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# mountain bike

January - February

Cover photo: Frank Staub  
Cycling in Canyonlands, Utah  
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JIM NORMANDIN



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JACK SAUER



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# Editor's Note

by Hank Barlow

any particularly outstanding cornering techniques. The differences between the fast and the slow were dramatically exposed on this turn.

A long, circuitous loop was then followed. The road crossed the small valley it had previously dropped into, angled up a hill and out into a meadow where water bottles were passed to racers, then up a long, gentle hill (the degree of gentleness depends upon how hard a racer is being pressed by another racer and how far into the race they are). The course turned left under the branches of oaks and dove down a very steep hill and back into the valley to a hairpin left immediately followed by a sharp right and the second most popular spectator point.

A stream (dry at the time of the race) has carved a deep cut between large oaks. The racers had to negotiate this miniature, I don't know if anyone successfully rode through or not. I doubt it. Not during the race. It was a fun place to spectate due to the variety of techniques used to get across with minimal loss of momentum. Gavin Chilcott, racing for Specialized, was probably the smoothest and fastest rider. His cyclo-cross experience gained him a clear advantage as he raced in, dismounted on the run, and lifted his bike onto his shoulder in seemingly one effortless move. His remount was equally adept.

The Wall was beyond the streambed crossing after a short straight and a dip past more oaks. The Wall was the course's humbler, the section that separated the superbly conditioned from the haphazardly conditioned. The Wall was tame for spectators. Nothing much in the way of excitement happened here except for Gavin Chilcott's amazing ability to pedal up the hill lap after lap while everyone else either ran, walked, or hung onto their bike for support while struggling up the hill. But it was here that the race was won and lost.

I was standing at the bottom of The Wall near the end of the eighth lap when Roy Rivers and Joe Murray (racing for Wilderness Trail Bikes and Fisher respectively) started up. Roy was first and had been since about the second lap. Joe had been as far back as fifth or sixth but slowly, inexorably had moved up until he was right on Roy's wheel at the base of the hill. He rode past Roy and immediately pulled out a lead. By the time he dismounted, he'd opened up about twenty feet between them. That was in a span of about seventy-five feet.

Then Joe was in his low crouch over the bike and striding/running up the hill.

Roy was giving it his all but by the top of the hill, the race appeared to be over. Then someone mentioned that Roy was a superb downhiller and would no doubt close the gap and possibly regain the lead by the time they were back at The Wall.

While they raced around the course, I took a short-cut up the hill to a point where I could look back at The Wall in profile. The Wall ended at a ranch road carved into the hillside. The road traversed the hill to the top of the easy, final downhill. From where I stood, I could see the top half of the final downhill and almost all of The Wall.

Racer after racer flew by. I waited, watching The Wall to see Joe and Roy appear. Gary Fisher was sitting nearby, nervously chewing on his bike's tires while waiting to see what happened to Joe's race with Roy. Someone spotted Joe striding up the hill in his distinctive style, head bent low over the bike's top tube, one hand in front steering, the other on the saddle pushing.

We all looked to see where Roy was, expecting to see him on Joe's heels. Another racer appeared out of the trees, wasn't Roy. Then another came out. Still not Roy. He didn't appear until well after Joe had topped out and was sprinting along the road. The race was won. There was another lap to go but unless Joe crashed or flatted or something, the race for first was over.

I stayed where I was to watch the final lap. It was the best spot on the course. I looked over later and once again saw Joe striding up the hill, even breaking into a run near the top. And I mean running.

This was the last lap, the race was his yet there he was running. He hit the road at the top and jumped on his bike. I kept watching him, entranced with his amazing performance. A small dip interrupted the flat road and when Joe came out of it, he was standing up, hammering the pedals! This was at the end of ten rugged laps of hard racing. He was so far out in front at that point that even if he had flatted, he could have carried his bike to the finish and won. But there he was, still powering. It was as if he was getting stronger, not weaker as was the case with everyone else.

Well, not everyone. Ned Overend (racing for Schwinn) was still going as if he was sprinting for the finish. He'd flatted right after the first lap. But there he was, having replaced his tube, passing racer after racer, forcing the pace, working closer and closer to the front, finally finishing in fifth place. Ned's performance was superb. There's no way anyone can

win the Nationals after flating unless everyone else does also but nevertheless, there was Ned, never giving up, hammering lap after lap. His performance as much as anyone's represented what the Nationals are all about.

But that's the kind of racing it was. Roy Rivers raced the race of his life. When he crossed the finish line, he crashed hard. He'd totally spent himself. For almost eight laps, he held off every challenger. Joe was the only one who could best him. Gavin Chilcott put on a steady, strong performance to garner third. What made Gavin's race so impressive was the fact that he'd spent the summer: road racing, not mountain biking. Casey Kunselman (read his story for another point of view on the Nationals) was another who put on a great race to finish fourth. Ned was fifth while a fading George Theobald (Fisher) gamely held off a fast closing John Loomis (Ross) at the end to finish sixth. Todd DeAngeles (Wilderness Trail Bikes) and Kyle Sharp (Schwinn) were two more whose steady racing garnered top finishes, eighth and ninth place respectively, while Joey Peterson, he of the first lap prime glory, hung on for tenth.

But that was only part of the show. The field was full of others who put on just as impressive a display of guts and determination. Jacque Phelan (Wilderness

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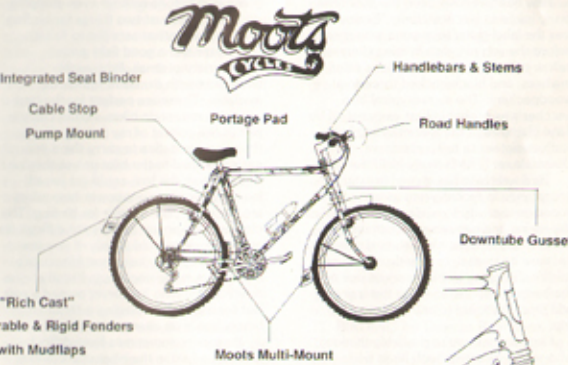
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# Bird Watching for Mountain Bikes



FRANK STAUB

## by Frank Staub

Fear hobbies have been the butt of as many jokes as bird watching. "Eccentric" was the label given to anyone who rose before the sun to catch fleeting glimpses of yellow-bellied sapsuckers, rufous-sided towhees, and black-backed three-toed woodpeckers. The stereotypical bird watcher was probably best exemplified by Jane Hathaway - the well-meaning but stuffy assistant to bank president Dredgale on "The Beverly Hillbillies."

Bird watching has gained greater acceptance in recent years as an accessory activity to wilderness recreation like hiking and canoeing. Mountain biking is especially compatible with bird watching because it's so easy to silently come upon wildlife. Stopping to observe just one of the birds encountered along the trail can add more meaning to any backcountry trip.

I know what you're probably thinking: who wants to bother with birds while descending a steep jeep road or a technical single-track? Too many of us don't stop to enjoy the scenery as much as we should anyway. Watching birds is just one more good reason not to rush through the woods. Besides, it provides a good excuse to rest during uphill.

One of the best places to combine birdwatching and fat tire cycling is at a waterfall refuge. Bicycling along the gravel roads atop the earthen dikes is so easy that its possible to look for ducks,

geese and herons without even stopping.

You'll need just two things for birding (that's what enthusiasts like to call it): binoculars and a good field guide.

A variety of small, lightweight binoculars with excellent optics are available. These are perfect for the bird watching mountain biker. I often carry a pair in the pocket of my touring shorts. (It's not a good idea to carry them in a pack attached to the bike unless they're well padded; the lens could get jarred loose.) Seven or eight-power binoculars are the most popular size for birding. The nine and ten-power models are difficult for many people to hold steady. If you are very keen-eyed or just poor, binoculars may not even be necessary. I read of one ornithologist who has never owned a pair. But for most of us, birding without binoculars is an exercise in futility.

Beginners sometimes have difficulty isolating a bird in the binocular's field of view. Sighting your quarry along the top of the binoculars first as if you were aiming a rifle may help. Another trick is to pick out a large reference point like a fork in a tree trunk or a patch of colored leaves and note the position of the bird in relation to it. After locating the reference point with your binoculars, simply shift your line of sight to the position of the bird.

A good field guide is essential for making accurate identifications. The traditional favorites are Roger Tory

Peterson's **FIELD GUIDE TO THE BIRDS** and **FIELD GUIDE TO THE WESTERN BIRDS**. However, I prefer **BIRDS OF NORTH AMERICA** by Robbins, Bruun, Zim, and Singer. In this book, all the birds of the US and Canada are described in just one volume. Also, the text and illustrations are conveniently placed on facing pages so you don't have to leaf back and forth through the book when trying to pin down a particular species as with the Peterson guides. The Peterson books do provide a bit more information on each species but for economy and convenience, Roberts et. al. is the way to go.

If you prefer high quality color photographs to painted illustrations, check out the **AUDUBON SOCIETY FIELD GUIDE TO THE BIRDS**. But as with the Peterson Guides, this publication comes in separate volumes for east and west and the text and pictures are in different parts of the book.

Before setting out on your first birding/mountain biking excursion, there are several things you should know regarding when and how to see birds.

-Spring is generally the season for the greatest variety of birds. Its also when the males are in their colorful breeding plumage.

-Keep your binoculars readily accessible.

Identifying a bird in the field involves more than simply noting its color. In this country alone, the bird watcher has to deal with approximately 700 different species (this number varies by fifty in either direction due to occasional visitors and migrants passing through). You may have to summon all your powers of deductive reasoning to decide which of the thirty-six kinds of sparrows or fifty species of warblers has just crossed your path. The fact that most species are limited to a certain geographical range narrows the choice down considerably. The following list should give you an idea of what characteristics to look for when identifying an unfamiliar bird.

**Bill Shape** - The shape of a bird's mouth parts reflect its diet: hooked for tearing flesh as in the hawks, long and pointed for nabbing fish as in the herons, thin and tubular for slurping nectar as in the hummingbirds.

Most birds encountered during a mountain biking trip through a wooded or semi-wooded area belong to the order Passeriformes or perching birds. Distinguishing between the twenty-five families which comprise this group in the U.S. can be confusing at first. But by paying attention to bill size and shape, you can simplify the task and learn something about the feeding habits of each family. Sparrows, grosbeaks, and buntings have stout, conical beaks for cracking seeds open. Warblers, vireos, and pitts use their slender tweezer-like bills to pick up crawling insects. The flat, broad bills of the flycatchers, kingbirds, and phoebes are designed for catching insects on the wing. The list goes on but this should give you the idea.

**Distinguished Markings** - When you spot an unfamiliar bird, ask yourself the following questions: Is the breast streaked, spotted, or plain? Is there a stripe through the eye? What color are the bill and legs? What color is the back, neck, breast, tail and wings and are there any noteworthy markings on these areas? When the bird flies, can you notice any characteristics not visible when the bird was perched?

**Shape** - Seeing a bird's color or markings may not be possible if the bird is between you and the sun. In cases like this, first determine its relative size (sparrow-size,

## What to Look For



FRANK STAUB

robin size, crow-size). Then note general body shape, posture, tail length, leg length, wing shape, and, of course, bill type. Most field guides provide silhouettes in addition to the full color illustrations.

**Sound** - Even if you can't take your eyes off the road and don't want to stop, you can still hear birds singing. Try to learn a bird's song or call each time you see a new species. Experienced birders frequently make positive identifications simply by hearing the song. Recordings of bird songs and calls are commercially available but in learning from these, remember there are differences between individuals and geographic races of the same species. Some birds can also be identified or at least located by their non-vocal sounds such as the woodpecker's tapping on a tree trunk or the towhee's scratching on the forest floor. Sometimes its possible to attract birds by imitating a call or song, drawing air in and out of the mouth to make a whistling sound, or making kissing sounds on the back of the hand.

**Habitat** - Two species which closely resemble each other will often occupy quite different environments. For example, the white-throated sparrow frequents thick brush and forests while its look alike cousin, the white-crowned sparrow, is generally limited to open areas. The rapid and erratic flight of swallows makes it difficult to pick out distinguishing markings so your best clues are often environmental. Tree swallows are found in wooded areas near water; barn swallows are seen near buildings and barns; and rough-winged and bank swallows both nest in river banks and steep slopes.

**Behavior** - A bird's actions often speak louder than its song, color, or shape. In the dim light of a dense forest, you may not be able to see the black cap and white face of the white-breasted nuthatch that distinguish it from the almost identically shaped brown creeper. The confusion is compounded by the tendency of both to walk on the trunk rather than the limbs of trees. But if you see the bird moving down or sideways in addition to up the trunk, you're watching a nuthatch. A creeper on a tree trunk moves only up, supported by its stiff tail feathers. Just remember "creepers creep up."

**Flight** - One of the big surprises in store for the person just starting to learn about birds is the incredible variation in flight styles. These differences can be an asset in species identification. For example, one of the easiest ways to tell one kind of western hummingbird from another is by the species-specific courtship flight pattern of the males. In the southeastern states, both the black vulture and turkey vulture soar at high altitudes. They can be distinguished at a glance by the more labored flight of the black vulture which beats its wings more often than the graceful turkey vulture.

The degree to which each of the preceding criteria is called into play will depend on the bird. For some species, shape will be enough. Many novice bird watchers rely too heavily on physical characteristics and don't give adequate consideration to song, habitat, and behavior. Not only can these clues simplify birding but they can turn it into a stimulating learning experience.

A book you may find valuable in gaining a feel for the ecological aspects of bird watching is **THE HABITAT GUIDE TO BIRDING** by Thomas P. McElroy, Jr. This volume also has an excellent listing of other bird books and bird song records. Another useful book is **ROGER TORY PETERSON'S DOZEN BIRDING HOTSPOTS** by George H. Harrison. **HOTSPOTS** describes twelve of the best bird watching locations in North America.

You might consider joining a club if you're interested in learning first-hand from experienced bird watchers. Phone or write the National Audubon Society, 950 Third Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10022 to find out the name of the club nearest you.



You never know when an interesting species may appear.

If you take your field guide on a bike trip, keep it accessible too. Small handbar bags are perfect places to stash it.

If you don't want to carry the extra weight of a field guide (I rarely do myself), study it at home in your spare time. You'll be more likely to recognize an unfamiliar species in the backcountry or at least be able to place it in the proper family, thus making it easier to find it in the book after your trip.

When you spot a bird you've never seen before, pick out as many characteristics as possible, as quickly as possible. You may not get a second look though some birds will return to the same place a number of times within a single hour. The patience and skill of a hunter are prime ingredients for successful birding.

Study the accompanying discussion titled "What to Look for in a Bird" to increase your bird watching efficiency.

Species identification is only part of the bird watching story. The greatest excitement comes when you can observe or even become a part of some dramatic demonstration of avian behavior. Several times I've been scolded and dive bombed by an angry bird for passing through its territory.

Once, while watching a flock of coots (small duck-like birds related to whooping

cranes) float along a Florida stream, I was startled by an explosion of thrashing wings, splashing water, and gaping jaws. An alligator had dragged one of the birds away for supper.

Several years ago, two friends of mine were relaxing in a pristine alpine meadow in the Canadian Rockies. Their reverie was suddenly broken by the sound of what they both thought was the wind noise of a crashing airplane. Expecting to see the worst, they turned toward the direction of the sound just as a warbler dove into its hole, inches away from a golden eagle's talons and not more than ten yards from where they sat.

You never know when you'll notice arresting bird behavior such as a shrike tearing off bits of meat from a mouse which it has impaled on a thorn, or a flying osprey holding a fish with the head facing forward to cut down on wind drag.

Perhaps the nicest thing about birding is that you don't have to travel very far to enjoy your hobby. There's hardly a tree or vacant lot that has been so tainted by human indiscretion that it isn't visited by some kind of bird. Even the lowly rock dove (more commonly known as the pigeon) has its own repertoire of interesting behavior.

Don't be discouraged if at first you can't distinguish one species of flycatcher from another or if that sparrow won't hold still long enough to let you see if it has a spot in the middle of its breast. Bird watching isn't the deadly serious business that many people would have it. Nor is it the dull and ludicrous hobby characterized by comedians. It's just fun.

## Just So You'll Know

by Andy Porter

I've never considered myself a hardcore cyclist. For one thing, nothing I own is made of polypropylene and for another, I've never mastered the pronunciation of "Campagnolo" despite intensive coaching by an Italian girlfriend. Yet now and again I've found folks regarding me as a two-wheeled fireball, or at least somebody who does a lot of riding. Maybe it's because I recently sold my grandmother to the Red Chinese to raise funds for a mountain bike.

(Grandma wrote recently and said she's enjoying her stay at the sandal factory and if she ever gets back to the U.S., I'm a dead man.)

But lately a couple of items have surfaced that have left me wondering if one day I might find myself wrestling with image problems other than explaining what has happened to various relatives.

The first one of note was a fashion trend this summer in New York City. Joggers, hip muggers, fashion messiahs and other folks were going whole hog into cycling clothes. The hottest items were skin-tight, star-spangled union suits that left bystanders see far more of a person's anatomy than is wise. Ragged, Levi cut-offs retreated to the south Bronx where people in over-tight union suits don't last long.

The second item was a movie, "American Flyers", which had a bunch of beautiful people riding bicycles hell-for-

leather across the Rockies. The idea was to win a big race or stop Godzilla from stomping all over Tokyo and Raymond Burr again. (I admit, I may have the plot a bit confused because the film hasn't made it to this neck of the woods yet and all I caught were some previews sandwiched between "Penguin Lust" and "Conan the Barbarian's Bachelor Party", two stirring epics which don't need going into here.)

What concerns me is that, between Hollywood and the fashion moguls of New York, John Q. Public may be getting a slightly skewed notion of how real bicyclists, especially mountain bikers, act, dress, speak, etc.

For instance, after watching the aforementioned movie, many might actually think bike racers can zip across Colorado in about 35 minutes flat. Actually, nothing could be further from the truth. I was assured by members of the local racing club it takes at least two or three hours to get across Colorado and maybe even longer if it snows.

So, to counter some of the misconceptions that may spring up in the future, I have scraped together tentative answers to some of the commonly-asked questions about mountain bikes and mountain bikers. I offer them for use the next time you find yourself trapped by trendy people at a party and fielding questions like, "How come you guys wear such tight pants?" and "What is an 'endo'?"

### HOW DO MOUNTAIN BIKERS ACT?

They are brave, reverent, clean, loyal, thrifty, oops...that's for the Boy Scouts. The answer is nobody really knows. As far as can be determined, bikers act just like anyone else except when they hit a big rock or a tree. Then they stagger around clutching themselves in interesting places and saying really colorful things.

### WHAT DO THEY WEAR?

Usually they favor clothes that let them feel good while dying from exhaustion. They avoid things that make their voice rise or interfere with breathing by causing unconsciousness.

