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July-August 1987  
Vol III, No 6

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# mountain bike

July-August 1987  
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Cover: Janet Andersen enjoying her new Ibis Avion on Poison Spider Mesa, Utah, Hank Barlow photo.

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# Editor's Note

## It's Time to Organize

It's the middle of April and the Colorado snowpack is rapidly disappearing. When you live at 9,000 feet, the speed with which the snow melts is of great interest. Winters in Crested Butte are long, especially in the spring, and by the time spring arrives, locals are eager, even desperate, for heat.

The ski area is closed and skis are, for the most part, put away, replaced by mountain bikes and tennis rackets. From my office, I can see the main (only) road into town. A parade of cars laden down with mountain bikes - some in combination with kayaks, some with windsurfers, some just bikes - has been heading out. Most are going to Moab, Utah where Rim Cyclery has been reporting eighty-degree days.

I joined the parade and headed out for a quick three days of product testing on the White Rim Trail. Six of us got together for the ride, one of whom volunteered his four-wheel drive Ford pickup for the wagon. The truck was great; without it I couldn't have done the ride. I have to ice my knees two or three times a day so coolers with blocks of ice were mandatory.

Our ride was a terrific entry into the joys of summer mountain biking! For three days, we had nothing better to do than ride a hundred miles through spectacular vistas, hike to ruins, explore side canyons, hang out in the sun, take lots of pictures, and sleep beneath a dazzling display of stars. All this in the midst of a National Park.

We must have seen fifty other cyclists during our circuit of the trail. Yet so vast is Canyonlands National Park that essentially, we were alone throughout our tour. Everyone - supported or not - had big sandy grins splitting brown faces. Serious Biking seemed to be the ruling philosophy, as if everyone had to soak up maximum rays to cleanse themselves of a winter's accumulated debris.

What an experience riding the White Rim is. There's nothing else like it, well over a hundred miles of superb mountain

biking on a for-the-most-part smooth (for bikes) jeep road through one of our most striking National Parks.

But what struck me most about our ride was how truly incredible mountain bikes are. There we were, virtually surrounded by wilderness, following a rugged - even primitive - jeep track, and riding bicycles of all things. Not only were we on bikes, the bikes were faster than the truck (unless we'd wanted to beat the truck into submission). In three days of sustained riding, between six of us we suffered two flats (one thorn, one stone) and one slightly bent rear derailleur (caused by stacking three bikes in the truck when their riders elected to drive). We hammered the bikes too, flying down hills at breakneck speeds and pounding over hard, rocky surfaces; typical backcountry cycling conditions. The bikes took everything in stride. I'd known they would but something about seeing so many bikes deep in the midst of Utah's canyon country drove home just how remarkably durable and versatile these bikes truly are.

I'm periodically asked if I think mountain biking is just a fad, another boom and bust sport. No way is it a fad; it's a recreational lifestyle and those don't disappear. Oh sure, there'll probably be some lessening of the current fervor and mountain bikes' sales might flatten but as far as the sport being a fad, no. It's too much fun and it's too great a way to experience the backcountry. By no other means can a person traverse so much terrain as easily and quickly as on a mountain bike. We can now explore places that previously lay beyond our limited recreational time frames, at least without the use of a four-wheel drive.

Those wonderful days in the midst of Utah's canyon country made me realize how badly mountain biking needs a national organization whose sole focus is land access and environmental concerns. We need an organization that has no interest in racing or tours or

any other kind of promotional mountain biking event. We need an organization with a paid staff including a hot lawyer whose sole purpose in life is to keep us able to ride on our lands.

The last few years have seen a dramatic erosion in the land available to us to ride on and it's getting worse. Evidently we have an implacable foe in the Sierra Club and they are intent on grouping mountain bikes as ORV's and banning us from Forest Service and BLM lands.

What really drives me nuts about all this is that it's totally unnecessary. Every mountain biker I've ever met is an environmentalist. We're as concerned about this world in which we live as the Sierra Club. Nor are mountain bikes environmentally destructive. Naturally they can be to a limited extent when in the hands of someone who doesn't give a damn. Even then, the environmental damage is minimal. Unconscious bikers can be equally destructive while horses can devastate trails.

But those are social problems. The mountain bike itself is a terrifically sane, clean, and fun way to experience the backcountry. That statement has been supported by Forest Service and Park Service personnel on numerous occasions. Studies have also borne that fact out. I am completely at a loss as to the source of Sierra Club thinking that produces statements such as: "The widespread use of the strong framed, heavy-tired vehicle, designed for a violent speed experience, has resulted in a concerted effort to restrict their use to those trails on which resource damage can be controlled, and the safety of other users is not at risk." They've got to be kidding! Violent speed experience? Hell, if that's what we want, forget the brakes and gearing; let's just ride them off Yosemite's Half Dome!

Tragically, they're quite serious and they are out to get us and they are succeeding. More and more lands are being closed to mountain bikes and the pro-

cess is about to be dramatically increased. There is currently a bill being pushed by California Senator Cranston (Senate Bill #7), the so-called Southern California Desert Protection Act, that will seal off some 9.6 million acres of land to mountain biking. Of course we're not specifically being excluded; it's just that since the Sierra Club has included us as ORV's, we are massed with all the jeeps, ATVs, motorcycles, etc. that are being excluded by the bill. The bill's intent is to label those acres as pristine wilderness and therefore closed to mountain bikes! The only way anyone will be able to see these lands other than from an airplane will be from the back of a horse or on foot. How extensive an area are they talking about? Bigger than some New England states combined!

The question becomes do we as environmentalists provide our desires to explore the backcountry by bike and support the bill or do we side with the four-wheelers, etc. and fight the bill. Unfortunately, we don't have that choice. As long as mountain bikers have no national organization to represent our needs, effectively we have no say in these decisions. Sure, we can write letters and send post cards to senators - and we should, immediately - but realistically, that does little good. The Sierra Club has too much leverage through their sheer size. The ability to deliver blocks of votes is what influences legislation, not post cards and letters. Not that they do any harm; just don't expect much in return.

We've got to represent ourselves as a block of voters who can influence elections if we want to be listened to. And that takes money because national organizations do not run on volunteer effort. That's part of it but there has to be a paid staff, etc. to get results. It also takes money to regularly inform members what's happening with legislation, it takes money to write up the kind of legal proposals governments want.

Any organization will

be made up of local chapters who concern themselves primarily with regional affairs. But imagine how much clout those chapters will have locally with the resources of a national organization behind them. There's nothing quite like having a lawyer on your team to get results from governments. It's a sad commentary on our nation's current state of affairs that that is so but...so be it.

Funding for this organization will come from individual members - and that should be all who ride off-road - and from the industry itself. Why the industry? Because if we can't ride these crazy machines where we want to, why own them? The bicycling industry has an incredible opportunity to create a vigorous, exciting recreational lifestyle built around mountain bikes and anything that will help see that come to fruition is good for the industry as a whole. If every bicycle manufacturer gave a small percentage of every bike's sale price to the organization, we'd be well on the road to being able to achieve our

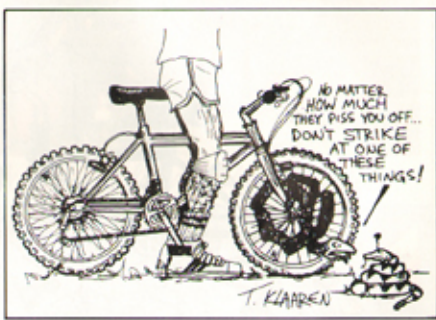
goals. Hell, just think of the tremendous publicity the cycling industry could gain by having a national organization duking it out with the Sierra Club and the government. Advertising is great - it helps support magazines like BLM and lets people know what products are available - but it also only reaches people who are already interested in the subject. Why else would they pick up BLM? But everyone reads newspapers. Imagine the headlines that could be generated by an environmentally conscious national mountain biking organization presenting their point of view before Senate sub-committees. Any such organization is clearly of vital interest to the industry and ought to be enthusiastically and financially supported by the industry.

Mountain Bike Magazine is prepared to help create this organization but without the support of you, the enthusiast mountain biker, it won't happen. If this all makes sense, drop us a post card telling us so. If we get enough replies,

we'll be in a position to get this under way. We need it immediately, before still more lands are closed to our bikes!

(Despite our vehement disagreement with Mountain Bike Action's portrayal of the sport - rad bikers flying off of jumps and sliding through turns, in short everything that supports the negative image of mountain

biking - we're glad to see they've finally realized that the off-road community has a serious access problem. And in response to that, they've included in their June issue post cards to be sent to various senators. All you have to do is fill in your name and address and mail them in. We encourage everyone to do so.)



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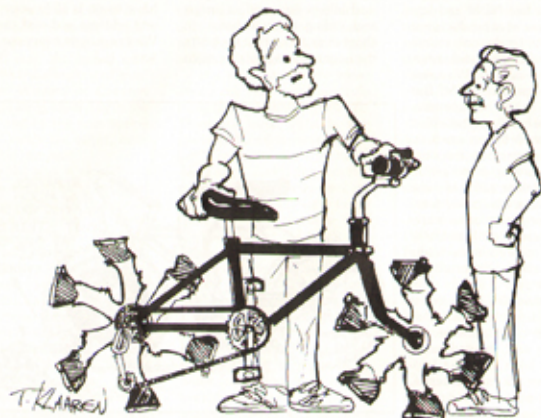
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# Mark Slate

## Working On Our Image



I THOUGHT I COULD GET AWAY WITH RIDING ON SOME PARK TRAILS THIS WAY.

Mountain Bikes, Off-Road Bikes, All-Terrain Bikes — call them what you will. Only a part of the name is "Bike." The other portion of the name refers to where they were designed to be used.

It is true that some 80% of mountain bikes sold are only used on unpaved surfaces 20% of the time. Even so with the number of mountain bikes currently sold, we are increasingly visible in areas where some folks think we shouldn't be.

Most of us grab our bikes to leave all our responsibilities behind. The escape to freedom just a few pedal strokes away. A great way to clean the old cobwebs out of the system. None of us like to worry about others' perception of us or want to speak to other cyclists we may meet during the course of our hard earned ride about the potential curtailment of our sport. That is a problem. If we don't ALL spread the word and present a positive image we will continue to lose access to beautiful and diverse land. We all need to act and ride responsibly.

I doubt if there is a single square foot of land in the United States, or anywhere on Earth for that matter, without an owner or land manager. That means someone to answer to. It is your right to enjoy life. It is a privilege to use land that someone else has taken title to.

It's going to take nationwide organization and lobbyists in Congress to fight for this privilege. We are already starting too late but at least we have finally started. Small, localized groups of concerned riders in the San Francisco Bay Area have been meeting to define problems and develop solutions. The name of this very new and growing organization is The Bicycle Trails Council of Marin. It takes its name and objectives from the original Bicycle Trails Council dealing with a similar situation in the East Bay. There are other organizations working to achieve an open dialogue between all user groups such as ROMP—Responsible Organized Mountain Pedalers of the Santa Cruz, California area and The Recon Riders

of the Santa Rosa, California area.

Every political effort is essential at this point in time. With the sport growing as fast as it is, the likelihood of other trail users seeing mountain bikers in their natural environment is greater than ever. If most of the riders in a given area are members of an organization given to the continued dialogue necessary for our land use then new riders will become aware and involved.

I feel regional organizations should be associated and conducted in the same manner to achieve their objectives, ostensibly under one name. The Bicycle Trails Council approach is given to compatible trail use between all user groups and responsibility for the area and its maintenance. It is not interested in race promotion. We need a widespread network of cyclists to work for land use privileges. Awareness of the severity of our problem is key. We are fighting an uphill battle with established trail users. These people look at us as a threat to

their peaceful outings and feel we should and could be stopped.

They don't understand the capabilities of a bicycle with an experienced rider on board. They think we are always verging on the limits of control. We must make a concerted effort to pass hikers and equestrians slowly. Do not just sail by no matter how much road you've got. Slow down and say things like "Howdy" or "G'Day" or "These bicycles sure are fun!" A bell's not a bad idea. Ring it discreetly about a hundred feet away, then again at fifty feet if you weren't heard. Still haven't been heard? Try again, but don't be obnoxious. When approaching an equestrian (especially from the rear) warn the rider with your bell and talk for the horse's benefit. The horse won't understand that you're not some alien being unless you do and even still some horses do not like bicycles so it may be a good idea to ask the rider about the horse. Whatever you do, be understanding and don't be rude. Mountain bikers need to promote a favorable image. Many folks will already be somewhat wary. They've made an effort to get out there with the trees and the flowers and don't want to be reminded of civilization by a piece of machinery however beautiful it may be to you.

