

January - February 1987
Vol. II No. 4

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mountain bike

January - February 1987
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Mountain Bike Magazine hopes you will spend some time thinking and planning ahead for a trip to some riding paradise new to you. After all — getting out there is what it's all about! Gnarps photo.

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Cover photo: Steve Cook riding for Richey leads the pack at the annual Winter Park, Colorado race. Rod Walker photo.

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editor's note



Hot damn! We made it through yet another year without the world erupting into war. So here's to mountain biking, a totally absurd yet perfectly sane way of living! Happy New Year! And here's hoping that all those official type of people out there so unfortunate to have not yet learned the ultimate and everlasting glory and redemption of clunkers clunking through the wilderness do so, soon! For you, people of tunnel vision; it's time for ever lasting enlightenment and the opening of National Park and Wilderness Trails to set fired flyers in all their notorious guises.

Ah well, I suppose Santa Claus will replace his reindeer with the seven dwarves riding 37 speed BMX machines before any mountain biker will ever legally ride to the bottom of the Grand Canyon then up the other side. Why that is so is both our strength and our weakness: the independence, some call it oneness, of every mountain biker. For proof, look no further than our frame builders. (I like to think of them as our referring to us, the mountain biking fraternity - frame builders in the same manner as "our National Forest", "our Wilderness".) A person could spend considerable amounts of time trying to find two mountain frame builders who agree on geometry, materials, component selection, etc. The same is true of those who ride these marvelous machines. Ten riders, ten opinions; twenty riders, twenty opinions. So trying to get this diverse group of individuals together long enough to come up with a concise organizational plan to promote the desires of mountain bikers and then steadily work for that goal is all but impossible.

Organizations working to change bureaucracy rely on people who love to volunteer and work on committees. These folks are the same ones who join all those junior high, high school, and college committees and clubs. Regardless of which side of an issue these folks represent, they're all looking at life through pretty much the same rule book. And so far, almost all the mountain bikers I've ever met just flat don't meet that criteria. They'd just as soon walk half way down

I know my passage on a closed trail will cause no damage. Can you say the same about your speeding or your drinking?

the block to cross rather than wait for permission from a school crossing guard. Heh, I'm not putting these committee folk down, nor at all, we just think differently. The world obviously needs committee members or we wouldn't have them. Unfortunately that currently pretty much leaves mountain bikers without a paddle.

So what we have to do is go out there and recruit potential committee members to represent us. Go out and find burned out PTA members, bored to tears church prayer breakfast members, environmentalists vacant eyed from too many late-night meetings, idealists fed up with things that never seem to change from the right and the left, don't worry about their political beliefs. Go out and find these people because they all are in desperate need for exactly what mountain biking can give them: good old chest thumping, leg twitching excitement. They need to feel fresh air on their faces while sweaty palms grip the bars of mountain bikes sweeping down a wonderful single-track. They need the exhilaration of successfully negotiating a demanding obstacle, of slipping by Cerberus and riding where no bicycle has ever gone before, of dancing on the edge before once again returning to society's claims.

Once you've found them and properly inducted them into the magic of backcountry cycling, take them out to your favorite trail, the one you ride rarely and always secretly since it's closed to bikers. Turn them onto this great ride then, after riding it, tell them that it's closed and why. Then stand back, well clear of their wash, for the paper will undoubtedly begin to fly. You see, at heart, they love causes, they love the games, the political maneuvering. All they needed was a little

excitement in their lives. Now they can return to the trenches with a cause that not only gives their days direction, it provides them the sheer exhilaration we all need.

Just be sure to back them up when they need backing up. And never, never let them go too long without getting out for a ride, preferably on closed trails, the oxygen every fire needs. If we all join in this conspiracy, we probably won't open Wilderness Areas to bikers and we still won't be able to traverse the Grand Canyon by bike but sure as hell we'll have some fine table-banging, tongue-wagging, bike-riding, beer-drinking parties to celebrate the latest opening of a state park's trails to bikes.

If you're wondering what got all this into my head, it's simple: I recently rode some absolutely wonderful trails that are totally closed to mountain bikers. Now I've done it. I can already hear the papers rustling as people get ready to hang me by my toe clips to the nearest saguaro cactus. After all, I did knowingly and premeditatedly break the law. I rode my bike past a sign that clearly prohibits bikes. (Or did it? I swear it looked too me as if the sign's intent was to tell me to stay off the surrounding fields. Which I did. I stayed right on that trail, never once wavering from its course.)

Why? I couldn't help myself. The trails beckoned (as I knew they would; otherwise I wouldn't have been there), my bike was ready, my soul responded. The day was everything I'd hoped it would be. The paths wound through dark forests and silent valleys and over wind buffeted hills. In the distance could be heard the ocean pounding the land into eventual submission. I swept out of the trees into meadows where deer grazed, startling them into staring at me in wonder before they delicately walked into the surrounding forest, instantly disappearing into the shadows. For two and a half hours I roamed this wildly beautiful land, encountering no one but four other bikers also daring to trespass where we weren't allowed.

But we weren't alone, the tracks of numerous fat tires provided ample proof of that. They also once again gave graphic evidence that mountain bikes cause no more environmental damage than sneaker-clad hikers. Our banishment is a social act barren of any objectivity. The ruling is silly, arbitrary, and reactionary but until we mountain bikers recruit those committee members we need so desperately to represent us, that's the way things will remain.

Consequently I'm afraid I have to admit that I will now and again knowingly trespass beyond signs bearing a bicycle with a slash through it. But not into the meadow itself. I do promise to remain on the trail. And to those who would lecture me on the wrongness of such actions, I can only say that as long as we continue to sit in the back of the bus, that's where we will always be banned to. And before you get too hopped up and write me a nasty letter, I want to ask how often do you break the speed limit? And how often do you get behind the wheel of your automobile with a couple of beers or more inside your belly?

I know my passage on a closed trail will cause no damage whatsoever. Can you say the same about your speeding or your drinking?

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Off the Road

The soloist joins a group



Last month I wrote a piece on mountain bike touring. Why it's fun, how to do it. A typical "get 'em enthused" piece about something I've been doing for two decades and adore.

Since then I've had several calls about it, and many responses while giving side shows to cyclists in several states. I had expected to hear disagreements. You know, "You're nuts to pack this or that," or the reasons for personal preferences in panniers. Or, especially from the hardy racing types, a condescending question of how does one keep from being bored at such a slow pace?

But I was mistaken. The most-asked question was, simply, "Do you really prefer to tour alone?"

And there they had me. Lord, how I hate being so indecisive before a group. It must appear that stage fright has hit, that the flood lamps have blinded you, that you're stumped or, probably, just plain stupid.

Why the uncertainty? I've surely answered it countless times before. Even written about communal travel in a manner some have objected to.

...Then there are group tours. Constant society. People pressure. All the requirements of Locke's social contract, with much given and little gained. Nevertheless, some people like them, and the Fates will likely conspire to involve you in one even if you decide that solo is your style.

And of solo travel I've waxed in glowing terms: ...solitude man in the saddle, suspended between heaven and harsh environment.

Brother. It's almost difficult to re-read. Not only because the writing is overdone, but because I've changed my mind. Sort of.

I still do almost all my touring by myself. And I love it. But, recently, I took a one-week ride with a group. A big group. 25, in fact. Needless to say, I didn't expect to like it. But I did. A bunch.

In dealing with the question of why the sudden attraction for society, my hope is that you'll think hard about the nature of your upcoming tours. Winter planning sessions by oneself are okay; group planning is far more fun. But an

amazing number of stories have come my way over the years of how a happy bunch of people around a table failed, somehow, to transform into a happy group on wheels. My first suggestion, therefore, is simply not to be deluded by easy talk. It's like politics: everybody means well, but that's no guarantee of success.

I don't feel right relating other people's tales of touring woe. What follows, then, is a personal tale: the single greatest impetus which, some ten years ago, pushed me into soloing.

Everyone who's ever taken even a walk around the block with another person knows it helps to travel at the same speed. This is, of course, also true on a bike. It's tough to share the ride with another when he's a half-mile ahead of you pulling away. Most groups recognize the various ability levels as potential sources of great difficulty. That's wise. "The weakest link determines a chain's strength; the weakest rider determines a day's progress." You don't have to be Einstein to see the logic.

Knowing this maxim of group travel, my friends and I, a decade ago, first established a goal of an "average" mpd (miles per day). It seemed elementary that if each rider in the group could attain a fitness level sufficient to do that distance day after day, without strain, we'd have no problems. Of course, some riders would be stronger. Well, they could spend more time off the bikes. Or get into camp earlier. Or fill their panniers with rocks. Or decide now that they'd be bored at such a speed and opt for another group.

We then spoke of the need to be able to ride that average distance easily, so that we would still be in good spirits at night. And so that, on those days when it became necessary to do a bit extra distance, no one would fall out. Fine. It



was agreed that we all would work up to a point where we could pedal the average mpd easily, and then some.

We planned occasional group training rides, spoke of the need to work up to riding with the weight of full panniers, promised to learn how to do basic repairs. What could go wrong?

Well, I learned the answers. One, it was easier to talk about training than to do it. Two, it's easy to overestimate one's physical abilities. Three, it's tough to browbeat a friend into attending a group training ride, or suggest he's lying to himself when he says he doesn't really need to do the extra miles.

What took place now seems inevitable; in hindsight it appears that we were blind not to have expected it. Giving up on the demands for group training and a final weekend shakedown ride, we took off. Traveling a thousand miles to our starting point, we put our bikes together, hung panniers, filled water bottles and took off. Well, almost. One rider, trying to pedal out of the parking lot, could not control her bike. Here we were, three thousand miles from our destination, at the end of a six-month period of preparation for two months of touring through some of the most difficult terrain in North America, and one member of our group had not ridden a single mile with her bike fully loaded.

Sick at heart for this inauspicious beginning, and trying not to let our anger show, we dismounted and watched as the rider circled a parking lot for forty minutes, attempting to accustom herself to the weight. But, if we felt ill while watching this and all it portended, it was nothing compared to our emotions when she finally wheeled back to the group, unsteadily dismounted and said, "Well, I can stay on the bike now. I just can't shift

gears." Ahhhhhhh!

After that it was solo riding for me (with the geometric increase in the number of people one meets when alone), or tours with a "partner." With just one other person it's far easier to gage physical preparedness and sociability. But it's still not a group. Let your single "partner" have an "off" day, be a bit out of sorts, start fighting a cold, prefer a different schedule,

beautifully, is beyond me.

Okay. Big deal. A solo rider can buy good food in restaurants if he wants. And veteran tourers don't need "leaders" - good or bad. Why the attraction, then? Why should I now be unable to answer as easily as before the questions of which kind of touring is best?

Because of that very element which almost scared me off the ride to begin

Story and photos by Dennis Coello

and you may as well be alone. In fact, you'll probably prefer to be alone when things aren't right.

With a group there's always the option of pedalling alongside someone else for a while. Discussing other things. Riding at a different speed.

I understood the benefits, but didn't know how to avoid the hassles I had found with groups. And then came Backroads.

Backroads Bicycle Touring, to be exact. A company which organizes groups for two-wheeled travel. They had seen a piece of mine in Sierra Magazine (you guessed it - everything I'd written about mountain bike touring received the red pen), and wrote to invite me along on a ride. At first I recoiled; tour with a bunch or novices? Become a groupie? Hadn't I passed these folks, or members of the many other touring companies which exist, while on the road? And hadn't I cast a condescending glance their way, born of the inevitable hauteur a solo, self-supported cyclist feels when seeing van-supported clubbers?

I wrote back. Asked if I could bring a mountain bike. I was amazed when they said yes. I asked what kind of wimpy distances they averaged, if there's a way one can ride more if he wished. About forty miles was the answer, with daily options of longer and shorter routes. Again I was surprised. I questioned the van support, fearing I'd then be out of shape for the long self-supported tours later that summer. Once more the reply was unexpected; I could carry whatever I wished.

Then came the ride. Banff to Jasper. I mountain biked my way through Glacier National Park on the way north, as usual enjoying the solo approach and wondering how I'd fare with a group of 26. Because of the number of touring companies today and the resultant stiff competition - I expected the food to be good, logistics to be handled well, and the leaders to be adequate. I was correct with the logistics. But the food was excellent, and the leaders better yet. There were only three, to make the meals/break camp/race the van ahead to make camp/ride with the group/ride sweep for slower riders/pick up stragglers/repair bicycles and, in general, guide us happily through a week on the road. How they did it, and they did it

with. Perhaps it's because of the kinds of people attracted to active vacations, or the opportunity to so thoroughly enjoy a tour when all one has to do is pedal. Whatever the reason, it was the people which, dammit, I now miss when out there by myself.

They hailed from everywhere. And from all professions. We ran in age from early twenties to late fifties, and across the spectrum in hobbies. There were some who'd taken several Backroads tours before, some who'd ridden with various touring companies, many who'd never ridden a bike farther than around the block until preparing for this trip. I found the fact that their lack of speed had no bearing upon my progress (one of the leaders riding sweep would stay with the slowest; the van was there if necessary) to be liberating.

I also found all three leaders, and at least two of the tour group, to be far faster riders than me. One fellow, in particular, a racer from Colorado, had obviously learned that such a trip offered camaraderie, but not at the cost of a good, hard, carefree workout. And I should admit that I never rode more than the "basic route" daily average of about forty miles; there were simply too many good-natured, enjoyable people with which to ride.