This tends to rule out such items as tuxedos, formal evening gowns, studded leather jockstraps, and Batman costumes. People who do wear things like that while riding court disaster, especially in regards to the jockstrap.

A final note on skin-tight cycling clothes. Extreme care should be taken to check local ordinances regarding overt flaunting of one's anatomy in public. This is especially important if you, like I, have the sort of anatomy that does not lend itself to flaunting, and, in fact, actively resists it.



JOHN LAPTAD

For those of you wondering, here's a real mountain biker doing what's real mountain biker's love.

### HOW DO REAL MOUNTAIN BIKERS TALK?

Generally with their mouths, although a few use sign language and at least one bunch from Maine have perfected the art of communicating by moose call.

(They admit that, although the technique allows them to chat over distances of several miles, it leaves something to be desired when employed in restaurants, bathrooms, and church recitals.)

But there are various expressions common among mountain bikers that may leave a newcomer to the sport wondering what in the hell everyone is talking about. A few of the most-used ones and their definitions are:

**ATB**-An acronym meaning "all-terrain bike" or "all those Belgians" if the user is in Europe.

**CLINCHERS**-term for steep, hairy trails that cause a mountain biker's teeth to clench.

**CRANK SET**-A group of people who are always complaining about something.

**EATING IT**-The direct result of an "endo." Eating it can be done by both on and off-road bicyclists.

**ENDO**-When the bike makes an abrupt stop and the rider doesn't. The result is often upsetting in more ways than one. (See "road rash.")

**FLATTENED OUT**-A mysterious event in which a rider vanishes from a bike's tires when the rider is about 20 miles away from a patch, pump, or civilization.

**HEAD SET**-A group of trendy drug abusers.

**KNOBBIES**-A veteran bicyclist's knees.

**MUDDER**-A soggy trail, as in "That course is a real mudder!"; a line from Hamlet: "Mudder, mudder most foul!"; or an insult: "Your mudder wears army shoes!"

**RALLY**-English term, as in "Oh rally, old chap, you don't say?"

**ROAD RASH**-Another result of an "endo," defined as where the rider met the road and lost.

**WHEELIE**-Rearing up on the hind wheel. Either done to impress bystanders or as the prelude to an "endo" in which case it will also impress bystanders, but not the same way.

### WHICH IS BETTER, ROAD BIKES OR MOUNTAIN BIKES?

This is a tough one. Generally, it boils down to personal preference and the availability of a grandmother or two to sell off for the needed funds, which can sometimes be pretty steep.

Generally, road bikers like going fairly fast while worrying about terminal collisions with moths, thumbtacks and small dogs. Off road riders, on the other hand, don't worry about these things but do have to watch out for little items like falling off 500-foot cliffs and wandering onto Air Force gunnery ranges.

In general, if you want to avoid hassles from impossible traffic, smog, junk in the roadway, mariac drivers, and marauding bulldozers, stay clear of east Los Angeles, the mousetrap in Denver, Colorado, and New York City in general. Otherwise, you should be fine, no matter what you ride.

### HOW CAN I LOOK LIKE A BICYCLIST WITHOUT REALLY TRYING?

This is probably the most important questions of all. The only way to really look like a professional, veteran cyclist is to ride for countless miles under all weathers, hundreds of miles a week with no let-up. With this and the letters "PRO VETERAN BICYCLIST" written in blaze-orange across your T-shirts, you should stand out in any crowd.

The alternative is to learn to say "Campagnolo," with an authentic Italian accent and wear polypropylene every chance you get. With those two items and a good line of chatter, you can go far.

FRANK STAUB





# Desert Mysteries

by Kathy Northcut

A gentle, persistent breeze pushed at me. I closed my eyes and imagined the wind was all that kept me from falling off my viewpoint thousands of feet above the valleys and canyons over which I reigned. A tailwind would have had the opposite effect, a disconcerting sense of being pushed toward a free-fall of considerable duration.

Tossing my ponytail, I glanced behind me to make sure my friend had no intentions of pulling the ol' shove n' hold trick. He was a few meters away, looking down the sheer sandstone cliff face, visualizing a climbing route. I straddled my brand new mountain bike's frame and contentedly thought of myself as fully indoctrinated into the world of desert cycling. Or perhaps I should say hiked.

This wasn't the first time I'd ridden a bike with a tire track wider than a man's thumb but the blessing those fat tires provides became obvious when we rode a footpath near the Dead Horse Point Lookout. It felt good to concentrate on something physical, far removed from the world of reading, writing, and "rhythmic" in which I, as a college student, live the greater part of my life. We descended into a gulley where the trail wound around boulders, hopped across rock hurdles, and plunged into scratchy thickets. I alternately bounced on and off my bike, unable to decide whether to ride or carry it. My bare legs were continually scratched and stung by nettles and weathered, dry bushes we passed through.

I followed Scott's tire tracks, knowing that wherever this excursion led, it would be magnificent in my eyes once I got there. "No pain, no gain," I repeated to myself at intervals. The way became easier and I rode some distance before dismounting where Scott had stopped to rest.

He was staring at the rocks, flora, and distant scenery. I could see in his eyes what he was thinking: "God, was this was a good idea!" The stratified cliffs in the distance looked as tantalizing as a slice of tortoni, and easily as colorful with their green and red shales interbedded with tan and orange sandstones. My mouth watered. I hungered for adventure, but opted for rest.

Scott got off his bike and attacked a boulder problem while I diligently worked on my tan. "Life's a beach," I thought, and smiled at the cliché. Judging by the grunts

I could hear, Scott had about conquered the boulder. I craned my neck to see and spotted his elbow protruding over the rock's summit.

"Wow!" The summit had been attained. "Whoa! What the...!"

I heard my normally unshakable friend's voice sound a distinct note of surprise. I got up to go see what was happening.

I caught excerpts from a casual but slightly strained conversation between Scott and the object of his surprise as I took a longer, easier way up the boulder. Who could have appeared so suddenly out of nowhere had me baffled. We'd seen no tracks in the sand along the trail or any other sign of people since leaving the parking lot. We were on the edge of a vast desert wilderness that was basically uninhabitable. By the time I reached the top, Scott and the stranger were bantering like old friends. I poked my head over the top and caught a glimpse of the stranger and immediately understood Scott's unchecked exclamation. I bit my lip to keep from squawking.

The man stood about 5'9" tall. That was the only normal thing about him. His weathered, ruddy face sported a black leather eye patch tied around his bald head with a length of braided cord. He wore a vest of tarnished chainmail and on his shoulder lounged a parrot. I still get shivers remembering that sight.

He wore knickers, or breeches maybe, of leather with high topped, suede, moccasin-like boots. Around his thick waist was a belt of what looked like cotton jute with assorted pouches suspended from it. The clothing was obviously worn and hand-made and somehow old, even ancient. He also had only one arm. He was the strangest looking person I'd ever seen.

In hindsight, I suspect I looked more outlandish to him than he did to me. Although Scott was relatively normal looking with cut-off shorts and polo shirt, I was the state-of-the-art fashionable biker from skin-tight lycra shorts to Nike Velos. I also wore a helmet, gloves, sunglasses, and a colorful Salsa jersey.

Scott and the stranger continued their conversation while I stared out over the vast array of canyons and mountains stretching across Utah, all the while surreptitiously stealing peeks at the

stranger and trying to figure out who this guy was. Even his accent was unlike anything I'd ever heard, quite formal yet old sounding, even archaic.

Scott was nonchalantly relating the tale of a recent journey through the Maze. The man seemed preoccupied with the scenery and grunted occasionally in response. The parrot softened the man's gruff image by continually interjecting. "Omigod! What the Heck?" I looked around for something constructive to do and by the time I'd found nothing, the dialogue was winding down.

There was something about him that made it clear this land was his even though I knew we were on government land. I wanted to say something to him, something to indicate my sorrow for having interrupted his peacefulness, but instead, I walked away hoping he didn't feel too terribly disturbed. We left him sitting by the rock, his parrot grooming its feathers. I looked back one last time before we turned a corner on the way back to the car. He was gone. I was sure I was looking at the right spot but it was hard to tell among the jumble of boulders. A shiver ran down my back as if a cool breeze had come up.

He was an anachronism. Or was I? I left with the impression he deserved to hold absolute claim to the whole desert if he desired. He made me feel like a twentieth-century bumbler tramping a landscape I could never understand. I wanted to get the heck out of there.

Scott's composure was admirable. He acted like he'd just run into an old high school buddy in the locker room or something. I, meanwhile, was unable to decide whether the sight of the man had enraptured me more or less than the time I woke up one night while camping to discover a rattlesnake crawling up my armpit. To this day, I'm undecided on that.

During the ride back, all that Scott and I said about the incident was when Scott told me the man had discussed how pathetic were those travelers who drive across the continent to see the Canyonlands and never get out of their cars. I pondered that but somehow couldn't even envision that character in a car. Maybe on horseback, but never in a car. Scott seemed to accept him as simply one more desert rat though perhaps one who was a bit stranger than most. Try as I might, I just couldn't see that. He was too unreal, too transient.

We got back to my truck and decided to drive to another location to ride in a less popular area. After a lunch of peanut butter and beer, we drove to Moab for a Park Service map I insisted on having then headed out of town. We finally turned off the highway onto a dirt road which may or may not have been the one we'd had in mind.

The road wasn't heavily travelled and since the area wasn't part of the extensive Park system, no road signs indicated our

location or obvious hazards. Dry washes dissected the road, some even formed the surface upon which we drove. In one spot, the drivable surface of sand was barely broad enough to hold all four tires of my Nissan. Deep trenches showed the recently preferred path of flowing water.

"Perfect flash flood channel," I thought, dismally looking up at the ominous, cloud-studded horizon while entertaining visions of my 1986 truck axle deep in slime.

After about an hour of driving into the desert, we stopped to camp. It was still early enough in the day for a short bike ride. We had no problem deciding which way to go; both of us wanted to see where the road led.

We rode across the next dry wash and the next, bouncing over ruts, trying to stay out of trenches, snaking around obstacles. The general trend of the road was downhill and we suspected it would lead into labyrinth canyon country. But after a few miles, the terrain levelled out in a plateau-like penplain. I stopped and took a long drink of water. Clouds still hung over the horizon without noticeably cooling the air.

Scott rode ahead. I resolved to ride slowly and alone to do some thinking I'd been putting off. I flipped the pedal and slipped my toe into the clip then shifted into an unnecessarily low gear. It felt good just to spin.

I rode along ignoring the scenery and sinking deeper into melancholy. I felt lost or reasons I didn't understand, as if time was flying past me, as if I was out of sync. I felt as if I was being swept along in a wave over which I had no control or even understanding.

A glance at the heavens didn't help. There would be no stars that night to wish on. I was lost somewhere inside my head, oblivious to the world, when suddenly, out of nowhere, there was a loud swooshing directly over my head. I was so startled, I almost fell off my bike before realizing it was a hang glider and not some prehistoric bird. After the earlier encounter with the pirate-like stranger, I think I would have been less surprised if it had been some weird bird rather than the hang glider.

I wanted to see whether the glider would land and wondered if a support vehicle would soon appear. I hoped Scott and I wouldn't have to leave his sanctuary we'd found. I could hear his variometer buzzing and knew the craft was gaining altitude. Then he banked into a left turn and began a descent - in a beeline straight towards me. I could see he had control over the craft and that there was no danger of his missing the landing so I sat tight where I was. He had to have seen me. No pilot would intentionally run over a biker...I hoped.

But the next microsecond told me that I'd better do something, and fast. I dove off my bike to the ground, landing on my left side, just in time for the pilot to lift his feet to barely avoid kicking me at forty miles an hour. The rush of air blew my hair across my face and I lay where I had

landed for a moment and began to laugh. The day was rapidly becoming totally unreal. First that character out of some Treasure Island remake pops up out of nowhere, and now I'm almost annihilated by a hang glider even further in the middle of nowhere.

The pilot finally landed his craft then struggled with his machine in my general direction. He set the glider down, tore off his helmet, and began to babble at me as I, once again on two feet, watched.

"You, I mean, Damn! That was close! You okay?" He was breathing hard, wiping his forehead.

"Yeah," I said, as calmly as possible. I was sweating bullets and shook all over. I stared into the pilot's crystal blue eyes and couldn't speak. My insides felt like melting wax. He was blonde, tanned, and tall. I finally opened my mouth only to say something dumb.

"This isn't like something that doesn't happen to me everyday," I lied. My mouth twitches when I lie, and I was sure he knew. I looked around and spotted a large rip in one wingtip. I asked him what got his kite.

The pilot looked at the wing as if he were seeing for the first time the wound in his vehicle.

"Coyote Gulch," he began. He still seemed disconcerted and spoke in rapid fire phrases.

"Flying low...the army does some kind of testing there...I didn't even see what it was that hit me...Just this high pitched whistling noise...then things started getting crazy...glider wanted to dive...Saw the road and came here to land..." He stopped, out of breath.

We stood there and looked at each other like two creatures from different planets meeting for the first time. I had to break the silence before his eyes bored holes straight through me.

"Have you got a radio," I asked. Always the pragmatist, that's me.

"No, no radio," he sighed. "But I just live in Moab, and this buddy of mine in a sailplane was supposed to be right behind me."

After some small talk about my mud-splattered bike, we headed back to the campsite. Drew, the pilot, looked hungry and tired and cold. My maternal instincts overrode any caution I might otherwise have taken. Besides, it looked like rain any second. When Scott came back, he would see the glider and be able to figure out what happened. Drew said his sailplaning buddy would do the same. We couldn't do anything constructive there so we headed for camp.

Drew and I found we had a lot to talk about. I'm usually quiet around people I don't know so our light, eager conversation was both a relief and a surprise. Soon I was pedalling while he sat on the seat of my bike. Progress to the camp markedly improved.

Home again, I boiled water and made tea and soup. Scott arrived forty-five

minutes later. As usual, his imperturbability was unaffected when I told him I almost got run over by the hang glider. His main concern was the tardiness of Drew's sailplaning friend until he learned they lived nearby.

The sun began to set in a silent, reddish, purple frenzy. We built a small fire in a sand wash near the tents. Drew was a natural story teller. Over tea and hot chocolate with Schnapps, he entertained us with tales he'd heard from old timers he knew in the area mostly desert rats from the sound of them. He'd even once met Edward Abbey, but recommended reading his books over seeing him in person. Scott, I knew, would never tire of hearing the folklore and I settled myself down for a long night around the fire. While Drew spoke, I toiled my bike chain, brushed my hair, and half-listened.

Later, after the western horizon was black and the fire only glowing embers, Drew started another story that instantly captured the rapt attention of Scott and myself. The subject was a queer old character by the name of Henry Butch. He wore the attire of a Spanish Conquistador, had a funny talking parrot and only one arm!

The story began with a telling of the old man's ability to survive all the challenges of the desert through his knowledge of herbal potions and cures. His clothing, food, and even the parrot were gifts from Indians whose members he'd saved from various diseases introduced to the New World by Spanish explorers. But, the story continued, Butch had been killed by those same Indians upon failing to cure a chief stricken by some new fever. In 1800! He went on to say that the legend stated that sometimes travelers and Indians in remote reaches of the canyon wilderness came upon ghostly images of Butch contemplating the land he knew and loved so well.

Scott and I exchanged glances. My blood pressure rose and my pulse raced. 1800! Maybe I didn't before but right then, I became a believer in ghosts. There was no doubt in my mind that that was who'd we'd seen.

"Did he tell you his name?" I asked. Scott in a low voice.

"No, I didn't ask," was his simple reply.

"Well, what do you think?" I was feeling frustrated at Scott's composure.

"We saw him!" I proclaimed to Drew. "How many people do you think know this story? I mean, it could be a hoax. Some crazy, one-armed ex-con trying to get his jollies. What do you think?" Scott asked Drew with a frown.

"Too weird! I heard this one from an old, old Navajo squaw who died years ago. And I've never heard it since. I've only told



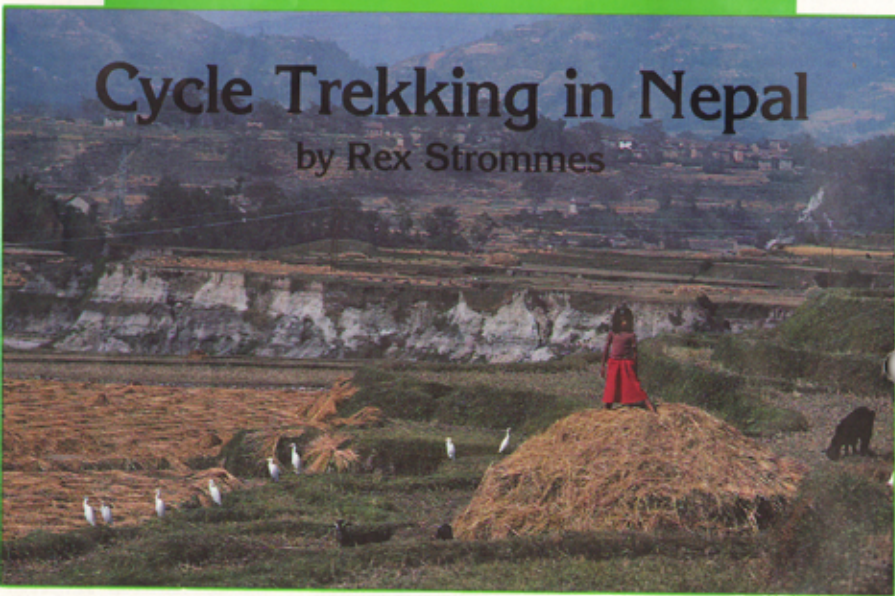
The Royal Nepali Boeing 737 descended out of the Azure sky into the emerald-green Kathmandu Valley. Geometric farm land and terraced hills green with rice shoots surrounded the sprawling city below. Beyond the fields, stacked up into the distance were the Himalayas, a towering wall of snow and rock. A mixture of fear and excitement had me on the edge of my seat. I stared out the window and tried to take in all the views, tried to imagine what Kathmandu and Nepal would be like, and even more,

wondered what my proposed mountain biking tour would turn into.

Rolling up to the old terminal was a welcome relief after two days of constant airplanes and airports. I'd come to Nepal to get as far away from my home and normal life in Colorado as I could and to make real a place that was just another color on my world map. I wanted to see and touch the highest mountains in the world, to eat and drink the food and water of another culture, and hopefully, to reacquaint myself with myself.

## Cycle Trekking in Nepal

by Rex Strommes



Dorjee, a Sherpa mountain guide and a new-found friend I'd met in the Delhi airport, was waiting for me as promised. He was returning from his first trip outside Nepal, thirteen days in New York City as the guest of a former client. I could hardly imagine this shy and soft-spoken young man dealing with the frenzy of New York but he seemed to have enjoyed himself.