One of the early sayings of "clunker" riders (pre 80's mountain bikers) was "away from the cars, cops, and concrete". These days every one of us needs to be our own cop if we're going to stay away from that concrete. The "good old days" are still here. We need to hold on to our access because it is slowly slipping away. It will take an effort on all of our parts to effect this trend. One bad incident can offset the positive efforts of twenty. So please talk to hikers and equestrians while passing slowly. Yield the right of way if necessary. If your area is in need of a Bicycle Trails Council, and most areas are, then adopt these goals and guidelines and stop the close-out before it's too late.

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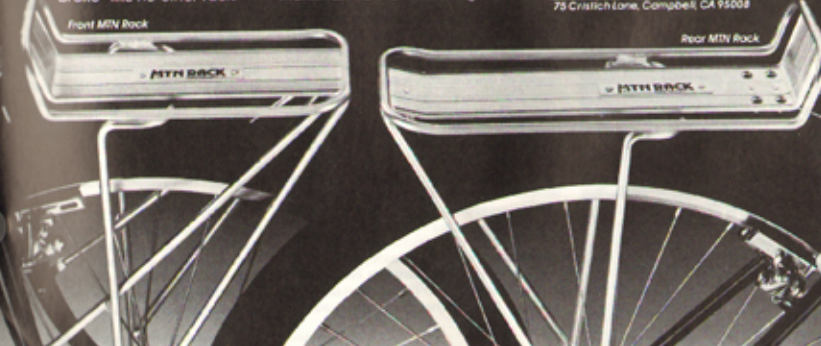
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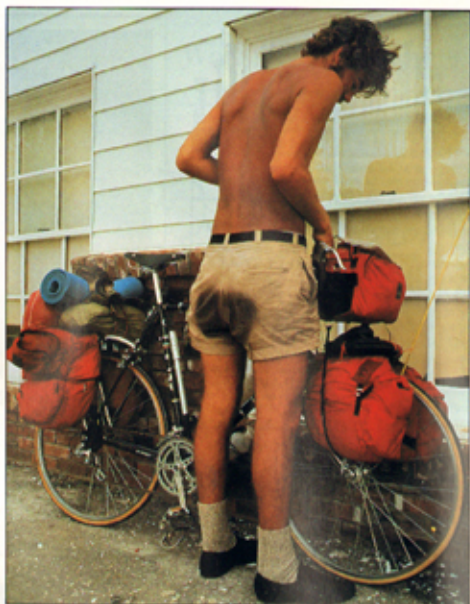
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## Off the Road

by Dennis Coello



Dennis Coello

## A Sharper Focus on Your Touring

It's time to talk about the little things of a tour. In past columns I've concentrated on what my editor recently described as "the grand design" - best route, equipment, training. All of critical importance to a successful ride. "This time focus on the little, unexpected problems which can upset even the best laid plans."

I didn't have to think long for examples. Two days before I'd come off a great ride with Rim Tours of Moab. The group, scenery, food, everything contributed to a wonderful time. Except for one minor glitch that cast a gray pall over an otherwise blue sky ride. There I was surrounded by spectacular scenery and I broke my lens.

Naturally I had backup lenses but they were standard, fixed focal lengths; my usual workhorse is a quality zoom. The lens I'd broken was new, larger than other zooms I'd packed before, and it had to be carried differently. I shudder to think how many times I've cautioned against beginning rides with anything that's brand new, whether in equipment or packing technique. Had I followed my own advice, I wouldn't have missed out on all the fine shots that I did.

Have you, like many of us, ruined a day

of touring with a sore posterior? One's rear must be conditioned to the hours-long pounding it will take and the deeper-in-the-saddle push that riding with a load requires. I've known some peddlers who begin a tour with a Spence "BioSoft" Saddle Pad, shipping it home when their rears are toughened. This pad - or something similar - can be a good idea for those who join a weekend tour group and have had little preparation for it.

And who among us has not forgotten that one inch wide band of untanned skin just below the belt line that suddenly is exposed when leaning toward the handlebars? Then there's the old muscle strain if training has been insufficient. I winced each time I read a piece by some young tourist, just back from a long ride and assuring readers they can "get in shape on tour". You can but only if you've got the time to start off slow and that requires a long ride, something most schedules don't allow. Getting in shape while touring also requires the fortitude to deal with the resulting physical discomforts caused by your poor preparation.

Then there's the difference in how your loaded bike handles. The wisest plan is to get used to these changes by slowly adding

weight during training rides. Only most of us wait until the final week before a tour to lay out all the gear to be packed. I'm still guilty of this since my relatively constant travel kit must be loaded into several different sets of "test" panniers annually. In my last-minute rush, I often distribute the weight poorly, guaranteeing handling problems and difficulty in finding things quickly during the first few days on tour.

Weight on a bike should be packed evenly on either side of the bike and distributed between the front and rear of the bike in roughly a one-third/two-thirds proportion. The weight should also be carried low and close to the frame. Reasons are obvious but for first-time tourists, here's why:

1. Too much weight on one side of the bike and you'll spend all day leaning in the opposite direction plus you'll damage your spokes.

2. Too much weight over the rear tire and you'll damage your rim, snap spokes, and feel like you're dragging your luggage behind you. Too much weight in front and steering will feel sluggish and difficult; jumping will be impossible and lifting the front end over obstacles problematic and tiring.

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3. Bike handling is greatly improved when weight is low and close to the frame because the center of gravity is lowered and the bike when turned or leaned acts as a single unit. Centrifugal force keeps a bike and rider upright when in a lean but too much weight on the outside of panniers gives gravity a better chance of pulling you down. Weight carried high on a bike also causes difficulty in braking because the load is above the brakes and tends to shift over them and to the front. Even with a properly loaded bike, new tourists are often surprised at increased braking distances.

Veteran tourists know this but nevertheless, most of us also pay the penalty for haphazard packing the night before a ride. That's why it's a good idea to make a list of your touring equipment and exactly where on the bike and in the panniers you packed it. With such a list in hand, you'll save a great deal of time and assure a properly handling bike when gearing up for the next ride.

The little hassles of clothing can also mar a ride. For instance, the discoloration of cycling shorts caused by leather saddle dye that should have been worn off in training or avoided in purchase. New clothing can be as bad as a new saddle. Some will shrink into an uncomfortable fit. Because laundromat stops on tour tend to be quick, throw-it-all-together episodes, be sure everything is either color-fast or faded and that a drier cranked to high won't cause your shorts or shirts to be skin tight. Two small plastic bags for dirty clothes are also wise; otherwise dirty clothing must be carried in one pannier, requiring repacking of clean items in the other.

All rider/bike contact points are critical. Your butt must be broken in annually or kept in shape. Gloves protect the hands from numbing nerve depression and road shock but it's still best to break the hands in before the tour. No single shoe provides sufficient stiffness, protection from pedal shock, insulation from toe clip and/or strap abrasion for everyone. The answer is finding pain before a tour and dealing with it in the comfort of your home.

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rack nuts and bolts that jar free and suggested locknuts or one of the several brands of liquid "loc-tite" to keep them in place. A proper job of installation and carrying a spare rack mount bolt may seem minor until you've lost one on the road.

Most of the other, myriad little problems which can arise will be found during full-loaded training. Except, perhaps, for food. Most of us still eat at home when training, or grab a bite to eat at a favorite cafe; packing one's food thus seems to be the last task actually performed. If this is the case with you you'll probably experience two problems. You need more pannier space for food than predicted and correct packing is extremely important. Toss even a rock-hard pear into a saddlebag and in an hour road shock will bruise it to the point it will osmose into and over whatever it's near. And bread instantly loses its physical integrity when it even gets near a bike no matter where or how you store it. (This being one of the few General Truths in life, you may as well have the pleasure of smashing it yourself before packing.)

And one last "little" problem, which looms as large as life itself under the circumstances of a hard day's ride and dusty tongue, a well-deserved brew, but forgotten opener.

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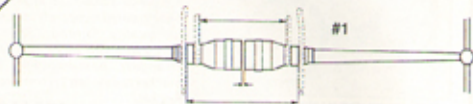
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## Technical Corner

### Building Up Your New Frame



With more and more people  
buying custom framesets in-  
stead of pre-built bikes, let's  
examine the steps needed to  
put the major fixtures (bottom  
bracket, headset, etc.) on the  
frame.

Proper assembly of your  
frame would not require special  
tools if the builder did every-  
thing perfectly - unfortunately,  
this is rarely the case. Expensive  
special tools are needed to  
properly mount the headset and  
bottom bracket. A good bike  
shop will have them and can do  
the job for you. Some framesets  
come with the headset already  
in them, making the job even  
easier. Assembly of the frame  
has specific steps.

Check its alignment before  
attaching brakes, derailleurs,  
etc. Special tools for this are  
available but you can check it at  
home. You need a length of  
string and an accurate ruler.  
Place one end of the string on  
the rear fork tip and run the  
string to the front of the frame,  
around the head tube, and back  
to the rear dropout on the  
other side. Have someone hold  
the string under tension in this  
position while you measure the  
distance between the string and  
the seat tube. The string should  
be equidistant from each side of  
the tube. If it isn't, some frames  
can be cold set (bent) back to  
shape. Materials such as alumi-  
num and 753 Reynolds should  
never be cold set!

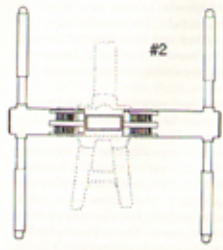
The rear dropouts and fork  
ends are an important part of  
the wheel bearing mounting - if  
the hub is clamped between non-  
parallel surfaces, the axle will  
bend and mis-align the  
cones. Fork end alignment  
gauges are a combination gauge  
and lever for bending the fork  
ends into alignment (Diagram  
#1).

Examine the overall finish.  
Are there gaps between the  
lugs (if any) and the tubes?  
Check all the threads - are they  
clean of paint? Stick a finger  
into the bottom bracket shell  
- slight distortions caused by braz-  
ing at too high a temperature  
can be detected here.

Before starting to install  
parts on the frame, all the bear-  
ing surfaces must be "milled" or  
"faced off" and the threads  
"chased" or cleaned out. Cut-  
ting tools intended to cut steel  
are made of a special harder  
"tool steel." All metal cutting  
tools have delicate, brittle cut-  
ting edges that are easily dam-  
aged by misuse. (More tools  
are broken than worn out.)  
When using cutting tools, both  
the tool and the piece to be cut  
must be properly lubricated and  
cooled with a high sulphur con-  
tent cutting oil. The heat and  
friction are at the cutting edges.  
Keep them flooded with cutting  
oil throughout the operation.

Thread chasing is used to  
clean paint from the threads  
and reform damaged threads  
on the bottom bracket, rear  
derailleur hanger, dropout ad-  
justers, and the fork tube.

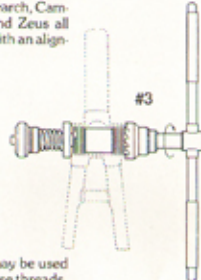
The threads and faces of the  
bottom bracket shell are



Gregg is a bike salesman and mechanic at the Tuneup Bike Shop in  
Gunnison, Colorado and captain of the Diamond Back racing team.

by Gregg Morin

the mount for the crank bear-  
ing cups. Even if these are ac-  
curately machined, they will prob-  
ably be distorted during frame  
brazing. Bicycle Research, Cam-  
pagnolo, V.A.R., and Zeus all  
make a double tap with an align-



ing pilot shaft that may be used  
to correct or cut these threads.  
Make sure you select the proper  
taps for the bottom bracket to  
be cut - english and swiss stan-  
dards require a left-hand thread-  
ed tap on the chainwheel side,  
and right-hand threaded on the  
other side. French and Italian  
standards use right-hand thread-  
ed taps on both sides. Inspect  
the inside of the bottom bracket  
shell to make sure none of the  
frame tubes extend into the  
path of the cutters - use a file for  
the slow and tedious job of  
removing them. Install the taps  
on the handles and insert the  
pilot shaft through the bottom  
bracket shell and into the hol-  
low handle. Flood the area with  
cutting oil and start both taps  
into the shell at the same time.  
(Diagram #2) Occasionally back  
the tap out to clean out metal  
chips. When the threads are  
small, as with dropout adjust-  
ers, the tap should be taken out  
completely and cleaned of chips  
or binding and even breaking of  
the tap may result.