Another unexpected attribute of this group was the development of friendships nationwide. I've had a half-dozen letters from different members since then, heard of several who've linked up for one-day rides when work has put them in one another's cities, was invited by one couple to spend the holidays. Human contact, in the otherwise cold world of fast-paced airline travel.

Did I enjoy the sights more, sharing them with others? I don't know. Later in the year, I rode Utah's White Rim Trail alone, not hearing another's voice, or my own, for an entire day. That, too, was a delicious time. Just as, I'm sure, would be the taking of that trail with the local Rim Tours mountain bike group. Delicious, but different.

And that's the point of all this blather. If you've chanced upon anything I've written over the years about touring, and I've given the impression that the only way to go is alone, think again.

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mark sate

Winter is here. In Marin County, California where I live, mountain biking is possible year round, though that can, and often does, entail slopping through mud. I enjoy the seasonal transition from dry, dusty soil conditions to the grippy, thick conditions of winter. The rains and winds clear the air and scatter loose vegetation. The woods and trails seem to engulf and embrace me. If it's raining, I feel an even greater sense of assimilation with the environment.

For the bikes themselves, winter is taxing. Components endure greater stress when operated in wet conditions and consequently wear at a much faster rate. Tires slip sideways off wet rocks and rocks then abruptly reestablish their traction on the new track, simultaneously with the rider's lurch to maintain balance and forward motion. The wheels and driveline are consequently stressed more severely than when the same passage is smoothly completed in dry conditions. If the bike is tight and everything properly adjusted, this presents no problem. If not, any looseness magnifies the transmitted shock, causing more wear.

Careening through mud and splashing it into your chain, derailleurs, and freewheel then grinding it in is admittedly impossible to avoid. It's all in the name of good times but it does present a problem: all these small parts take a severe beating. Regular maintenance, preferably upon returning from the ride, is required. Once the lubrication has been washed off the chain and out of the bearings, the elements immediately start the process of reclaiming them. Save those parts for another day by washing and wiping them down then relubricating them. Avoid using a high pressure hose to remove the mud. Despite the allure of simply hosing a bike down and calling it good, wipe your bike clean whenever practical. This can be time consuming but it's well worth the effort in preserving your bike's performance and longevity.

Water under pressure invariably finds its way into bearings, whether sealed or not, and in so doing, introduces tiny abrasives. If the bearings are not adequately flared with grease, these water droplets will dry between the balls and race, leaving behind corrosive deposits. These corrosion will quickly cause the bearings' performance to deteriorate. Spraying your bike clean with a hose may seem harmless but it isn't. Next time you do spray it clean, take the time to open up the bearings and you'll see just how much water got past those seals.

I've always thoroughly enjoyed the

performance of a smooth-running machine. I like the way everything feels and sounds when all moving parts are properly adjusted and lubricated. But when the grit starts to fly, those freewheels, chains, and derailleurs take a beating no matter how well lubricated and adjusted they may be. These are the components that off-road cycling taxes most heavily. Looking down and seeing the mud churning through the freewheel and derailleurs makes me wonder how these components even survive as long as they do. All those moving parts operating in such totally adverse conditions takes its toll, especially on the chain. And a freewheel full of mud sounds as if it's being tortured way beyond its designer's wildest nightmares. It's such a horribly grating sound that there've been times when I wish I'd never make it back with the freewheel still in one piece.

There's but one way to keep these components running smoothly and that's to prevent the grit from getting there in the first place. The way to do that is to lubricate liberally with grease. But since it's also ultimately impossible to completely keep the crud out — as long as we insist on riding coarse mud or high water — that means we have to get rid of it once it's there. A solvent bath is the only effective way to clean chains and freewheels subjected to this abuse. Once they've been cleaned, lube 'em up again.

Wheel and bottom bracket bearings are another story. The ideal solution — really the only solution — has been used by the automobile industry for years: forcing contaminants out with fresh grease under pressure. Unfortunately this option is only now beginning to become available. Those who have loose ball bearings can open them up then carefully clean and repress the balls then re-adjust the cups — a time consuming, tedious job at best. If you have cassette bearings, about all you can do is ride them until they're shot then replace them. It is possible to open up the seals and clean and regrease the bearings but doing so is even more tedious than with loose ball bearings. Consequently the best route of all is prevention by avoiding deep water and spraying with a hose and keeping the bearings as lubricated as possible.

The one area of maintenance most often ignored by riders is the cleaning and lubricating of cables and pivots, especially cables. Taking care of those cables and pivots can be another time consuming pain but doing so will dramatically restore new life to your bike.

Brakes and derailleurs previously thought rather sluggish in their action suddenly will have the zip and light action you remember from when they were new.

The brake and shifter cables should be removed for cleaning. Use solvent or WD-40 to clean the wire and housing thoroughly. In some cases, replacement will be necessary. Lubricate liberally when reassembling. Cleaning the brake arm and lever pivots also requires disassembly. Once the cables are removed, you'll quickly see how much more disassembly is required. This can be determined by actuating each individual part. If the action is smooth, don't bother with it. Detect where any friction is coming from and address that area only.

Regular, thorough maintenance is a necessity for sustaining your equipment and for enjoyable winter riding. While new developments in bearing lubrication promise easier maintenance and higher performance in the future, somebody will still have to do it. The components won't do it themselves. So make taking care of your bike an enjoyable habit, one that will produce dividends in the form of more performance, longer component lifespan, and the freedom to ride your bike through any condition knowing it's been prepared to take whatever abuse the environment throws at you.

But then again, if you're like so many of us — myself included — you'll probably ignore most of the above. Not everyone has the mind-set to constantly maintain his or her bike. If that's the case with you, don't despair. There is hope.

The key is recognizing to what extent you're willing to maintain your bike. The less interest you have in doing so, the more important it is to avoid those conditions that will do the most damage to your components. When you get to a stream crossing, carry your bike across instead of riding across. Ride around mud puddles and mud baths. When you get home, leave the bike dirty instead of hosing it down. A dirty but lubricated bike is better than a clean but unlubricated bike. And finally, regularly pass your bike's care over to your local bike shop. Just let them know that it's not that you don't appreciate your bike, you're just not mechanically motivated.

If even that is too much, you're still not out of luck. Most of today's better quality components will survive an unbelievable amount of abuse before giving up. But when they finally do, just replace them. It's not the end of the world.

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Dice across America - Len and Susan



A Steve Potts and Ritchey tandem, both of the Mountain variety, showed up this year along with a few cars for the kids. The variety of the rides in the area give limitless possibilities for these options. Also the camping is breathtaking to say the least. Everyone can find their own private spot or join up and play with friends.



Gary Fisher Rabbit with Stella and new babe

Frank Strub



Hank Barlow

MOAB

Fat Tire Festival

Moab, Utah was the scene of one fine party - the Canyonlands Fat Tire Festival - from October 28 through November 2. Over 300 mountain bikers showed up for daily tours through eastern Utah's dramatic landscapes, a wild Halloween party complete with live music, a poker run, two time trials, and a combination bike/jet-boat tour.

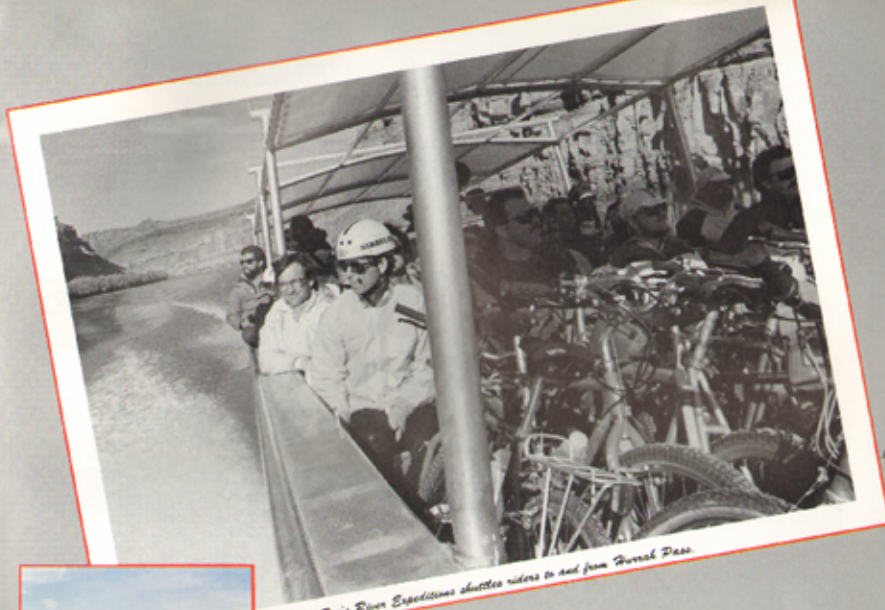
The only flaw in the week's events was rain on Friday and Saturday but even that wasn't so bad. Riders got wet, bikes dirty, but the riding and the fun never stopped, just slowed down a touch. The rest of the week was incredible: sparkling days of hot sun and nights so clear the stars were touchable. But for snow on the Manti La Sals and yellow leaves on the trees, it was mid-summer. Bare skin was the standard garb.

Moab (elevation 4,025 feet) sits in the Colorado River canyon at the base of the

12,000-foot Manti La Sal Mountains. Northwest and a few miles distant is Arches National Park while Canyonlands National Park sprawls to the west and southwest. Further south and west are Natural Bridges National Monument, Lake Powell National Recreation Area, and Capitol Reef National Park. South-southeast are Hovenweep National Monument and Mesa Verde National Park. In other words, Moab is right smack dab in the middle of some of North America's most beautiful country. There isn't anything like it. Canyons thousands of feet deep curling through ancient sea

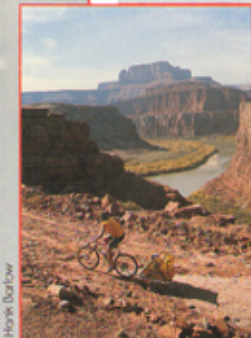
beds. Waves of rock stripped of all cover undulating into the distance for as far as the eye can see. And everywhere surreal abstracts of pastel purples, reds, and browns.

Rainfall is infrequent while daytime temperatures are warm to hot, even in the winter though cold snaps can drive the temp into the 30's. What snow does fall lasts at most a week or so but generally less than that. The hiking is unlimited. Jeep roads and trails penetrate every corner, every mesa. Most of the riding is on roads - graded, gravel, and jeep. What few single tracks there are lie within the



Tee's River Expeditions shuttles riders to and from Fossil Pass.

Wally Pumb



Hank Barlow



Hank Barlow

By Hank Barlow

National Parks and are unfortunately closed to bikes.

It's amazing land to explore on a bike. There you are careening through sandstone labyrinths, whipping along in surprisingly big gears, and all the time you're surrounded by rock, vertical walls of rock, towering monuments of rock, all teetering on the edge of collapse. There's a magic in those canyons that enralls all who visit, from the Anasazi to Escalante to Powell. Even today's air conditioned enshrouded visitors who glide through, causing barely a murmur in the desert silence, are astounded.

Why that is so is difficult to pin down. Perhaps it's the elementalness of the land, the stripping of all the accessories modern

man has surrounded himself with - including mountain bikes. Photos of earth taken from the moon generate the same feelings. This enormous expanse of rock, rock that was formed hundreds of millions of years ago beneath ancient seas, is an immediate and graphic reminder that despite all our modern trappings and apparent security, we're really not so far removed from the Anasazi. All it would take is the outbreak of the nuclear war that constantly hovers around the corner like a nightmare hiding in the dark.

One key to Moab's great biking is their fine bike shop, Rim Cyclery. Owners Robin Groff, his brother Bill, Bill's wife LaVona, and Rim Tours' co-owner John



Groff provide a wealth of information for visiting bikers. Invariably the first thing any off-roader does upon arriving in town is go straight to the shop for the latest rides and conditions. Starting the Canyonlands Fat Tire Festival was a natural for them. While

Frank Strub



Mary Plumb

Kevin Christian as The Off-Road Warrior with his well-deserved Columbia replica prize.

If you don't believe there are reasons other than performance for buying a bike, check out the Columbia replica bike. Take it for a spin through town down to the local barber shop, preferably one that still has a barber pole outside. Put the kickstand down and step away and get ready for the rush. Before long, you'll have quite a crowd gathered around asking

questions but mostly just telling tales from the good old days. Pretty soon the bike'll be spinning up and down the street while person after person takes it out for a quick one. That's the kind of bike it is. You could do the same thing with a Cunningham, a Potts, a Ritchey, a Fisher, a Mantis, you name it, and no way would you get the same response. Most people

wouldn't even notice any of those bikes unless they happened to be enthusiasts. But the Columbia, ah now, that's a totally different story.

The bike is an exact replica of Columbia's 1950 vintage one speed, coaster brake cruiser - including fenders, chain guard, and lights, the full enchilada. No expense was spared by Columbia in reproducing in limited numbers this original bike. And it's a beauty though truth to tell, it looks better than it rides. I mean, if there's any kind of hill looming in your path with this machine, you'd best turn around and search out a different route. This baby is heavy! If you need to know just how heavy, this isn't the bike for you. It's heavy, that's all.

