without this person, the movement would be only a handful of CRAZIES in outlying mountain areas. It would be a blessing if you could have a section for the average rider and commuter. (I know how your staff loves the HIGH PRICE BIKES but how about a non-prejudice evaluation of \$350 - \$700 mountain bikes or a listing of good but maybe not the top of line in clothes or accessories items?)

Another request of your power as the Leader in Mountain Bike Information, PLEASE bring back the FUN in mountain bike racing. I have been a tourist (passenger killer) for 6 yrs., but in 1984, I started

mountain bike racing. It is the most fun I've ever had. My first race was in the beautiful gold mine hills of Cripple Creek Colorado (Brian's Folly). I was dead at the finish but I never felt so good as I did at that moment. In 1985, I introduced my 11 year old son to mountain bike racing, where else, Brian's Folly (part of the Rocky Mountain Series). The course wasn't in the mountains, it was in the town (I was told that is the new way so more spectators can see and taste mountain bike racing) and even though the race was well run and fun, it seemed that the biggest concern was the money amount of the pro-am contenders purse. It is mountain bike racing, isn't it?, not City Bike racing, least to say my son and I were disappointed. I do want you to know I am a NORBA member and I'd give my soul to live and work and RIDE in a place like Crested Butte, but I am a factory worker and the last time I saw your beautiful town, there were no factories. (Okay, enough of the sob story.) Just please always keep the adventure in your magazine, let's not get too serious! Billy J. Ono, Jr., Colorado

You got it, some less expensive bikes. But there's a reason why we emphasize the hotter bikes. They are the cutting edge of the sport. If you test the top-of-the-line bikes, then you'll know what kind of performance is available and can then look for a bike in your price range that comes closest to that performance. I heartily agree with your views on racing. Read my piece on racing in the Nov/Dec issue for more on that.

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Packs shown:
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Rads

RADS is a small company out of Laguna Beach, California. A group of off-road cycling enthusiasts had gotten together to form a club. Out of frustration with existing clothing on the market, they started experimenting with making their own. Their designs were met with approval from everyone who tried them out and a clothing company was formed.

The clothes are made out of a four-way stretch Lycra that has what they claim is a unique treatment to resist looting. That's what happens to Lycra whenever it is snugged. RADS claims that their clothing is virtually resistant to looting.

All their shorts and tights have crotch pad made out of super suede. It's supposed to drip dry over night and stay soft and comfortable through countless washings. We haven't used the garments long enough to verify these claims but have noticed that the pad does remain supple and dries quickly.

What probably makes RADS stand out are their designs. They're bold. Bright colors are mixed in definitely non-standard patterns. They're the sort of clothes that people either like or they don't. If your wardrobe tends to the conservative, you'll probably not be too enthusiastic about RADS. But then their designs simply reflect their own enthusiasm for mountain biking.

We've now worn them in a variety of conditions and everyone has liked them. They're comfortable and made everyone feel fast, even standing still. The tights were especially nice. Good cycling tights made out of durable Lycra with a crotch pad are hard to find. These felt good and kept the legs warm on cool mornings. (RADS, 812 S. Coast Hwy, Laguna Beach, CA 92661)

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Eclipse
Eclipse has come out with a special version of its Superpack for Mountain Bikes. The new Max 4061 T-6 road bike are an extruded top platform into a single high strength unit. The lower sleeves are covered with stainless steel attachments that add 35% more strength to the critical area.

Wheeloc
Designers at Jamis Bicycles have developed a device called Wheeloc to protect bikes against wheel theft. It's constructed of steel and a patented slip ring heat treated design they use to virtually prevent forced wheel removal on most cruiser style bicycles, BMX, and mountain bikes with 3/8 x 26 TPI axles. They're packaged in sets of four and come with a personalized key for easy installation and removal. Jamis Bicycles, 3000 Commercewealth boulevard, Tallahassee, FL 32303

BSL Machinery
BSL Machinery now offers six ounces of "tough" polystyrene plastic that they claim will protect the chain and chainwheel of most mountain bikes. It's fastened with stainless steel screws. BSL Machinery, 148 Los Molinos, San Clemente, CA 92672

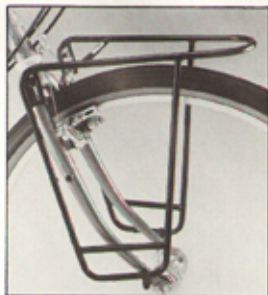
Overland Equipment
Overland Equipment is producing a cover for roller-cam brakes. It's made out of Cordura or Polycloth nylon in a variety of colors. Custom silkscreening is also available. The Cover, according to the manufacturer, is a simple and effective solution to mud build-up on brake adjustment. Overland Equipment, PO Box 3255, Chico, CA, 95927



Bruce Gordon Cycles
Bruce Gordon has added to his line of racks with a Mountain Bike Rack. It's hand brazed out of 4130 chromoly tubing with internally reinforced joints. A four-point mounting system was designed for extra strength and rigidity, according to Bruce Gordon. It also has a "unique" wedge shape to provide cantilever clearance for positioning packs four inches closer to the steering axis for what they claim is improved stability and control. It's also fully adjustable and can be used with or without braze-ons. Bruce Gordon Cycles, 1070 West 2nd St, Eugene, Or, 97402

Vigorelli - Women's Wear
Vigorelli is now offering multi-sport apparel designed especially for women. According to Vigorelli, they've combined attractive designs with their high performance standards in this new line. Featured are outfits in guava (watermelon pink), white, sky blue and fishnet. The garments include shorts, jerseys, tank tops and tri suits. Vigorelli, 220 Adeline Street, Suite 250, Oakland, CA, 94607

Salsa Cycles - Off-Road Components
Salsa Cycles is now manufacturing a number of off road components to complement their hand built framesets. They are now making several models of chromoly "moto stems", heat-treated aluminum handlebars, nylon portage straps and also a line of silkscreened clothing. Salsa Cycles A La Carte, 30 Howard Street, Petaluma, CA, 94952



Gary Fisher

continued from page 28

"It's not an adversarial relationship. Our big competition is not each other but all the other things people can do with their expendable cash."

Directing a healthy mountain bicycling business has more than just financial satisfactions. As Kelly said, "I've seen plenty of people that have changed their lives dramatically because of mountain bikes. You can get almost evangelical about it."

Fisher agrees: "Mountain bikes got to be a real movement for me. Americans have forgotten how to ride bikes; fat tire bicycles are the perfect vehicle to bring people back

to a healthier, saner lifestyle." (To entice more newcomers into the fold, Fisher MountainBikes produces four models of bicycles, ranging from "user friendly" ones to precision race models.)

The healthy gains in the mountain bike industry please Fisher on both financial and philosophical levels.

"Mountain bicycling has definitely changed some people's lives. It's totally wild and outrageous but in reality totally practical. It clicks on too many levels to be denied," he said.

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