When all threads are clean,  
it is time to "mill" or "face off"  
the outside bearing surfaces of  
the bottom bracket and head-  
set. Use the same tool as for  
tapping, but replace the taps  
with the flat facing mill. (Di-  
agram #3) Using cutting oil, press  
and turn clockwise (do not  
reverse as with threading) until  
bright metal shows all the way  
around the end of the shell.  
Repeat on the other side and

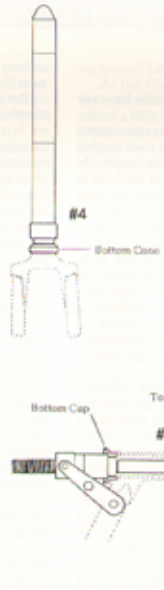
clean up chips and oil before  
installing the bottom bracket.  
Use lock-tight on the fixed cup  
after cleaning the threads with  
alcohol, and really lean on the  
cup to seat it properly.

Where the steering tube  
enters the fork crown, the di-  
ameter of the crown must be  
machined to accept the headset  
bottom cone. The cone is then  
pressed on. (Diagram #4) The  
head set bearing cups seat in  
the ends of the head tube. As  
with the bottom bracket, the  
ends of the tube must be faced  
off. Many head tube tools mill  
and serve as a press to install  
the cups. (Diagram #5)

Remember to grease all of  
the threads as well as the bear-  
ing surfaces when installing the  
bottom bracket, headset, drop-  
out adjustment screws, and  
the rear derailleur. Also grease  
the brake posts, seatpost, and  
stem before they go on the  
frame.

Check the wheels you plan  
to use in the frame - make sure  
they are in dish and check the  
spacing with the freewheel on.  
Is there enough space between  
the smallest cog and the frame?  
Does the wheel sit evenly in the  
frame? Wheel spacing, dishing,  
and aligning can become a big  
job so we will discuss it further  
in future issues.

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the frame, and the final cable  
routing, etc., can be quickly  
done. You will have more con-  
fidence in your bike knowing  
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# Is Mountain Biking New?

by Bodfish



It's development was inevitable; the real surprise was that it took so long to come into focus as a unique sport. Bicycle adventurers have been tackling the "rough stuff" for well over one hundred years, including utilizing multi-gear transmissions for over fifty years while racing, exploring and trekking cross-country on two wheels. All of the ingredients have been wandering around in the pot for several decades, yet the mixture failed to coagulate until the mid-seventies when a simultaneous "gestalt" occurred among bikers and bicycle builders in numerous locations across the North American continent.

In spite of names of print to the contrary, mountain biking was not "invented" in Marin County. The Marinites were only more vocal about their discovery of the jelling of the soup and clever enough to come up with a name for the phenomena. Variations of the mountain bike were also taking shape in Southern California, New England and Colorado.

In England, "mountain bikers" have been dragging medium-fat tire/derailleur bicycles to the tops of remote peaks and along winding trails and cow paths and over unpaved roads for dozens of years. The American "mountain bike" was developed about the time The Rough Stuff Fellowship was entering its third decade. This group has been publishing a newsletter describing

their off-road exploits-by-bicycle for over thirty years.

It's been my good fortune to encounter a handful of true American off-road cycling pioneers from the first half of the century. In the early seventies when I first dabbled in wandering the back roads of the southern Sierra Nevada (on skinny tires), I ran into seventy-five year old Art Mathis as he sat by the side of the road drinking from Saddle Springs (at nearly 8,000 ft.) in the Piute Range above Bakersfield, California. He was on a Schwinn Continental. On his back he carried a small canvas pack stuffed with wool blanket and food. As I rode up he moved toward his bicycle and began inspecting his twisted chain, the broken end of which lay in the deep road dust.

"Hello, how'd you get up here?" I asked. I was amazed to see another bicyclist ten miles from the nearest paved road and a vertical mile above Lake Isabella.

Without a hint of surprise in his expression he countered, "Same way you did, I reckon, on my two wheel horse."

"But I didn't see any tracks." I wasn't actually doubting him; there he sat, hands covered with black chain grit and a smudge of the same on the left side of his nose.

"Came up the back way, out of Kelo Valley. I slept up on Piute Mountain last night, a peak I've been aiming to bag for a half dozen years now. Broke my chain while

shifting on the downhill. Whatcha' got for tools?"

Art was a treasure. Over the next six months he told me cycling stories that, had I not first met him high in the Piutes, I might have guessed were the product of warm bull manure and seeds cast from an old fashioned fur trappers' rendezvous. Art Mathis, however, had the documentation to back up his anecdotes.

In '43, he took a month off from his job at the Palo Alto, California Post Office to visit his sister in Sheridan, Wyoming.

"I struck out across the valley and the Sierra Nevada on highway 50...over Echo Summit. Oh, that first week was painful. I rode from dawn to dusk and sometimes longer. Had a full moon over Nevada so I put in several hours of night riding, mostly on gravel and sand through the deserts of Nevada and Idaho. Coming down out of Yellow-stone, down the east slope of the Rockies, I rode my three speed Raleigh one hundred and eighty-five miles in one day - from the Park to Sheridan...and there's another mountain range in there that no one told me about beforehand, the Big Horns."

He showed me a full page article out of the Sheridan newspaper complete with pictures of a glowing Art Mathis - "The Man Who Cranked His Way Across Desert Mountains to Visit His Sister."

Most of the old-timers I've met are not as far-traveled as Art. A few never wandered more than one hundred miles from their

homes, yet found bicycling the best mode of transport between fishing holes, to sweethearts' houses, and as a good mule substitute throughout the gold diggings of the West.

Kip Phillips, of Oak Run, California, wouldn't tell me his exact age but he didn't mind telling me that he never owned a telephone, car, chainsaw, or T.V. His house was never even wired for electricity. What he did own was a balloon tire two-speed "kick-back" bicycle, a good axe, a fishing pole, and a complete "wheelkit." Which, according to Kip, is all a person needs for a week of adventure in the backcountry.

I met Kip while taking a group on a tour of the Cascade foothills north of Lassen Volcanic National Park in the late 70's. As I arrived on a ridgeline between Little Cow Creek and Cedar Creek leading a procession of twenty brightly dressed, helmeted, fully outfitted (with wildly colored Overland panniers) tourists, Kip straddled the top tube of his two-speed bicycle, feet on the pavement, chin clipped in his hands while his elbows rested on leather-wrapped handlebars, staring down the hill at the spinning/veering cyclists.

I introduced myself but Kip was transfixed by the group's passing. Finally, as the poly-colored rider arrived at the top, Kip said, "They sure look tired. I usually walk that hill, it's easier." Before I could respond he had surrendered to the call of gravity and was falling like a meteor on his fifty-pound

rig toward Little Cow Creek.

At the General Store a little further up the road in the village of Round Mountain, I asked a fella camped out on the front steps about the old-timer on the balloon tire bicycle.

"You musta run into ole Kip Phillips. He lives in a little cabin up on Ponderosa Way. He's been all over these hills on his bicycle...ridden every road and trail in these parts, I suspect. He and another fella on one of them pedal bikes, named Peter, I believe, used to wander all the way up to the Thousand Lakes area and return a week or so later with a basket full of smoked trout wrapped in burlap."

I followed my customers over Hatchet Summit on our way to Burney Falls State Park. I was in a trance, not thinking about the tourists riding ahead of me or the road under. In my head, curiosity was blowing like giant thunderheads over a mountain lake. I had to go back and find this guy Kip Phillips. He must have some stories to tell.

I found Kip Phillips years later while riding through the same country. He had become quite senile; his younger brother had taken his bicycle away because he was "bullying the logging trucks...wouldn't get out of the way for 'em, maybe he couldn't hear them coming but I doubt it...sooner or later one of them woulda' run him flat over and think nothing about it."

Kip was reluctant to talk about the fishing trips up into the Thousand Lakes Wil-

derness - he thought I was a game warden hot on the trail (some forty years later) of a couple notorious fish poachers.

Yes, mountain/off-road bicycling has been around a few years longer than the marketers and manufacturers of mountain bikes and mountain bike components would have us think. What the Marinites, magazine editors, and company executives did figure out a few years back was how to package the backcountry/adventure bicycling experience and present it to the buying public.

But it's time for the media and salespersons to stop treating the machine like the new kid on the block. The multi-speed fat tire bicycle is here to stay, it won't disappear overnight or during one bad year. It's not a fad and it didn't develop overnight. In fact, when the "mountain bike" phenomenon was just beginning to take hold, when the self-named "pioneers" of off-road bicycling were modifying their balloon tire one-speeds to handle the steep dirt road descents near their suburban neighborhoods, Kip Phillips, his friend Peter, Art Mathis, and without doubt many others were just winding down off-road careers that covered several decades of sweat and exhilarating backcountry exploration.

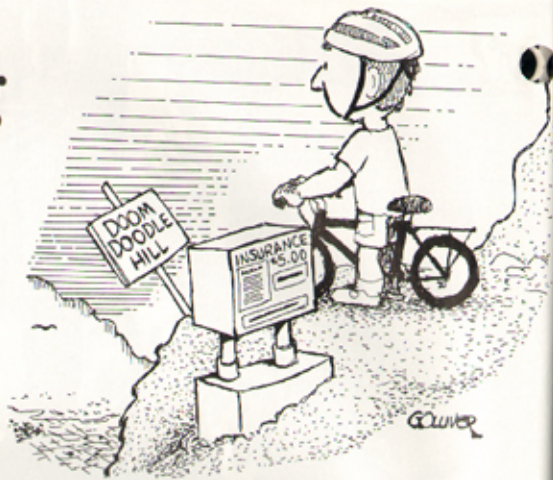
Self-propelled fat tire adventuring has been with us nearly a hundred years. The so-called mountain bike is only another step in the evolution of bicycles, not an aberration in their long term development.



# Braking

So it's not the braking itself that you need to worry about, it's your balance.

by Turner Brown



Braking makes novice riders more nervous than any other aspect of backcountry cycling. Especially the front brake. People shy away from that front brake lever as if it's some creature lurking in the shadows waiting to throw them bodily to the ground. It's not. Mountain bike brakes are one of the best of the advances introduced by bicycling's fat tired brethren and rather than being feared, should be eagerly appreciated.

Braking, like shifting gears, climbing steep hills, or negotiating turns, is just a skill to master. A key to that mastery is changing your perception of braking. Think of it as negative acceleration, an adjustment of your speed to match the terrain. That negative acceleration generates predictable results, a forward shift of the rider's weight. And that's the source of riders' nervousness: the fear of doing an endo over the bars.

Don't worry about going over the bars; it rarely happens. Focus on the forces generated by that negative acceleration. Concentrate on maintaining a balanced position over the bottom bracket so that the force lines of gravity pass through your center of mass and through the bottom bracket. But because you're moving, the laws of motion are also in force so the center of mass/bottom bracket relationship is a dynamic relationship, not a static one. The bottom bracket is simply a basal reference point. To maintain that dynamic balance, you've got to unglue your butt from the saddle and move your mass in response to those combined forces. In other words, move back when braking.

You're not moving away from the front wheel; you're adjusting your position in response to the laws of nature, to wit: a

moving object will continue on its path until acted upon by an outside force. The bike may be slowing but your body wants to keep on roaring full speed ahead and suddenly the force lines from your center of mass are no longer passing through the bottom bracket; they're well out in front of it. But if you'll move your butt back, you can reestablish the path of the force lines through the bottom bracket thus maintaining your balance.

And as long as you're balanced over the bike, you're not going to go ass over tea kettle over the bars. Not only that, locking up the front wheel is almost impossible unless the terrain is such that it insures locking the wheel, for example soft sand or an abrupt depression that swallows the wheel just as you hit the brake. Even then, if you've anticipated the dramatic deceleration and consequent flinging forward of your torso, nothing other than the bike coming to a stop will happen.

So it's not the braking itself that you need to worry about, it's your balance. Consequently, you can use the front brake as much as you want. And you should, some seventy-five percent of a bike's braking power is generated by the front brake. That's why racers like Ned Overend make a point of putting the most powerful brake in front. When he wants to adjust his speed, he wants to do so as efficiently as possible. That's why cars have disc brakes on the front and the less effective drums on the rear.