Nor is it exactly the nimblest handler around. This is not a machine to go dodging through traffic on. Stand up and pound the pedals and it'll flex all over the countryside. What it is good for is cruising leisurely, elegantly, smoothly. This is the bicycle industry's answer to the Spanish promenade. The bike looks good and you'll look good on it. What more could you ask for?

Production was limited so if your memories are rich with bikes such as this, you'd best find a dealer who still has one as quickly as possible for believe me, it won't last long. And if you don't like others riding your bike, don't take it downtown - especially to the barber shop.

What could and couldn't be ridden had shifted. Hills that had seemed impossible to go up were eagerly looked forward to and downhills that had all but paralyzed riders with fear turned into playgrounds of boldness. The previously timid riders found themselves throwing caution to the winds and tackling the terrain with abandon.

Though everyone tested their mettle on the Slickrock Trail at least once, most of the action took place on the tours. One of the most popular followed Long Canyon up and up and up to Islands in the Sky in Canyonlands National Park. Then it was down and down and down and down some more over what has to be one of the world's wildest descents. Not that the riding itself is all that difficult. It isn't. The gradient is steep enough that everyone has their hands full of brake levers but the road surface is really quite smooth.

Technically, the ride's a snap. What makes this descent so memorable is its location. The road was blasted out of the sandstone walls at the head of a canyon leading down to the Colorado River. The slope is so steep that if you baled out over the edge of one of the switchbacks with any kind of speed at all, the first thing you'd probably

continued on page 37

Introducing 3 models of middle range bicycles. The deal here is a bike ready to roll off the showroom floor as is or the potential to be much more with a few inexpensive changes.



Univega Alpina Pro

You've been a road biker for a few years, nothing serious, recreational riding on weekends with friends mostly. You're thinking of getting a mountain bike. Friends have them and you've heard nothing but glowing reports on this new sport. You don't want to spend too much money, at least not yet, but you're also experienced enough to appreciate the differences in bikes so you're willing buy

something better than an entry level machine. But not too much. If you can save a hundred dollars or so and get just as much performance, you're all for it. If that describes where you're at, or perhaps a friend's situation, you're in luck: you've quite a few decent bikes to choose from. But if your primary objective is off-roading, be prepared to make some changes on just about any bike you look

at. According to industry figures, some 80% of the mountain bikes sold never leave the pavement. They're ridden to school, down to the local market, around the block, over the city bike paths, anywhere but in the dirt. At least that's the common assumption. Consequently almost all lower priced mountain bikes are set up for street use, whether the frames were in fact designed for off-road use or

Bike tests



Rear wheel view of Univega



Peugeot Canyon Express

not. It's a logical, economical reaction to an existing situation.

Instead of fat knobies, the bike will have combination tires designed for street and dirt. Though we can't fault the motive, what that usually translates into are tires with only the slightest semblance of a lugged tread. They're also heavy and make the bike's handling sluggish, even on pavement. Off-road, the tires are worthless. Not that excellent combo tires aren't available, they are - the Ritchey

Quad, Specialized Crossroads II, and the CyclePro Pinnacle come immediately to mind. But such tires are also more expensive and manufacturers have to hold down expenses somewhere.

Invariably these less expensive mountain bikes also come equipped with short seatposts. We have yet to understand why except for the possibility that they're cheaper but in this instance, the rationale doesn't work. Mountain bike frames are sized smaller than road bikes

with the size difference made up by the seatpost and stem. Correctly sizing a mountain bike is impossible with too short a seatpost.

Almost all mountain bikes under \$500 or so also are equipped with bars with too much rise, resulting in a more upright rider position than is generally preferred. An excessively upright position can make riding over narrow trails, steep hills, and rough terrain chancy at best. Look at most experienced mountain bikers and

you'll notice that their saddles are either higher than or level with the handlebars, usually the former.

Despite the necessity of making these changes, your chances of picking up a pretty fine performing mountain bike for not too much money are excellent. In fact, most mountain bikes priced under \$500, including the three following test bikes, are better equipped than the original Stumpjumper that cost some \$750.

The Peugeot Canyon Express, the Univega Alpina Pro, and the Takara Highlander all lacked proper tires, seatposts, and handlebars for off-road performance. Making the appropriate

shed the unwanted fat, to shape them up for true adventure cycling.

The Univega, befitting its price, is the most decked out of the three with its better tubing and component selection and a consequent lower weight. The Takara fell in the middle while the Peugeot was the least expensive and outfitted accordingly. The old adage that you get what you pay for is quite true in bikes. The higher the priced bike, the better the components and materials. And comparably priced bikes will almost always have comparable components and



Takara Highlander

changes dramatically altered their off-road performance. Where we had first gingerly ridden, not fully trusting their handling, we could charge ahead full speed. Don't misunderstand us; the alterations did not turn what are inexpensive mountain bikes into hot race jobs. The changes simply enabled us to extract all the performance they were capable of - and that turned out to be more than we had initially expected. All they needed was a mountain bike's equivalent to a Jane Fonda workout to

materials.

Decked out in their standard garb, all three bikes were heavy and slow with only the slightest hint that beneath their guise of a being nothing but a cruiser there lurked the soul of a mountain bike. We yanked the wheels and replaced them with lightweight wheels with quick release hubs and knobby tires. A lighter stem with flat bars replaced the high-rise originals. Saddles and seatposts were then replaced. We also replaced the pedals, replacing

them with Suntour XC Comps with clips and straps. Then the bikes were ready for the dirt.

The difference was startling. Bikes that we had first looked at rather condescendingly were now true off-road riders. They may not be world beaters but if you should decide to jump into a local mountain bike race, you won't be able to blame any of these three bikes if you don't win; they'll go as fast as you do. Once you've perfected your riding skills

new products

of shallow angles while others prefer the quickness of steeper angles. (All had 2-inches of rake.)

Each of the bikes' handling was fairly typical for its head angle. The Univega and the Peugeot had the quickest steering with the Univega requiring a shade less steering effort than the Peugeot. Theoretically, the Peugeot should have been quicker due to its 70-degree angle and shorter wheelbase but it wasn't. There was a definite "heaviness" to its steering response, even with the lighter wheels and tires. Why that was we could never pinpoint though we suspected more weight was distributed to the Peugeot's front wheel than to the Univega's.

The Takara, with what is now considered an extremely laid back head angle, had the slowest steering. Bikes with a 68-degree head angle are rare anymore since the trend to shorter and steeper designs took over. The Takara's front end handling at slow speeds was a distinct handicap but at speed, the handling

smoothed right out, especially and understandably on downhill. What it gave up in nimbleness was made up for in stability. If a rider hammered into a rough trail section at a higher than desired speed, all that had to be done was to apply the rear brake and hold on and let the front end crash on through.

Single tracks bring out the best and the worst in a bike's handling and that's where the Takara's slow steering response and its long wheelbase and chainstays were most noticeable. Rather than darting over the trail, the bike had to be consciously steered down the track. The ride was certainly smooth enough but it was a little like driving a large American sedan down a twisty, narrow road. The Univega's handling was distinctly sportier, requiring a lighter touch on the handlebar to guide it along. Shallower head angles have what is generally referred to as a tendency for the front wheel to flop into turns. The Takara and the Univega have that tendency, the Takara more so than the Univega. The flopping was even more pronounced when riders stood up. The bikes zigged and zagged instead of carving round turns. On narrow trails where speeds are slow, the effect can be rather disconcerting. The faster the speed, the less pronounced was the flopping. The Peugeot, despite its heavier steering, maintained a straight line of direction whether in the saddle or out.

Overall, the Peugeot's handling was somewhere between the Univega's and the Takara's. More steering effort was required than with the Univega while the turning response was quicker and rounder than the Takara's. Considering the Univega's higher price, it should have provided more performance and it did. Its turning effort was light and direct, equally smooth in or out of the saddle. Its wheel flopping was not overly dramatic with riders quickly becoming used to it to the point that it was no longer noticed. But then, that's true of any bike's handling. People adapt to whatever they're riding and that's the feel they become used to, whether the bike has a 68 degree head or a 72-degree head.

Otherwise all three bikes' handling was steady with no unexpected tricks. Climbing traction was fair though steep hills immediately brought out the fact they had long chainstays. Spinning the rear wheel when climbing was easily accomplished. We also felt the rider position was a bit further forward of the rear wheel on steep downhill than we wanted but that's more a matter of personal preference. That reaction was probably just the result of our for the most part riding much more compact bikes than any of these.

Weissenrieder, Jet Bass

Schwinn team rider John Weissenrieder has come out with some pretty interesting bars for mountain bikes. They're similar to bars used by track racers and look a little like antlers. The flat bar extends out to the sides perpendicular to the top tube. At either end, the bar makes an abrupt almost 90-degree bend forward and up. They feel a bit like flying a plane and take a bit of getting used to. Like drop bars, correct positioning is critical. That requires a short extension stem without excessive rise. Too long a stem and you'll be stretched way out with too much weight on the front wheel. But once you've got them set to where they are comfortable, the bars are pretty tricky.

Climbing with them was great, very powerful, a little like drop bars only your not in so low a position. Theoretically, moving back onto the flats would be similar to the positioning on drops but it's not. Instead of the flat being like on drop bars, the Jet's flat is lower than the grips. We never did get all that comfortable riding on the flats so spent most of the time on the grips.

John included modified thumb shifters that mount where the flats meet the grips. Brake levers were mounted on the ends of the grips. Shifting while braking was easily managed except at the extremes.

All in all, the system worked quite well. The more we rode it, the more we liked it.



Jones Sunglasses

We received a pair of Jones "Magic" sunglasses this fall and have been using them ever since. We came up with one basic complaint about the glasses: every time they were set down somewhere in the office, invariably someone else would walk off with them.



Why? A number of reasons. First they're light and extremely comfortable. Almost forgot they were even on. Secondly, their color, sort of a gray, worked in all conditions. They weren't even disastrous during those transitions into heavy shade. Third, great wind protection with minimal tearing during fast descents. We're already looking forward to using them this winter on the ski slopes. The only negative ever heard was a tiring of the eyes after hours of wearing.



Shoes

Puma has come out with a sharp touring shoe appropriate for mountain biking, especially if you use clips and straps. The sole's tread has enough definition to hold reasonably well on the pedals yet still comes out quickly and easily in the case of a fall. Like most cycling shoes, they're not too good in the walking department. They're also a bit tight in the front for wide feet. The leather uppers look well made and have stood up fine so far despite numerous dunkings. If you're willing to give up some walking abilities in exchange for better riding qualities (especially if you do a lot of touring also), you might check out the Puma Touring shoes with the yellow sole.



PROFILE

Phil Anderson

Story and photo by Piera Larocca

Imagine forests filled with thousands of varieties of eucalyptus and a multitude of plants unchanged since prehistoric times. A flock of yellow-crested cockatoos fly overhead, their screams mingling with the mad cackle of a small brown kookaburra lurking high in a gum tree. The evening's dusk finds a herd of gray wallabies thumping confidently through the fragrant undergrowth.

Although urban Australia is as harried and built up as any metropolis in the northern hemisphere, outside the cities are endless kilometers of verdant pasture land and the unspoiled vastness of the Australian outback. Far and away, the majority of this island continent's population clings to the southeastern shore, leaving the sprawling center all but deserted.

I went to Australia in search of the strange marsupials the island is famous for and, while I was there, to see if this land that boasts more dirt roads than paved harbored any mountain bikers. Within two days of arriving in Sydney, the second question had been answered; I'd connected with hard-core mountain bikers, racers and tourists, at the inaugural meeting of the Australian Mountain Biking Association (AMBA).

I heard during the meeting a rumor that Australia's most famous professional cyclist, Phil Anderson - a man who spends most of the year in Europe racing for the Panasonic Team - was an enthusiastic off-roader. According to a shop-owner attending the meeting, Phil Anderson - nicknamed "the Kangaroo" by the European press and the land down under's greatest road racer - had walked in to his shop one day and straight away went to the tough looking dirt machines. He'd had no interest at all in the sleek road racers lined up across the shop floor, only the mountain bikes that are rapidly dominating Australian bicycle sales. The Aussies are sports mad. Almost every town hosts a couple of racing clubs and at least one velodrome besides the standard swimming pools, tennis courts, cricket ground, and football oval. Since the introduction of these fat tired dirt cruisers, Australians have embraced mountain biking with the same fervor formerly reserved for the popular "Aussie rules" football.

Anderson's alleged interest in mountain biking piqued my curiosity and a meeting was arranged. I met him outside a

pub in Jamieson, Victoria, a tiny village nestled in the lushly forested mountains northeast of Melbourne. He and his wife, Ann, along with their nine-month-old son, Loren, had recently arrived in Australia from Belgium to oversee the final touches on their new house outside of town.

Phil Anderson has been riding bicycles since he was a young boy. He was bitten by the racing bug at age sixteen and started competing on the road and track circuit in his home state of Victoria. By age nineteen, he had made the National Team and won the 1978 Commonwealth Games road race in Edmonton, Alberta. Anderson was soon afterward invited to join an amateur club in France. Within a year, he was a domestique for Peugeot and then, four years later, became team leader for Panasonic, Belgium's most prestigious team. He's raced all the European classics including the month-long Tour de France five times and the Paris-Roubaix (the "Hell of the North," as this race is commonly known), a tortuous 200-kilometer race over the cobbled roads of northern France.