We grabbed my backpack and bicycle bag and jammed them into the back of Dorjee's cousin's beat-up old taxi. His cousin slipped on his dark glasses and we were off, horn blaring, into the city.

A visitor's first ride along Kathmandu's narrow, crowded streets is both a delightful and shocking experience. Cars, buses, and trucks careen down streets, narrowly avoiding each other and spewing exhaust. Horns are used more frequently

than clutches and brakes. Cattle, sacred to the Hindus, roam freely through the city, sometimes lying in the middle of even the busiest intersections. Small, dark men squat behind blankets laden with food and trinkets for sale. Bicycles and pedicabs fight for position with the cars and buses. Everywhere are temples, idols, and monuments, tangible proof of the strong Hindu and Buddhist influence.

Dorjee dropped me off at a nice hotel after assuring me he'd return in the morning. I sat in the quiet room, tired, overwhelmed, and very happy I was there. I lay down for a much needed nap before organizing my gear and putting my bike together. Then I rode the busy streets through the warm evening air rich with the odors of Kathmandu, my mountain bike the focus of much attention.

Waves of sights, smells, and sounds

washed over me. Beautiful Hindu women with voluptuous, black hair and traditional red Tika marks on their foreheads walked alongside Tibetan merchants who had brought their wares over high passes through the Himalayas. Nepalese men unashamedly held hands and freely touched one another while they talked. Grotesquely deformed lepers sat on corners holding out begging cups. Hawkers, in clear English, beckoned tourists into their shops to behold great bargains on rugs, Tibetan tankas, and clothing.

I rounded a corner and, to my surprise, met two mountain bikers. One was a long-haired Californian named Greg who I found out was Kathmandu's unofficial cycling expert. The other, a Canadian named Bill, was one of a group of Canadians who had just completed the

Annapurna Circuit on their mountain bikes. In truth, they'd had to carry the bikes 70% of the time. Bill showed me a spot on his padded frame worn from shouldering the bike over miles of steep airways at fifteen and sixteen thousand feet. He grimaced when remembering the painful, arduous journey. He was glad he'd done it, didn't recommend it, and wouldn't do it again.

They told me the classic treks to Annapurna and Everest were just that—classic treks, unsuitable for bikes. The trails ascend and descend continually, mostly via rock stairways. The few sections of flat, rideable terrain are too short to make hauling a bike along worth the effort. But while the treks are best left to trekking, they also told me there is still plenty of mountain biking in Nepal.

After an hour of talking, we bid adieu to each other, I thankful for the meeting and much clearer about what I wanted to do. I had planned to ride in and around the Everest region but upon hearing their recommendations, decided to cycle from Kathmandu to Pokhara, 130 miles west. I would then leave my bike in Pokhara and trek into the Annapurna region. But first I'd explore the Kathmandu Valley.

Dorjee showed up the next morning and we rode (he on my Stumpjumper, and I on the typical one-speed clunker found in Nepal) around Kathmandu. Kathmandu is dirty compared to most Western cities. Garbage and sewage is swept into gutters where cattle and dogs feed on it and the smell of diesel fumes mixed with the garbage can make riding and walking through town a less-than-pleasurable experience at times.

We visited the popular Monkey Temple, a Buddhist Stupa inhabited by hundreds of sacred monkeys. The temple sits on a low hill affording panoramic views of Kathmandu. Inside was a scene centuries old: Buddhist monks reciting ancient sutras in low, eerie tones. After paying off the kids who had "guarded" our bikes, we set off across the Bhagmati River and out into the countryside.

We rode along the Ring Road, a 30-kilometer loop around Kathmandu. I struggled to keep up on Dorjee's clunker while he joyfully rode ahead on my Stumpjumper. I noted every intriguing dirt road we passed, intending to come back and explore them later. All roads out of Kathmandu lead into the countryside and the surrounding hills. Inevitably, they eventually turn into dirt roads and trails perfect for mountain bikes. North of Kathmandu is a government park where a few rupees give access to a circuitous 28-kilometer dirt road with no traffic. The road winds through pine forests and has excellent views of the Kathmandu valley and the Himalayas in the north.

After a morning of struggling up and down hills on the one-speed, I was relieved to hear it was time for a lunch prepared by his wife. We ate Dahl-Bhat (rice with a lentil soup poured over it) washed down



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with Chang (a millet beer), and talked of Dorjee's life.

He was born in the Solo-Khumbu (Everest) region, home to the Sherpas for centuries. His father was a carpenter and wanted Dorjee to follow in his footsteps. But Dorjee had other ideas and instead moved to Kathmandu to work for a friend's mountain-guide service.

Dorjee had been leading groups for a number of years and proudly showed me photos of himself standing atop some of Nepal's highest peaks; but I sensed a restlessness in him. He wanted to raise a family and spend more time at home. The trip to New York had changed him. He spoke of his desire to start a restaurant and move to a larger, more modern living situation. He confided to me his fear of climbing. He had escaped any serious injuries so far but he knew his luck might run out at any time.

I discovered during the return to my hotel that Nepal's Dawhili celebration started that evening. I rode down the streets feeling as if I was in a war zone. Fire-crackers and M-80 bombs, thrown with little regard for who was around, went off all around me. I learned the celebration would last for four days with singing and partying late into the nights. It was time to leave Kathmandu.

I pedaled out of Kathmandu the following morning into the undulating countryside and felt as if an enormous burden had been lifted from my shoulders. The traffic thinned, the air was cleaner, and I rode wide-eyed and smiling through the warm, humid air.

I passed people working their fields of corn, barley and rice. Barefoot men, women, and children, all carrying enormous loads of hay and firewood, stopped to watch me pass. I asked to take a picture of one of these men and asked also if I might try carrying his load. He laughed and obliged. Though nearly twice his size, I could barely manage to stand up with the load, let alone carry it. I rode away with a new-found respect for Nepalese neck muscles!

Every time I'd stop, I'd immediately be surrounded by children who appeared from out of nowhere to gaze at this tall, bearded man riding a strange two-wheeled vehicle. I'd eat with a rapt audience of children staring at me. I had trail mix to give out to the children but soon I was making sure no children were around when I stopped so I could eat and drink in private.

No matter who I encountered, a "Namaste" (the traditional greeting) was certain to evoke a response and a smile. The Nepalese were curious and, with few exceptions, friendly and helpful.

I passed slowly through the villages and countryside, breathing the air, smelling the smells, and experiencing the terrain - every hill! The road between Kathmandu and Pokhara is a constant series of climbs and descents. I'd steadily pedal, gradually climbing up and up until finally I reached

the top where glimpses of the Himalaya came into view. Then gravity would pull me down and my speed would rapidly increase. I'd relax and flow with the pull, feeling at one with my bike and the world, senses sharp, the green landscape flashing by, wind blowing through my hair, banking around turns, cautiously close to the edge.

I discovered the Dawhili celebration had followed me as I lay on a short hard bed in a Nepalese Inn in a village called Mugling. I also discovered Mugling was the main stopping point for trucks and busses. I was serenaded with song, fireworks, and buses screeching to a halt and honking their horns late into the night. Too tired to move, I lay there trying to relax and rest, an exercise in patience!

I arose early the next morning to leave when I turned around to see a smiling Nepalese man who had apparently spent the night in the bed next to mine.

"Not such a nice place to sleep, eh," he said with a grin.

We drank some Chia (milky tea) which, along with the warm morning sunshine, helped make the previous night's experience laughable. This man, as other Nepalese I was to meet, seemed caught between two worlds. The influx of tourists and the consequent exposure to materialism had set in motion feelings of desire and frustration.

"I would like to have more," he said. "I would like to have more money, a better house, and to be able to travel...I just don't have the means. I see people with nice equipment, cameras, and lots of money traveling through my country and I envy them. But I'm also seeing bad effects on my people. There is much begging and farmers leaving their land to cater to the tourists, leaving their traditional ways behind. I also see resentment and even some hatred toward the tourists that pass through our country for their own pleasure, then leave."

I rode off into the morning and saw the people (many of whom had little more than the clothes on their backs) in a different light. I felt a twinge of guilt as I thought about my bicycle, camera, clothes, travelers checks, and a ticket back to the U.S. where my car, house and other possessions awaited me. But then another day of sunshine, hills, and smiling soon restored my enjoyment. I arrived in Pokhara spent and dehydrated and found a place to recover from the ride for a couple of days before starting my trek.

Coming up with a more idyllic setting than Pokhara is difficult. The skyline consists of twenty-six and twenty-seven thousand-foot peaks. Macha Puchara, Annapurna, and Dhaulagiri to name a few. Among the numerous nearby attractions was beautiful Phewa Lake, where rowboats can be rented for swimming and fishing. Pokhara is the perfect place to begin or end a ride or trek.

I drank a beer and gazed at the high peaks, longing to be among them and

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looking forward to my trek. To stand atop one of those peaks entailed more time, expense, and danger than I was willing to incur. Instead, I would do an eight day trek into the Annapurna Sanctuary, a high basin surrounded by giant peaks, and on to Ghorapani, a village whose views are said to be unsurpassed.

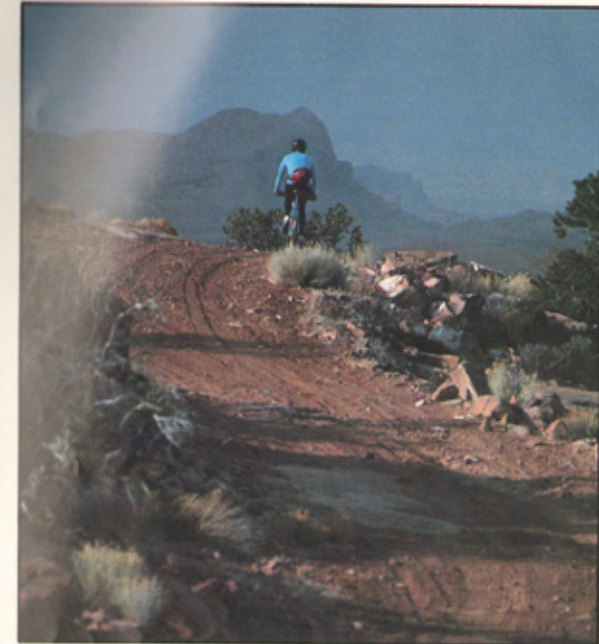
I left my bike in the hands of an American I met, awoke early in the morning, ate breakfast, then hired a taxi to get me through town to the trailhead.

After traversing flat rice fields for a few miles, the trail began to climb into the mountains along an ancient stairway made of carefully placed rocks. I was happy not to be logging the bike. Views of the valley below and the peaks above kept me in a trance-like state as I walked for hours, stopping only occasionally to eat, drink, and rest. Lush, green, terraced hills gave way to forests of Rhododendron and Pine. I passed through small villages every few miles, along the way meeting Nepalese and Tibetans carrying supplies, brightly-covered mule caravans, and occasional Westerners. Food and lodging is available everywhere along the main routes. The quality and cleanliness varies but they're always a wonderful way to experience Nepalese lifestyle and cuisine. Evenings spent around smoky wood fires (chimneys are unknown) eating, drinking and sharing experiences with trekkers from all parts of the world are among my fondest memories of Nepal.

I remember one particular day that included a frustrating wrong turn and consequent backtracking. Finally I arrived at a small Inn for the night. My fellow boarders were an older English couple and their daughter. They all spoke French, German, English, the daughter even spoke Nepali. After ordering dinner, I walked outside to catch the last rays of sunlight. The Inn was set on a ridge top overlooking the Modi Khola River gorge, one of the deepest in the world. Silhouettes of distant mountains and ridges beyond the gorge danced through the woodsmoke haze. The far hillsides were dotted with the lights from small cook fires. The roar of the rushing river below was all that broke the stunning silence.

I finally arrived at Ghorapani from where I would return to Pokhara, then ride back to Kathmandu, and fly home. Sunrise at Ghorapani was an event I had been hearing about for several days. I was up before dawn to climb the hill behind the inn where I was staying. I stumbled up through the cold darkness, anticipation urging me on. I reached the top, black outlines of mountains looming overhead. It was still quite dark where I sat but suddenly the sun's first rays struck the tops of Machu Puchara and Annapurna. A shiver ran up my spine and tears welled up in my eyes. This was the zenith of my trip. I smiled, took one last photo, and walked down the hill - ready to head home.





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## Anytime, Anywhere with Dennis Coello

Ask most mountain bikers why they love their bikes and chances are you'll hear of their "go-anywhere" capabilities. Look at the photographs accompanying most mountain bike stories and you'll see the same thing - warm weather shots of intrepid cyclists crossing streambeds, rock hopping on trails, screaming down dirt road mountain passes.

Naturally, the "all-terrain" aspect of these versatile machines is their most prominent quality. But there's another facet to these bikes which - to me - is just as important. And that's the "all-weather" ability their engineering allows.

Think of it for a moment. Tourers greeted mountain bikers with such initial enthusiasm because of the ability to

escape from the traffic-laden, paved-road world. But add a final element of technology (rainsuits, polypropylene underwear, lightweight but amazingly warm sleeping bags...) to the age-old human penchant for adversity and touring cyclists can avoid both busy roads and those busy, tourist times of year.

To be honest, I don't care for summer touring. My preference for cool weather aside, I have the feeling that towns show one face to the world in summer, and quite another when most visitors are gone. Business returns to normal in fall, providing a far truer view of people and town life.

In a series of upcoming columns, I'll deal with these aspects of all-terrain, all-weather travel. I'll suggest tips on outfitting

one's bike and touring kit, critique various panniers, sleeping bags, and tents, relate some of my past experiences throughout the country, and take you along on a tour.

Feedback - letters with questions, concerns, disagreements - will be addressed. Everything, in short, will be done to help make your approach to mountain biking as personal and satisfying as can be.

My own bike has packed deer out of the Utah mountains, been rigged for mobile butterfly collection in Idaho, and carried me on road and trail from California to Maine. And because of its year-round capabilities, it has allowed a special view of people along the way. As in the tiny Arizona town I visited on tour in mid-November of '84.....

A week before, I'd awakened to four inches of snow on my tent. I broke camp hurriedly, took a last quick look at the South Rim of the Grand Canyon, then pedaled through the fluff to the lower, warmer elevations of the Navajo Reservation. I was doing a thousand-mile loop research ride for a touring book and my route ran me north to Lees Ferry, past the colorful hues of Vermilion Cliffs, up the steep eastern face of the Kaibab Plateau to Jacob Lake and out to the North Rim.

All the settlements I reached during those days were resorts and so I looked forward to the real (and tiny) town of Fredonia. Falling out of the pine and snow-covered mountains, I had grand views of Utah hills across the barren Kaibab Plateau. My sturdy, winter-loaded mountain bike coasted for nearly twenty miles. Finally, I saw Fredonia out ahead. It looked like a bottlecap, a tree-encircled, green spot upon the plain.

Most Western towns live along the highway. Only one or two blocks deep, they make the two-lane thoroughfare their "Main Street," line it with businesses, and slow the traffic down to twenty-five. Fredonia fit the mold. She offered the usual run of services - small motel, grocery, clothing store, and restaurant. But with one exception. I pulled in where the sign said "Auto Parts and Campground." It was an incongruous mix I just couldn't resist.

My tent up and sleeping bag in place, I headed out for dinner. A block away another sign grabbed my attention: "Tree Amigos" it said, followed by "Two Friends" in parentheses. An Anglo sign painter, no doubt. But the food was superb, and so was the entertainment. For an hour I listened in on two state politicians discussing their election bids. It was a fascinating peek into their problems - campaign flights, mis-quotes, and early campaign mistakes for which they'd spent months atoning. I heard of how it was to be an Anglo candidate of a reservation district, of which reporters were the best and which motels were dumps. The

candidates had looked me over closely when I first sat down, for fear I might be a local. But my maps and questions to the waitress soon reassured them, and they talked quite openly.

All conversation ended throughout the place, however, when two motorcyclists entered. Cacoined in full-body black leather suits, they wore identical blue helmets. Their bubble masks were tinted; not one human feature could be seen. No doubt it was our stares that froze them in place but we couldn't help it. They looked like astronauts. The waitress, in a remarkable show of courage, led them to a table next to me. They both sat down, still with gloves and helmets on. It was worthy of a picture. Finally one reached up slowly to its head.

A shock of yellow curls cascaded to the shoulders, beautifully contrasted by the black leather suit. Now the other figure removed its lid, a male with shorter hair but otherwise identical: mute, red face, blue lips. And then it hit me. They were frozen to the core.

It was such great fun to watch them come to life again in stages that I quite forgot the candidates. They couldn't form an articulate word for a full five minutes. Only the eyes worked normally, and when the waitress returned with menus and two glasses of ice water, she was murdered by their stares. Gloves came off with the deliberate, exhausting effort of an arctic explorer, and when coffee was set before them, they accepted it like the condemned receiving a governor's reprieve.

We talked once they were fully thawed. They had reservations for that night at Jacob Lake and I tried gently to dissuade them from the ride. But like bearers of bad tidings throughout history, I wasn't liked, even though I stuck only to the facts. It was night; the sky was cloudy and would obscure the moon; some hairpin turns awaited on the three thousand foot climb; temperature drops one degree Fahrenheit for every three hundred foot gain in elevation; it had gotten down to 8 degrees the night before (but my sleeping bag had kept me warm).... The yellow curls were all for waiting until morning but the fellow said they'd press on. It was the first day of their journey; falling behind schedule would be bad precedent. Such logic.

It had happened into Fredonia on a special night and, as I sat there with my leathery friends, the restaurant began to bustle. It was a town meeting, billed as the "Fredonia Forum," a chance for all to meet the candidates. I joined the human tide into the basement of the library.

We were about three-hundred strong: brown-faced farmers in bib overalls, wry plaid-shirted ranchers in Levi jackets, merchants with whiter skins and softer looks. And there were handsome, no-nonsense women wearing an attractive air of Western easiness. The demands of ranch or small town life fell evenly, I guessed, and thus the women dealt with their own and other men as equals.

Watching this, it was easy to understand why Western states were the pioneers in women suffrage. Demure, coquettish acts were absent, as were get even scenes of female bullying. Men and women both held and tried to quiet the profusion of children; there were usually too many for one pair of hands. It was obvious the crowd lacked sophistication. For all these traits which I saw as attributes had been acquired naturally; it came with the territory. (In doing research months later I read that the name Fredonia "derives from 'free dona' or free women, applied because Mormon refugees from federal anti-polygamy laws were among its first settlers during the 1880s." Such history!)

Facing us were an even dozen candidates. Those running for state and national office wore tailored suits; local hopefuls were in dresses, or sport coats and bola ties. The atmosphere was that of a family reunion, and I was greeted pleasantly by all. Well, almost all. The two candidates I'd overheard at dinner froze in place when they first saw me.