Now that we've somewhat roughly, even primitively, established the physics of braking, the question becomes how best to apply the brakes. First, make sure they're properly adjusted and learn how to adjust them

yourself. What you want is enough pad clearance so the wheels don't rub when the brakes are relaxed. That way a minimum of lever travel is absorbed in getting the pads onto the rim. Adjust the lever reach for your hands. You want the reach to be comfortable. If you have small hands, check out the Dia Compe 283 levers. Check that your handlebar grips aren't too fat or skinny for your hands.

Okay, everything's set. How do you apply the brakes? Ideally with one or two fingers and certainly with no more than three. (The pinky is reportedly the strongest.) That way you can keep a firm grip on the handlebars. Squeeze the levers in a smooth, progressive curve; don't just grab them. Pay attention to how the bike responds to the braking. If the rear wheel skids, lighten up the back brake. Don't skid the tires. (Though there are exceptions to this, it's still a good rule of thumb. Those times when it's desirable to skid the rear wheel are few.) If the front wheel starts to plow, lighten up on its braking effort. That's all there is to putting on the brakes. Easy, no?

Ride over all kinds of terrain only using the front brake. Do it on steep hills, too. Become proficient at this and you'll never worry about braking again.

Now you're ready to get to the heart of good braking - when to brake and which brake to use. Brake before going into a turn, not during it. If speed is your objective, you'll be better off going in too slow than too fast. If you apply the brakes during the turn, you'll adversely affect the steering. (How the brakes affect the front wheel is practically a subject in itself - more physics - so we'll just

let that go.) Any time front wheel handling is of paramount importance, minimize front wheel braking. Release the brakes through turns. The idea is to slow to the optimum speed before the turn and then carve a clean arc through it. Don't skid the rear wheel through the turn; it's bad for the trail, worse on mountain biking's image, hard on your tires, and slower than carving through the turn. If you absolutely have to brake during a turn, use the rear brake and use it lightly.

When riding into sharp depressions, brake before hitting the bottom then release the brakes before the front wheel hits the other side. The combined deceleration forces of applied brakes and the opposite force can send you flying. You'll also want to carry momentum up the other side and you can't do that with the brakes on. Be sure to downshift to an appropriate gear before the depression. If the depression is such that you'll want to unweight the front wheel, absolutely don't do it with your fingers on the levers; you may inadvertently squeeze them. Keep your arms flexed and relaxed. Shift your weight back in direct response to the forward surging of your body's weight. The steeper the grade or the more dramatic the dumping of speed, the greater the rearward weight shift. Anticipate this weight shift. Don't move back too much; you want some weight on that front wheel for optimum steering response. As long as you stay tuned into your body's position over the bike and the bike's consequent response, needed weight adjustments will become obvious.

The trickiest braking occurs on narrow single-tracks across steep hillsides. As already mentioned, braking really screws up the steering response and if the ground is at all soft, the result can be dramatic. That doesn't mean you completely ignore the front brake, just use it with great control.

Finally, which brake do you use? Both, with normally the emphasis on the front brake. The faster you want to decelerate, the more you should get on that front brake; that's the one that's going to do the job. If the terrain surface is slickrock, you'll hardly need the rear brake no matter how steep the descent. In fact, the steeper the slope, the more ineffectual the rear brake is anyway. After that, the looser the surface, the more you'll have to rely on the rear brake. Avoid skidding by adjusting brake pressure on the wheel that's slipping.

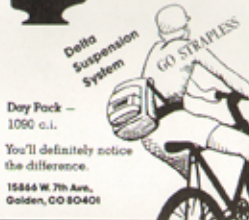
Where you position your body is going to have more effect on the brakes' effectiveness than any thing else. Trying to brake without moving your body's position is like trying to turn around without moving your feet.

So that's really all there is to it. Braking isn't such a big deal. Maintain your fore and aft balance, rely on that front brake in response to the surface terrain, squeeze those levers smoothly with a relaxed grip, unglue your butt from the saddle, and stay in tune with your bike.

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## Fanny Packs

Mountain bikers carry all sorts of odds and ends along during their backcountry adventures - tools, food, clothing, even spare parts. They have to. Unlike roadies, there's never a near-by bike shop to duck into or even the option of thumbing a ride home - unless a jeepster happens by with room for a rider and bike.

A variety of methods have been used over the years to carry those odds and ends. The most popular solution appears to be fanny packs, those nylon sacks strapped around the waists of skiers, hikers, and now mountain bikers. They've been around for years though earlier versions tended to be cheesy little affairs made out of cheap nylon that couldn't hold much more than an extra pair of glove liners. Today's versions are vastly improved and provide excellent alternatives to backpacks. They can also carry surprisingly hefty loads.

In selecting a fanny pack for mountain biking, be sure to go to the store with the maximum load you intend to haul in it so

you'll be sure to get one large enough for your needs. After packing it, go for a short ride, preferably over rough terrain though. What you're looking for is how comfortably the sack rides, especially when you're bent low over the bars. Generally, you're better off getting one slightly larger than what you need since a lightly stuffed sack is more comfortable than one whose seams are strained. It'll bend around your body better and ride more comfortably.

All the fanny packs pictured here have been used with fine success. Some were better for one type of load than another. That's why ideally you should try them with whatever load you expect to carry. For example, cameras are about the most uncomfortable objects to carry. At least single reflex 35mm cameras with longer lenses are. They're all angles and hard corners and it all has to be carried relatively with a minimum of jarring. Our favorite for hauling my Nikon has been the MountainSmith. It has a padded back that keeps the camera off your back

and it's small enough so the camera doesn't bounce all over the place plus there's enough room for more film. But not for an extra lens, nor if your main lens is relatively long.

Another favorite has been the Bodabell fanny pack but not for carrying the camera. The Bodabell wraps in such a way that the load is stabilized and there's almost no load shifting. The Transap fanny pack is somewhat similar in design and equally effective but the waist strap on our sample was too slick. It has this annoying habit of slipping. What really made that annoying was that in every other respect the sack was excellent. The Vertical Systems fanny pack has straps that tighten down to stabilize the load and they too work quite well. It also worked quite well for carrying bulky objects like cameras because of the straps and the padded back.

Fanny packs from almost every pack manufacturer come in a variety of capacities so you ought to be able to find one to meet your needs.



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# The Ironhorse Classic Durango, Colorado

by Hank Barlow

If you've been wondering whether John Tomac is legitimate, he is. Definitely. He proved that beyond any doubt at this year's Ironhorse Classic. So impressive was his performance that the question now being asked is whether the MongOOSE-sponsored Tomac can be beaten. The consensus is a highly qualified maybe. According to no less a racer than Schwinn team member Ned

Overend, last year's NORBA Champion, John is the hottest young racer in the country - road or mountain! Quite simply, this young man, who already has had one off-road magazine nicknamed after him, is astounding.

All he managed to do in Durango was finish fourth overall in the Durango to Silverton road race against many of the finest

amateur road racers in the country, two minutes off winner Ned Overend's time. And this only his fifth road race! Obviously, John wasn't in the least intimidated by the quality of the competition he was up against, nor by the fact that this was Ned's home course. He came not to just win the mountain bike race but the road race too. He wanted it all and wasted no time letting the others know that. On the way to Silverton, twice he attacked off the front without any team to support him and knowing full well that Ned was a member of a powerful road team. He eats up competition and makes no bones about it. He's also incredibly self-assured and seems to operate on the assumption that he's the man to beat and no one's going to pull it off. Yet he doesn't appear any brasher or cockier than any other competitor who knows he's hot. Like Ned Overend, he wears his success well.

Day Two of the Schwinn-sponsored Ironhorse Classic is normally an off day for the King of the Mountain competitors. They prefer resting for the following day's grueling mountain bike race rather than spending themselves on a long, exhausting circuit road race. Not Tomac, the man is driven. Not only did he race, he was near the front throughout the afternoon, rarely lower than fifth or sixth place and always ready to pursue any break. His fellow mountain bike racers wildly cheered him on every lap, partially out of a desire to see him wear himself out and partially because of the camaraderie that exists amongst the off-road racers. John eventually finished near the front, tired but still eager for the morrow's race.

Day Three had all the makings for drama. Ned Overend was the local champion performing in front of his home town crowd. This was his race; he'd won it every year since its inception. He was the 1986 NORBA National Champion and hungry for his first 1987 victory over John.

John had given up two minutes to Ned in the road race and knew he'd have to push hard to gain that much time on Ned to win the King of the Mountain prize - the combined time from the Durango to Silverton road race and the mountain bike race. Two minutes seemed a safe lead to most but not Ned. Before the race, he was clearly concerned with just staying close to John. His strategy wasn't to win the mountain bike stage as much as hang in there and keep John from picking up all of those two minutes.

Tomac wasted no time in establishing his dominance. He led the pack out of the start and never backed down. By the quarter point of the second lap, he'd gained almost two minutes over second place Overend and showed no sign of slowing down. The local crowd kept hoping Ned was biding his time while John, in a youthful rush for glory, wore himself out in the early laps. Instead, they watched him extend his lead until he was assured of the King of the Mountain prize then he rode just fast enough to maintain it. There wasn't a thing Ned or anyone

else could do to stop Tomac. The power John displayed climbing the hills was astounding. He didn't ride his bike; he drove it over the ground. At the Vulture's Roost Jump where a large and enthusiastic crowd developed, Tomac never failed to arouse a huge roar of excitement every time he took to the air over the water. His bike handling is flawless.

Not that he was the only hot riding racer around or that his and Ned's was the only race going on. Far from it. Spectators were treated to great racing and bike handling from the entire field. The course follows a single-track that twists through a forest of lodgepole pines then up, around, and over a hill covered in scrub oak. Climbing skills were tested to the max with two short, steep hills. (While strong recreational riders used a 24-inch or lower gear to climb the hills, top racers pounded 29 or 30-inch gears!) After the longer of the two climbs, racers plunged immediately down a dramatic technical section with the trail zigging down the mountain side over small drops and around scrub oak constantly attempting to knock riders off their mounts. Just riding this section, much less racing over it, is ample challenge for skilled riders. Watching mountain biking's top pros fly through the turns and over the drops was an eye-opening education in just how good these riders and their equipment have become.

While Ned was doing all he could to close the distance on John, Marin Mountain Bike's George Theobald was holding onto third in front of a constantly pressing Rishi Grewal (riding for Moets). Grewal was the best of the road riders and is rapidly developing into a strong contender. Behind Rishi was Fisher MountainBikes' Mike Kloser pushing as hard as he could to capture fourth place while simultaneously holding off Ritchey team riders Max Jones and Steve Cook. Rounding out the final Top Ten finishers were road racers and Unipro team members Mark Southard and Brian Miller with Duwayn Fritz in tenth place.

The hard tempo set by Tomac and readily accepted by everyone else guaranteed that no mistakes could be tolerated. A missed shift and a thrown chain or a crash all but assured an instant drop in the standings. The concentration required by the track's technical nature made for a long afternoon of exciting racing.

The women's race was a runaway by Lisa Muhich riding for Raleigh. She's an extrathlete and getting stronger every year in the dirt. Second and third places were captured by relative newcomers Melissa Murray and Lynda Walter. Both rode strong, steady races and could develop into impressive racers with more a few more races under their belts. Fourth place was won by Kimberlee Caledonia racing for American Bicycle Manufacturing. Kimberlee's coming off a bad training crash that laid her up for some time and seemed to have a hard time getting going in Durango. In fifth was another

newcomer to off-road racing, Ellen Hol-finished from Breckenridge. Unfortunately the women's field was weaker and smaller than in past years and Lisa's easy win didn't get the recognition it would have had a stronger field been pushing her. But making up for small field were the presence of quite a few young and strong newcomers.

A surprisingly large vets class took to the track shortly after the women and hit it hard and heavy. The competition was intense with Joe Green finally winning over closely pursuing Dave Kinsey. Despite starting a few minutes after the women, the two top men even managed to get by women's leader Lisa Muhich. The finish was almost a sprint after three laps of hard riding. Riding

into third was Mike Englehardt. All three were from New Mexico.

Schwinn is the Ironhorse's major sponsor and as usual, the race lived up to its reputation as one of the country's best. It's a unique event where spectators can watch the country's top off-road racers go head to head with the top amateur roadies on each other's turf. What the three days of racing proved was that hot bike racers are hot wherever they race and that nineteen-year old John Tomac is a force to be reckoned with in whatever field he chooses to compete. After his fourth-place Durango to Silverton road finish, people couldn't help but wonder just how far he could go if he turns his eyes to full-time road racing.