"You're into mountain biking," Anderson said, spotting my mud-speckled Cannondale in the back of the car. "I tried it a bit last year."

"I'm just a beginner," I replied, "but I have a good time."

We went inside the unusually quiet pub and, accompanied by glasses of locally brewed draft beer, Phil related his dirt riding adventures. Long before the invention of the modern mountain bike, a young Phil Anderson, like so many American kids at the same time, was terrorizing his neighborhood's trails.

"When I was a kid, I used to do a bit of motorcycling. Then I fell off and broke my arm so instead I would ride a bicycle on dirt trails using real low gearing."

That was only as a young lad though and it wasn't until a trip to the USA that Phil rediscovered his childhood pastime. He and his family spend every other vacation in the United States at their country home in Washington state.

"I heard people talk about mountain biking plus I was reading about these crazy people in Winnings. I thought it looked like fun. Quite a few people I knew in America raced mountain bikes too."

"We were living in the mountains outside Seattle. After one kilometer on the road, we'd come to these amazing four

wheel drive tracks that were perfect for mountain biking. A couple of times Greg Lemond came up. We'd go out together and have a gas of a time. Greg is too competitive, though. Everything he does is a race. When we'd come up to a trail and suddenly there was only room for one person—he'd have to be the first one there."

Anderson usually sticks to well-established tracks on his forays into the bush though he has dabbled in the more demanding side of fat-tire technique. Fallen logs, rocky terrain, and hiking trails do not deter the man who has ridden the slippery cobbles of Paris-Roubaix.

"I ride over whatever is there. I'll try to go over a rock, if it tips me off, well...I might get off and have a look at it before I do it again. I think it helps my coordination a lot."

The kilometers Phil logs off-road are not part of his preparation for the tough European circuit though. They're purely for recreation.

"Last year (1985), I did quite a bit of mountain biking and really enjoyed it. The season is quite the opposite (from the road season). Riding in the country off the bitumen is quite a nice contrast to what I am used to—riding 20,000 to 30,000 kilometers on blacktop."

"You can ride anywhere you want; on difficult terrain or on easy stuff. You can really go out and hammer yourself or take an easy ride along the river. I don't do it routinely, sometimes I'll only go out for two or three hours a week, sometimes everyday. If I want to try for the top of the mountain, it might take two hours."

Most of Phil's wilderness adventures have been in the mountains of the Western United States.

"I'm looking forward to riding again in Australia. We've got this piece of land that's 100 acres. Going around it is close to three kilometers. We had the fence put up three years ago and there are trails going around it either on the inside or the outside - the first thing the little animals do is check the fence line - so we got these little trails that are just perfect for mountain biking. We've got some really steep stuff I doubt I could get up on a bike. It's not that I'm not strong enough, I just have to lean over the front wheel so much it digs into the ground."

Most of the European pros spend the off-season in a more traditional manner -

tackling the ski slopes in the Alps or basking in the sun on the nearest tropical island. Phil's pastime raised quite a few Continental eyebrows.

"The other cyclists heard I was riding a mountain bike last year and were quite interested to hear exactly what a mountain bike was. The journalists also picked up on it. On the television, they would say: 'Phil Anderson is going so well... last year he had a vacation in America and was riding a mountain bike. Maybe that is the secret to his success in 1985.'"

And what does Phil think about using a mountain bike to help stay in condition?

"It's better than doing nothing. It is pretty taboo for someone who rides a bike for a living to do nothing. I don't usually touch my road bike until after Christmas as I can get my form quickly. If you take up mountain bikes, you are still pedaling and it is a whole lot more fun than riding a road bike in the winter."

I mentioned to Phil that the newly formed executive council of AMBA wanted to start up a series of mountain bike races in Australia. They were planning to hold the races during their summer - winter in the states - in order to attract American bikers to the southern hemisphere. This hardened veteran of the European circuit seemed interested in the prospect of competitive mountain biking in his homeland.

"I think that would be quite exciting." When asked whether he would consider joining the ranks, he laughed and said, "Maybe, maybe."



Although custom-made mountain bikes are available in Australia (Master builder, Gordon Hillman from Hillman Cycles has designed an exceptional machine sporting an extra-long wheelbase for the rocky terrain of Australia's outback), Anderson chose to go with a Malvern Star Bushranger. Malvern Star is the oldest bicycle manufacturer in Australia and has sponsored many of the great sprinters and road racers in the nation. Phil Anderson's possible involvement in Australian off-road racing may even give this newest form of bicycle racing the boost it needs to create an industry rivaling what has already begun in the states.

Mountain bikes are the perfect

machine for touring Australia; the rugged roads tear up lighter machines. Endless miles of dirt tracks are a delight to explore. It is not at all uncommon to cycle for hours at a time and not see a single human being. All there is is the pungent odor of eucalyptus and the sounds of unfamiliar (at least to Americans) birds and marsupials thrashing through the bush to keep you company. Not too shabby a way to spend the winter months. Not bad indeed! In fact, once word gets out to the states about Australian mountain biking, who knows, maybe Phil will line up for the start of an off-road race and on either side, discover rows of American bikers eagerly awaiting the start gun.

What's new for '87

The good news for '87 is all the hot new components being introduced. The bad news is all the hot new components being introduced.

SIS mountain bike front end and rear derailleurs (Shimano).



Long awaited smaller Biopace chainrings available now in 26, 36, 46 tooth cogs (Shimano).



Just when you think you've finally got your bike set up the way you want it and everything is humming along nicely, along comes all these new pieces that have supposedly antiquated what you worked so hard to get together. Now you have to decide just how devoted you really are to having the ultimately put together machine. Do you scrap what you've got and rush out and buy the latest or do you sit tight and wait to see how they all turn out?

Not easily answered. In terms of enabling you to actually ride faster than you ever have, to make it up that hill you've failed on so many times before, the answer is no. Any increase in speed will probably be more mental than anything else. All that's really happened is a very fine tuning of what you've already got on

your bike. Derailleurs that are easier to shift, shifters more conveniently placed, lightweight hubs reputed to be stronger and less easily contaminated by the elements, brakes more powerful and easier to adjust. Things like that.

Every company is introducing new, improved, more powerful derailleurs to make cleaning those obstacles more enjoyable. From what we've seen so far, they look - repeat, look - pretty good. They probably are, too. It wouldn't make a heck of a lot of sense for a company to ballyhoo some new widget and have it turn out to be a lemon compared to what they already had - or somebody else has. Sure, it's happened before but the company heard about it pretty quickly when nobody bought them. Plus most bike shops are not interested in getting stuck

with products that do nothing but enrage their customers. There's also a steady exchange of information amongst enthusiast bikers so pulling the wool over our eyes isn't so easy nor does it last long when they do succeed. Besides, maybe I'm a bit naive but, based on the people I've met in the bicycle industry, I have to say that most of the industry is sincerely attempting to come out with solid products. No doubt a few crackers are out there but they're the exceptions.

Probably the most talked about and looked forward to components are the indexed mountain bike derailleurs by Shimano and Suntour. We're withholding judgement until we've tried them out. We've got one of Shimano's Deore XT model and will have a report on it in the next issue. Suntour also has an indexed rear derailleur but we've only seen it at the Reno trade show. We'll let you know about our experiences with it when we get one to test. "New and improved" front derailleurs have also been introduced but you'll have to wait on those reports also. They look good though.

The brake everyone's been expecting ever since Suntour presented the roller cam brake is on stage but it's not at all what many expected. Shimano's newest brake is called the U-brake, basically a center pull. It's a bit on the ugly side and a tad heavy but according to reports, works quite well. It's meant to be used on the chain stays and mounts on the same studs as roller cams. According to Shimano, the U-brake is not their top-of-the-line performance brake though, that honor belongs to the revamped Shimano Deore XT cantilever brake. It pretty much looks like the old version except for being a bit spiffier. According to Shimano, a properly set up Shimano Deore XT brake has more braking power than a properly set-up roller cam! Does it? Stay tuned for a future issue to find out.

Suntour hasn't been sitting idle during all this. The roller cams have reportedly been improved for increased effectiveness and ease of adjustment. The latter has been the primary complaint with XC brakes in the past so perhaps they've answered that. Again, we've only seen the new XC's and can't comment on how they

Deore XT hubs, the mountain biking version of the Duraace hubs.



perform.

The new brake we can comment on is IRD's mountain biking version of a center pull. The ones we've tried were prototypes and according to IRD (Interlock Racing Design), the production versions are even more powerful. If so, those guys have got themselves a brake. This was the most effective brake we've ever used, one finger was all that was



Cable housing cutter developed for the SIS system (Shimano).

Chainstay protector also keeps chain from dropping between the freewheel and spokes (Shimano).



needed down the steepest of hills. The action was light, smooth, positive. It's the only brake we've used where some at first thought it might even be too much brake. Locking up the front wheel is a definite possibility in the hands of a novice.

But then that's the point: it's a high performance brake designed to provide

that level of power. It's not meant for novice riders. In the hands of an experienced and skilled rider, these brakes seem to provide optimum performance. We haven't really ridden them enough to give a final word but we will in the next issue. We'll also have a report on the entire Shimano Deore XT group - hubs, shifters, derailleurs, brakes, brake levers, 26/36/46 Biopace chainrings, the works.

And no, for those of you interested, the Browning Automatic Transmission isn't available yet but it's getting closer all the time. We've seen and heard about some pretty impressive operating prototypes and according to Browning, it won't be too much longer when they're available. That ought to make things interesting when it does appear since everyone who's ever ridden one has said it's the best front derailleur they've ever used - a rather heady statement for something that's still only in the final design stages.

So if you're ready to build up your new frame set into a full fledged flying machine, you might just wait a wee bit longer for the new goodies to come out. Or else you might use their imminent arrival to leverage yourself an especially attractive price on the older stuff. You won't be any slower with it but then you won't have the ultimately put together mountain bike either. Tough decision.

Components aren't the only area where changes are happening. It seems almost everyone is coming out with "new and improved" tires. The Specialized Ground Controls as predicted released an avalanche of splendid tire designs: the CyclePro Pinnacle, Ritchey Force, Fisher Fatrux. And now just everyone is coming out with new models from Ritchey (including an improved Force, Ritchey's race tire), Fisher, and Specialized (yes, even the Ground Control has been

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Shimano's new center pull U-brake.



Circle #16

changed).

We were all set with a report on the Ritchey Force and the CyclePro Pinnacle tires but decided to hold off and report on all the tires at once in an upcoming issue. Don't expect any absolutes on whose tire is the best for what conditions though. If you think frame design is subjective, you should listen to a group of racers talk about tires. We've seen Scot Nicol running a Fisher Fatrux on the front and a IRC 1.75 X-1 Racer on the back (sometimes replaced with a Ritchey Force), Ross Shafer of Salsa Cycles with a Ground Control in front and an IRC 1.75 Racer on the back, a Team Stumpjumper with a Ground Control on the front and a Pinnacle on the back, and any number of other combinations. Last year, the Ground Controls were hands down the most popular race tire but with all the improvements coming out, that probably won't be the case this year. You ought to be able to find exactly the tire that suits your needs in '87.

New shoes are also coming out. Most are basically touring models for off-road cycling. Soles have been improved for better grip with clips and straps while attempting to maintain a sole that still hikes well. The Rivet Cyclocross shoe continues to be the leader in performance mountain biking shoes and we have yet to see anything comparable.