The meeting came to order. Each candidate would have five minutes to introduce himself, present his platform, and wound his opponents. Then would come questions and answers. What was scheduled after that I didn't hear, for the baby next to me began to bellow. I quieted the little malcontent with a breadstick I'd lifted from the restaurant, but it was a bad move on my part. The mother and father smiled and nodded, turned their full attention to the remainder of their clan, and thereafter left the little one in my care. I spent the evening picking up its rattles, and marveling at the constant flow of slobber from its mouth. By the fourth speaker it had soaked its shirt, and I had visions of being charged with child abuse.

It was Bob Stump's turn to talk. He was up for reelection to the US Congress, and I had read his handout before the meeting began. "Bob works hard, keeps his promises, and tells you where he stands." "Bob, 57, is a native Arizonan who farms with his Dad...." The message was simple, straightforward. It was like the Boy Scout motto turned biography. And we could call him "Bob."

Fred Burke got up to speak. Well-known for his successful raft trip business on the Colorado, he dragged a huge inflatable raft around for advertisement. "Vote for Fred Burke - State Senate" was stenciled on the sides and this contraption had nearly killed me twice out on the highway. He'd already lost my vote. But he regained it when he took the stand. Running in a district which included a piece of reservation, the unabashedly Anglo rafter-candidate began by looking at the crowd, smiling broadly, and booming out "Well, it sure is good to say 'Hello' instead of 'Ya tah hey'" (the traditional Navajo greeting). The crowd roared.

Betty Pec was up to bat. County assessor for eleven years, she lived in

Flagstaff. (I made a note to ask her after the meeting which route she'd driven up, hoping she might have found my stocking cap.) She was a pleasant, matronly woman, but I had my doubts. Her campaign literature was in the form of bookmarks; a great idea for letting voters know she was practical. But she'd lost favor with me because of what was written on them. Gaily colored birds and butterflies and flowers surrounded the words, "Our imagination can take us as high as we can imagine." Another slogan was "Positive thoughts make positive living." But the worst of all was "I never knew what I could not do. So, I was willing to try anything." Fine thoughts, I figured, for someone growing bean sprouts or teaching second grade. But assessing preference?

They all rose, one by one. Challenged gracefully leveled shotgun blasts at the incumbents' records; incumbents let us know in honeyed words that their opponents couldn't pour water out of a boot. Every single candidate was "an Arizona native," or had moved to Arizona "early in life," or had "recently arrived in Arizona, it's true," but had "always loved the state and planned to stay."

The last to talk was Harold Pratt. Nearly seventy, running for the Fredonia school board, he walked slowly to the podium. A thin, wrinkled leather face looked toward us, while bright blue eyes skipped about the room. "Well," he said, "you all know me. Been here all my life. Moved once ten years ago - across the street. And when I die I'll only be movin' four blocks more." The place cracked up. "If you vote for me I thank you. And if you don't, well, it don't make much difference. I'll still like you anyway." Harold Pratt didn't belong on any school board. He should have been running for governor.

Two hours later I was in my tent, back at the campground wedged between the auto parts store and a junkyard. I lay inside my sleeping bag - it had dropped to 14 degrees - and worked at writing down the day's events while wearing gloves. But it was later, after I'd logged in all the particulars, that the meaning of what I'd seen began to come to me. It was pure democracy, closer to the Greek agora than any modern parliament. New England's small town meetings go west on wagon trains and used for a century in frontier settlements. These unsophisticated folk had turned out in force to judge the people wishing to represent them. Not filtered through the media or reporters' biases, here the ranchers heard and saw and felt all for themselves. The lawmakers, sheriffs, judges, tax assessors and school board members faced the grilling equally, questioned hard not by their subjects, but by those who would decide their fate. This one-horse, two-bit, roll up the sidewalk-at-eight-o'clock town was closer to its government than all the minions of New York.



# Adventure and Riding via the Mexican Volcanoes

by Eliane Wissoeq



Keith and I walked out of the Civic Center in El Paso, Texas, where we had left our car, and jumped on our mountain bikes - he on his Klein, I on my Moocs. The bikes (and my muscles) groaned beneath four heavily loaded panniers, pads, and sleeping bags. We were ready for adventure, for fun, and as much biking as time and distance would allow. We soon rediscovered that fun doesn't necessarily come easily and that adventure wears many a disguise.

We spent the next twenty-four hours in Juarez attempting to get a bedroom on the train to Mexico City. First the ticket window was closed. They were sold out - or so we were told. Only first or second class seats were available (the difference is how many people stand up). The freight office was also closed and nobody else would ship our bikes to Mexico City.

The next day, after waiting half an hour in line, we were told to go to another window. Naturally, it didn't open until two in the afternoon. We waited. Finally it opened. There were no beds available and we were sent back to the 1st and 2d class counter. We finally got on the train and managed to get a seat though the location next to a smelly bathroom wasn't ideal. The window wouldn't close either. We spent the day being buffeted by the wind and watching a layer of dust build up on our clothing. By the time the sun set and the temperature dropped, we were too tired to care anymore.

Neither of us was overwhelmed with enthusiasm for the thirty-six hour, including two nights, trip. After a few futile attempts to switch to either "Especial" or "Dormitorios" whenever the train stopped in towns, we tried to get some sleep - unsuccessfully. We were jostled and leaned on by passengers who were also trying to sleep while standing in the aisle. The next day found us sore, dirty, and tired. We kept thinking things could only get better. We were right.

Two-thirds of the passengers got off at noon in Torreon and we moved to a "camarin" (roomette). What a difference! Now we had a private room with a comfortable seat that converted to a bed plus we had access to the "comedor" (dining-car).

We arrived in Mexico City the next morning. Vera-Cruz, on the Gulf of Mexico, was our final destination. Our route was via Iztaccihuatl (17,742 ft), Popocatepetl (17,887 ft), and El Pico De Orizaba (18,800 ft), three volcanoes dominating the valleys and hills around Mexico City.

We unloaded our bikes from the train, attached the panniers, and were off. We cycled through the heart of this sprawling, teeming city, including the area that had been struck an earthquake three weeks earlier. Surprisingly, the roads were undamaged and, but for soldiers guarding the buildings that had been destroyed, we wouldn't have known an earthquake had so recently wrecked havoc through the

city.

Our route to Amacameca was unexpectedly circuitous. It seems Mexican road maps are totally unreliable as far as minor roads are concerned. We were forever having to ask directions. We rode through the villages of Milpa-Alta, Mixquic, and Chalco accompanied by piercing whistling from guys watching our progress. We never did decide whether it was for Keith's legs or mine.

It wasn't until Tlalmanalco that we had our first view of Iztaccihuatl, more commonly called Ixta. We'd ridden 60 miles by then but as tired as we were from the distance, I was even more exhausted from dealing with trucks. A pre-requisite for Mexican trucks is the removal of any muffler system. And, as if that isn't enough, the drivers then seem compelled to constantly blow their horns. The clouds of diesel fumes pouring out of their exhaust pipes was the black icing on the cake. We decided we had three ways to die: shattered ear drums, polluted lungs, or being run over while passing out from a combination of the first two.

Clouds hid most of Ixta's snow-capped peak but the sight of this volcano lifted our spirits. All the hassles we'd endured so far were swept away in a twinkling of bright sunlight reflecting off the summit snows.

Tlalmanalco had no hotel so we pressed on another 8 miles to Amacameca where we found a "posada amilal". These lodgings are usually cheap

(\$5 for two) and they always have an interior courtyard, a great place to work on bikes - something we were in need of. We'd pushed my bike the last half mile into town because of a flat tire.

Those seventy miles on heavily loaded bikes was rather enough for me for our first day of cycling. Plus we had to save our legs for the next day. The ride would be short enough, 17.5 miles, but it was all uphill, over 5000 vertical feet. At least the road would be paved, the traffic light, and the views beautiful.

Morning found us carbo-loading in a bakery. Mexican bakeries are incredibly cheap and laden with superb selections (especially in the afternoon) of "pan dulces" (sweet breads). The upcoming climb rationalized the careful filling of our stomachs we indulged in.

Amacameca to El Paso de Cortes is fourteen and half miles of continuous uphill. The first few miles consist of a gentle, steady climb with continuous views of Popo's imposing, ice-clad mass, hypnotizing in its whiteness. We stared at the mountain with feelings of calm admiration mixed with controlled excitement. The road steepened and we lost Popo in the switchbacks (as well as the two bikers who were following us on their 10-speeds). A comfortable temperature, the shade of pine trees, a good lunch break, and a few quick stops made the ride especially enjoyable.

Another three miles and 1,000 feet of climbing beyond Paso de Cortes led to the

end of the pavement and an incredible lodge, Tlamanca, at the base of Popo. Magnificent is the only word to describe this building. Architecturally, it's impressive but not really remarkable. No, what so amazed us was its very existence, that there at the base of Popo was this full-blown lodge where everything worked and that it was there for the use of climbers and hikers. The building is big with a huge stone terrace and an interior boasting two lounges with enormous fireplaces. The cost per person is only a dollar per night for a bunk, the shower has plenty of hot water, and the food is good, filling, and cheap (thirty cents for a sandwich). Plus, and this is highly prized by veteran Mexico travelers, the place is safe. There's a room to lock gear up in while you're gone.

We walked out on the terrace that evening after dinner and watched the night chase the day into the distance. Our final view before retiring for a well deserved rest was the pale glow of Popo's summit slopes floating amongst the clouds.

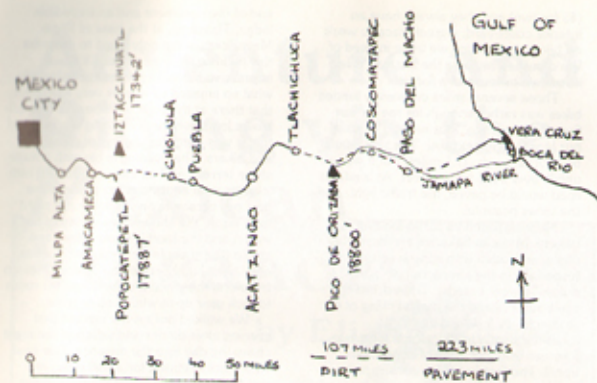
We had planned on leaving for Orizaba the next morning but couldn't resist putting off leaving. The lodge's magic and the area's calmness was too refreshing. We decided to stay and explore.

The trail up Popo is steep and covered with volcanic ash. Keith ran along it in the morning and returned saying it was like running up steep sand dunes. But there were plenty of flat sections so we decided to try biking it. I won't lie to you; we pushed the bikes more than we rode them. The potential excitement of the downhill was all that kept us pushing the



KEITH AUSTIN





bikes further up the mountain. That and the spectacular views of Ixta to the north, Orizaba to the east, and Amacameca far below a sea of clouds. It was a view that captured our senses and made us forget time.

The downhill was surprisingly easy. The deep sand slowed us down yet was soft and light enough that steering was no problem. I didn't have complete control of the handlebars but it didn't matter. The bike worked its way through by itself as long as I didn't lean to either side too much. It was great! We approached the lodge and thought of packing up and moving on but neither of us was ready yet. We were enjoying ourselves too much. Instead, we went hiking again, up to almost 15,000 feet where we sat and contemplated where we were.

Not leaving then was a fortuitous decision. Upon returning to the lodge, we met Rafael, the official guide to the area. He told us that our project of biking from Pico De Orizaba down to Vera Cruz via dirt roads was indeed possible. Everyone else we had asked, including climbers, told us we couldn't make it. There was a large canyon we wouldn't be able to cross with the bikes. Evidently they were unaware of the trail Senior Rafael described to us. The topographic map was also inaccurate and didn't show the trail. Rafael told us he was guiding some people the same day we were planning on hiking Orizaba and he would show us how to get to the pass leading to the trail down the canyon. But if we missed him, we should talk to Joachim Canchola in Tlachichuca and he would help us. We left Tlaxiaca around three pm, psyched for our first dirt road trip and the downhill from 13,000 feet to Puebla at 6,645 feet, forty-six miles away.

We rode three miles of pavement then, just before Paso de Cortes, turned right onto a dirt road to Buena Vista. We then turned onto a trail to the right just before Buena Vista and followed that for 13 miles of wonderfully smooth downhill riding.

About the time we started to take the smooth switchbacks for granted, conditions changed.

The trail became straighter and much rougher! Talk about testing our bike handling skills! Fortunately we were still going downhill. We bounced over boulders and through deep sand for five miles. I thought I was losing it at least twenty times but fell only once. In spite of such rough conditions, I was amazed by the stability of the panniers and the smoothness of my bike.

I'd had a hard time keeping up with Keith on the uphills even though he was carrying the tent, stove, and tool kit plus his own gear. He seemed to fly up with his Klein. But on the downhills, I had my revenge. He was amazed at the speeds he hit down the hills with his Klein, faster than he'd ever been able to go, but even the Klein was no match for my Moots.

We stopped in three small villages during that downhill: Santiago, San Nicolas and Buena Ventura. The center piece of each village was the ubiquitous church, all alike in their Baroque construction with a dome shaped roof painted or covered with multicolor tiles, three bell towers, ancient wooden doors, and in the manner time had faded their originally bright colors.

We arrived at the first and most primitive village, Santiago, in late afternoon. Everyone walking to the village either had a long stick over one shoulder with buckets filled with water on each end or else a load of firewood was precariously perched on their back.

A rapidly setting sun and tired muscles sent us in search of a campsite by a cornfield. We crawled in our sleeping bags and lay watching the light dance on Popo.

The night was warm and despite our tiredness, we stayed awake until we finally lost sight of Popo's steaming crater as darkness fell. Just before falling fast asleep, we looked up one last time and suddenly there was Popo again,

shimmering high above in the light of a waxing moon.

The mountain villages are remote and inaccessible yet all have one or more "tiendas" (little stores) where snacks and "refrescos" (sodas) can be purchased. Finding the center of the village is easy; look for the church, often on a hill, and you've got the center. That's where you'll find a tienda and the market, if it's market day. The market is great for eating traditional Mexican food at bargain prices, almost nothing in dollars. The only places where we never found a "tienda" were "rancheros". "Rancheros" are small settlements consisting of a few houses or farms, rarely further than 20 miles at the most from a village.

Beyond San Nicolas, the road became smooth and flat for eleven miles until Cholula where the pavement started again. In Cholula's plaza, people were friendly and curious about our bikes and us and we had to answer a thousand and one questions and in this order: how much did the bikes cost, where was the "motor", where did we come from and how many hours did it take (even if it had taken days), didn't we get tired, how did we manage to sleep and eat if we had to stop at night with no village near by? Then came: were we married, and what time was it (our stop-watches were the second attraction)? The Plaza was big, clean, and bright with its freshly painted arcades and churches, its park and fountains, and its benches covered with hand painted tiles but lacked the sleepy tranquility usually associate with colonial buildings.

The pavement lasted until Puebla where we arrived that same afternoon. We were making good time and expected to be close to Acatzingo before dark but Keith's camera didn't cooperate. It wouldn't focus anymore. We found a repair shop but it was siesta time. The camera wasn't repaired until six in the evening so we stayed in town. It was a good night for it; Mexico was celebrating some memorial day and a few thousand people gathered on the plaza for speeches and fireworks.

The following day took us from Puebla's 6,400 feet to Tlachichuca's 9,000 feet, seventy five miles away. We left early, avoiding most of the traffic for a little while. We turned off the main road onto a quieter road after thirty miles of heavy traffic. The uphill sections were more gentle than expected, especially from El Seco to Tlachichuca. That was good! Our pace had severely slowed down by then after 60 miles of steady riding. Another 15 miles and we arrived in Tlachichuca.

Orizaba's mass dominated the village. The weather was clear so we looked forward to a good hike the next day. Mountain climbers take a taxi from town to Piedra Grande where the climb starts. We wanted to bike up but were afraid the panniers might cause us to push more often than ride since the elevation gain was 5,600 feet. We looked up Joachim as

Rafael had recommended and asked if he could carry our panniers to Piedra Grande the next day while driving Rafael and his group. He accepted right away. He showed us on a topo map where the trail we wanted was then invited us to stay overnight with him and his family.

The next day was our first on light bikes in quite awhile. What a treat! We had forgotten how light they were. The dirt road to Piedra Grande was a steady, scenic uphill, gentle across the plains, fairly bumpy over volcanic gravel, then steeper but wonderfully smooth as we reached the pine forest until Hidalgo, a small village where we stopped. There we saw the highest soccer field we had ever seen, about 11,500 feet. Beyond Hidalgo, the road steepened with deep gullies, rocky sections, and sometimes mud. We rode most of it, only pushing the bikes a few times. Above tree-line, we hit deep sand and had to push for about two miles still arrived at Piedra-Grande before Joachim.

We were in the clouds and it was cold. A group of four Americans and a Canadian were comfortably installed in the smaller hut. They invited us to warm up inside and entertained us until Joachim arrived with our gear and warm clothes. We set up the tent by the Huts. The night got quite cold and I was happy, I'd lugged along my four-season sleeping-bag and layers of extra clothing. We spent the next day hiking the glacier of Jamapa up to 17,500 feet. And let's say the beauty of La Malinche, Popo, and Ixta's summits majestically soaring into the blue sky while below us cumulus filled the valleys was a view that will always remain in my memory.

We elected to head down that afternoon toward the canyon Rafael had told us about. We had a good idea where to find the trail but the mist was so thick, we couldn't see further than fifty feet ahead. We went anyway down a sandy, narrow, rocky, steep trail twisting along the mountain's flank, having to push the bikes for close to a mile. We stopped and compared the information we'd gathered about the trail with what was before us. It didn't jive.

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Keith ran ahead a couple miles to see if things improved. They didn't. We decided to back track and find the right trail. Pushing the bikes loaded with the panniers up that trail was out of question so we carried the panniers first, then pushed the bikes up.

We were both wet and tired but Keith's British imperturbability handled the

situation better than my French tendency to protest. We struggled back to where we'd lost the trail and found the correct trail a few yards away but the fog was still thick so we played it safe and pitched camp. The next morning was clear where we were above the clouds. Ahead of us, a hundred and twenty miles away and some 14,000 feet lower was Vera Cruz.

The trail led us to a beautiful dirt road that, switchback after switchback, swept down to the bottom of the canyon where we crossed Jamapa river and reentered the clouds. A "scotch mist" slowly lifting created an eerie, cool atmosphere. We were laughing, enjoying the easy riding down the canyon, thinking we had it made. Then our cruise was brutally stopped. A rock slide had taken out the road, leaving only a tumble of rocks and a narrow ledge where the road had once been. Below was a steep drop to the canyon floor. We watched a couple with a child and a horse work their way through

the rocks and onto the ledge. We talked with them when they reached us. The lady seemed shy but was smiling. When we crossed over the ledge, they told us "You've watched us come through. Now it's our turn to watch you." We reached the other side after carefully negotiating the slide and looked back as they waved goodbye.