Ned Overend of the new Diamond Back racing team powers through a turn on the Ironhorse course.

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## Trails

by Gary Sprung

Mountain bikers have been cut off from an awful lot of America's single-tracks including all designated Wilderness Areas, most National Park Service trails, and too many municipal parks. We can organize and fight for improved access to these lands; we can also lobby for more single-tracks outside restricted areas.

Bicyclists share one common interest with hikers, motorcyclists, horse-riders and cross-country skiers: the need for more trails.

Trails in America today are a shadow of their former glory. Before the auto, before the iron horse, Native Americans had created an extensive network of trails through the woods of the East for commerce and travel. White pioneer settlers carved more. The US Forest Service inherited those trails in the 1890s and for the first half of the agency's existence, the network grew. Rangers used them for protection and administration: catching poachers, fighting fires, delivering messages and supplies, even visit-

ing between ranger districts. During the 1930's depression, the Civilian Conservation Crew built still more thousands of miles of trails - and roads.

The USFS trail system peaked in 1941 at 164,000 miles. By 1974, the mileage had decreased to 94,776 then slowly grew again. Mileage in 1986 stood at 99,761. Trail use also increased dramatically. In 1960 there were nineteen visitor days of trail use recorded for each mile of trail within the system; twenty years later, each remaining mile

of trail supported 126.5 visitor days of trail use.

Blame for the trail mileage decrease can be laid at the feet of America's love affair with the automobile. In the late '40s and '50s, cars symbolized everything modern, progress, the way to go. The Forest Service switched to cars and trucks and replaced trails with roads for its protective and administrative duties; trails decreased in apparent value. The recreation explosion of the past 20 years renewed the importance of

## How to Build a Trail

oppose the trail. Such problems don't necessarily mean the end to the project, but they can draw the assessment out to a half year or longer. So it's best to get started early.

If you create a really strong case for the trail, the agency might decide to build it themselves or hire a private trail crew. In that unusual case, you're done. More likely, though, you will need to promise a heavy volunteer commitment, including a contract with the Forest Service. The volunteers become temporary agency employees.

Assuming the District Ranger says okay, the next hurdle planning. First, who is going to use this trail? If it's just hikers in the wilderness, the construction standards are much lower than for motorcyclists in a roadless area. Mountain bicyclists are perhaps more sensitive to grades than any other user so the trail design must try to minimize steep inclines and maximize a smooth rolling surface.

If there are any private lands involved, the Forest Service must obtain a legal easement from the owner. That may involve money so now you're talking about the federal budget.

To design and locate the trail, you've got to walk it to make sure it feels right, probably the most fun step in the process. The Forest Service will send a recreation manager and an engineer to the site to provide technical expertise. These professionals have tight schedules. Again, it's best to start early so the agency personnel can plan to be available. Once a route is determined, it is flagged with red or orange tapes tied on trees or posts.

All problems that may be encountered must be listed and planned for. Will you need ten water bars or a hundred? Does this trail need a bridge across a raging stream? Must you build retaining walls along steep slopes or punchions to elevate the trail above bogs? Materials and tools must be assembled in advance. Will you need to provide tents, too?

Now comes the hard part. The difficulty is not the actual sweat of pick and shovel

work. It's getting the workers to the site.

"You need to make it something people want to do," Gaskill advises. She suggests including a fun feast, like a barbecue and party on Saturday night between two weekend working days, or a pancake breakfast. If the volunteers are going to spend a whole week, be sure that there is plenty of time set aside for simple enjoyment of the area, for play instead of work.

Extensive publicity is essential. Beside providing press releases to all media, you can contact chambers of commerce, service groups like the Kiwanis, or college recreation clubs. Other recreation groups can enlist.

Food: A crew of fifteen to twenty costs \$500 to feed for a week. An enthusiastic District Ranger may pay all of this. He or she may even provide a small per diem payment to volunteers. Or you may get nothing and then will have to go to the community for support. Grocery stores may be convinced to sponsor the project with a donation of food.

Trail crews need at least one leader for every fifteen people. As the number of workers increases, the need for leaders increases faster. A crew of forty may need four leaders. Leaders should have prior experience in trail building.

You don't just go out and start swinging axes and sawing logs. All workers must go through a training session of a few hours on safety and proper utilization of tools.

A crew of fifteen people can build a mile of trail though a forest in two to four days, depending on terrain. A mile on grasslands might be finished in a single day. Across a talus field, it can take a week or more.

This is hard physical labor and workers should be told to expect that. For some, it may be a refreshing change from a desk job. Most will get some satisfaction from feeling they are making a useful, tangible contribution to the world.

The greatest pleasure comes later when you enjoy the fruits of your labor. If the first project is a success, later efforts will come more easily.



Tom Lenon, the Forest Service National Trails Coordinator, noted that in 1941 only 111,000 of the trail miles met agency standards; 51,000 were substandard. "In the early years, they reported almost anything as a trail," he said. But many of those substandard miles have totally disappeared while many existing trails suffer from deferred maintenance.

Causes for that disappearance are varied with lack of maintenance the most important. The Forest Service has identified a backlog of \$100 million worth of trail work needed to bring existing trails up to standards and to save the neglected trails that can still be saved. Almost none of that backlog is addressed in the current funding request submitted by President Reagan to Congress.

Replacement by roads is the number two cause of the mileage decline. While trails declined, the Forest Service road system expanded enormously. The road system's 343,000 miles is eight times longer than the interstate highway system. End to end, this system would reach fourteen times around the world. The agency continues to construct roads rapidly and is rapidly eliminating all non-widerness roadless areas. Most roads are built for timber sales; most timber sales cost taxpayers money because receipts from timber purchasers don't meet the agency's costs.

Growing in importance is the third cause of trails disappearing, access across private lands. In the past, the Forest Service did not obtain legal easements when building trails across private lands. Landowners are now often deciding that allowing the public to cross their land is a hassle or an intrusion so they just cut the public off. Though the public lands section of the trail remains, there is no access between public roads and the public forest. The trail loses its value and the Forest Service ceases maintenance. Lenon called this a growing problem, not yet at crisis levels.

The agency can condemn private land for a trail right-of-way but that does not make for good neighbors. They can also negotiate to purchase easements but its Land Acquisition Fund is limited and used up quickly.

In Washington, D.C., recreation groups have joined with environmentalists and are now lobbying aggressively for increased trail funding. Part and parcel of the effort is an attack on the bloated Forest Service road building budget and the practice of deficit timber sales.

The National Trails Coalition charges that between 1979 and 1984, 76 of 119 National Forests lost money on their timber sales while 49 of these returned less than fifty cents to the Treasury per dollar spent by the government. In slow-growing timber regions, the figures are worse. In Colorado, National Forest timber sales return just twenty to twenty-seven cents per dollar spent. Nationally, the agency does profit from timber sales due to larger receipts from

## The agency responds that deficit timber sales have non-dollar benefits such as recreation or wildlife habitat improvements.

sales in the South and Pacific Northwest.

The agency responds that deficit timber sales have non-dollar benefits such as recreation or wildlife habitat improvements. The conservationists counter that timber sales are rarely the most cost effective way to achieve such benefits. In the case of recreation, money spent building and maintaining trails would provide far more benefit than timber sales.

The National Wildlife Federation points out that already one mile of road exists for every square mile of forest yet the agency plans to increase system mileage by 60,000 miles by the end of the century.

For the upcoming 1988 fiscal year, the Forest Service has requested a total funding level of \$377,854,000 for roads. The trail budget requested is just \$18,550,000: \$7 million from 1987 and \$11.5 million for maintenance. This proposed budget will increase the trail maintenance backlog.

The National Trails Coalition is calling for an increase in the trail budget of \$7.5 million, for a total of \$26 million, accompanied by decreasing the road budget by \$100 million. The Coalition claims this would leave the federal timber program well funded with over \$277 million in road building funds while helping to improve the federal deficit.

The proposed \$7 million trail construction budget will build about 1,000 miles of trails. But only 20% of those miles are new trails; 800 miles are reconstructions of old, worn out trails.

Some of the \$7 million goes to feeding, tooling, and directing the volunteers who build about 40% of the 1,000 miles. Organized efforts by groups such as the Appalachian Trail Council, Sierra Club, American Hiking Society, and Colorado Mountain Club contribute millions of dollars worth of volunteer labor each year. Usually these volunteers pay some money out of their own pockets for the administration of the programs. Sierra Club trail builders each pay \$175 to the group for a one-week "working vacation."

Mountain bicyclists are joining this effort. For example, in Santa Cruz, California and Crested Butte, Colorado, local groups are beginning to construct and maintain public trails. Such efforts may eventually help solve the private land access problem by showing landowners that bicyclists can be responsi-

ble, caring people who recognize landowners' problems and are willing to work for their mutual benefit.

The trail problem, like most political issues, can be solved only by increased action on two levels: 1) lobbying at the centers of power, the nation's capital, state legislatures, and local governments; and 2) solid grassroots efforts at home.

One might question why volunteers should put in millions of dollars worth of labor when the government used to pay for it and now squanders billions on money-losing timber sales, pork barrel construction programs, and unproductive military activities.

Gudy Gaskill, trails coordinator of the Colorado Mountain Club, has an answer. She agrees that federal funding priorities "are so lopsided, it's incredible. But we feel we are educating 800 people a year. Most of the damage to our public lands is done by ignorant people. We teach them to be better campers, to respect their heritage, to appreciate the land."

The recent report by the President's Commission on the American Outdoors called for a network of "greenways" funded by a \$1 billion federal trust fund. Yet the Commission directed their report not at the Washington, DC policy makers but at the entire nation. They said they hoped to start "a prairie fire of concern and investment, community by community."

It will be a long time before recreation gains its fair share of government budgets. Local grassroots action remain essential to saving and enlarging our system of single-tracks.

There is hope but getting results requires action.

Write or phone your US Representative and two Senators urging more funding for the trails budgets of the US Forest Service and National Park Service and a beginning of a trail budget in the Bureau of Land Management. Point out that additional money for these programs can be obtained by reductions in unprofitable USFS timber sales and less building of USFS roads.

Contact your state government recreation planning office to see if the state has any trails planning or funding for trails; lobby state legislators for additional funds for recreation and trails.

Become involved in the Forest Service planning process. All National Forests are developing fifty year management plans which are supposed to address trails. A guide to this process, "Protecting Trails in the National Forest Planning Process," is available for free from the National Trails Coalition, c/o Sierra Club, 730 Polk St., San Francisco, CA 94109.

Join a national or local organization working to protect and develop trails. If no local organization exists, consider starting one yourself.

Work with local public land managers to maintain existing trails and to build new ones.

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## The Combination Vacation

*A common sight at the manicured campgrounds along the Columbia River: Roof racks loaded with lots of toys.*



### Hood River, Oregon

Sometimes, riding isn't enough; the senses are slightly jaded, the image not so sharp, the edge that keeps you honest missing. Routine has reared its boring countenance. It's time for a break, something more relaxing, cooler, maybe wetter. Pushing back those anaerobic thresholds is all very well but sometimes a body wants to hang out and relax, soak up some lazy rays, even play in the water. Sometimes what you need - though you might not know it yet - is a big dose of windsurfing.

The two sports are the perfect complement. Mountain biking has the hard core physical workouts and plain old soul whacking adventure we want while windsurfing offers up water, speed, and terrific dynamic natural relationships. The mountain biker uses metal and gearing and a delicate mix of finesse and brute strength to dart through the wilds while the board sailor stands on a wing and holds up a piece of fabric and dances before the wind.

The down side to windsurfing is that you're tied to the wind like a fish to the sea. Without wind, the sport is extinct. But if you're a windsurfing mountain biker, no problem. While the rest of the windsurfers are restlessly flopping about on the beach and waiting for the wind, you're ripping down twisting paths of dirt and rock.

And the fact that many a windsurfing spot is adjacent to fine mountain biking makes escaping the doldrums even easier and explains why more and more windsurfer-laden cars also have mountain bikes strapped on.

The two sports seem to complement each other from a conditioning point of view though this is strictly an empirical, not scientific, observation. Windsurfing gives your arms and upper body a terrific workout though as you get better and start using a harness and doing water starts, the degree of that workout diminishes. Meanwhile mountain biking develops powerful legs and lungs. The arms get a pretty workout too if you do a lot of hill climbing and single-tracking though not as much as windsurfing.