The trend to shorter, steeper frame designs has taken over the market. No

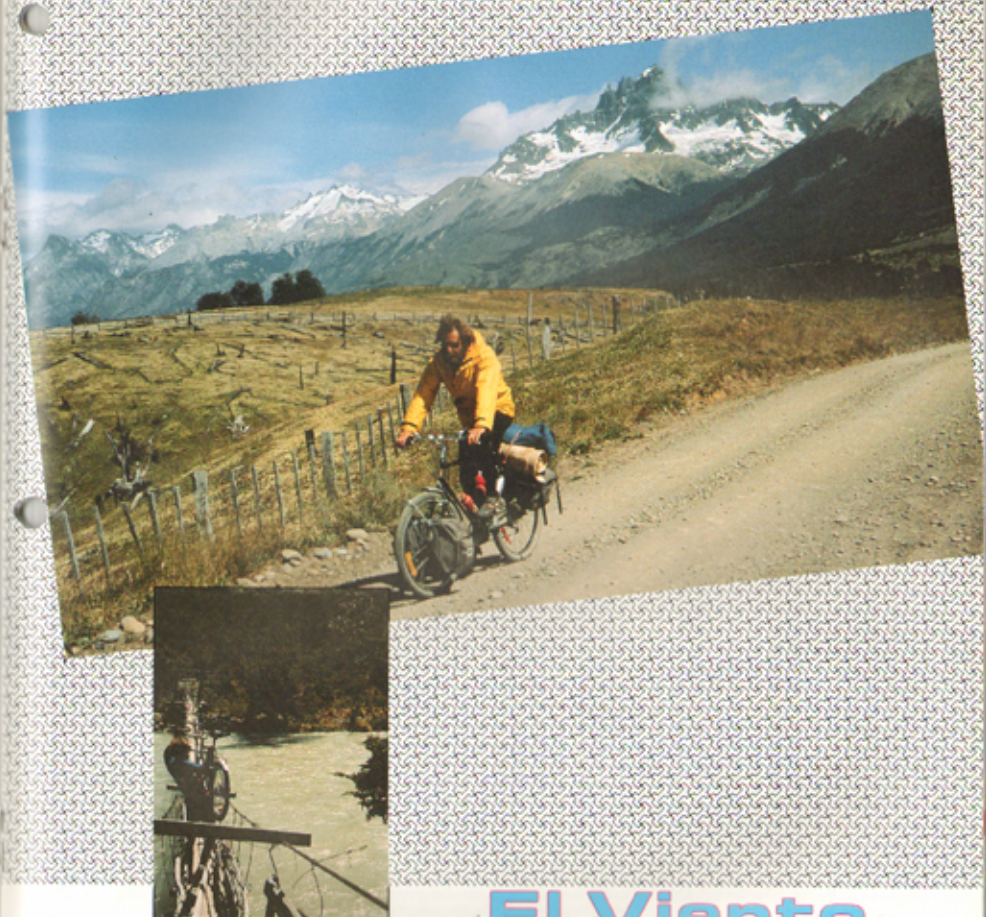
less a builder than Tom Ritchey has introduced an optional 70-degree head angle on his new Super Comp racing bike. Don't be surprised if in the future there's a slight reversing of that trend and frame designs once again become more relaxed. Short and steep is not by definition a race bike despite what much of the media touts. It's simply a difference in style. Ask Ritchey team riders Max Jones and Steve Cook about that. They've consistently placed in the top ten with so called "relaxed" head angles. A lot of people seem to think mountain bikes will become road bikes with fat tires but we don't agree. We still think anything steeper than 71 degrees will be rare with most frames designed with 69 to 71-degree angles. Wheelbases will probably fall in the 42-inch range with 17 or so-inch chainstays. Seat tubes will fall in the 71 to 73-degree range despite a current tendency to experiment with even steeper angles. Why the steeper angles won't stick is simply because of the nature of off-roading: the terrain is too rough for super steep, short bikes.

Don't expect weights to fall much either. Mountain bikes absorb an astounding beating. That in turn requires stronger and therefore heavier tubing than might otherwise be the case if weight alone was the criteria. Most of the current improvements are incremental; the big leaps have already occurred. The exception to this is going to be things like the titanium Fat Chance frames. Etc. In

other words, in the realm of the exotic. But don't hold your breath waiting for an eighteen pound fat tired flyer.

What you can look forward to are improvements in stems, handlebars, seatposts, hubs, rims, things like that. We've already received some pretty nice stem/handlebar combinations from IRD and Hammerhead that we'll report on later. The same is true for hubs. IRD has a beautiful oil filled prototype hub but it won't be on the market for quite awhile. WTB is also introducing a new hub with a grease injecting system that looks pretty impressive. Specialized has come out with a new rim, the X-26, and according to reports out of Marin County, they're light and strong. Gary Fisher has also said that Araya has finally solved the joint problem that seemed inherent to the otherwise fine Araya rims. No more bumps when braking.

So 1987 looks like another good year for mountain biking. Better equipment for better riding, to paraphrase GE. But don't panic if you just bought a bike with all the best stuff that was available in '86. Believe us, you won't be any slower and your friends on the new goods won't be any faster, at least not because of the equipment. Besides, all these new goodies aren't being passed out for free. You can definitely expect to lay out more money in '87 than you did in '86. But what the heck, we'd just spend it on something else and probably not have nearly as much fun.



El Viento

Story and photos by Jeff Hahn

The suspension bridge offered a bit of a contrast to the familiarity of pedaling on dirt roads. The rest of the cycling was over every imaginable condition in between.

El Viento, the wind, the Old Man of the South, the constant companion of all who venture to Patagonia. Across that bleak, featureless terrain, El Viento is nearly the only living thing. Most of the vegetation, even the dust, has been blown away and nothing remains but those calloused, horny hands pushing back all who dare travel south.

It was into those hands that we had delivered ourselves. The spirit of adventure and the thought of stories to tell our friends was all that was driving us onward, our bodies and bicycles helpless, tiny obstacles to the unceasing blast.

Some months before, Gary Clauss and I had proposed to leave the comfort and easy cycling conditions of our small southwestern Colorado community. We would ride our mountain bikes from the end of the Pan American Highway at Puerto Montt, Chile to Tierra del Fuego. Our proposed route was a recently opened highway, the Carretera Austral, to Argentine Patagonia then on to Tierra del Fuego. Had we at the time known of El Viento's inexorable power, we might not have so cheerfully selected our destination while studying maps in our homes. But that knowledge wouldn't arrive till later, when it was too late.

Paved roads led us from Puerto Montt, a picturesque fishing town surrounded by snow-capped volcanoes, to the island of Chilo. Horse-drawn carts outnumbered cars on the road and so set the tone for our easy pace southward. For Chileans, Chilo is the land of mist and legends, where brujos roam at night concocting spells with the herbs of the forest. But not for us. Bright, sparkling weather dissipated the mists while any fears we might have picked up from the locals like burrs from a hedgerow were equally missing. Instead of warding off spells, we sped over quiet roads through rolling agricultural lands, our only obstacle giant bumblebees - no doubt harried at us by witches lurking in the tall grass.

From Chonchi, halfway down the island, we crossed back to the mainland to try our luck on the new highway, La Carretera Austral de Presidente Agostino Pinochet. I preferred Gary's name: The Highway of Bowling Balls! The road's surface consisted of washboard, sand, and cobbles! At best, the riding was discouraging. But the valley through which we rode more than made up for the road surface. Nearly vertical walls of glaciated rock were alive with dense tangles of beech, hawthorn, and fuchsia while beyond and partially hidden by thick, scurrying clouds were towering peaks dripping with glaciers and waterfalls.

The Carretera, completed two years before in 1982, had been built to encourage development of Chile's resource-rich southern lands. But pioneer

settlements were still few and we saw only five to ten vehicles per day. Those who had moved there were busy building houses and barns, hurrying to complete them before the too brief summer elapsed. One pioneer, in either a moment of grand inspiration or a frenzy of desperation, had made a house out of a crashed DC-9 tractor. It looked tight enough but we imagined it must be a bit noisy in a rain.

Part of our reason for attempting this route had been the hope that we'd be the first cyclists to traverse the road's length. Though an inconsequential feather, the possibility of being the first added an element to our adventure that wouldn't have been there otherwise. We stopped and asked the DC-9's occupant if he'd seen any other bicyclists? He had; a Canadian the summer before. Our disappointment was off-set by some relief at learning the route could be cycled. Then again, perhaps he was wrong, maybe the Canadian had only gone a short distance. Our hopes for bagging a first returned.

Our second day on the highway saw us arrive at a hot springs, Termas Amarillo. The springs were well away from the highway in a densely forested valley. Tired, dirty, and slightly irritable from the jarring ride over the cobbles, the sight of steam rising out of a picturesque bath house nestled amongst the trees seemed too luxurious to be true. Hours passed unnoticed while we soaked and relaxed to the sounds of birds we would never see but whose song I'll never forget.

Hoping the tractor's occupant was mistaken or that the Canadian had turned back, we asked the elderly owners if they'd seen a cyclist pass that way. No, they thought we were the first to visit the Termas. Our hopes soared. We couldn't imagine any cyclist failing to stop at the springs.

The further south we traveled, the wilder the country became. The highway may have been open but it was still far from complete. Most of the large rivers had yet to be bridged. Traffic is carried over in ferries and rowboats. We discovered that when we arrived on the banks of the Rio Yelcho. A lovely family living near the boat dock treated us to salmon soup, bread, and cheese all homemade. Then the ferryman rowed us over in his small boat. Again we asked about any other cyclists. He claimed it was a French couple that had ridden through, with fat tires like ours. Our hopes were dashed. Whether Canadian or French or some other nationality, we were sure someone had beaten us to our goal.

We left the coast and approached Coihaique, a town previously accessible only by air or boat. Climatic changes became immediately noticeable as we rode inland with the wet lushness giving way to



Whether the route was passable was a major question.

continuing aridity. Over 200 inches of rain fall annually along the coast, qualifying it as a temperate rain forest similar to the Olympic Peninsula in Washington. Coihaique, 50 miles inland, receives but 40 inches of rain while on the Argentine pampas, 35 miles away, the rainfall is only 10 inches.

Continuing south and determined to follow the path least travelled, we departed from the Argentina-bound traffic at Chile Chico to follow the southern shore of Lago General Carrera (Lago Buenos Aires is the same lake on the Argentine side). Whether the route was passable was a major question. Our maps showed only a dashed line, some 35 to 40 kilometers in length, connecting existing roads at either end of the lake. The map provided no

explanation for what those lines meant. It had to be passable; if it wasn't, we'd have to dramatically alter our plans. After collecting half a dozen opinions from locals concerning the meaning of those lines, we decided it was a horse path, at least part of which we hopefully would be able to pedal.

Our hopes for a successful passage were buoyed by the fine riding immediately after departing the road at Fuschal but not for long. Our first obstacle was a precarious bridge consisting of two planks precariously swinging just above a river swollen with glacial melt. We looked at each other dubiously but had no choice since that was the only way across. It took

three trips each to muscle our bikes and gear across. No sooner had I reassembled everything when I discovered my first flat tire! The tone for the next two days had been set.

We drug our bikes and gear over boulder fields, up and down steep, indeterminate trails, and through thorny, puncture-causing calafate bushes. What riding we had was minimal, though perhaps more than we really remember simply because the struggles dominated our thoughts. Never had either of us had to work so hard to get from one point to another. Eventually, scratched, bruised, and tired, we emerged at a farm house beside what was now a beautiful sight, a

bumpy Chilean road!

That road, our last in Chile, ended in the town of Cochran. From there, we crossed into Argentina at Paso Roballo, much to the stunned amazement of the border guards who see but four or five vehicles each month and never a cyclist.

We were finally in Patagonia proper, the Old Man's lair. He had been waiting. Even the gauchos were complaining about him. Gusts of up to 100 kph per hour attacked us, forcing us to seriously question the feasibility of riding. All we could do was hunker down in second gear with the front wheel tacking into the wind to avoid being blown sideways. One gust lifted both my wheels off the ground and turned me exactly the opposite direction I wanted to go! Every 45 minutes or so, we would be flat on the ground beside the road and lapse into semi-consciousness, dreaming of soft, tropical breezes.

After 500 kilometers of this and only one small town, Tres Lagos, we caught sight of our major destination in this region, Cerro Chalten, also known as Fitzroy, a granite massif rising 9,000 feet above the surrounding pampas. Chalten, god of the heights in the Tehuelche tongue, a mecca for world-class alpinists and the logo for Patagonia clothing, was guiding us on. No matter that we were nearly exhausted, that now we were riding directly into the wind, and that the last of our noodles had been eaten, we finally knew we could make our goal, the hosteria at the mountain's base. Luis and Silvia, lodge managers, warmly greeted us when we rode up, claiming we were the first cyclists to ever arrive there.

After a much deserved rest, we continued south to Calafate. The battle with El Viento continued but regardless, we turned off for a short side trip into the mountains to see the remarkable Perito Moreno glacier, a spectacular river of ice. From there, we returned to the our route only to struggle through the dust and traffic of the Rio Turbio coal mines before crossing the mountains' crest back into Chile. Our reward for that day's ride - into the battering headwind, through clouds of coal dust, and over a high pass - was one of the trip's best: pavement! That it was nearly dark by then didn't matter. After 1,500 kilometers of bumpy, dusty trips (dirt roads), there was pavement at last. We couldn't believe it. The remaining 10 kilometers to Puerto Natales were a cruise despite the icy headwind.

The next day, at last, we were heading eastward. Graciosa a Dios, El Viento was magically transformed into La Muerte. Two almost effortless hundred mile days and we were in the golden arms of the bay of Punta Arenas. The shining Straits of Magellan and the island of Tierra del Fuego were close enough to touch. Our journey had ended.

COSTA RICA

by Sandy Fails
Photography by Dennis Johns

How does a snow-dwelling academe gain a non-textbook appreciation of a tropical country? With a dictionary, a camera, and a horse called Univega.



Rio Paraisano - Washing clothes in the Caribbean lowlands



Valley of Rio Sarapiquí - dwarf bike and Gunnera leaves



Overlooking the Pacific Ocean near Esmerillas



Valley of Sarapiquí - La Paz Falls





The young Costa Rican insistently pointed at the peculiar bicycle and fired questions at the strange American despite the man's repeated "no habla español, no entiendo."

"He wants... to buy... your bicycle," an older Costa Rican translated in aboriginal English. After a few more halting words, the man turned to the boy and explained why the purchase of the bike was impossible.

"Es so caballo," he said. It's his horse. Biologist Dennis Johns's eighteen-speed "horse", a Unisvega mountain bike,

allowed him few of the field guides and other tools he'd normally use to explore a foreign environment. But then Dennis had little use for them; he'd planned his Costa Rica by mountain bike trip not to gather facts but to, well, shake himself up a bit.

The former director of Colorado's Rocky Mountain Biological Laboratory near Crested Butte, Dennis seems, on first impression, a scholarly, quietly competent, almost bashful man - the kind whose alarm clock never malfunctions and who never has to ask for assistance in the library. Gregarious and spontaneous would be

unlikely middle names for Dennis Johns.