A few miles down, the mist disappeared and our eyes popped open wide as if we were suddenly waking up in a different world. We were surrounded by a tropical rain forest. It was like being in a South American jungle. It was like a dream. I had seen profound, deep green before, in Chiapas, Mexico and in the Samaria Gorge, Crete and I remembered the blinding bright green of trees in Utah canyons but here were at least ten different shades of green. The dream lasted for 20 miles of kamikaze downhill along a ridge top with sheer, thousand-foot, canyon walls to either side.

Camping in the shadow of Orizaba

KEITH AUSTIN







In sharp contrast to the mountains of Mexico - the beach. KEITH AUSTIN

The excitement was too much. We were torn between flying downhill non-stop and wanting to take pictures at every corner. Brightly colored clothes drying on the grass by adobe homes constantly caught our eyes in this universe of green.

These homes and their subsistence cornfields, some almost literally clinging to the canyon wall, showed bitter poverty in the midst of natural beauty.

We arrived in Coscomatepec after twenty-five miles and 9,000 feet of

downhill. The vegetation was no longer quite as dense, the land was more cultivated, the temperature was warmer, and the sunlight was washing over fields of beautiful flowers. I can still remember their smell. The downhill continued until El Paso del Macho, 34 miles further. occasional sections of mud or cobblestones slowed us down so we camped out before reaching El Paso. The night was warm and humid and we lay there gloating over the ride we'd just had. We'd ridden forty-two miles, losing 12,000 feet in the process.

The downhill ended at El Paso, 17 miles later. So did the beautiful vegetation and flowers. We headed to Vera Cruz via Soledad de Doblado. The bumpy, gravel road remained flat and straight for twelve miles; so did the fifty miles of pavement to Vera Cruz. The last fifteen miles were the hardest, once again back in heavy traffic. The weather was hot and humid and that didn't help. The bikes, our clothes, and ourselves were crying for a good clean.

We kept on to Boca del Rio where the Jamapa River that we'd followed since its source on the Orizaba glacier meets the ocean. That's also where the best beaches are found. The seventy-eight miles of riding had whetted our appetites and since Boca del Rio is known for good seafood restaurants, we pigged out on seafood without the slightest tinges of guilt. The next two days were spent lazing on the beach.

The first leg of our trip had ended. We planned two days of rest before heading for Barranca del Cobre (Copper Canyon) and our next adventure, cycle touring in the land of the Tarahumujara Indians.

#### EDITOR'S NOTE continued from page 6

Trail Bikes) once again finished first as she always does. Mary Lee Atkins (Schwinn) was a distant second but that didn't stop Jacques from giving the race her all. Mary Lee said she raced the first lap as if it was a one-lap race. She rode as hard as she could to force Jacques' pace, totally throwing herself into that first lap only to watch Jacques leave her far behind. Where other's came out of turns sitting down, taking it easy, Jacques came out of them standing, constantly forcing the pace. Her win was impressive.

Yet there were still others just as determined. They didn't win any prizes; they just finished. And on this demanding course, that in itself says reams about their character. They weren't just riding the course either; they were racing, giving it their all, pushing to pass whoever was in front or to keep someone from passing. But if faster riders came up behind, they'd immediately yield the right of way, as often as not shouting a quick word of encouragement as they were passed.

Equally notable as the racing was that the race took place on private land, on ranch land. It was a perfect example of the kind of cooperation we all wish was the rule rather than the exception.

But there was a substantial downer.

These were the National Off-Road Championships, supposedly the premier event of the season, the highlight for all the racers competing. Yet when the race was finished shortly before nightfall, finding out who won and who placed and where and what these times were was almost impossible. But even worse was how the festivities were carried out. Everyone ended up standing around in the dark while the wind was blowing the dust and ash from the recent fire around. By then, the only ones there were racers and even many of the had left. Spectators were long gone. The awards ceremony was completely anticlimactic. After such a day of great racing, it was a shocking let-down.

I realize that putting on a race isn't easy, especially when most of the workers are volunteers or certainly low paid. But come on, these are the Nationals with the finest collection of mountain bike racers ever put together. The racers, their

sponsors, and mountain bikers in general deserve better. Our sport was not well represented as far as the finale was concerned.

To my thinking, the Nationals should be a season end celebration of mountain biking. Towards that end, perhaps there should be more going on, maybe industry displays of mountain biking products, maybe videos on what the sport is all about, and not just racing. Why not hold the Nationals Trials at the same time. Why not turn it into one huge party where all of us involved in mountain biking from the manufacturers to those of us who just enjoy riding on a fat tired flyer can get together and enjoy this culmination to the season.

Despite those justified complaints, what remains in my memory was Joe running up The Wall the last time, Roy Rivers crashing across the finish completely spent, Ned passing racer after racer, and all the others giving the race their best. For me, it was an inspiring day. The more I watched, the more I wanted to be out there with them, putting it on the line, going for some little bit of private glory. It was in short, a great day of mountain biking.



FRANK STAUB

## An Interview With America's Two Top Trials Riders

by Pam Delaney

Kevin Norton has no peer in the world of American observed trials. Not that there aren't others competing against him; there are. But while they're competing against him, he has only himself to compete against. And that is by open admission of those who are competing against him. He's simply that good. But then, by Kevin's admission, there are at least a dozen trials riders in Europe who can run circles around him. Those are the ones he's ultimately gunning for.

The next finest trials rider is probably Scot Nicol of Ibis Cycles. He's pretty consistently second or first, depending on Kevin's participation or not, but usually has to wait until the competition's end to discover his final standing. He's also relatively new to the sport but has taken to it with a vengeance, to the point where he has even included a trials bike model in his renowned line of custom mountain bikes.

The following is an interview with Scot and Kevin during a barbecue at Scot's house following the California State Observed Trials Championships. The interviewer, Pam Delaney, is definitely not a trials rider. In fact, she's not even a mountain biker. She's a road rider who leads cycling tours in France, France Velo Bike Tours out of Los Gatos, CA. Her introduction to trials came about because







have to ride super hard stuff to get excited. You know those jetty's going out to the ocean? Those big rocks piled on top of each other, with holes and gaps in between the rocks? I can ride over the top of them, jumping from each rock. It's real dangerous. The rocks are all uneven and there are little lips everywhere. You can fall into a hole or fall over the side. They're really jagged. If you fall, you're going to get cut.

P. Do you wear special clothing or padding?  
K. No, but if you're starting out, you should wear all that stuff: elbow pads and gloves, a helmet, knee pads. I have knee pads. I have a couple of friends who used to ride with me but they don't ride anymore. This guy was riding along and clipped his knee on a rock. Just riding on a trail, he hit his knee and it cut him bad. Really bad.

P. Have you seen anyone get hurt at these trials?  
K. No. If you fall, you're at a dead stop.

P. What were your scores today at the State Trials?  
K. Two - three - three. I had eight points.

P. What did you do wrong when you got those points?  
K. I did a little "Endo" turn, swinging the back end around. I put my foot down. I've done a thousand Endos. I just did it

wrong. There were rocks in the way.

P. Do you think the size of the wheels makes a lot of difference?  
K. Sometimes mountain bikes are better for rolling over stuff. You don't get caught in those little holes. But my bike can hop around better, turn, and go in tighter places. It's not as long (it has a little bit shorter wheel base), and the wheels are smaller. That makes a big difference. Everybody's laughing at twenty-four inch wheels. They think it's too small, but everybody in Europe uses twenty inches. You can maneuver a lot better.

P. The first time you showed up with small wheels, were they surprised?  
K. Yes, I guess. I use 24-inch wheels. My frame is like a BMX. Frame - a lot smaller than a mountain bike. I don't have big, high top tubes, and everything is condensed.

P. Who put your bike together?  
K. I did.

P. How available are trial bikes like yours? Do they have to be custom made?  
K. Mine is custom made but Kuwahara, my sponsor, is going to start putting them into production. Our main distribution is in Los Angeles but they're made in Japan.

P. What is Kuwahara known for?  
K. Mostly BMX. They have the biggest

team. They sponsor over 300 kids. They made all the bikes for the ET movie. They make four different road bikes.

P. Do you have any other sponsors?  
K. Yes: Suntour and IRC tires.

P. Did Kuwahara find you or did you find Kuwahara?  
K. They heard about me. The Boy Scouts, who use Kuwahara bikes, told Kuwahara: "Some guy was out here riding over picnic benches on his bicycle!" It was at a motorcycles trials. (I usually bring my bicycle and fool around a little bit.) I went over the bench, end to end, up to the table. It's really high. I went up there and I turned around on top. I went down to the bench, up to the table, down to the bench - every which way. I used to practice a lot at the local park a block away from my house. I'd go up there and ride over all these picnic benches. (I'm going over bleachers, now.)

P. Do you have someone who tutors you in trials, the psychology of winning, or in any aspect?  
K. No, I read a trials book that's very good. It's written by a world champion, Bernie Schreiber: The Bernie Book. You can find it in motorcycle shops.

P. Do you watch your diet?  
K. Yes, I eat really well. I live at home and my mom cooks really good meals. I train a couple of hours every day.

P. Do you do any working out at gyms?  
K. No, just riding my bicycle, surfing, and swimming.

P. Then, there is Virginia City, Nevada?  
K. Yes, the Nationals - the United States Championship.

P. What will it be like?  
K. Virginia City is like a desert. They'll have to drag a lot of man-made stuff together. They'll push rocks together and make sections. They're going to bring that log over there. Here (Santa Rose), it is more natural. Usually the man-made stuff is a lot tougher.

P. Will you have any competition at the Nationals?  
K. No, hopefully not. There is Rich (Cast) and Scot (Nicol), but I know I'm going to win. The only people I'm scared about are people who come from motorcycles. That's the only way I can get beat.

P. Maybe there'll be some surprises. Have you thought about that?  
K. Yes, the little kids can really be good at trials. But still...experience again. I can do it the first time on my first try.

Scott Nicol

P. What do you think of Kevin?  
S. Oh, he's incredible. My prediction was that he would get less than half as many points as the second place person. He got approximately one fifth as many points.

P. Who was the second place winner in the California State Trials?  
S. I was! He had eight points; I had thirty-eight.

P. Can you make a comment about this event called "trials"?  
S. I think trials is a great event. I really love it. I'm glad it's becoming more popular. For one thing, all the competitors act more like friends rather than competitors. The first, second, and third place people...we all did the local loop together. We were just cheering each other on. It's a nice feeling.

P. Why do you think it's like that and not dog-eat-dog?  
S. Maybe because it's really new and people are really enthused about it. There used to be a lot more camaraderie in mountain bike racing than there is now. Now it's so competitive. There's a lot more at stake when you're talking about \$500 or \$1000 at stake for first prize.

P. I thought today was supposed to be a big event. Why weren't there many people there?  
S. There aren't many people into this. It's brand new. And, it's not a race. It's a competition. It takes lots of skill. It's not

something that you can just go out and do and be good at. It's something that takes some serious practice and maybe people aren't willing to put the time in. It's a brand new aspect of the sport of mountain-biking. It's been around a real short period of time. It's a grass roots effort now that is going to grow slowly. Since it is such a new thing, it's so exciting.

P. What makes it so exciting?  
S. The fact that there's so much camaraderie and it's fun - it's really fun. It takes a lot of skill. It's different...

P. Where does the skill come into it?  
S. First of all, if you have really good natural hand-eye coordination, you can do well at trials. If you haven't spent any time on a bike or if you don't have good coordination to start off with, it's going to be hard for you to do. It's something that really takes a lot of skill.

P. What makes Kevin so great?  
S. He has a background in motorcycle trials and that is what this event is patterned after. Also, he's been riding a bicycle for a while and he practices a lot. He has some years of experience behind him.

P. Do most people use different bikes than Kevin?  
S. Some people are using real similar bikes. This sport is evolving from the mountain bike end and you see mountain bikes more than BMX.

P. What was it today? A "mountain-bike trials" or was it something else?  
S. This is going to be a major point of contention in the next year or two. Are we going to allow people who are obviously not on mountain-bikes to do this (the trials)? Obviously mine isn't a mountain bike either, but it does have 26 inch wheels.

P. What will be the specifications for entering these trials?  
S. Probably what's going to happen is that they're going to specify 24-inch wheels...26-inch wheels...20-inch wheels... whatever, in a lot of different classes. The wheel size will probably be more important than the number of speeds because a larger wheel is a little harder to move around. It's heavier. My anticipation is that maybe the national champion who will get the most respect or the most money or the most recognition will be the one with the largest wheel size, 26-inch maybe. This might be one possible scenario.

P. The one with the largest wheel size will get the most attention?  
S. If you take 20-inch wheel size...24...26... those are the three wheel sizes that you see out there. The 26 is the standard wheel size for a mountain bike. For instance, this was a NORBA event, the

national organization for mountain biking. They might want to see the trials evolve into an event which uses at least one 26-inch wheel. This is hypothetical. It's going to come up in meetings.

There are going to be people who will be on 20-inch bikes that are super light. They'll be able to go through sections just like on a pogo stick. So, they might have to make some rules. These other guys who are trying to ride it on a different machine are going to be really frustrated.

P. So, why don't they get smart and start using something like what Kevin's using?  
S. Maybe they don't want to. Maybe they're purists.

P. Does Kevin have any competition in Nevada (Nevada)?  
S. I don't think so. No.

P. Do you know of anyone in the U.S. who comes close to him?  
S. Not right now but I bet in six months there will be.

P. Do you think that's true? (turning to Kevin)  
K. Yes, I hope so. Then, it's going to get more popular. S. Yes, exactly. BMX and free-style kids are going to come into it...also, motorcycle trials guys.

P. What about these guys on the east coast? Isn't there anyone with any talent?  
S. Sure, Mike Augsburger is an excellent rider (3rd in the Nationals) and a few other talented riders. However, the indication in the Press has been that the overall ability on the east coast is superior to the West. I think that's a distorted view.

P. Kevin said they've been doing trials for a long time.  
S. Motorcycle trials... sure. K. Motocross came from trials. In 1906. Bicycle trials in Europe have been popular for many years. Next year, you'll be reading about them in all the magazines in the U.S. - something new to do.

P. Any other comments about trials?  
S. I'm into trials because I love it. I think it's a great sport. I really enjoy it. Another thing about this sport is that it's an excellent spectator sport. The thing about trials is that you can watch it and you can see the whole thing happen. You can't have that in very many aspects of cycling. I think that has a tremendous appeal that the people are going to be able to see.

In two or three years we're going to be remembered as the fathers of the sport, the fathers of million of kids, just like the Cabbage patch dolls. They're going to say, "Remember this guy? He couldn't do crap. Look what we're doing now!"





# A Somewhat Truthful Recounting of the Quest for Bull Monument

by Don Cuerdon

In the northern-most reaches of Reagan's kingdom lies a land of ancient mountains and deep green forests. Vermont is the name of this mist-enrouded place and literally means "Green Mountains". Many of the great Druid tribes still inhabit the area including the Red Necks and the Hippias as well as wandering bands of Nomadic Squires. Perhaps the strangest band of all is the loosely organized troop of mutants who call themselves the Mud Warriors. Most of the time, the Mud Warriors are disguised as members of other tribes and go about their duties with seemingly endless entropy until called upon to fulfill a quest. Then, when the gauntlet is thrown down, the once and future Knights of the Knobby Tire assemble for another adventure in the ancestral hinterlands of the Green Mountain National Forest.

This began the "Fat Tire Quest for the Bull Monument"; perhaps not a great quest but it would have to do until a dragon or something became available for slaying. Legend has it that some poor sap was gored by his prize bull on the way home from a fair. His wife thereupon erected a monument alongside the road to commemorate the occasion. Finding it sounded like a piece of cake until the collected Knights looked at the local road maps from 100 years ago. Things have changed a bit since then.

The acres of forest around this humble hermitage I call home were once laid bare by logging and farming activity. That history is evidenced by feldstone walls stretching throughout the woods from the middle of nowhere to the edge of nowhere. I've also discovered, by counting the growth rings on some fresh tree stumps, that the trees in the forest are quite young—something on the order of 30-50 years. This seemed to indicate that many of the more level trails out there were actually main thoroughfares at one time and lent credence to the possibility of this bizarre monument's existence. We also had to keep in mind that the prize bull in the legend may have come from the mouths of the locals who told me the story and that the quest could well be for a wild goose. But if Sir Gawain hadn't believed in the Holy Grail and restored Arthur to the throne, Margaret Thatcher would probably be making pizzas in London for the current Emperor of Rome instead of running the joint. Quests are a great opportunity to rationalize whatever you want.

The stalwarts of the quest, with great sense of purpose, were assembled in the

name of duty, honor, and Sunday afternoon exercise. Each fair knight was chosen for his strongest trait so that he may better serve his fellow Mud Warriors. Sir Neil, lord of the local bike shop, was chosen for the wisdom of his advancing years (besides, it's fun to have the old wise-guy along). We called upon Sir Oliver of Putney, tribal leader of the Marlboro College Nordic Ski Team, who would need a lift to my house, er, castle as he had recently been relieved of his driving privileges by the local constabulary (Sheriff of Whittingham?). With Sir Oliver came his trusted squires Charles the Technocrat and Evan the Financial Advisor. From the flatlands of Nu York (anyone from anywhere other than Vermont shall be forever known as flatlanders until such time as they move here on a permanent basis and earn the title of transplant) we summoned William the Wheel Wizard and his squire Richard the Numb and sorcerer's apprentice Eric the Know-It-All. I, Sir Captain Dondo, would serve as scribe and spiritual advisor for the pilgrimage.

After a frantic phone call from Charles, who had methodically been to three houses that morning that matched the description of this one, we were soon united for the day's assault on points unknown. Armed with a photocopy of the local town tax maps and the word of honor from the Lady Fair Who Owns the House I Live In that she's really seen this thing out there, we plotted a circuitous route that would lead us to the object of our quest and maybe back past a beer store. The only glitch in the loop was the section of land between the end of the bull monument road and the beginning of the next logging road. Examining the map, there was much conjecture as to the possibilities of crossing this no-man's land. "It's a stream bed," said Sir Neil. "It's a contour line," said William the Wiz.

"No way, dude, it's a trail for sure," said Evan.

I know, deep in my heart, that the faded line in question is from a crack in the glass on the photocopier I used to copy the maps.

"Yes, verily, the financial advisor speaks truthfully. It is a trail we shall follow," said I, hoping to break the impasse by confusing the issue.

"Quit talking funny and start riding," said Sir Oliver, a true Chieftain.