As far as the excitement factor goes, both sports are superb. Ripping over a fast, smooth single-track or diving down a screamer descent or forcing a passage up a gnarly, old hill will turn any enthusiast's hair on end and peg the fun meter at the max every time. So too will catching a hard wind and streaking over the water, your back practically grazing its surface, or catching serious air off standing waves or, if

you're really hot, booging across the face of ocean waves. Either sport has more than enough thrills for the most addicted of adrenalin junkies. Both also have fast learning curves; it doesn't take very long before you're able to go out and thoroughly enjoy yourself in either sport. Those learning curves also flatten dramatically once you begin to tackle advanced levels.

There's a place on the Oregon-Washington border where both sports come together to provide aficionados with superb playgrounds, the Columbia River Gorge. The Columbia River has some of the world's finest windsurfing while south of the Gorge is spectacular Mt. Hood and within the Mt. Hood environs are excellent single-tracks. The center for all this activity is the town of Hood River, Oregon.

The Gorge is for windsurfing what Jackson Hole is for skiing. Hawaii's North Shore for surfing, Crested Butte for mountain biking, and Moab for canyon exploring. If you want to sail the best, this is the place to be in the summer. The wind almost always blows somewhere on the river. Note we're talking wind, not breezes; we're talking heavy winds and short boards and rags for sails; we're

talking thirty, forty, fifty, even sixty knot winds and huge, standing waves!

Most locals don't bother sailing if conditions dictate anything bigger than a 4.5 square meter sail. When sail sizes start getting down around 4.0 and smaller, then they get excited. Short boards are standard fare.

Gorge sailors are also into air time off the standing waves, lots of it. When the wind's howling up the canyon and standing waves bigger than most of us can imagine are building up, that's when the Gorge really lights up. They had one day they call Big Tuesday. Evidently sixty-knot winds and monster waves produced one of those legendary days that everything in the future will be measured by. How big were the waves? You had to be there to understand.

But the wind doesn't always blow that strong; it just does it often enough that people pretty much count on it happening somewhere on the river. That's the trick to the Columbia River Gorge. The wind is almost always blowing somewhere on the river at whatever strength you want; all you have to do is find out where that is and go there.

The mountain biking is the same sort - high quality goods. Logging roads are ubiquitous in the northwest and that many roads means lots of abandoned





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roads. Even better are the first-class single-tracks available. They wind through dark forests of huge firs where pictures are all but impossible without fast film and fast lenses. Pine needles cover the ground in a soft blanket of rotting mulch so the trails are wonderfully smooth and fast. But you've got to watch out for those needles too, especially in turns. They can be slick.

Hillsides tend to be steep so the trails climb out of the valley floors via sharp switchbacks. Those switchbacks can be unrideable by anybody other than hot trials riders. But from one switchback to the next, trail grades are shallow and perfect for bikes. Once the climb out of the valley is completed, the riding turns into a cruise with trails contouring along ridges and hills. Sounds in the woods are muted and voices are absorbed before they can carry far through the thick foliage. Stop to take a break next to a slight creek bubbling through a glen and you may well end up finding yourself sliding into a philosophical mood. Those northwest woods are amazingly restful.

Views tend to be intimate though one trail in particular that the guys from Hood River Windsurfing took us over had spectacular vistas out across the valley at Mt. Hood. We'd climbed up an at times seemingly unending hillside of sharp switchbacks linked by smooth single-tracks beneath a roof of green high above our heads. The soft dirt provided excellent traction and we stayed in our granny gear and spun away up the mountain. The forest's cover was ideal since it kept the temperature down; the climb would have been a cooker without the shade. Eventually, the trail leveled then intersected another. A branch trail broke off out to an overlook where we got our first view of Mt. Hood.

The view alone was worth the effort of climbing. Mt. Hood is classic, a lovely pyramid of snow and ice piercing a blue sky. It's the kind of mountain a child loves to draw, symmetrical and pointed. Evidently a network of trails lace its slopes but all are unfortunately closed to mountain bikes.

From the overlook, we flew along the crest of a long, winding ridge top, contouring around

drainages then up and over another ridge. The middle chain ring and small cogs were the rule. Too soon, the trail finally dived off the ridge to once again return to the valley floor but not before winding through deep, shadowed woods and glens of ferns and rich vegetation growing out of a thick mulch cover. Rocks were coated in moss while hanging down from the trees above were cobwebs of vines. Keeping an eye on the trail was difficult with so much beauty passing by.

Every ride we went on was like that. Soft single-tracks, huge trees, lush vegetation, great riding. Fast too. Rarely did we have to push or carry the bikes, on switchbacks was about the only time. Then in the afternoon we'd return to the river, rig up, and go sailing. Never was there a lack of wind. One campground we stayed in was right on the river. We could rig up right at our campsite, walk across the grass to the river, and push off. Coming from Colorado, the water seemed downright warm. Unless the wind was really blowing, wearing a wet suit was unnecessary.

The state campgrounds around there are remarkable with lots of room between campsites and beautiful grass everywhere. Toss in hot showers, fresh water, and views of the river and you've got a hard combination to beat.

Hood River is clearly a windsurfing center, not a mountain biking mecca so there's a lack of a really hot mountain biking shop but undoubtedly that's changing. It has to; the biking is too good for it not to. But in the windsurfing shop department, there's no lack whatsoever. Windsurfing shops are all over the place. The oldest and, from what we heard during our visit, best is Hood River Windsurfing. They also happen to be the shop most into mountain biking, not in terms of equipment carried but just in information.

So if you're a windsurfing mountain biker and you've ever had an inclination to mix it up on some of the world's best water, load up your car and head on north. But be sure to take along your mountain bike. Your friends might think you're crazy to do so but you won't be. The riding is excellent.

# AUSTRALIA

by Melissa Johnson

Mention Australia to an American and the word conjures images of vast expanses of flat, uninhabitable desert with kangaroos hopping everywhere and koalas leisurely chewing eucalyptus leaves from high in a brown, scraggly tree. Obviously getting out into wilderness in a country as big and as lonely as Australia must be easy but who would want to ride a bicycle in such a desolate and arid place?



Mark Freeman





Meadow grassland in Gudgenby Reserve.

A good question for sure but any Ozies on the east coast would wonder at such a description of their country. They may never have seen a koala except in a zoo and the vast desert expanses are so far away as to be all but inaccessible. Australia's east coast is as different from the interior as the American east is from its western deserts. Nevertheless, we found within that relatively tame and accessible eastern coast two great places for trail riding on our mountain bikes.

For seeing kangaroos, our favorite place was Gudgenby Nature Reserve with a great one-day, point-to-point ride that can easily be turned into a loop. The Park is but 55 kilometers from Canberra, the nation's capital, making it easily accessible to cyclists.

A good dirt road runs right through the center of the Park, leading to the New South Wales border and the base of the Snowy Mountains in the south. The tour's excitement doesn't start until crossing the Gudgenby River and passing through a gate onto private land open to hikers. The trail is called Old Boboyan Road. We wouldn't have gone that way except that the Ranger in the Reserve Headquarters at the beginning of the Park advised it to avoid Hospital Hill, "A hill well worth avoiding", he assured us.

The trail opened onto some short but steep roller coaster-like hills and a expansive pasture dotted with stands of Eucalyptus trees. In Australia they're called gum trees and there are 400 different varieties providing cover for the most extraordinary bird life we have ever seen. I, while you are screaming over the lumpy terrain, you have the presence of mind to look up, you may be surprised to see huge flocks of pink and white Galahs, about the size of pigeons, flying overhead. With their screeching, they're as hard to miss as the huge white and yellow Sulphur Crested Cockatoo, a bird that even more loudly screams it's disapproval of any bicyclists in a most disturbing way.

After a short distance, the road begins to flatten out and another unlocked gate has to be negotiated. Beyond, the route leads onto a gently rolling pasture. The brushy grass was dry and golden during our passage as were the tall gum trees lining one side of the road. Range cattle grazed in the distance, staying far away from what must have seemed a strange, silently moving creature but not so far away that they couldn't satisfy their obvious curiosity.

Suddenly, we had our first sighting of live kangaroos. There must have been a hundred of them grazing just like the cattle. The sight of cyclists caused considerable commotion among them and

they bolted away in long graceful hops. But like the cattle, they were curious and after their initial surprise and panic, they stopped just out of camera range to look back at us.

What so startled us about this particular species of kangaroo was their size. Some stood well over six feet tall while the rest were at least five feet. When they hopped, they seemed really to glide. Their hop was not a convulsive movement but a flowing, graceful flight.

After another fence that forced us to remove our panniers and lift the bikes over (there was a narrow walk-through but the loaded bikes wouldn't fit), we entered the Boboyan Pine Plantation. All the pines, neatly planted in straight rows, appeared to have suffered from a fire some time ago. The land's extreme brownness made it obvious that one small spark and that would be it for this excessively dry area.

The road turned into a track and it was at that point that we wished we were free of our packs. But much to our surprise, our mountain bikes seemed to come alive with the challenge and even the heavily laden front and back panniers couldn't inhibit the responsiveness of those frames. The bikes nimbly carried us through rocky dry stream beds and up rutted hillsides where the pine trees changed to gum trees and the forest quickly changed to a mountain meadow. After several kilometers of rough but easily negotiable trail and one more gate, we rejoined the main road. From that point, it was smooth sailing all the way to the next town, Adamaby in New South Wales. Had we wanted, we could easily have made a loop back to the northern boundary of the Park and on to Canberra.

For a totally different and challenging ride, the road along the coast from the crocodile infested Daintree River to Cooktown is hard to beat. It can also be done as a loop starting at Cairns in Northern Queensland and taking four to five days to Cooktown and then following the inland road back to Cairns.

We hadn't originally planned to make the dirt road trip from Cape Tribulation to Cooktown; our plan had been to ride up to Cape Tribulation then turn around and cycle back to Cairns. Several people had said that for political reasons we shouldn't ride the road from Cape Tribulation to Cooktown. The road along what is now called "the Daintree" had been made under considerable protest from various environmentally concerned citizens and groups. It had been bulldozed through a unique "wet" rain forest environment rapidly disappearing from the world. The project's hasty development has since affected the Great Barrier Reef off

the coast of Queensland by depositing run-off silt from the road into the ocean thus killing the coral reef.

But we understood none of those facts when we stood in the store at Cape Tribulation. "Wouldn't try that road on a push-bike in the rain," the store owner told us, "We lose cars on that clay up there." We had heard lots of warnings about how only four-wheel drive vehicles could make the journey and even they slid down clay that was as smooth as glass when wet. That didn't seem to apply to us with our knobby tires and low gears. After stocking up on groceries, we rolled away from the lovely secluded beaches of the Cape Tribulation area and headed down the road.

In early August, before the rains had arrived, we found the Daintree Road to be quite good. Corrugations were absent with most of the road consisting of a smoothly packed hard clay. Crossing the creeks flowing over the road presented no problems. The respite from the tropical heat offered by those creeks was especially appreciated. We checked out a beach or two along the way but never felt safe swimming. Man-eating Estuarine crocodiles, although very territorial, seemed to be lurking everywhere. We never saw one of course but we had been warned about swimming in the estuaries and I had heard that the huge beasts had been seen in the ocean. What was to stop one from prowling the shoreline looking for tender bicyclists flopping around in the surf.

It was not far from the beautiful tropical paradise of the Cape that one of the lowest gears ever put on a mountain bike became useless. There are at least two very intimidating hills on the Daintree Road and I will confess right now that we had trouble just walking up those hills. They more closely resemble walls. Even without packs, they're unrideable.

It was on those hills that the tropical sun seemed the most unmerciful. We'd be tempted by views of a very distant and very blue sea calmly enticing us through the leaves of the tree ferns while sweat poured out of our bodies. Reaching the crests was an

anticlimax to say the least because we then had to walk down them as well! Believe me, walking down a hill is truly a humbling experience. We tried to ride down them at first but when our hands hurt so much from squeezing the brakes that we were in danger of losing our grip, it was impossible to continue. At one point, aimed downhill with both hands squeezed tightly on the brake levers, the bike's rear end tried to slide down to the front end. I decided to get off and walk.

This rugged section of the Daintree Road to Cooktown ends at the Bloomfield River. There are still more good climbs but most have been cemented so they won't wash away and present little problem. Several settlements are north of the Bloomfield but the only grocery store is at the Bloomfield Hotel about 8 kilometers from the River crossing and about 30 kilometers from Cooktown. It's a not to be missed stop with the biggest and best hamburgers we have ever had in Australia. The proprietress rewarded our efforts with some homemade caramel bars which we reckon are worth the trip along the Daintree Road in themselves.