Why did the 38-year-old biologist/photographer grab his bike and head out alone to chase monkeys in a land whose language and society were totally foreign to him?

"I wanted to break old habits of seeing and listening, to become a child again. It's not important to be able to attach names to things but to experience things, to see them in new ways. Maybe naming is the worst thing we can do, as soon as we attach a name, we lose interest and walk away."



Cahuita National Park

If Dennis sought a cultural jolt, Costa Rica immediately accommodated him. He left his Colorado home in the midst of a February snowstorm and arrived in balmy San Jose in late evening, alone, airplane-weary, clutching his Central American guidebook, with only a bare smattering of Spanish. San Jose, a city of open markets and decaying hotels, honking cars and screaming drivers, and unfamiliar colors and sounds, offered little comfort to the apprehensive bicycling American.

An eight-hour train ride to Puerto Limon on the Caribbean Coast did little to calm his nerves. "As soon as they opened the train doors, people started pressing in. I kept thinking they could fit possibly fit any more people on but they just kept packing them on. Then the vendors got on, selling sweets, ices, trinkets. It was incredible, a marketplace on wheels."

The train ride left him exhausted and ill prepared for the news that greeted him in Puerto Limon: his bicycle had been unloaded and irretrievably locked up for the weekend. With a month's vacation and a country famous for its natural diversity beckoning, Dennis had to cool his heels, literally and figuratively, in the Caribbean Sea. Snorkeling the barrier reef at Cahuita National Park not only effectively cooled his heels, it took Dennis's mind completely off his imprisoned bicycle - especially when a nurse shark joined brilliant clown and coral fish as his swimming companions.

"That shark and I eyed each other, each figuring the other was harmless but not quite willing to test out the theory."

On shore, Dennis heard the spotted white-face monkeys in the jungle while lizards ran around his bare feet.

"I'd read everything I could get on Costa Rica before leaving and I remembered that the country - one fifth the size of Colorado - has more species of

flora and fauna than any other country its size. Mostly because of its position as a land bridge between North and South America, its tropical climate, and its varied topography. So I knew I'd find an astounding natural diversity but intellectually knowing something and experiencing that are completely different. The extent of this diversity was amazing, especially in remote areas. There's this overwhelming sense of vitality, of land teeming with life, of levels and sub-levels and sub-sub-levels of activity. It was tremendously exciting."

By Monday, Dennis was impatient to hit the road. He returned to claim his bike amid the crowds and despair of Puerto Limon, Costa Rica's oldest and busiest port city, and was immediately reminded of his aloneness. He was in a foreign land, knew only token Spanish phrases, and was loaded down with valuable camera and bicycling gear. Despite his cautious nature, curiosity drove him to the colorful, exotic, and too often fragrant market places.

"Meat would just be hanging in the open air, lending a distinctive smell to the market. Fortunately the incredible variety of fruits - both strange and familiar - was much more fragrant and attractive than the meat. Vendors called out in a kind of musical chant as I walked by: '¡Jacotes! Naranjos! Guadalupe!' I kept remembering the super market back home and its orderliness then I'd look at the apparent chaos surrounding me and I'd have to grin. I loved it. The place vibrated with energy."

On day six of his trip, Dennis finally faced the open road with his bike. He rose early to escape the heat but the air was already hot. "Nothing was going to stop me that morning. I was so exhilarated to be on the bike traveling down an unknown road, past unfamiliar vegetation and people I couldn't even talk to. It felt like the trip was really just beginning."

Enthusiasm carried him a hundred kilometers that day, through banana plantations and clearings stolen from the forest to graze cattle on, and thick, humid jungle. Whenever the heat drummed its way through his zeal, Dennis hopped off the bike and into clear streams - shorts, shirt, and all.

"I turned into a Coca Cola addict on the first day of riding. It was a fast and easy way of getting liquids in me. I got a luck out of the stares of bystanders when I'd cycle up to a roadside shop, order two Cokes, down them in a couple of minutes, then ride off."

In retrospect, I wish I'd taken my time and been able to converse to people at those stops instead of chugging the Cokes and heading out. But for the first part of the trip, I was forever torn between burning because there was so much to

see, feeling over stressed (because of the heat, the physical effort, and the unfamiliar surroundings), and wanting to slow down. I wanted to listen to all I could listen to; see everything I could see; observe and absorb. But I kept getting caught up in just moving forward down the road. I had to consciously slow myself down."

Riding a bicycle into the towns proved an almost guaranteed method to meet people while bicycling out provided a much needed break when the effort of struggling with cultural and language barriers became too much.

"The bike was a people magnet. Sometimes I'd pedal into a village and would almost instantly be surrounded by people. They were fascinated with this fat fella, loaded down bicycle of mine, especially kids. They'd never seen anything like it. Everyone was friendly and hospitable and I quickly learned to explain in Spanish, 'very strong bike, good for rough roads and much weight.'"

He appreciated the native curiosity and helpfulness even more when he discovered the frustrating inaccuracy of his maps. Several times, he took wrong turns and had to backtrack, or bypassed a town not on the map, or found, exhausted and thirsty, that the next town, which was on the map, was nothing but a schoolhouse.

Two days of steady riding led him to a comforting familiarity in Finca La Selva, a biological field station near Puerto Viejo. The banter over dinner, the labs, the personalities, all reminded him of his own Rocky Mountain Biological Lab haunts. But the similarity ended at the dining hall door. Beyond were animals as exotic as their names: macaws, motenols, oropendolas, inamous, agoutis, poison arrow frogs, howler and spider monkeys, parrots and parakeets.

"The howler monkeys were easy to find - they sounded like an army of squeaking rock machinery. It was astounding how much noise they made. This one male picked me out and he kept climbing through the canopy trying to get directly above me. I had a good idea what he wanted to do and, believe me, kept well away. Eventually the unexpected became commonplace. Once, I was peering up into the trees looking for monkeys and instead spotted a giant lizard, a four foot long iguana, crawling through the canopy."

Some of the wildlife observing had a larger component of suspense that Dennis had counted on.

"I joined a friend from the field station one night to go spot lighting. We took these powerful flashlights into the pitch-black forest to view the wildlife. Almost immediately, this huge sphinx moth flew into the light. Startled the heck out of me. Its eyes looked like giant, glowing rubies. Every animal's eyes had a different reflection. The spotlight makes them glow

supernaturally. But to tell the truth, I couldn't really appreciate them. I was too nervous. Costa Rica is filled with poisonous snakes and there we were walking through prime snake habitat at night! The further we walked, the edgier I became and the more engrossed my companion became. My aesthetic appreciation of the night deserted me when we spotted this one snake. He kept following the light beam and I didn't like it at all. But I wasn't about to turn the light off either."

At Dennis' suggestion, the spotlighters retired, Dennis sighing gladly, his companion commenting, "I can never get anybody to go out and do this with me. I just don't understand it..."

From Finca La Selva, Dennis headed up... and up. Grumpy gear and frequent photographic stops made the traveling bearable but Dennis was still exhausted when he reached Vara Blanca just before dark... and even more exhausted when he was told there was no lodging in the vicinity. A group of Costa Ricans overheard his plight and offered him a ride, an evening at the country club, and a comfortable bed in nearby Heredia.

His hosts illustrated Costa Rica's surprising racial variety. With few indigenous people in the country, many of its citizens are of European origin - both

Spanish and Western European. Atypically for Latin America, Costa Ricans with light hair and skin, some even with freckled faces, are common.

After leaving his new-found Costa Rican friends and spending two days surveying the local culture in San Jose, Dennis hit the road again and, once again, the road climbed radically. He soon entered a belt of fog, fog that at times grew so thick he could see only a few yards ahead. The combination of the road's tight curves and narrow width and the lack of visibility sent him scurrying to the roadside whenever the sound of a truck approached. That sixty-mile stretch of road, from San Jose to the continental divide at Cerro La Muerte, rose from 3,800 to 11,000 feet. Once he'd left the fog behind, he found himself stopping at roadside stands and drinking two and three cartons of orange juice at a time. But even during the slowest, driest, dustiest sections, he never longed for four wheels.

"If I'd rented a car, I might have been tempted to get to all corners of Costa Rica and hit them really quickly. I would have passed by places that were really interesting. With the bike, I had to concentrate on what the trip was going to be about since I couldn't take much with me. Limitations are simply part of bicycle touring. I started out in warm country and

later in the high country I froze a couple of nights for lack of a warm sleeping bag. But I think it helps to have those limitations. It helps you to focus and to interact more closely with what's going on around you instead of just zipping through, intent on getting from A to B."

Dennis followed the Talamancan Ridge along the continental divide, slept at the well-known Hotel Georgina, then reaped the rewards of the previous days' climbs - a 25-mile, 8,500-foot descent to San Isidro de El General.

The cyclist in me said go faster while the photographer wanted to stop at every overlook. I could have made the entire downhill in my highest gear but the spectacular scenery reinforced the photographer in me and I stopped constantly."

By the time he arrived in San Isidro, he was ready for a break from the saddle. He checked his bike into a hotel, switched to backpacking gear, and boarded a bus to San Gerardo and the Chirripo National Park where he discovered that fog can bedevil hikers as well as bikers. The swirling gray mists cut visibility to less than fifty feet and he missed a critical turn in the trail up 12,533-foot Cerro Chirripo Grande. He discovered his mistake only after hours of backtracking. The trail wound up the mountain through immense

vegetation dripping with moisture while the thick fog intensified the closeness of the cloud forest.

"I was struggling up the trail, feet slipping in the mud, surrounded by this supernatural yet strikingly beautiful forest. Suddenly, just when I was lost in my thoughts, there was this huge black snake right in front of me. I had no idea what kind it was and didn't really care at that point. The snake, at least five feet long, retreated from the path then coiled, ready to strike. I froze in mid-stride. My head was buzzing from all the adrenalin coursing through me. I made a wide detour, figuring the snake didn't care for such close surprises any more than I did."

"I was on the alert from then on. I didn't run into another snake the rest of the trip but I sure had my eyes open."

At 11,000 feet, the paramos (alpine grassland) opened up with bunch grasses and lizards in abundance. He slept overnight in a refugio (hut) and rose early to climb to Cerro Chirripo's summit, his path lit by a crescent moon.

"I sat there on this small patch of ground, 12,000 feet above sea level, an island surrounded by rain forests, and watched the sun rise above a meringue of pink tipped clouds. Had it been clear, I could have seen the Caribbean Sea and, by simply twisting my body around, the

Pacific Ocean. To the north, mountain tops pierced the cloud layer over Nicaragua while to the south lay Panama. It all made me understand just how small and politically vulnerable Costa Rica really is. But what really struck me from that airy perch was the extent of their political stability and progressiveness. Here's this tiny country with a long history of democratic rule, surrounded by highly volatile countries, and yet they have no army, navy, or air force."

Such political thoughts quickly dissolved under the spell of a morning that held Dennis hypnotized - until the lure of unexplored shores cut through his reverie and sent him scrambling back down the path. It was time to head to the Pacific. He returned to town, retrieved his bike from the hotel, and headed west over a low coastal range.

Despite the cushioning effect of the blue's fat tires and the relaxed geometry, the dusty, bumpy road called for numerous rest stops. Especially with the clear, deep Rio Naranjo irresistibly inviting him down off his bike. His arrival at the coastal National Park of Manuel Antonio coincided with a spectacular sunset, atonement for his body's grievances. The following day was spent exploring the wonders of forest trails, tidal life, and sunburn.

Two more days of cycling then led to Puntarenas where Dennis saw the first familiar face in three weeks, fellow biologist Rosemary Smith. Dennis' "caballo" was again temporarily abandoned. A four hour bus ride took the two friends to Monteverde and the nearby rain forests of a biological reserve famous for its diverse bird life. Costa Rica boasts some eight hundred and fifty species of birds, more than all the species in the U.S. and Canada combined, plus some twenty-five hundred kinds of trees and twelve hundred species of orchids.

The reserve lived up to its reputation, treating Dennis and Rosemary to several almost magical views of the magnificent quetzal, one of the world's most beautiful birds. The male displays a striking plumage of brilliant, shimmering greens, reds, and whites and tail feathers up to 18 inches long. Adding to the biologists' delight was a rare opportunity to witness two manakins courting, bobbing around like they were puppets suspended from invisible hands. Still more exotic birds entertained the observers with vivid plumage and equally colorful names: three-wattled bellbirds, toucans, tinamous, black-faced solitaires, weasels, frogs, and even Haley's Comet rounded out their

continued on page 46

TREK'S NEW MOUNTAIN BIKES RAISE THE STANDARD OF PERFORMANCE AND HANDLING HIGHER THAN ANYTHING ELSE VISIBLE ON THE TERRAIN.

Mountain bikes have come a long way from the rough trails of Marin County, California. And ever since, innovative new geometries and component designs have tried to keep pace with the serious off-road rider.

Now Trek introduces the

8000 series. The first all-terrain thoroughbreds to utilize Trek aluminum technology. And the first to offer fatigue-fans a radical combination of both lightning-quick response and extreme shock dampening.



Custom midsize ATB aluminum tubing is bonded together using Trek's precision internal investment casting.