Down the driveway, er, drawbridge and right onto a smooth dirt road, I'm leading our tribe on its merry way. I'm also

feeling a new zinginess in my mount that I hadn't felt before. Eric the Know-It-All had taken it upon himself to offer unsolicited advice to everyone on the mechanics of their bikes. So, when I was inflating my fat 2.2125 inch wide tires to my usual 35 psi, he interjected that the rolling resistance of such low pressure would prevent me from keeping up with him and the other stalwart riders. Fearing such a dubious fate, I cranked the suckers up to 50 psi and was subsequently rolling like a last freight train and trying hard to recall why I didn't ride on skinnier tires like Eric had. Since this was to be my first fat-tire foray in quite some time, I listened politely for a while to Eric's fascinating adventures hoping to learn some off road tech tips.

"Yup, actually I've done most of my woods riding on my road bike with 70 psi in the tires."

I'm impressed for a while. As we approached the first turn onto a logging road, I pulled slightly ahead of the bunch and prepared to dazzle my fellow knights with a grand display of cornering finesse. Pedal down, bike laid out, I suddenly felt what the lion-tamer feels when one of his big cats turns on him and his pistol doesn't fire. Whatever it's called: coefficient of friction, traction, or bite, Our Blessed Lady of Traction had failed me and I slid off the trail and into the surrounding flora. The blood trickling from my elbow was not nearly as disheartening as the thistles that affixed themselves to my nether parts upon my sudden reunion with Mother Earth.

While I was deflating my tires to 35 psi and muttering epithets about flat-landers under my breath, my fellow men were helping to deflate my ego by laughing just a little too heartily. Eric finally caught up and I caught on that anybody can ride with 50 psi as long as they only go 4 mph.

Our path at this point was a woods road consisting of two wheel ruts straddling a bed of grass. We took turns leading the others back and forth across the center mound in search of drier riding surfaces. Small streams crossed our path and were easily bunny-hopped or ridden through with a minimal break in the rhythm. Sir Oliver experimented with air travel at every bump or rise in the trail but so far it was pretty flat and we were cruising. As spiritual adviser, I felt it was my duty to inform him that if God had meant for us to fly, he would have given us Unicorn forks earlier. The trail is well kept by the leaders of the Snowmobiler's Tribe who prune the overgrowth and clear the trees that blow down during storms.

We lead a peaceful coexistence with the pilots of these infernal fat machines, but always at a distance when at all possible.

We approached our next land-mark, the log and earthen bridge crossing Thoney Brook, and the leaders made a quick check for trolls and knights who get off on collecting trolls and jousting and such. Warnings of a bottomless pit on the left side of the bridge surface rippled back through the string of riders causing us to ride further to the right as each of us passed. We regrouped on the far side and turned our attention to Sir Neil who was stopped on the bridge and talking to the underbrush over the right edge of the span. We feared that poor Neil had been bewitched until the bushes answered back.

"Yeah, I'm okay. How do I get back up?"

It seems that Sir Richard the Numb was the last rider in line going over the bridge and was so far to the right avoiding the pit that he rode off the opposite side and into the brook. The surrounding undergrowth broke his fall leaving him unscathed save for a few souvenir scratches. When we finally hauled him back up to trail level, he swore a troll had tripped him, causing his fall. We suggested that it might be time to stop putting every mushroom he found into his mouth and quoting from "Alice in Wonderland."

At this intersection, we turned right onto a Jeep road with fresh tire tracks indicating recent activity. The road climbed gradually and passed several beaver ponds that appeared to be lived in although we saw none of the elusive residents. Soon thereafter we encountered a gate barring the path. There were several small, shed-like buildings in the yard and a newer looking log cabin in the background. Everything appeared to be normal sized, ruling out the possibility of dwarves or giants. I dismounted to enter the yard and asked the others to cover my retreat. After all, gates are usually put up for a reason. I removed my helmet as I crossed the yard in an attempt to look less like Flash Gordon in lycra shorts and cyclo-cross cleats.

"Hoi there" I called to the house in my best Red Neck dialect (Red Neck Vermonters wouldn't be caught dead in lycra anything).

"C'mon in," said a voice inside the cabin.

I sauntered as gingerly as I could up onto the porch (click, click, trip, damn cleats, clunk, stomp) and poked my head in the doorway. Inside was a man and woman hand at work cementing bricks into a chimney in the center of the floor.

"Voice cabin," said in fluent Red Neck.

"It's a labor of love," said the man.

We chatted about the cabin and the weather and I introduced myself as his "naybah down th' road apiece." Finally, I asked permission for "me an' th' boiz to

cross his land so we might continue our quest for the Bull Monument on our "woods boosicles." He granted permission gladly and volunteered that we were within half of a mile of our destination.

"Fill up on water from the well in that maple stump over there. The lade's on the tree next to it. Once you start down the hill...well I don't reckon we'll see you back this way today."

With that amen I returned to the hoard with news of my encounter with the Keeper of the Bull Monument.

The trail narrowed beyond the yard and dropped down to a second gate which we negotiated without opening by passing our bikes through it. The fellow at the cabin had described the monument's location as a grassy patch just beyond some very slick bedrock. After the third grassy patch beyond the third patch of slick bedrock, we assumed that one of us (probably Oliver) had been thinking impure thoughts which angered the Gods who, in turn, had hidden the monument from us. In despair, we started down the next stretch which suddenly became very wet, smooth, and steep. We were forced to dismount, but to no avail.

The aluminum cleats in the heels of my fancy imported cyclo-cross shoes would not bite into the sheer surface of the bedrock. With the bike unweighted, and with the aid of my steady death grip on the brake levers, the tires also broke free. Friction had failed, once again, leaving me to lead the awkward charge down the mountain. I landed in a grassy patch with the gracefulness of a pregnant gooney bird, the handlebars of my erstwhile mount planted firmly in my solar plexus. Upon regaining my breath, I looked up to discover I had not been alone in my dilemma. We had stumbled upon the monument commemorating the day that Benjamin Converse had also been gored on the very spot where I lay.

"I found it," wheezed I. I read aloud as the others stumbled down the path, "This is the place where BENJ. CONVERSE was killed by a bull Returning from WELMINGTON FAIR Sept. 29. 1859 ae.56. Erected by Mrs. Converse & N. Hammond of Boston."

"Exactly one-hundred years and four days before my birth." I couldn't figure out the connection either. Who was N. Hammond of Boston, anyway? This was heavy Karma which would probably bother me for the rest of my life or at least the rest of the afternoon. The cryptic inscription had been carved into a slab of marble measuring approximately four feet high by two feet wide by two inches thick, much like the old grave markers in the local cemeteries, and was standing erect about ten feet to the left of the trail. I wondered if there was one buried on the moon sporting similar proportions. This was a primal moment and I knew we'd have to leave before we started hitting each other over the head with old bones. Vermont can be a very spooky place.

Skittering further downward and to the north, we attempted to negotiate the part of the map that I knew to be a misprint.

"What a fine example of trail building," I blurted, trying my best to convince the crew that I had some clue as to our whereabouts. These guys would leave me tied to the Bull Monument and feed my eyes to the turkey vultures if this trail dead-ended and we had to climb back up. Suddenly the land flattened and we were in an open field. A quick check of the map and compass, standard equipment on these outdoor versions of Dungeons and Dragons, revealed that we were approaching the booming metropolis of Podunk, Vermont. Every bend of the road with two houses on it around here has a name on it and this one was named Podunk. Not exactly a town, but enough of a landmark to get us back on track. A turn to the right sent us east toward South Wardboro along twisting, improved logging roads whose washboard surfaces made me remember why I ride on fat tires. Eric was off the back with his super hard skinnies and I was not above gloating.

At the next intersection, Sir William, Eric's employer at a bike shop in Albany, NY, asked me if I had seen the video tape of the guy riding his mountain bike through a stream with only the saddle and handlebars above water. I replied no, but I've tried it myself and was sent swimming after bonking into a submerged rock. Then Eric piped up with, "Well I've done it on my ten-speed with the bars and saddle fully submerged." It was beginning to look like Eric had done everything. Time to fight B.S. with B.S. On the next uphill, I rolled up between Sir William and Eric and casually mentioned, "Well, actually, I've done most of my woods riding on a fixed-gear track bike like they rode in the Olympics with 150 gram tubular tires inflated to 200 psi. I even rode it for three days while fully submerged in water over my head without taking a breath." Eric was stunned. "It's hard to get the good help cheap," said Sir William.

The rest of the ride rolled along more civilized dirt roads, past nicely kept farm houses with neatly trimmed lawns—golfers homes no doubt. We had squirt-gun fights with our water bottles and refilled them at roadside springs. One is never thirsty for long in southern Vermont. We payed our "gravity dues" (what glides down must go up) on the climb back up to Cooper Hill. The last stretch of road from Goose City to the top climbs from 1200 feet above sea level to 2200 feet in the span of three miles. We were rewarded for our efforts with a panoramic view of eastern Vermont and the mountains of western New Hampshire— that other New England state that's just like Vermont only upside down. One more mile down the back side of the hill to home and we dove into the beers cooling in the fridge. We came, we rode, and we conquered.



# BIG BEND

## The great winter get-away

Peter Nagel

Winter got you down? Are you itching to take your bike out of the garage and head into the countryside for a brisk ramble through the woods? But when you look out the window, dull, gray clouds are scudding across a lowering sky while gusts of wet wind whip around the corner of the house and rattle the doors. You're bored with riding the rollers, the kids are pale and grouchy, while your mate has that resigned look of empty expectations. It all adds up to another weekend of half-hearted arguments over nothing.

In Colorado, the condition is called cabin fever. No more virulent disease strikes the winter-bound residents of these snow-clad mountains. Winter arrives early and leaves late. But last January, my wife and I discovered an escape, a dramatic leap into spring. What we found is Big Bend National Park, located along the Mexican border in southwestern Texas.

We didn't exactly stumble upon it while wandering about the countryside since it's not on the way to anywhere. Big Bend is at the end of a very long road and far from anything. The nearest major city is El Paso, well over five hours of fast driving away. From our home in the foothills near Boulder to Big Bend is some 800 miles of flat, boring driving.

The park's twenty-nine degree latitude is about the same as Daytona Beach, Florida and Hermosillo, Mexico. That means balmy winters. Daytime temperatures ranging from sixty to eighty degrees are normal though the rare cold snap can drive temperatures below freezing. It's also not unusual for snow to fall on the summits of the Chisos Mountains in the heart of the Park. Nights are cold but then cold is a relative term. The mercury hit thirty-four degrees one night during our visit. That was fine by us since we were equipped with down sleeping bags and the cold made for comfortable sleeping. But once the sun

rose over the horizon, we rapidly shed layers of clothing until we were down to t-shirts and shorts. Shirts were worn only to minimize the sunburn our bleached skins so eagerly sought.

Big Bend is one of the largest, driest, most desolate National Parks in the country. It's also one of the most striking, beautiful, and exhilarating. Sunsets last for hours until suddenly, without consciously realizing what's happening, it's pitch black. In the morning, the pastels of dawn creep over the horizon like a cat upon a bird until with a great rush, the sun leaps high into the sky with a corresponding upward movement of the mercury. Most of the park's 1,141 square miles is desert. Vegetation, heavily armed with thorns, is strategically scattered about so no plant intrudes upon another's water absorbing area. The spaces between plants are a no-man's land where any intruder is instantly

exposed to the burning sun and to eyes patiently watching from thousands of feet up in the pale, washed out sky. It's as barren a landscape as you may ever encounter.

Enter the park at noon and you may well wonder why you ever drove all those miles to such a sterile, inhospitable place. At least we did. We squinted our eyes, stared into the distance through shimmering waves of heat, and wondered how anything survives such aridity. But don't turn around. Press on to the campground and wait till morning. Wake up well before dawn's first light and walk into the desert, find a knoll to sit on, then wait and watch. A subtle sense of life stirring will erupt before you. Colors you never dreamed existed yesterday will arrest your eye, movement detected but unseen will almost overwhelm you. The scene before you will be unchanged from

what you first saw yet an awareness of something undefined will excite you. Perceptions of time, self, and the nature of living will shift. I found myself straining to use senses partially atrophied from the magnified pressures of modern civilization, straining to catch delicate nuances in the fabric of life.

Big Bend is a perfect tonic for the not-getting-out-enough blues. Countless miles of hiking trails, over a hundred miles of boating on the Rio Grande, a hundred and sixteen miles of paved roads, forty miles of improved dirt roads, and a hundred and twenty miles of primitive dirt roads turn Big Bend into a veritable backcountry playground. Plus there are the usual Park Service nature walks, self-guiding trails, and evening talks on the area's geology, history, etc. And to top it off, there's a superb hot springs pool along the Rio Grande River. What more could you possibly ask for to banish the malaise of limping, dreary winters?

We had expected the park to be all but deserted at that time of the year. Instead, by the time we finally arrived at the Rio Grande Village Campground just after sunset, we were astounded to discover that almost every site was occupied by motor homes. Slow circuits of every camping loop finally turned up a vacant site and we settled in for a long night's sleep after the straight through drive from Colorado. We awoke in the morning to discover we were surrounded by Snowbirds, retired folk who annually migrate south to avoid northern winters then back north as summer approaches. We subsequently learned that

Thanksgiving through Easter is the park's busiest season. Few visit during the summer since temperatures are more appropriate for the interior of blast furnaces. The three campgrounds provide ample camping sites but are pretty well filled by Snowbirds. The exception is the Chisos Mountain campground where temperatures are surprisingly colder than those along the Rio Grande River.

My wife and I were the only people in the campground under fifty years of age. That alone was rather noteworthy to these permanent vacationers who seemed to think of the park as their own retreat. But of even greater interest to them, especially the men, were the mountain bikes on the roof of our VW van.

After a leisurely breakfast in the shade of towering cottonwoods, we unloaded the bikes and took a tour around the village and campground, our circuit greeted by smiling, white haired couples entranced with our bikes. We ended up lowering the bike seats for curious Snowbirds and sending them wobbling down the road. Invariably they returned glowing, ready to take the bikes home.

We'd come to Big Bend because of rumors about super backcountry biking in the park. We'd heard of miles and miles of jeep roads, warm temperatures, and beautiful desert views. We weren't

disappointed. The hundred and twenty miles of primitive dirt roads were even better than we had hoped for, relatively smooth though soft sand can be encountered in wash bottoms. Most of the rides are point to point. You either have to yo-yo back to the beginning, travel equipped for camping out, or have someone drive around to pick you up at the far end. The easiest is to travel self-contained, camping along the route. That was our plan. Accordingly, we'd brought along our Burley cart to haul gear and water in. But life in the campground was so relaxed and luxurious that we ended up base-camping there for most of the time and taking lots of short rides. After all, we were on vacation and once we settled in, our spirit of adventure had to compete with overwhelming desires to imitate lizards and hang out in the sun, absorbing every ray we could. But once our minimum daily requirement of sun and heat was quenched, we'd hop on our bikes and take off into the desert.

Two rules must be followed before heading off on a mountain bike into Big Bend's backcountry. The first is take lots of water. One gallon per person per day is generally recommended. How much you take along on your ride should be based on the estimated time you'll be riding. Then add some extra. Three of the large Specialized water bottles should be considered the minimum for any long rides.

The second is take along a tool kit equipped with tire patches. Some sort of thorn protection inside your tires is also a good idea. Deserts mean thorns and a flat tire with no means of fixing it can turn a casual day ride into a disaster. Even though you'll be cycling on roads traveled

Carry a full patch kit to combat the desert vegetation.

PAUL GALLAHER



by 4x4's, you can be out all day and see no one. Winters in Big Bend are relatively benign but carelessness can extract a heavy penalty.

The riding is, for the most part, cake over fast, hard-packed roads. But I was still thankful for the low gearing typical of mountain bikes. The sandy stretches bogged us down and without the low gearing, would have often made us push the bikes. But with a quick shift onto the granny chain ring, we'd spin right on through. The gearing was also appreciated on many of the hills. The climbs were short enough and not super steep but loose gravel often coated the surface. We'd shift into our lowest gear, stay in the saddle to maintain weight on the rear wheel for traction, and spin our way up.

The rest of the time the riding was superb. We didn't have bike computers don't know how fast we were really going but it often felt like at least twenty or twenty-five mph. It was great. We'd be on our big chain ring, hammering the pedals, flying along, all the time surrounded by spectacular vistas without a soul around.

Three primitive roads traverse the Park. The River Road is the longest, fifty-one miles from pavement to pavement. Developed campgrounds with stores, gas, water, and ranger stations are at either end. The road parallels the Rio Grande River though it's rarely in sight. Small, primitive fishing camps are scattered along the way at the end of side roads. To give you an idea of the kind of riding these roads provide, the River Road can easily be ridden in a day by experienced, conditioned riders. In fact, riding to one end then back in a day is a reasonable proposition for very strong riders. But that's only if you're primarily interested in getting in all the riding you can.

If what you want to do is ride, relax, and enjoy the views, then take two or more days for the ride. The longer the better since there is so much to explore. But definitely take along a trailer to haul your water, food, and gear in. We pulled ours over the road with no problems. Sure it slowed us down, especially in the sand, but the freedom it allowed us was more than worth the effort. We'd trade off pulling it so neither of us got too tired or bored.

When I passed the trailer over to Alexis, my bike would instantly leap forward. I'd come out of the saddle and sprint down the road, diving through dips and turns, hammering up hills then rocketing down the other side. The miles would seem to fly by beneath my spinning tires until I'd finally slow down and turn around then sprint back the way I'd come. I'd feel like a kid just released from school. Slowing wasn't easy since the road beckoned me on and the riding was so amazing.

The Old Ore Road is the second longest tour and is also rideable in a long day. Views are expansive. The road traverses typical Chihuahuan Desert with



endless acres of creosote bush growing as if gardeners crazed by the searing sun had planted it in rows. The road crosses a high plain, descends into McKinney Wash to a spring, then up into the McKinney Hills. From there to the Rio Grande is more of the same, at times following braided stream beds through loose sand, at other times crossing low hills. It's a wonderful ride with campsites along its length and fine views of the surrounding mountains.

The Glenn Springs Road, the shortest of the routes, is west of the Old Ore Road and near the base of the Chisos Mountains. Days can be spent exploring this route because of the fascinating side canyons the road traverses. The canyons lead into the Chisos. Rarely used trails follow their twisting courses. An excellent loop can be done by starting at the Rio Grande Village, heading up the paved road to the turnout, then down to the intersection with the River Road, and back to the village.