The distance from Cape Tribulation to the Bloomfield River is less than 30 kilometers, normally an easy morning ride. It should be considered a tough, all-day ride if you get an early start and are in good physical condition! We had trouble defining the Daintree Road as a road in the traditional sense of the word. It seemed more a hastily bulldozed swath through the rain forest that paid little attention to contours. It charged straight up steep hills then straight down. Because it is politically unpopular, I doubt if much effort will be expended to maintain it. It is definitely a challenge for even the most trail hardened mountain biker but the bright sandy beaches and beautiful lazy town of Cooktown make the challenge more than worthwhile. It's also a route that should completely dispel any thoughts that Australia is nothing but an empty, harsh desert! Just don't attempt it during the rains; those hills may well be impossible when wet.



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by Dori Klaaren

After one sour attempt at a Florida off-road biking story, we were happy to discover all of this southern state isn't the bikini-clad, bottom pinching scene of Fort Lauderdale.



## Journey to the Swamp Summit

Mention Florida to the average person on the street and you're liable to hear the typical Miami Beach/Gulf coast Palm/ Mickey Mouse description. That's fine, let them go on thinking that way. But if the truth be known, there's a passionate beauty to the interior wetlands that leaves the tourist-oriented coastal areas light-years behind.

This is the part of Florida marked on most maps with horizontal dashes and labeled uninhabitable or un navigable. Towns stay to the edges of these areas while roads swing around or come to abrupt stops. This is the region where the Seminole Indians successfully eluded "civilized man" for decades, becoming the only undefeated Native American Nation.

After a ride through a piece of this swamp land, I can appre-

ciate how and why they held out.

Swamp land. It's one of those imagery, definitive words that sound like contradictions. Swamp land. No way, that's as crazy as "mountain biking in Florida". Bear with me for though we may not have mountains, our sea level challenges are not for the weak-spirited.

Florida's off-road hiking scene is as unique as its wildlife and terrain. The state is dotted north to south with large tracts of state-owned land known as Water Collection Areas (swamps). Closed to traffic and development, these water management flood plains teem with wildlife. Panther, deer, raccoon, fox, opossum, bobcat, armadillos, otter, wild pigs and alligators as well as hawk, eagle, crane, vulture, heron, and all varieties of common and migratory birds take haven here.

The public accessible trails within these wildlife areas pass through oak forests, pine woods, over sand hills, limestone rocks, into broad prairies of grass, and, of course, through the swamp wet jungles.

My husband, Terry, had been turned onto mountain biking by a local musician friend of mine named Russell Farrow. Russell's contagious enthusiasm for mountain biking in central Florida's backwoods and swamp lands have earned him a cadre of converts and I was the latest. After a discussion on the trails in our area, Russell and Terry settled on the Green Swamp (not that far from Mickey Mouse's place) as the perfect place to impress a novice Florida mountain biker.

It was April and perfect. Unlike the grumpy summer months, the mosquito population was low while the tropical heat and humidity were non-existent.

Birds were singing en masse as we lifted our bikes onto the sand road. We rode away from sleepy cow pastures and headed towards a wall of forest in front of us. The dry fronds of palmetto scrub clattered at us as we maneuvered through washouts on the road. Spring weather had just dumped five solid days of rain on the area. Russell scanned the scene and remarked on how high the water was. We knew it was going to be a wet ride.

I looked around at the palmetto field and tall pine trees being enveloped into a jungle forest stretching up out of standing water. The light grays of weathered cypress bark and the bright lime greens of spring were dotted with gold and red buds on silver bushes waving lazily in the slight breeze. The forest seemed tame from the outside, even downright beautiful.

I'm not a complete stranger to the swamp lands. For years, Terry and I have floated the backwaters by canoe and camped out in it. So I knew that once inside the dense jungle, there comes a tingling up the spine as if your senses are hyping themselves for a return to the primitive self. Everything is alive with a feeling of time and evolution transcended.

We made a right turn at a splotch of orange paint on a tree and entered into a three-foot by six foot green tunnel.

The speed with which a person can be swallowed up by the thick density of a Florida cypress swamp is incredible. There's no horizon anymore. Tea colored water lying beside and across the trail reflects back the green of vegetation and the blue of the sky and everything seems flipped upside-down. Reality becomes only a firm grip on the handlebars aiming the front wheel down the foot-wide path.

Russell set an even-tempered pace and sometimes I could see as far as ten feet ahead to plan my approach around a cypress knee or across a root. But most of the time it was a series of instantaneous decisions influenced by which side of the trail I was most likely to get soaked on. Or maybe eaten... (Hurrah for 'gator mid-day naps!')

I geared down and hung back and listened to the pine needles under my wheels pop like Rice Krispies. I watched the guys ahead of me maneuvering over palm roots and steering between trees not much wider apart than the span of the handlebars. As the experienced guide, Russell led the way, lowering his head every now and then to clear out a spider web with the top of his helmet. Now I knew why Terry had referred to the swamp as the Web Eater, a title reserved for the lead rider who has to deal with the occasional wood spider (with a leg span of up to four inches).

We stopped next to a trail-blazed tree and heard a cacophony of birds. We stood very still, soaking in the place - and visa versa. A breeze blew life into the trees, swaying the spanish moss and vines, and the jungle slowly writhed around us.

We were in an area so thick with vegetation it seemed impenetrable and so full of water that any passage seemed impossible. That's when Terry started talking about how difficult it must have been in the 1920's and 30's to come in here with a logging company and be expected to build a railway to haul out the timber. Work? Here?

We stood there a few moments more and through the trees overhead, we spotted white herons and black vultures swaying in the wind. Noisy blue jays scattered to our right. A woodpecker rapped loudly.

"Which way is the trail?" Terry asked, looking around. Russell grinned and pointed to a tree on the far side of some fresh standing water. "Time to get wet."

Terry hopped on his bike and pedaled down the path and into the water, paddling when his sneakers went under. He quickly crossed to the other side and paused to watch Russell following. After a quick check for snakes, and confident there was not any quicksand, I plunged in after them.

The water was cold and soaked my socks and sneakers. All I cared about was reaching the other side - fast.

In spite of it, or because of it all, the ride was becoming fun. There was something about being on a bicycle in such a prehistoric setting that left us feeling silly. Imaginations can go wild in a place like this.

We pushed on. The rest of the water hazards were a lot easier after the initial emotional shock of the first crossing. Besides, once our feet were wet and our shoes full of swamp stuff, it didn't matter anymore. We were part of it all then.

There were a couple of places where the trail had been maintained and walkways had been built across submerged marsh areas. We portaged our bikes, sneakers squishing, looking down into the water. The water was clear but tannin stained and shallow enough to see green grasses and leaves on the bottom. The scales on a palmetto root looked like part of a dinosaur we'd been expecting to find.

We rode up a slight hill on slippery oak leaves then down an



"SLOGGIN' THROUGH THE SWAMP"



embankment into more water than up a root stepped gully. Swerving to miss trees and piles of brush accumulated during high water, I found where part of the trail had been torn up and dug into.

Terry called back, "Look out for the pig ruts!" Oh yeah, I'd forgotten. Wild pigs. Oh, boy. Suddenly I wanted a pith helmet and an elephant gun.

We reached the old railroad line and followed it deeper into the swamp. The rails and ties were gone, leaving a high dike in the middle of the swamp. Vegetation was crawling up the sides and gradually reclaiming it. The trail along the top was edged with dry grasses and covered in a fine black sand with patches of dry ferns and brown leaves sprinkled over its surface. Suddenly the ride became leisurely.

We ducked under low palm fronds and skirted saplings covered with air plants, all the while staring in wonder at the dense cypress swamp to either side. Because of the logging, there weren't many cypress trees over fifty years old. The ancient oaks that had survived loomed like giants to the side of the trail.

We pedaled on casually, constantly spotting evidence of wildlife but no wildlife itself. The high water had sent every one elsewhere.

The dike ended abruptly in the middle of the swamp. This was our journey's turn-around point. We had reached the swamp's summit.

Here, where no direct sunlight penetrated, where the wind could not disturb the order, the plings of a long forgotten trestle were mingled with new cypress trees and entangled in vines. The water was like glass, forming perfect reflections of the silver-gray trees, the lime-colored spring leaves, the dark green fronds and brown vines.

The swamp was totally still, absolutely quiet.

We stood on that point for a long time taking in this dimly lit enclosed panorama. In the overwhelmingly natural yet unnatural silence, a hawk swooped through the trees to rest on a branch over our heads. No one moved. The hawk watched us watching it for a short minute before suddenly winging noiselessly away into the jungle's folds.

After awhile, we left too, back-tracking our route down the dike. I took the lead at the start and noticed there were only a few tire tracks in the sand to indicate our passage. I knew that they'd be gone with the next rain and I was glad; the swamp lands should remain a timeless place.

To get to the Green Swamp, take Interstate 4 to the Lakeland exit and Route 98. Take 98 north for eight miles on divided and two-lane roadway. At the forestry tower, turn right on Rock Ridge Road, traveling for five miles on paved road. Take the left fork where the paved surface ends and go for another five miles to Green Swamp Wildlife Management on the left. Look for the signs at the sand road. Be sure to sign in with the Rangers at the trailer up the sand road. They'll want to know how many bodies to look for.

## Official Information

After writing this article, we thought it would be a good idea to get some "official information" on the legalities of riding on the Florida Trail. We called the Florida Trail Association located in Gainesville and asked about off-road bikes using the trails. The officials were confused. They referred us to the Florida Department of Transportation State Bicycle Program which lists eleven or so paved roads designated as biking routes.

No, we didn't want to ride on roads with cars and trucks; we meant off-road bicycles.

"You mean motorcycles?"

"No, we mean bicycles, off-road bicycles."

"On the hiking trails? Well, um, er, I'm not sure what you mean exactly but we do not encourage bicycles on the trails."

It became obvious that the folks haven't considered the possibility of such an absurd idea. Bicycles in the woods?

Down here, there seem to be two categories of the Outdoors Person: the environmentally conscious backpacker or hunter who takes the time to join the necessary organizations and pay the necessary fees and the Motor Freaks who delight in slinging sand and mud and anything else that gets under their tires while making lots of macho noises in the wild.

The folks on the phone confused mountain bikes with the second group. Rangers imagine hordes of bikers knocking bikers off the trails like tenpins.

As of now, bikes are legal on trails. But when the powers that be are finally confronted with making a decision, my guess is they will follow the course of other states and ban us here too.

All we can do is try not to annoy anyone and hope that a lack of complaints will keep any decision from having to be made.

In Florida, mountain bikes are just being discovered. This is a mixed blessing. By being few in numbers, we can keep a low profile and ride where we want while officials remain in ignorance. But being so few, we also have no popular support when it comes to political influence.

Eventually, we may be faced with signs showing a bicycle in a circle and a slash through it and like my fellow off-roaders in other states, I'll have to decide whether to break a rule and live my life or turn around and look for an alternative.

The folks at the Florida Trail Association were helpful and courteous; they stressed that their members had respect for the land and were responsible for the land and for themselves. Are we really any different?

# Bikes

## With a look at the custom option



Salsa Custom

The Verdict? The Salsa is hot, very hot. It's also radical and not for everyone.

Salsa

Every frame has a riding style and balance point that optimizes its performance. Call it the sweet spot to borrow a phrase from tennis. Changing stem length or rise or sliding the saddle to one extreme or the other on the rails can move a rider out of a bike's sweet spot.

Riders have sweet spots too only here I'm referring to their body position on the bike. Some feel stronger in a high position, some like being stretched out, some like to sit back and slowly hammer the cranks, others sit well forward and spin. The trick to getting a perfect bike is matching the bike's sweet spot to the rider's.

This is where custom frame builders come on stage. Their designs take all that into consideration. When you receive your frame and build it up into an operating bike, you won't need to be changing stems, handlebars, or saddle positioning in the search for your ideal riding position. You'll already be there and that position will coincide with the frame's sweet spot.

At least in theory. It's an enticing thought. To test it, I had Ross Shaler build me a Salsa frame. Interviewing him for his profile in the May issue had convinced me that a custom bike isn't just some illusory bait dangling out there for the unwary. Ross is known for building pretty radical mountain bikes but that was fine by me since I like short, steep bikes. I filled out his order form, told him what kind of riding I like to do and what sort of style I have. He took the appropriate measurements, asked more questions, then I sat back and waited.