The 8000 is crafted from mid-size aluminum tubing, bonded to precision investment cast lugs. Since no heat is used in welding the frame,

resiliency, strength, and alignment are kept at a maximum. Durable polyurethane paint, electrostatically applied to resist nicks and dings, is the only fitting finish.



Look Ma, no mid-shifts. Shimano's new SLS thumb shifters give you more positive control of all 18 speeds.

Then a group of the finest new ATB components are bolted on. Like Shimano's new Deore SLS indexed thumb shifters. Biopace triple crankset. Fully-sealed bearing

mechanisms. Powerful under-the-bottom-bracket "U" brake. And a pair of lightweight, yet stomp-proof Rigid wheels.

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Circle #48

GET A TREK AND YOU'RE ALREADY ON TOP OF THE MOUNTAIN.



Night Riders

by Eric Rupp

It started innocently enough, a slight dimming of the sky toward the end of our after-work rides. Riding became more challenging but, in the midst of flying down fire roads, we hardly noticed. Then, some weeks later, the light abruptly went out.

"Five minutes after five!", Kent shrieked. "It's dark at five-o-five!"

"The time changed, Daylight Savings Time ended." Kent was crushed. It was a dark hour for after-work cyclists.

A few nights later, instead of being out on our bikes, we were sitting in the gloom of my darkening house. We couldn't imagine having to ride only on weekends for the next six months. There had to be a better way. Someone mentioned a neighbor, a hard-core bicycle commuter - rain or shine, day or night. He had a nice bike, well equipped: racks, panniers, fenders, a computer, lights...lights! What kind of lights! We wasted no time calling him to find out about the lights he used.

We were at his house in minutes. He happily showed off his well used bike. The lighting system was made up of a halogen headlight and tail light and a small, rechargeable battery pack fastened beneath the seat. After each ride, he'd remove the battery pack and plug it into a wall charger.

He switched the lights on. I immediately wanted the same lights for my mountain bike. The halogen headlight put out a strong beam that lit up the yard across the street, more than bright enough for woods riding. The system was wonderfully small and lightweight, perfect for mountain biking.

Each of us bought a similar lighting system the next week. An evening was spent installing them on our bikes. We flicked them on and suddenly, each bike had a powerful beam of light piercing the darkness, turning the ground in front of the tire from night to day. Plans were immediately made for a ride the following evening.

We met after work. Our plan was to climb a fire road to a summit fifteen hundred feet above from where we'd catch the last of the sunset before descending through the darkness via our favorite trail. I gave my light a last test and pedaled around the parking area to loosen up. Kent and Mike nodded their readiness. The road up was originally a narrow gage railroad, built around the turn of the century to open to logging previously unreachable redwood forests. The forest became a primary source for the lumber that rebuilt San Francisco after the 1906 earthquake. The long, even grade is ideal for rapid mountain bike ascents.

We fell into a comfortable pace and spun toward the summit. Our timing was perfect. The sun began to set just as we

arrived on top. Out came a Frisbee and we relaxed to enjoy the show, content in the knowledge that on our handlebars

were the keys to our return through the rapidly approaching blackness. Struggling to get out of the woods before dark was behind us. Now we could watch the sunset to its completion.

The ridge tops and western slopes were awash in a warm glow while behind us, night crept over the redwood forests like a dark blanket. Finally, the sun was gone, our bikes and lights ready. I took a deep breath and a last glance at the still bright horizon. Three sets of headlights burned brightly, their lights playing of the tops of trees lurking just beyond the ridge.

We slipped off the ridge into the trees and my pulse instantly quickened. All light was gone, as if we were diving into a tunnel of pitch. The trail we knew so well in daylight was dramatically altered into some sort of surreal jigsaw puzzle of light and deep pockets of blackness. My concentration was focused on only a few yards of trail immediately in front of my wheel. Beyond the circle of light, there was nothing. The sensation was at first disconcerting but I quickly adjusted to it and soon realized the beam illuminated the twisting path well ahead and slightly to the sides. The light can play tricks on your eyes, giving the trail a one-dimensional appearance, creating shadows directly behind every object on the path. These

pockets of darkness can be a little scary when you're about to slide into one.

On a fairly straight section of trail, I slowed down and switched off my light. Total blackness! A single second was all I dared. Riding this trail at night without a light was impossible.

The bikes' bouncing threw sharp beams of light into the underbrush. We seemed almost extraterrestrial in comparison to the quiet, dark forest. We blazed by - helmeted, gloved, and fish eyed.

A harmony was developing between my body and bike. Despite the lack of normal visual cues, I was intimately in touch with my machine as I knifed through the blackness. My headlight shown ahead while my hands sensed the surface of the trail beneath my tires. I felt my bike rock gently through an unseen series of depressions and small rises.

I shifted into a higher gear on a slight downslope, passing a stump on the right with a quick move. A surge of power sent me to the crest of a small knoll. The trail traversed a broad slope where it dropped away again and again, each time rising sharply to another crest. I concentrated on keeping my composure but every sudden drop squeezed an involuntary shout out of me.

The trail swung to the left and a split-second of uncertainty swept through me. The soft and friendly trail turned abruptly

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to avoid a steep erosion gulley. My light bounced off the opposite side of the gap, maybe thirty yards away. Between was only air and bottomless darkness.

I stood on my pedals and crept along the suddenly narrow path. My left shoulder grazed the wall as I felt my way around. On the right, only the blackness below marked the trail's edge. I eased my bike forward, almost diving for the opening where the normal trail resumed.

I wondered where Mike was. I hadn't seen his light in some time. Had he casually ridden past the gulley without comment? That was not like him. I

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No, we're not referring to those amazingly ineffectual generator lights you may have tried using when you were a kid riding home from school. We're talking serious lighting. We're talking being able to hit all your favorite trails without fear of the closing darkness.

Run out of daylight, no problem. Reach under your saddle, fumble for the on/off switch, and click, you're in business. The trail is suddenly lit up in front of you. There's not even a need to slow down. You continue on safe in the knowledge that you have from four to six hours more riding ahead of you.

What's it like to ride at night? A little eerie at first. The trail's lit up but the very nature of the lighting causes a dramatic shadowing effect. Because the bike is bouncing around over the terrain and the headlamp is mounted on the handlebars, the shadows are also bouncing around. Yes, it can be a bit disconcerting but only at first. Then, like all things, you get used to it and give it no more thought. Your eyes and mind adjust to the new perceptions and react accordingly. As the

night darkens, you find yourself following a bubble of light through the blackness like a hot air balloon's basket trailing along for the ride. Trees and rocks become barely discernible objects in the peripheral vision. You can't even look at your freewheel to see what gear you're in. All your concentration becomes focused on that bubble of light leading you on.

Yes, it's true, night riding deprives you of one of mountain biking's finest attractions: the scenery. And yes, if something happened to your light - a stone breaks it or you just run out of juice - when you're deep into a ride, you could be up the creek. Hey, those are the breaks. Night riding isn't for everyone. And there are rewards. You won't have to worry about excessive traffic on your route, no horsemen, no hikers. It will just be you on the trail slicing through the backcountry. And you might spot raccoons, opossums, deer, elk, maybe even a bear. After all, night is when much of nature creeps out onto the stage that man has finally deserted. A night ride can also transport you out onto some distant promontory to watch a rising moon dancing on the horizon. The possibilities are endless.

Brite Lights has produced a lighting system specifically for cyclists. We've used it and it works. The lighting is powerful, the battery is easily recharged - just plug it into a wall socket - and it holds a charge for over four hours of continuous use. They offer a variety of bulbs and battery packs that affect the hours of use you can

expect. The battery is contained in a nylon sack that fastens securely beneath your saddle while the light mounts onto the handlebars. There's also a tail light that we recommend you eliminate if you're only going to use the system off-road where you've no concern about traffic. You're battery will last longer that way.

The only thing we would like to see as an option is some sort of helmet mounting system. The action of the front wheel is passed directly through to the handlebars and rough terrain the bouncing light can be disconcerting. A helmet mounting system would also enable you to periodically look into the woods for any wildlife. And if you did have to make a repair to your bike, your hands would be free to do so while your headlamp would be directed wherever you look. Such an option would enable you to mount the lamp on the bars when that's appropriate and on your helmet when that seems a better course.

Night riding isn't for everyone. In fact, it's probably not for very many. But if you're at all interested, try it; you might like it. You might even get hooked. Even if you're not so much interested in night riding itself, a headlamp can at least dramatically increase the length of your outings since you're no longer bound by the confines of having to return before dark.

For more information, contact: Peak Experience, PO Box 13862, Soquel, CA 95073

straighter when the underbrush near by rustled.

A distant flash of light announced Kent's imminent arrival. The light bounced through the trees, appearing then disappearing as he got closer. He blazed through our stopping place in a quick flash of light and the "wop-wop-wop" of a Three Stooges lasso. Mike leapt to his bike and the Chase was on. I watched the two tail lights race into the blackness.

I heard another rustling a few feet away. Instantly, my light was on and I was on my bike, chasing after my companions. It felt good to be afraid of the dark, just like the old days.

The three of us stayed close together as we sped downhill toward the forest's edge. We emerged from the woods, blinking onto the brightly lit streets of civilization and filled with a sense of accomplishment. Better yet, we had

discovered a new way of enjoying our mountain bikes. No longer were we limited by early darkness. Our ritual after-work rides would continue.

Even more importantly, we had ridden in a way that allowed us to feel subtle signals coming through our hands and feet. Signals that seemed almost imaginary provided very real feedback from our bikes about the conditions around us. Our favorite trail had seemed almost unknown to us. Familiar turns, dips, and rises had been mysteriously rearranged. The redwood forest had been experienced from a completely new perspective.

The night's adventure over, I said good night and rode the short distance home and plugged my battery pack into its charger. Drifting into sleep, I caught images of friends and the warm, sun drenched ridge...then my pulse quickened as we slipped into the dark woods.

continued from page 14

hit would be the next switchback below! (If you really want to scare yourself, try driving down this narrow road.)

At the bottom of this screaming downhill is a junction. A right leads onto the White Rim Trail, a 100-mile jeep road around islands in the Sky. A left eventually loops back to the Potash Road and the return to town. What makes this ride so dramatic are cliffs soaring some 2,000 feet up on the left while to the right is a 500-foot drop into the Colorado River.

Separating these cliffs like a referee holding two boxers apart is a bench covered with desert shrubbery. The route is a constant paradox. Looking at the land from above, you'd never believe a road could possibly traverse such wild country. Yet not only is there a road, it's a wonderful road, perfect for high speed mountain biking, even drafting is possible. There's no traffic, no sign of civilization except for this superb road in front of you yet surrounding you is this dramatic beauty that fills every pore of your body, every cell in your mind.

You'll just have to ride there to understand.

The Festival's highlight had nothing to do with riding; the Halloween Party and the outstanding prize awarded to the best overall costume filled that role. Not everyone had arrived prepared for a costume party but as soon as they walked into Rim Cyclery and spotted the Columbia leaning on its kickstand with a notice that it would be awarded to the best costume, imaginations kicked into gear and the local thrift shops noted a distinct uptick in business. In fact, the eventual winner, Kevin Christian, spent another twenty hours on top of the twenty he'd already spent at home making his costume. He'd had no idea the bike would be the prize but when he saw it, he had to have it. His Off-road Warrior costume was hands down the hit of the party.

The Halloween Party and the Columbia bike perfectly represented the Festival. Why can be answered in one word: fun. The '86 mountain biking season was pretty much over; the hard core races had been won, champions crowned, prizes awarded. Now it was time to kick back. Top team racers like Ritchey's Steve Cook, Schwinn's John Weissenrieder, and Cunningham's Jacque Phelan were there but like everyone else, they were there to ride, party, visit, and explore new country. Racing was the last thing on their minds. Even Gary Fisher, a man who lives his business, was there with his wife and newborn child just for the sheer fun of it all. Canyonlands was the ultimate escape and what better way could there be to escape than via an outlandish costume party. And what could better represent that spirit than that truly wonderful Columbia bike awarded not to the fastest or strongest but to the most creative. This was mountain biking at its best.

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It started with the travel section of the San Francisco Chronicle on a Sunday morning. Hey Bill, look at all these places we can go in the South Pacific for a thousand bucks!"

Mountain Biking in the South Pacific

Story and photography by Bill Cushway



Shelley cycling on the beach on Lennax Head Australia



Rubber eating Kei bird. Avuthen Pass, S. Island, N.Z.

Our home for 10 days in Fiji on Cagelai Island



Emosi Yee Show with our dinner



Ten minutes later I was on the phone with Air New Zealand. The summer passed in a restless, almost nervous, state of anticipation. Most of our time was spent eating, saving, planning, listing, pricing, and writing tour brochures. Plus dozens of calls to Air New Zealand's 800 number. (When calling the 800 number for info, do it at least twice for every question since all their answers are different, especially about potential cycling routes.) Tickets were bought through a travel agent, saving ourselves the hassles of dealing with passport and visa photos as well as all the paperwork.

Flying Air New Zealand with a bike is easy. It's just wheeled onto the plane so there's no need for a box. Leave your panniers on for padding and take the pedals off and let some air out of the tires.