Big Bend cycling's crowning glory is the reward at the end of the day: the hot springs pool next to the Rio Grande River. The springs were developed into a remarkably remote health spa by pioneers just after the turn of the century. The resort operated until the 1940's when it was sold to the state of Texas and subsequently added to the Park. The buildings' stone shells stand along the path to the pool. The pool is about 10 feet square and shallow. A low wall separates it from the river. Temperatures are just right for prolonged soaking, about 102 degrees. The best times for bathing are early morning or late evening, before or after most visitors arrive. Even better is during a full moon. After a glorious ride across the desert, what could be finer than a soak in a hot tub under the stars? The perfect end to a day of exploring the Park.

The one hundred and sixteen miles of paved road inside the park are great for road riding, especially the seven mile access road into the heart of the Chisos Mountains, remnants of an ancient volcano. The road follows a canyon to the rim of the caldera, a steady uphill pedal, then drops into the caldera via a series of hairpin turns and 15% grades, an exciting descent.

A campground, lodge, store, and ranger station are in the volcanic basin from where a network of hiking trails take off up the surrounding mountains. One leads to the summit of Emory Peak, 7,835 feet and the highest in the Big Bend. The views are awesome. The Rio Grande is 6,000 feet below while rugged mountains eighty miles south in Mexico are visible. The entire park is spread out at your feet. It's a place where hours can be spent just staring into the distance.

And if that isn't enough, haul along a canoe or raft and float the Rio Grande. It's known for mellow boating through dramatically beautiful canyons. The water is smooth enough that kids can be safely taken along. Days will pass too quickly

while you're lazily carried along by the river, camping out, and sun-bathing.

If you want still more adventure, take the small ferry from Boquillas across the Rio Grande into Mexico. Stand on the shore and whistle at some Mexicans on the far shore and one of them will paddle an aluminum row boat over to pick you up. The Mexican village of Boquillas is about a mile inland from the river.

The village is picturesque in kind of a trashed out, run-down adobe way. But a couple of cantinas serve beers and food and make for a relaxing end of a day of cycling. The main attraction in the area are Boquillas hot springs down stream from the village. For cycling, the landscapes are as spectacular as in Big Bend and the cycling as good. The biggest

advantage is the lack of regulations so prevalent in the Park. Trails in Big Bend are closed to hikes but in Mexico, you can ride anywhere you want.

So if the winter-time-not-enough-cycling blues get you down, there's an escape in summer readily available for the adventurous of spirit. Big Bend isn't easy to get to but it's definitely worth the effort. There's a quiet timelessness to the Park that relaxes and revitalizes. By the time we had to return back to Colorado and the winter-shouldered mountains, we were refreshed and invigorated to once again enter the fray. But the whole time we were driving back, we kept wishing we could have stayed longer. It's the perfect winter get-away.

The seemingly barren scenery offers days of great riding in Big Bend.



PAUL GALLAHER

## New Products Review

### BRITE LITE BICYCLE LIGHT

Manufactured by the Peak Experience Company, the Brite Lite Bicycle Light is unique among all other available bicycle lighting systems because of its high performance and endurance capabilities. That is according to Eric Rupp, president of the company.

The system utilizes a Halogen headlamp and a rechargeable "Gell Cell" battery. A complete system includes a tail light, head light, battery, convenient carrying case for the battery, and a recharging unit. This combination, according to Rupp, extremely bright light with considerable endurance; as much as six and a half hours is claimed. It's also reported to be light -twenty-nine ounces for the standard system.

For more information, contact Peak Experience, PO Box 1386Z, Soquel CA, 95073



### BLACKBURN APX TRAINER

According to Blackburn, the APX Flywheel Trainer represents a significant advance over conventional wind trainers. It incorporates an inertial flywheel which smooths out the dead spots at the top and bottom of the pedal stroke. The result according to Blackburn is a more realistic training experience at higher overall work loads. They also say it is substantially quieter than wind trainers.

Another innovation is their distinctive bipod front-end for a particularly stable and rigid design. Blackburn claims the trainer is designed for rugged workouts and lots of them.

The trainer is available from Blackburn dealers.



### DRI SLIDE BIKE AID

Bike Aid is molybdenum disulfide based lubricant especially made for bicycles. The manufacturers claim it goes on wet, but dries to leave a long lasting

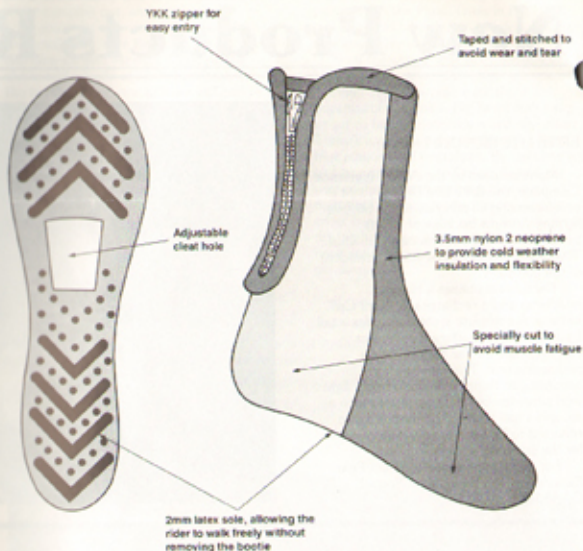
film of protection. They say that because it is not oily, it won't sling off chains and won't attract dirt, dust, or any other harmful abrasives. It's available through bicycle distributors.



## PYI, Inc. NEOPRENE BOOTIES

PYI Inc. is now importing from Europe what they claim is a unique new bootie designed for cold and wet weather riding. The bootie is made out of 3.5mm nylon II neoprene upper with a molded latex sole. According to the manufacturer, this offers protection from the rain and cold without restricting the rider's ankle. The bootie has a latex sole with an adjustable cleat hole to insure a proper fit with most shoes. They claim it is durable enough to allow the rider to walk freely without any damage to the sole.

For more information, please contact PYI Inc., P.O. BOX 71098 Seattle, WA. 98107, (206) 784-4468.



## SUN METAL PRODUCTS

Sun Metal's American-made Mistral and Levanter rim lines now include 25mm models for 1.75 and 2.125-inch tires. They're designed for mountain bikes, city bikes, BMX's, etc. and come in 20-inch, 24-inch, and 26-inch sizes. They have hard anodized finish, spoke eyelets for added strength, 36 spoke hole pattern, and Schrader valve holes.

Sun Metal has also introduced a new lock clip that they claim reduces the high-stress slippage that can be encountered in mountain biking. Six clips, featuring four specially tapered gripping points, fit on each rim and are held in place by either .080 or .105 spoke nipples. The tires are secured by the evenly spaced clips. According to Sun Metal, they eliminate



any slippage that can cause valve stem damage during acceleration and braking with low pressure tires.

## STERLING TRAINER 1000

The Sterling trainer is lightweight and portable and compatible with virtually all bicycle frames, according to Lawee, Inc. The front fork has a secure quick-release mechanism for easy installation and removal. A spring loaded bottom bracket cradle features a unique (according to Lawee) solid top-piece constructed of molded nylon that protects the bike's frame. The legs are extra wide and close to the ground for maximum stability. Lawee claims that two fans provide the optimum resistance for effective training.



## MOUNTAIN BIKING WEEKEND

continued from page 13

a couple of other people. You two saw him? Talked to him? Drew looked like a kid, intrigued and totally believing.

"Yes we saw him!" I blurted out, interrupting some blasé comment of Scott's. "Jesus! He was so real! Both of us saw him! Scott talked to him; he ignored me. And the parrot..."

My voice trailed off as I vividly relived the encounter. My head was spinning. I didn't know how much more of this rest and relaxation I could take.

The rain began to fall and I used it as an excuse to go hide from the world in my tent. We'd seen headlights bouncing our way in the distance and assumed they were Drew's friends. The day had raised questions I was sure in time I could

answer. The patter on my rainfly momentarily drowned out my thoughts as I undressed and climbed into my sleeping bag - after checking for rattlesnakes, of course.

Snug in my bag, I thought about how the desert is always a place of deception, mocking all that humans tend to hold dear - stability, predictability, civilization. Entrance into the unknown and uncharted is a tantalizing proposition to those seekers of adventure still left on the planet whose spirits are not yet dampened by years of blue collar drudgery or office work. I was dozing off, aware of the possibility of morning flash floods yet I felt strangely peaceful. Honored. To be a part. Somehow everything I'd thought so

important didn't seem quite so important any more.

I peeked out the tent flap one last time when I heard the sound of a truck coming up the road. Scott was walking off into the bushes while Drew huddled over the dying embers. A stray gust of wind flared the embers into tiny flames, casting flashes of light on Drew. The flames reflected off of something bright on his chest. I watched in mute fascination. He was staring into the distance and I swear, he had a black patch and only one arm. Something like a dark shadow flew off his shoulder. Oddly enough, I wasn't at all scared. In fact, I felt exceptionally peaceful.

The flames died down just as he turned and looked straight into my eyes. The eyes were Drew's.



# The National Championships 1985

## Santa Barbara, California

by Casey Kunselman

The Crested Butte Stage Race ended one week before the NORBA National Championships and provided absolutely no indication as to who would earn the title of National Champion. All that was known was that the competition would be intense.

I drove home from Colorado with the upcoming Nationals occupying my thoughts. I was preparing myself for an all-out effort in Santa Barbara seven days hence, on the slopes overlooking the Pacific Ocean, where the champion's jersey would be passed on to the 1985 champion.

On the way back to California, my Wilderness Trail Bikes teammates and I swung by Moab, Utah for a look at the Slickrock Trail. We'd read about it in Mountain Bike Magazine and wanted to see if it was all that it was cracked up to be. Stopping also gave us a break from the long drive.

The trail was even better than we'd heard. We played live kids on vacation at the ultimate skateboard park, constantly challenging each other to yet more outrageous feats on the smooth sandstone. But the Nationals were never far from my mind. It was while riding this undulating trail overlooking the Colorado River that I decided my goal for the Nationals would be a top five placing.

I had two reasons for not bidding for the champion's jersey. Even in my best shape, I knew how I was climbing compared to the other racers. Plus, I'd just spend six days in bed three weeks earlier with a brutal cold, managing only an half hour of riding per day. I'd lost five pounds but felt optimistic about a full recovery within the week. A top five finish seemed a challenging goal.

From Moab, we drove straight through to the base of Mt. Diablo in northern California. I grew up riding on these hills and, although road lagged, I eagerly began my training week.

The poop sheet for Santa Barbara stated that the three-mile course had 500 feet of climbing per lap. With this in mind, I rode through Thursday at a medium intensity, riding on seldom ridden trails and over known routes in the reverse direction from normal. I concentrated on

fluid climbing and fast, smooth downhill. I played TV theme songs in my head to psyche myself up: Bonanza, Hawaii Five-O and the king of theme songs, Mission: Impossible.

My pre-race training complete, I joined my Wilderness Trail Bikes teammate Roy Rivers and began the trek to Santa Barbara, arriving Saturday morning.

Hundreds of people were milling about of the course over a recently fire-burned downhill near the parking lot. Though the downhill grade was only five to seven percent, the bumps' magnitude was such that pedaling was impossible. I made a mental note for the Mission: Impossible theme.

Roy and I gathered with our two other teammates, Joey Peterson and Todd DeAngeles, for breakfast to discuss strategy for the prologue race. We'd race five laps over the same course we'd race for the finals. There were less than 100 pro-expert riders so we'd only be racing for starting line positions for the finals.

During the prologue, I concentrated on a fast start to keep away from the mid-pack dust storms then settled into a nice, medium rhythm. Anywhere within the second row for tomorrow's start would suit me fine. The course wound through a downhill chicane, across a hillside, turned left at the bottom, and then wound in a cloverleaf pattern thru the surrounding hills and valleys. A run through a dry creek bed took us to the base of The Wall. Named by the riders, this almost unrideably steep hill gained about 150 feet of elevation to the top of the half-mile downhill to the start/finish area.

I varied my lines during the race, sometimes climbing out of the saddle, sometimes sitting, and practiced theme songs. The pace was moderate so I joined some other racers going for style points at spectator gatherings. Most of the racers, including myself, enjoyed having a little fun preparation for the following day.

I eased into bed that night after two lunches, a huge carbon-dinner, and an evening Santa Barbara stroll, and visualized tomorrow's race, gently alerting my body about what to expect. In fourteen hours, a season's worth of



Women's National Champion - Jacquie Phelan

JEFF ROTH



Men's National Champion - Joe Murray





Aaron Cox helps out teammate Todd Sweitzer

JEFF ROTH



Joey Peterson of WTB chases Dave MacLaughlin of Specialized

JEFF ROTH

knowledge about pinched tubes, derailed chains, and body fuel requirements would be put to the ultimate test: a one-day, all-out ride to determine who the best mountain racers are.

After a relaxed breakfast, my teammates and I rolled out to the race course and began our warmups. Soon it was time. The racers were called to the line. This was the strongest field ever to line up for the Nationals. Team Ritchey: Max Jones and Mark Fris. Team Specialized: Mike Jordan, Gavin Chilcott, David Myers and Dave McLaughlin. Team Fisher: George Theobald, Jim Deaton, and Defending Champion - Joe Murray. Team Ross: Jon Loomis, Aaron Cox, Joe Sloup, Todd Sweitzer, and Cindy Whitehead. Team Schwinn: Ned Overend, Jeff Norman, Kye Sharp, and Mary Lee Atkins. Team Wilderness Trail Bikes (WTB): Roy Rivers, Todd DeAngelo, Joey Peterson, myself, and Women's Champion Jacques Phelan. The only top riders missing were Colorado riders Steve and Don Cook whose sponsors (Ritchey and Ross respectively) hadn't flown them out. Either brother is a potential winner in any race and their non-presence was ultimately felt by both teams.

**BANG!** The pack was first sent back up the final downhill to a horse-shoe turn and then came flying back down across the start/finish line. When the dust settled after half a lap, I was in the top ten, maybe

fifth or sixth. Ahead were Joey Peterson (WTB), Roy Rivers (WTB), Ned Overend (Schwinn) and George Theobald (Fisher). Cash prizes were awarded on alternating laps and season-long holeshot man Joey P. wanted the first one. Ned was hot on his wheel but I won the prime by a few lengths. Unfortunately for the race's potential drama, Ned stayed on Roy's wheel and didn't see a large rock through the dust cloud. The impact punctured Ned's tire and sent him flying over the bars. Ned was removed as a serious threat to first place but not out of the race, not with his competitive drive and ability.

Joey was still in the lead but tiring from his sprint with Ned. He was soon passed by his teammate Roy Rivers with George Theobald in close pursuit. I passed Joey and suddenly realized I was in third place. Knowing the other strong riders would soon be breaking free from the dust pack forced me to keep up a hard pace. Joe Murray (Fisher) came by within half a lap, about two gears above my pace. I looked down to check my brake shoes with the dim hope that it wasn't just him. I held fourth position for a complete lap, and then Gavin Chilcott (Specialized) came by. I slipped onto his wheel and waited for a mistake. None came. If anything, he seemed to get stronger. In fact, Gavin rode the entire way up The Wall, pulling out a strong lead over me in the process. That I knew of, no one else had ridden The Wall. I chased and caught him halfway down the downhill, then rested. We played

cat-and-mouse for the next lap, exchanging fourth position several times. But on our next go at the wall, Gavin literally spun away from me, stretching out to a one-minute lead.

Roy was still enjoying first position at the front of the pack. George Theobald challenged him once but unsuccessfully while Joe seemed content to sit in the third position, waiting for the right moment to establish himself.

Meanwhile, developments were taking place behind us. Aaron Cox (Ross) and Mike Jordan (Specialized) dropped out. Max Jones (Ritchey) derailed and then twisted his chain beyond service. Ned Overend had fixed his flat and was moving up last. I completed my sixth lap just as Jacques Phelan (WTB) was completing her fifth and final lap for her third consecutive National Championship. Several minutes behind Jacques came Mary Lee Atkins (Schwinn) and still further back Cindy Whitehead (Ross).

Through trail side reports, I learned that both John Loomis (Ross) and Kye Sharp (Schwinn) were moving up while ahead of me George was fading seriously. It was not time for theme songs yet. Wilderness Trail Bikes partner Mark Slate handed up my special mixture at the water hand-up station. I drank half, began to go faster. Only three laps remained and I was feeling fresh.

Reports kept coming in. Ned was motoring behind me. George was burnt toast ahead of me. And Joe Murray had

just taken the lead from Roy! I now became involved with my race against the terrain. I threw down my eyeshade system. My bike became my self. My eighth and ninth laps were possibly my fastest for the day. I spotted George just ahead on the downhill when I started the tenth lap. He saw me alter the corner at the bottom of the long start/finish hill and tried to sprint away but had nothing left. I passed him easily. Renewed with power, I set my sights on Gavin and third place but it was too late. I crested The Wall for the tenth and final time and looked down to see Ned passing George below me. At the top of the final downhill, I watched Gavin crossing the line for third.

It was all over for me except the coast to the finish line. I was still feeling fresh in fourth place and decided I needed to set higher goals for myself. Ned completed an incredible comeback to finish fifth after that fat tire. George Theobald was almost nipped by John Loomis at the line but held on for sixth. Todd DeAngelo held off a persistent Kye Sharp for eighth with Joey Peterson following Kye to round out the top ten.

The Nationals were finished until next year. Once again Joe had retained his jersey but not without having been pushed by Roy Rivers for much of the race. If Max hadn't twisted his chain, if Ned hadn't flattened, the race might have been even closer. But then mountain bike racing isn't just strength; it's survival of man and machine under all conditions. Joe Murray is still the champion.

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# Northern California Travels

by Gary Sprung



A. Chabot Park

GNURPS

The topographic map on sale at the visitor's center had dotted lines all over the place.

"So, all these trails on the map, they're open for bicycles?" I asked the ranger.

"Well, uh, not really. You'd have to lift your bike over branches and such."

"Oh! well I like that. What I mean is, is there any rule prohibiting bicycles?"

"Not that I know of," she replied.

That 50 cent map was the easiest purchase I've ever made. It was an incredible ticket to adventure.

Thus began our mountain biking exploration of the 51,000-acre Humboldt Redwoods State Park in northern California. Our first discovery was a perfectly groomed trail system. Branches in the way? Heck, there weren't even rocks. Fallen leaves and needles padded the paths and covered the mud and crunched sweetly under our knobby tires. Evidence of our passage was slight.

The trails even have log handrails on huge redwood log bridges over minor streams. That may sound too developed and too easy for hikers but for bicyclists, those bridges present an interesting challenge. Ever tried to ride between handrails over a two-foot wide log without

a foot stomp or waiver of the handlebars?

Perfect trails do not equal an absence of challenge. With over 3000 vertical feet between the South Fork of the Eel River and the top of Grasshopper Peak, our muscles found plenty to grunt over. Steep, abrupt switchbacks interrupt long, smooth flats, necessitating some very tricky maneuvering.

Those three hundred and fifty-foot high coastal redwoods are temples of both earthy and ethereal delight. The trees thrive on fog and create a microclimate of cool, high humidity. The sun's rays filtering down through the canopy of soft green glisten with what seems to be drizzle, yet the precipitation cannot be felt on your skin.

Most of the miles of single-track trails in the park follow the rivers, staying just above the flood level where stand the biggest redwoods. The cycling is just strenuous enough to stimulate, the grades just moderate enough to titillate.

The uplands produce smaller redwoods but add Douglas fir, California laurel, madrone, and several species of oak to the forest mix. Travels to the higher country are best accomplished via a network of fire roads in the upper Bull

Creek area, a watershed encompassed by the park boundaries. These roads give the rare treat of double-tracks closed to motor vehicles but open to bikes and provide a tremendous variety of backcountry loops. The road up to Grasshopper Peak connects into two single-tracks for whizzing descents back to the river.

One good half-day loop starts with a four-mile climb towards Grasshopper's summit then on to the first single-track. That trail in turn traverses the mountain over to the Johnson Trail Camp, a group of log cabins built by "The Hackers" making railroad ties between the 1930s and the 50s. These cabins are now available to campers. They're clean, comfy, and lovely.

The trail down from the cabins, narrow and slightly overgrown with brush, doesn't quite meet the meticulous standards of the riverside routes but there's still none of those obstacles the ranger warned of. A left turn at the bottom yields a final two miles of glorious temple-tripping to close the loop.

The climb to the top of the Grasshopper Peak is twice as long and twice as high. But besides the view from the summit fire lookout, it presents an

eight-mile single track descent down a different side of the mountain. An excellent loop over this route starts with a long ride up the Bull Creek flats then a climb to an overnight rest at the Grasshopper Trail Camp near the top.

The second day starts with the eight-mile descent, then a long flat along the Eel River. Gonzo riders could no doubt complete the loop in a day. Since both ends of the trail network are at the paved highways, a car shuttle is another option.

Car camping in the park is luxurious. Sites come complete with food locker, barbecue, table, water, and hot showers. You get all that for only \$6! Another camping option is the "hike and bike" camps for the primitive types only.

Just south of the park is the Knights Inn restaurant in the hamlet of Myers Flat. They serve a good array of your regular American fare, cooked superbly with good options for vegies and several brands of wine made just a hundred miles south in Napa/Sonoma country. Reasonable prices, too.

The best season for visiting Humboldt Redwoods State Park has to be autumn, just after Labor Day. The crowds and mosquitoes have largely disappeared by then, the trails are dry, and temperatures aren't too hot. The worst time is winter-monsoon season, unless you hit it during a dry period. If you do, then winter can be the best of all times. Absolutely no

crowds, wonderful temperatures, and super riding. Spring can be mucky but deliciously joyful with abundant wildflowers.

North of Humboldt Park are several more redwood preserves, but few offer the extensive backcountry of Humboldt. Just east, on the coast, is the King Range Conservation Area managed by the U.S. Bureau of Land Management. This spectacular coastal wilderness has been largely denuded of its sacred 2000-year-old redwoods but it does have few people and fine riding on roads and trails.

Too much of northern California is owned by the big timber companies. These lands are laced everywhere with excellent roads suitable for bikes and you can often enter if you get permission from a local company office. Trespassers beware. A serious hazard to watch out for in this region, whether you're on public or private land, are paranoiac pot-growers who aggressively covet their privacy, anonymity, and crop. This is not a threat to be lightly treated.

The recreation potential of the redwood region has barely been tapped so far. Most of the recreation economy revolves around roadside attractions, leaving the backcountry largely unused. Should mountain bikers and their kindred non-motorized outdoorsmen start spending more dollars there, the locals might find more ways to make a living other than chopping down some of Earth's most magnificent trees.



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QUOTES FROM THE MOUNTAIN

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# Mark Slate

## Keeping Your Feet on the Pedals



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

Approaches to cycling in the dirt are varied, sometimes extremely, but no matter what the style, of overriding importance is remaining on the bike. This is accomplished by gripping the handlebars and keeping your butt and/or one or two feet in the appropriate places.

A bicycle is best controlled by smooth, positive, and often subtle moves of the rider's anatomy. The more secure the contact points between bike and rider are, the more fluid the control. This can get tricky when the bicycle seems to be hardly touching the ground, so violent is the bouncing. While your hands are able to grip the bars and only get jolted off when you're caught unawares, your feet rely on gravity to keep them on the pedals. The same bouncing that is disrupting your bike's flowing movement can also dislodge your feet from their position. This is the fundamental reason I believe toe clips and straps are essential for mountain biking. Naturally, they are also useful for pedaling efficiency.

Most mountain biking equipment evolves for solid reasons. Up until three to five years ago, virtually no one used toe clips. I didn't. The idea of strapping my feet to the pedals quite frankly scared me. Switching over was a slow transition but now I wouldn't be without them.

When I first installed clips, I used a system designed for quick, easy removal. I'd remove the straps for any tricky trail work. Just the thought of how I'd get my feet to the ground if need be could cause me to blow a section. It wasn't long, however, before the quick and easy system was just too much trouble. My confidence and proficiency had improved to a point where I was learning the usefulness of controlling the bike with my feet. The lugs on the soles of my boots were also worn to a more manageable level, facilitating entry and exit.

Getting in and out of clips is greatly aided by a few simple guidelines. Your straps should be loose enough for unhindered insertion of your foot once it's inserted. The only time I really pull the straps tight is on long ascents and on roads.

Proper length and positioning of toe clips is extremely important. The clip should be long enough to get the ball of your foot over the pedal axis. Lateral location of the clip should be determined by the individual's comfortable foot placement on the pedal. Ideally, when your toe is buried in the clip, your foot will be correctly angled for maximum efficiency and comfort.

Getting into your toe clip is made easier by a toe clip in which the strap carrier is not directly above the rear of the pedal cage. This helps get your toe on the pedal platform to steady it for insertion of your foot. At this point, it is important to note that resistance may be caused by serrated pedal cages and deep lug shoes. Turning the pedal over and inserting the foot should be a fluid motion. A pedal with clip hangs at an angle that requires rotating it backwards for insertion. The pedal cage must be rotated until the platform is on or near the same plane as the sole of your shoe. A handy aid to this maneuver is the Wilderness Trail Bikes Toe Flip. We designed its form through years of revision. It provides your toe a purchase point on the backside of the pedal so you can easily rotate the pedal. After rotation is complete, the curved top portion of the Toe Flip aids in reducing the repelling characteristics of the pedal cage edge.

You can also fabricate your own pedal flipper out of an old toe clip. To do this, take the bolt-on portion of a toe clip and cut approximately 1" plus from the 90 degree bend. Round the sharp edges with

a grinder or file to a smooth radius. Then bend into an S-curve with the middle section parallel to the pedal cage.

Now that we've got you into your toe clips, you need to learn how to get out. Simply pull your foot backwards with a wiggle if necessary. After you've been done a few times, you'll be able to disengage your foot in milliseconds. More than once, I've avoided an eminent, low-speed endo by jumping over the handlebars to land on my feet.

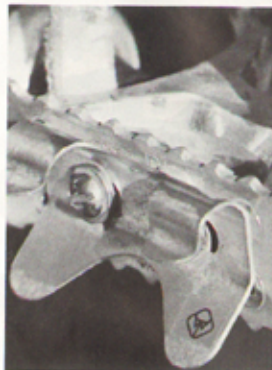
Toe clips can be an asset or liability at high speed. They'll keep you on the bike but can also keep the bike under you. They'll help you stay attached to the bike but if you're not on your wheels anymore, that may not be desirable. I have been reduced to a standstill (read "crashed") from speed by an unfortunate mistake to discover I'm still in one or both of my toe clips. This has not caused me any undue discomfort but I try to avoid it just the same. Mostly I put my clips and straps to good use by using them to drive the bike.

Straps should be minimal stretch items for effectiveness. Buckles should be positioned high on your foot to prevent damage from passing rocks. This placement is such that no bones are irritated by the hardness of the metal buckle. The buckle should not shift. If the strap slides in the pedal, secure it by twisting one revolution between pedal spiders or use an end button or tape. The strap carrier portion of the toe clip should not slide on the strap either.

Toe clips come in plastic, alloy, or steel. Since durability is foremost in most folks' minds, alloy is out. Steel clips are pretty hard to break, but stepping on them is fairly easy. This can result in a reduced

target for your toe to engage, causing you to bend them back to their original shape. Steel's stiffness is a desirable attribute. It provides resistance when nudging the strap carrier upon engaging the clip. This stiffness also aids in pedaling efficiency. Plastic clips are highly flexible, some more than others. The only plus here is they don't flatten when stepped on. Some are guaranteed unbreakable. There are advocates of both steel and plastic but I see more plastic on mountain bikes. I use doubled (riveted) plastic clips for more stiffness while retaining their reliability.

Although almost all pedals can be made to mount clips, flaps, and straps, some are better suited than others. My choice, up till now, has been the Suntour MP1000 modeled after their Superb road pedal. This adapted road design is well suited to the mounting of toe clips. Oval cage pedals are intended for use without toe clips, although they can be fitted. The width of an oval cage locates the clip substantially further forward than rectangular pedals, thus requiring shorter clips. The shorter clip coupled with the width of the cage locates the strap carrier



further from the rear of the cage making pedal rotation for insertion easier. The same end may be achieved with standard width pedals by fitting a spacer with a shorter clip. This provides a deep enough toe box with the ball of your foot over the spindle while locating the strap position forward. Having the strap carrier too far forward results in an insecure feeling; your foot doesn't feel like it's "in". The ideal strap carrier position seems to be halfway between pedal axle and rear of cage.

Getting in and out of clips is quite easy if you're properly set up. Lugged shoes may need a little beveling with a knife to aid entry. Even better are cycling shoes, particularly models such as the Rivat Cyclo-Cross. Its sole is designed to grip the pedal yet comes out readily, particularly with a bit of a twisting action. Mountain biking shoes such as the Nike Discovery are even easier to insert and remove with its reverse lug design. Once you become used to the idea and proficient at flipping the pedal up and sliding your foot in, my guess is you won't want to be without clips, straps, and some sort of toe flip.

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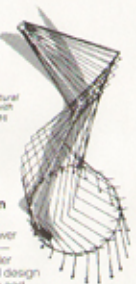
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# Letters to the Editor

Editors,

After reading my first Mountain Bike, I felt that I owed you and your entire staff a letter of appreciation. Your magazine is the greatest!

Let me start by telling you that I purchased a Rockhopper by Specialized approximately one month ago and it is one of the best recreational purchases I have ever made. I live in New York on the north shore of Long Island, which is moderately hilly and I've become addicted to my bike.

I'm sure that anyone into mountain biking shares the same thrill and enthusiasm while day tripping on their machine as I do! Possibly in the future, I will be able to contribute an article as mind enhancing as your Colorado stories, but for now let me get back to your magazine and the praise it deserves. This letter is probably a bit long winded to say thanks for a great magazine but your articles just blew my mind.

I recently read your Aug/Sep issue cover to cover in less than a day and I can't wait to get the next one. Your stories, pictures and details are superb! I am green with envy after reading about and seeing Colorado's excellent biking trails in your magazine. Keep up the great work.

James McAllister,  
New York

Editor,

Being one of a few people in town with a bicycle trailer, I enjoyed reading the article by Kimberly Schappert in the Aug/Sep issue entitled How About A Trailer.

I have owned a Burley and I now have an Equinox. My wife, son, and I have done nearly a thousand miles with each trailer. We would disagree lumping the two trailers together for comparison, notably in the rear triangle attachment clamps.

Our Burley had a wind nut locking mechanism that was easy to attach to the bike and very secure. It came loose less than a half dozen times. When it did come loose, it was quickly noticed.

For reasons I now regret, I sold the Burley and bought an Equinox. The trailer hitch I quickly found out is not as easy to attach to the bike. It comes loose almost every time we go out, and takes gorilla strength to get it sufficiently tight to prevent it from coming loose. I lost a few

millimeters of hub because it came loose once. The Equinox also has a rocking motion to it which makes it difficult to notice when the clamp comes loose. The last arguments against the Equinox is that it has very narrow clearance when I hook it up to my Schwinn mountain bike. The spokes of the wheel come precariously close to the clamp.

Louis & Julie Melini  
Salt Lake City, UT

PS. I really like the magazine, especially the wilderness vs mountain bike debate.

Dear Mountain Bike:

Thanks for your Nov./Dec. issue, it's simply fantastic. The road tests are some of the best I've seen on dirt bikes. Even though I applaud your fun comes first philosophy, I must complain about the article titled "Trials and Errors."

As a bicycle trials rider I protest the equation of bicycle trials with juggling or frisbee.

Trials is single tracking taken to its limits, not picnic table riding. Why print a report of a trials event written by someone who knows so little about it? Someone who connects single tracking with "lots of push and ride", someone who wants to "write about the stuff even die hard road bikers would love."

The obvious sarcasm in the last three paragraphs is offensive to trials riders. Jeff Lindsay is smart to mention motorcycle trials. They have been at it for a long time and can tell you all about the bad effects of having beginners write about their sport.

Sincerely,  
Mike Augspurger  
Belmont, MA

Editor,

As a representative of Earth First! I wish to express our disagreement with you concerning your recent well-written but misguided editorial criticism of Sierra Club's position against mountain bikes. Mountain bikes, in their place, are excellent, fun, and harmless machines—immeasurably better than the accursed ORV's and ATV's which befoul our countryside. However, there are places where no machine—not even bicycles—

should be permitted. There are even places where no deep-lug soles should be permitted. Bicycles have a heavier impact on trails than do hikers. Mountain bikes are appropriate for the hundreds of thousands of dirt roads in our national forests, but mountain bikes should not be allowed in Wilderness Areas.

Despite our disagreement with you on this issue, many of us have, or want to have, mountain bikes. In fact, Arizona Earth First! is considering (funds permitting) purchasing a few mountain bikes for our eco-actions in national forests. Do you have any advice for us on where we could get good mountain bikes at a low price to aid in our environmental actions?

John Davis

John, thanks for your letter. I agree with most of your statements about wilderness. My problem with the Sierra Club is not their stand against bikes in the wilderness; I oppose their grouping mountain bikes with ORV's, etc. They're threatening to close still more forest service land to bikes, not just wilderness areas. I believe there should be some sort of objective guidelines as to where bikes are allowed rather than basing such decisions on personal preference, which is what the Sierra Club is doing.

As far as bikes are concerned, contact your local bike shops for information. There are plenty of excellent bikes available and at surprisingly low prices. They can help you in that respect more than I. And also, keep up the good work.

Dear Hank:

I am writing you in regards to the current conflict between mountain bikers and the United States Forest Service. In particular, I am concerned with the Forest Service position on riding in Wilderness Areas.

In the August-September issue of your magazine, you ran a story written by Lou Dawson about riding the Midway Trail in Pirkin County. Most of the ride that Lou had ridden on is in the Wilderness Area. Because of the Forest Service rule prohibiting all bikes and hang gliders in the Wilderness Areas, I feel that this article was completely out of pace with the intent of your magazine.

There are so many potential rides in



the state of Colorado that we can avoid riding in the sensitive Wilderness Areas. Even though Aspen is surrounded by the Wilderness area, we have established hundreds of miles of potential mountain bike terrain. The last thing we need to do is to create a schism between the Federal Government and our small but growing group of biking enthusiasts.

By condoning riding in Wilderness Areas in your magazine, it gives an air of rebellion against what we perceive as unfair treatment to our segment of back country users. We want to try and cooperate with the Forest Service, not openly flaunt their regulations. With cooperation, we may be able to receive special consideration in specific areas.

For example, the Aspen Velo Club is working on a mountain bike trail network that will link Aspen to Redd Reservoir and further on to Vail. The proposed trail crosses through the Wilderness Area in one little neck of land, about two miles across. We have asked the local Forest Service office for a special exception for this area. When a bunch of yahoos careen off into areas that are specifically closed and the Forest Service discovers them, it makes our job even more difficult when asking for exemptions.

I had a conversation with a local rider last year who had just completed a mountain bike ride. Obviously it had been quite a trip due to the packs and mass of mud he was carrying.

"Where did you go?" I asked.

He replied, "Conundrum Hot Springs and Coffee Pot Pass."

"That's in the Wilderness area, you know."

"So what? They'll never find me up there and I could always ride away from

them if they tried to stop me. Its my right to be able to ride in that area."

That sort of exemplifies the attitude people are fostering in this area. Of course, this is the same person that will ski powder chutes in the back country during high avalanche conditions.

I guess what I am trying to convey here is that we need to work together to make the riding more available for mountain bikers. If we can stick to roads and trails that are not so sensitive, we'll preserve a lot more peace and perhaps be able to get permission for riding in those areas we feel that the mountain bike impact can be minimized.

We look forward to the success of your magazine. It typifies that particular joy we all feel when we're self-propelling in the back country. The thought of cresting that last ridge before descending into town is a distant memory as we prepare the old bike for the winter months. But wait! Isn't canyonlands still warm this time of year? Maybe its time to go and hang out in the bottom of a warm gulch for a while. Keep up the good writing!

John Wilkinson  
President Aspen Velo Club  
Aspen, CO.

John,

First, at the time when Lou and his friends rode the Midway Pass trail, there were no restrictions about bikes in the Wilderness. Secondly, we were not condoning riding in Wilderness Areas. That the area he rode through was in a Wilderness Area wasn't even mentioned. And as far as cooperating with the Forest Service is concerned, that sounds all well and good but the fact of the matter is that

mountain bikers are not welcomed by them. It would be nice if mountain bikers could sit down with the Forest Service and work out compromises but so far, that's been like butting heads with a wall.

As far as the person you mentioned who rode through the Wilderness Area, hey, you're right. Actions such as those do nothing to help our cause. But I can also relate to his (or her) frustrations.

Mountain bikes seem to have to walk on egg shells, causing not the slightest ripple along the way. But then I hike through the Wilderness and run across horse packers' camps where garbage is laying about and fires are still smoldering and yet nothing is ever said by the Forest Service about the problems horse packers cause. No matter what they do, no matter how gross their actions whether by a few or the majority, horses riders will never be banned by the Forest Service.

I'm afraid that I personally, and not as a representative of this magazine, sympathize with those who say the hell with the Forest Service and ride into Wilderness Areas. It may not be right and such actions may do nothing to further our cause but when we've already been saddled with the black hats of wilderness supporters, getting excited to cooperate with the Forest Service isn't easy. It takes two to compromise and so far, I don't see much willingness to do so on the part of government agencies and various environmental groups, specifically the Sierra Club.

But good luck with your efforts on the Aspen to Vail trail. That would be a great bike ride and deserves to be made an exception.

Hank Barlow

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