Despite all our phone calls, we still didn't learn all we should have. Namely: Never use an open ticket during tourist season in the South Pacific, particularly to places where the airline only flies once a week. You can always change dates later but if you only have an open ticket, you could miss some places altogether. Use American Express Travelers Checks so you can receive real at their offices as well as receiving a better exchange rate than you can with cash. If you don't already have one, get an AAA card. With it, you can get lots of free maps and information. Take a good tent with a rainfly that reaches to the ground unless you prefer sleeping in water. And most importantly, be flexible. You never know what unexpected opportunities might arise.

Our first stop was Nadi (sometimes called Nandi) in Fiji where we found the

friendliest people we've ever met. Cycling down the road was like being in a parade with everyone waving to us and yelling "Bula Bula" (hello). Touring Fiji is a snap. All the lodging is listed on a board behind the immigration desk so you can decide where to stay while standing in line to get stamped in. Camping and dorm style accommodations cost as little as \$4.00.

October 8, Fiji. Nice little town, cheap Indian restaurants, expensive supermarket, great outdoor fruit market. We met Richard and Mike from Vancouver. Doing the same tour as us, also on mountain bikes. Spent the day riding around and eating tons of fruit.

Most people here are 1/2 Fijian and 1/2 Indian. The Indians are more industrious and less friendly. Stayed at the Sunny Holiday Resort campground, \$4.00 each.

That was my journal's first entry. But as pleasant as Nadi was, it wasn't the Fiji we'd flown so far for, the one featured in colorful brochures. Finding that Fiji meant leaving our bikes in Suva and departing the main island. We took a bus-ferry-bus ride to Ovalau on the island of Levuka where we met Emosi Yee Show, owner of the Old Capital Inn and self appointed tour guide. His casual style and magnetic personality made the role a natural.

The Inn was full when we arrived but no matter; he rented us a room in his house - with his family - \$7.00 for both of us!

Our original plan had been to leave the next day for a campground on the other side of the island. Before we'd left, Emosi made us an offer we couldn't refuse. For \$20.00 each, he'd take us out to a small island with six other people. He'd provide

six meals (mostly fish and lobster he would spear). We'd stay in little bamboo huts (called Butes) for \$2.50 a day. If we wanted to stay longer than a day, we'd have to bring our own food. So with \$11.50 worth of food, we headed out with Emosi, four other Californians, and two Canadians. We ended up staying ten days and could easily have stayed longer.

Our next stop was Cagelai Island where we snorkeled on the outer reef between bouts of sun bathing. From my journal: "October 18, Cagelai Island. I speared two fish one morning - the big one got off - and Shelly speared one. Beautiful island. We walked around it in twenty minutes. Lots of coconut and papaya trees. A nice couple and their son came take it for the church. We pay them \$2.50 a day. These prices are really helping us with our budget."

After returning to Suva and our bikes, we headed back to Nadi. We made a few side trips on the way to do some off road riding but normally stuck to the pavement. I'll always remember the Fijian kids running up to us and waving "bye-bye".

Somewhere they got the coming and going reversed but they were really cute. It was like a huge smiling contest going on all around us.

Then it was off to Brisbane, Australia almost. The plane was delayed over four hours. The airline gave us free food and beers during the wait and we got pretty wasted. We finally arrived in Australia and went through customs and got the bikes and were looking around trying to figure out what to do next when a customs officer came up and started talking about our bikes. He had an Aussie mountain bike called an Apollo and invited us to stay at his home.

Nov 2, Brisbane. It's a grand old place, over a hundred years old. Peter's a chameleon - a straight guy at work and a throwback to the hippy days at home. Doesn't own a TV, no radio, not even a stove. Big spiders are hanging all over the place but they leave you alone if you leave them alone. The house has holes in the

floor and a cracked ceiling but Peter's a great guy and his house took on a lot of character.

We stayed with Peter for nine days and he introduced us to the local mountain biking and the city. Then we rode to Sydney, about 600 miles away. Took three weeks to get there. That was faster than we'd planned since we'd wanted to linger on beaches along the way but the weather was bad almost every day so we just rode and camped.

Nov. 19, Karuah, Australia, en route to Sydney. Got up at 6:15 a.m., ready to hit the road. Started to rain with lots of wind. Decided to stay put. I worked on the tent's rain fly, watched TV, and slept. Getting real tired of rain and wind.

We also got tired of Australian roads. Lots of trucks, not too many shoulders, and plenty of pot holes. We were glad we had mountain bikes so we could turn off the pavement and on to the dirt. Most of the time, we did so for pleasure, a few times we were literally blown off by semis.

Sydney was wonderful, a beautiful harbor city, rivaling San Francisco and Cape Town, even Rio de Janeiro. We



Cooling off with a wet towel and juice

Goofing with the kids during a fruit stop in Fiji



lodged in the attic of a small hotel for \$5/day US. The room even had a stove and refrigerator. We stayed a week, rode to all the museums and parks, and cycle-toured the city by following tourist buses. Then it was time to move on to New Zealand. But as we headed to the airport, we vowed to return to Australia again someday but next time, we'd buy a van, a surfboard, and a fishing rod. Distances are too great for cycling, at least for us. The roads are in bad shape and the "trucks" too rude.

"December 3, Christchurch, New Zealand. New town. Lots of young people and tons of bikes. Got some maps at the auto club and called my friend Peter who lives on the North Island. We're heading directly there for the warmer weather and will probably spend Christmas with him. Getting there should take about ten days. The riding is better here. Wider shoulders, fewer trucks, and drivers are more aware of cyclists. The people seem very friendly."

New Zealand turned out to be a cyclist's dream with only one major complaint: not enough time to see everything. We had two months left and a minimum of two months are needed just to see one island. We wanted to tour both. Especially since home is half way around the world and we didn't know when, or if, we'd ever make a back. New Zealand has more National Parks, campgrounds, and trails per capita than anywhere in the world. The campgrounds even have kitchens, eliminating the need to carry a stove. These kitchens are also great places to wait out the rain.

About every climate and scenery that exists can be found in New Zealand: volcanoes, semi-tropical beaches, glaciers

flowing into the ocean. Everywhere you look are swirling green tapestries of every imaginable hue. And sheep, lots of sheep, more sheep than we'd ever seen. New Zealand has over 20 times as many sheep as people.

Our cycling started and ended in Christchurch on the South Island's east coast. From there, we rode north along the east coasts of both islands then looped back down the west coasts. This entailed two ferry rides and two trips to Wellington, the country's capital.

"Dec. 10, New Zealand. Blessings to Pictou in Wellington. Rode on a practically flat valley road to Pictou with mountains on all sides. Nice town with a lakeside feed because it's so far inside the sound. Great ferry ride to Wellington, about eighteen miles. From the ferry dock we rode about two miles to the rail station downtown. Got directions to the "Beethoven House" \$9 per person NZ. A classic place run by a guy from Singapore. He has big speakers in the hallway and, at seven a.m., starts things off with classical music at low volume. By 7:30, it's blaring away and everybody is up, like it or not. About 35 people congregate for a breakfast of

sausages, toast, and tea or coffee. There are more Europeans than Americans or Canadians, for a change. Signs on the walls describe adult behavior. Smoking isn't allowed, even in the garden."

"Dec. 12, Wellington to Greytown. Some traffic, the first twenty miles but the road had plenty of room. Then a long climb to Pakuranga Summit (50 meters), five miles of steep climbing, fast descent. Flat road to Greytown. Staying at a campground with kitchen, fire, showers, etc. It's raining hard so we'll sleep on the kitchen's wood floor. No one else is here, not even the caretaker. We leave the \$6 NZ in the slot that says donation."

Eventually arrived in Waipara and spent the next ten days with our friends. Spent one day catching crayfish and skink on a nearby beach. On another, we rode to Lake Waikareiti where we ate the biggest trout I've ever seen (weighing under 14 inches has to be returned). After eating, drinking, and partying over the Christmas holidays, we were ready to get back on the road.

Summer had fully arrived. The weather was warm and the whole country seemed to be on holiday. We met cyclists from all over the world and on all kinds of gear. Most were on touring bikes that weighed about 90 lbs., including gear. We might have had to work a little harder because of our mountain bikes but we also had only one flat, no broken spokes, bent forks, or mechanical failures plus we could go anywhere.

"Dec. 28, Rotorua, New Zealand. Sunny and hot. This town is amazing. Steam's rising everywhere. All the campgrounds and hotels have mineral baths. Everyone taps into an underground thermal pipe for their heaters, pools and cooking. It's strange to see all the pipes on top of the houses with steam coming out. Met a guy from Vermont (Jay). He's on a sport bike with 17 tires. He's had 12 flats in one month. A good reason to stay with fat tires. We steamed up a lot of veggies and drank some beers and then, into the hot pool. Eight other bikers staying here.

Some going north, some south."

It was south for us, to Lake Taupo where we spent New Year's. Its similarity to Lake Tahoe was amazing. Same size, same mountains, though not as deep or cold. We continued south past Tongariro National Park's beautiful volcanoes where we rode a fine single track. Another ferry crossing returned us to the South Island. We headed for the strikingly beautiful Abel Tasman National Park where we left our bikes in the campground and hiked into the park. After so much time on our bikes, walking felt great. After yet another brief stay, it was back on our bikes, heading south. The first beach we came to was too inviting and we camped there for three days. In front of our tent, across a stretch of white sand, was the ocean. Behind us was a fresh water stream. We needed the break and spent most of the time just kicking back and enjoying the sun.

The South Island's West Coast has the

country's most spectacular scenery and cycling but it's not without cost: rain, lots of rain. How much does it rain? "The people on the West Coast don't get old, they rust!" "It doesn't rain for three hours, they think it's a drought." "If you can't see the mountains, it's raining, and if you can, it's going to rain."

"Jan 12, Punakaiki, New Zealand. Strong winds came up last night and tore out some of the rain fly's patch job. Then it dumped and we got wet. Our fibertill bags are saving us. Despite the weather, this place is beautiful. Great forests and giant fern trees. Lots of royal palms. The hills and mountains look like Yosemite. Most of the cyclists we've met are all here today. Must be at least 20, all going south. Had a good north wind today but decided not to ride. Too much rain."

We now had only a little over two weeks left before we'd be out of money

and have to head home and we still hadn't seen everything we wanted to see. We'd been riding for over three months but weren't ready to go home. We decided to sell the bikes as soon as we got back to Christchurch. An ad was placed in the local paper and the bikes sold within a few days. The sale of the bikes enabled us to stay another month and we got to all those places we hadn't wanted to miss.

I'm writing this from my home near Lake Tahoe. Memories of people and places flood my mind yet what I remember most is the riding, the physical exhaustion at the end of a long day's ride, the battles against the elements, the exhilaration of riding for hours after hours with each day completely different, the simplicity and naturalness of our lives. I also remember those times when I looked forward to the journey's end and going home. But I knew, in the back of my mind, before long, I'd find myself wishing I was once again back on my bike and exploring unknown lands. We've been back a month now. Yesterday I found myself calling another 800 number.

continued from page 33

Monte Verde observations. Upon returning to Puntarenas, Rosemary continued her trip by bus while Dennis hopped back on his bike, anxious for one more stretch of riding before returning to Colorado's snows. His last major stop turned out to be

one of the most dramatic - the volcano Volcan Poas rising out of an expanse of rich, green fields, fields whose tremendous productivity is due to the volcano itself. Dennis once again parked his bike in order to scramble over the mountain's slopes. He found one crater fuming through a sulphurous lake while still higher he discovered a crystal clear lagoon. Dennis

the photographer took over and much of his remaining film was shot of the volcano's stark beauty, the grand finale of his month-long trip.

Back among the parkas, skis, and twelve foot snow banks of Crested Butte, surrounded by thirty rolls of Costa Rican photographs, Dennis was content but far from satiated by his Costa Rican tour.

"It wasn't an education of specifics. I wanted impressions - on film and on my psyche. I got that but there's so much more left unexplored. This was almost like a reconnaissance trip; there's so much to go back for. I'm studying Spanish now and I'll be back on the plane for Costa Rica next winter. I'll continue to work on seeing and listening like a child does - spontaneously and without preconception. I feel younger just thinking about it."

Corrections, etc.

The Iceland story in the Nov/Dec issue was written by Harry Hurt and Kevin Christian.

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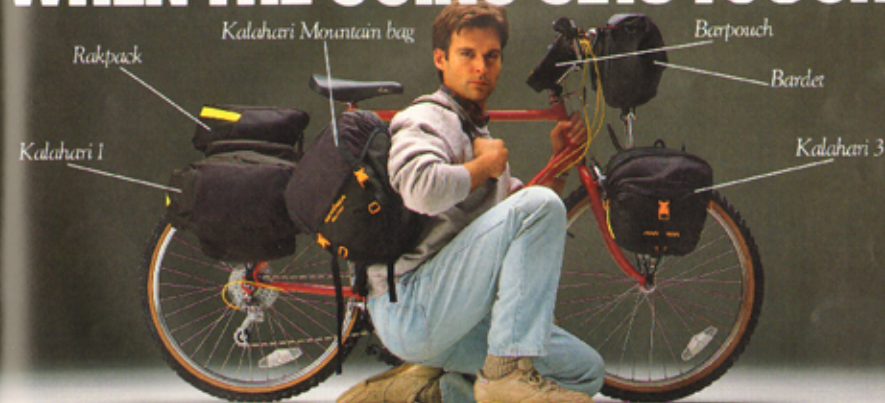
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