All that happened during the winter and the frame was forgotten in the excitement of another ski season. The frame arrived unexpectedly in the spring a few days before a product testing trip to Moab. A mixed batch

of components were quickly hung on it and we were off to Canyonlands National Park's White Rim Trail. I couldn't think of a better way to discover if this custom frame was really special than to spend three days riding over one of the best mountain biking routes in the country.

The verdict? The bike is hot, very hot. It's also radical and not for everyone. The stays measured 17.25 inches, short though not dramatically so since 17-inch and shorter stays started appearing. What is dramatic is the 41-inch wheelbase! (One of Ross's questions is whether you want a fat rear tire or a skinnier one. I like the cushioning of fat tires. Had a 1.5 Specialized Hard-pack in back been acceptable, the stays would have been under 17 inches; the wheelbase obviously would have shortened too.) The front/center measures a mere 23.75 inches. In other words, the front wheel is remarkably close to the rider. Getting

all that happened during the winter and the frame was forgotten in the excitement of another ski season. The frame arrived unexpectedly in the spring a few days before a product testing trip to Moab. A mixed batch

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## What Frame Builder?

Ross builds four levels of bike strength, depending on your weight, strength, and riding style. The one he built me is his Ultra-light frame set. I weigh 150 pounds, am not a weight lifter, and never break equipment. In providing the information Ross requires, don't misrepresent yourself out of ego or a desire for the lightest bike possible. If you do, if you're an animal on a bike yet claim the opposite, you could well end up breaking your frame, a foolish and unnecessary result. Remember, the objective is to build a frame whose characteristics match yours.

Before you get involved with ordering a frame, be sure you have a clear idea of what kind of rider you are, what your riding style is, what you want the bike for, and how much abuse you expect to give it. If you're planning on jumping off of rocks, picnic tables, and cars, be sure to let Ross know. Tell him what riding position you prefer. Give him through your dealer as much clear information as possible.

Also bear in mind that while the frame will be designed to fit your body and riding style, the overall geometry is derived from Ross's perception of how a bike should be built. If you prefer low wheelbase bikes with a laid back head angle, Ross is not the man to build your frame. Such bikes just aren't his style. That's true of all custom builders; they have to be true to their own design philosophy. So be sure you understand the style of the frame builder you're dealing with.

used to it took some doing. My brain hesitated every time I went into an abrupt depression or down an especially steep, rough hill. Though normally I rarely lower my saddle for downhill, on the Salsa, I wasted no time dropping it down out of the way. This is one bike where the advantages of a Hite-Rite become obvious.

This also turned out to be one area where you really do get that little something extra with a custom frame. Ross brazes the

sestpost quick release in front of the seat tube for easier access and then brazes on an attachment for the Hite-Rite in back of the seat tube. The design is so clean and makes so much sense that it makes a person wonder why everybody doesn't do it that way.

Accentuating the closeness of the front wheel are a 71-degree head angle and 1.75 inches of rake. This is not a bike for the casual rider but then a casual rider wouldn't lay out this much money for a frame either. Doing nothing to dispel my nervousness about that short front/center is the 73-degree angle seat tube. The subsequent saddle position combined with the 22-inch top tube dictated a fairly long extension stem to achieve a powerful off-road stance with the hands held low and the hips driving over the cranks. Ross hit everything right on the button because in three days of riding, I suffered no discomfort whatsoever and that despite a minimum of riding during the winter.

Before I ever jammed a toe in the clips, I knew this was going to be one quick handling bike. And it was. What I hadn't expected was its incredible stability and smooth tracking. The bike had this terrific response to any steering impetus yet simultaneously there was this resistance to that impetus, almost a heaviness to the steering though that's not the right description. It's something I've experienced on a few other bikes in the past that had fairly long extension stems, the Ritchey Comp for example. The only thing I can relate it to is the steering on a high performance sports car. At slow speeds, such machines are difficult to turn but at speed, they respond instantly to any impetus though there's still that sense of heaviness. What it all adds up to is a great sense of security. The faster the Salsa was ridden, the smoother and more stable the ride. That was particularly noticeable on fast single tracks.

It's not an exaggeration to say that this was the best high-speed handling mountain bike I've ever ridden. The response is so smooth and quick that dodging rocks or darting through trees on a twisting track is accomplished with minimal effort. Without a doubt, the Salsa saved its best for twenty mile-an-hour rippers over a twisting track.

But there's also a penalty for this kind of performance. If you screw up, that front end will let you know in a hurry (Soft ground cover like sand really brought this out. The front wheel is weighted more than on longer bikes and that combined with the steep angle causes the front wheel to plow whenever the going got soft.) The margin for error is minimal. The bike demands a high degree of rider skill but in exchange, it promises exemplary response. It's almost a Catch-22 situation. Learning to ride this quick a bike is a challenge but once you do, it suddenly becomes a snap. After that, bikes that you held in high regard may seem downright sluggish. The hardest thing to learn with this

tight a bike is to let go of the brakes and boldly fly through rough terrain. Forget the closeness of that front wheel. Just hold on, adjust your positioning, and steer it around any obstacles; the bike will not fail you. But if you hesitate, you're in trouble. The bike will do all you ask until you waver in your commitment.

That short, steep geometry also proved ideal for slow, technical passages. So steady is the handling that coming to a momentary halt during a particularly tricky passage in order to pass the front wheel around an obstacle and then pedaling past it never having dabbled a foot—became commonplace. Sections were cleared that previously had avoided many of our best efforts, sections that only a couple of bikes had been able to negotiate. The Salsa loved finesse. These qualities were really appreciated during technical climbs. Threading a route up the roughest hill became a dance of delicate proportions and highly controlled energy releases, a challenge to be eagerly looked forward to.

Part of the bike's excellent performance is due to the Koski Dura Trac fork (hand-brazed by Ross). Its lateral rigidity and dampening insured positive steering regardless of the terrain and especially when crossing ruts at oblique angles.

But while handling is the bottom line with any bike, there's still another reason for going custom and that's the quality workmanship you expect to receive. Suffice it to say that the Salsa frame is exceptional in every detail. Ross's reputation as one of the finest bike frame craftsmen around is secure. The quality of his fillet brazing is unsurpassed. A close look at the joints makes his refusal to sand and file his fillets understandable. Ross spares no expense in seeing that the frame is built to the highest standards. One example is his use of a Keith Bontrager designed gusset under the down tube where it joins the head tube. Another are the already mentioned Koski Dura Trac fork blades and front dropouts.

The bike exceeded all expectations in every respect. And those expectations were quite high. Though it's clearly not a bike for everyone, for those who prefer the short and steep and are fully capable of riding such, the Salsa will bring face splitting grins.

### Trek 8000

Sporting one of the prettiest paint jobs on the market is a finely balanced bike, the aluminum Trek 8000. The frame, unlike every other aluminum mountain bike frame, is bonded, the same construction method used in Trek's widely acclaimed aluminum road bikes. Because there are no welds, the frame is a wonderfully sleek looking and beautifully finished unit. The tubing is slightly oversized though thin enough that a person may not suspect the material is aluminum.

*Since the beginning of time we haven't been able to leave anything be...*



BWOS IMPROVES THE WHEEL.

Trek elected to go with slightly thicker tubing instead of the faster and thinner tubing many riders are used to seeing. Possibly because of that, the bike isn't particularly lighter than many a steel framed bike. Still, its ride is distinctly different than that of a steel frame, typical of all aluminum bikes. How so escapes description; you have to try it to understand.

By today's standards, the geometry is relatively conservative: 42.5-inch wheelbase, 17.5-inch chainstays, 70-degree head angle, and 71-degree seat tube (20-inch frame). Trek's objective in designing this top-of-the-line frame was balanced handling for all conditions and in this they succeeded. What climbing traction the bikes gives up with the longish chainstays is made up for with the smooth, even handling it displays in every other condition. Cornering power is impressive, probably due to the short front/center length relative to the chainstays. Push the grips into a turn and the bike responds instantly with a nice, round curve. Subtle shifts in weight distribution bring out an immediate but smooth reaction in the bike's line. That translates into predictable steering regardless of rider ability level.

The Trek 8000 is not a racing bike per se though certainly it can be raced with fine results. It's more an all-around, adventure seeker, one that doesn't require its rider to be some hot expert but in the hands of such a rider, is perfectly capable of ripping, single tracks are particularly fun with this aluminum frame.

Aluminum has been around long enough by now that everyone no doubt is fully aware of its excellent qualities. It's stiff and light and dampens shock surprisingly well. Though

Ah, but why buy a custom frame in the first place? Other than ego of course. After all, production bikes with every geometry imaginable are available. Are custom frames really all that much better than production frames? How can they possibly be worth the considerable extra cost?

Pride of ownership is an intangible force but nevertheless, it exists. If it didn't, there would be no privately owned works of art. Knowing your bike is special, built for your body and your riding style alone, is a powerful incentive. Part of that incentive is appreciating the workmanship and the details that get overlooked on production lines and the one-of-a-kind paint job. Knowing your frame builder by name is even part of the magic of custom frames.

Are custom frames really better? Of course, there's no way a production bike's craftsmanship is going to match the efforts of a skilled custom builder. But that doesn't necessarily mean you'll ride faster with it. You might but any improvement could simply be due to your believing the bike is superior.

Is a custom bike worth the cost? Only if you can afford it. Your bike has to have a

pretty high priority to demand that much expense though once the money's spent, it's gone. But the bike remains and a custom frame is truly a thing of beauty, something to be proud of for years to come.

There's also a practical reason for going custom—bike fit. Obviously all riders do not have the same proportions per body size. Production frames can be made to fit most riders but not always. Enthusiast riders whose proportions don't fit into the general scheme of things should strongly consider the custom route. It's the only way they can guarantee a proper fit. For instance, if Ross has a specialty, it's building bikes for riders on the extremes—very short or very tall. He loves the challenge of building bikes for folks who have never been able to find a bike that fits them correctly. I don't fall into that category and am unable to say whether he succeeds in fulfilling that objective. But based on the frame he built for me, I'd say the chances of that being so are excellent. The bike, with no adjustments whatsoever, fit me to a "T". That alone, without any consideration of the bike's actual performance, can more than justify the cost of going custom.

aluminum also has a slightly dead feel, frames made out of it also have this sense of instant response to energy input. The Trek excels in these respects.

Components are for the most part what you'd expect on an approximately \$750 bike: Deore shifters, derailleurs, and brakes (cantilever in front, u-brake in back) with 28/38-48 Biopace chainrings, sealed hubs, Araya RM-20 rims, Ritchey Quad tires, fine Specialized saddle, and a beautiful Sakae FX stem and flat bars with Grab-on grips.

It's a fine package though for the money we think a Shimano 600 freewheel is appropriate along with clips and straps on the pedals and better hubs and definitely a longer sestpost.

This is one bike that's set up for off-road performance. This is no boulevard cruiser thinly disguised as a pseudo mountain bike; it's a mountain bike through and through. The saddle/handlebar relationship feels just right while the bend of the handlebar falls nicely to hand. The 71-degree seat tube

*Trek is one bike that's set up for off-road performance. This is no boulevard cruiser thinly disguised as a pseudo mountain bike.*

Trek 8000







Supergo Access from Bikelogy

*The Supergo Access is an impressive bike. For \$499, you get a frame made out of Columbus SL tubing equipped with excellent components.*

angle insures a comfortable ride and plenty of climbing traction if you stay seated. The position is such that the inclination to hammer creeps into the mind whether you want to or not. The Trek 8000 is simply very easy to ride quite fast, no matter what the terrain.

#### Supergo Access

Given MBM's history of supporting the Independent Bicycle Dealer Network, it's logical to ask why we're reviewing a mail order bike. Because it's a legitimate product and not every MBM reader necessarily has a mountain bike dealer nearby. In our minds, there are definite and clear reasons for not

ordering bikes through the mail but they don't always apply. If a mail order bike has everything you want, is set-up appropriately, is easily assembled, and the price is right, there's no reason not to order by phone. Granted, you won't have established a working relationship with your local shop that in the long run can pay off but then there might not even be a shop you count on nearby in the first place.

The primary drawback to purchasing bikes by phone is the fit and how it rides. Unless a friend has one, you won't be able to test ride it. There's little that can be done about that situation. All we can do is as best as possible pass on our impressions of the bike. So you'll have to make a decision

*The Dakar is one of the best thought-out bikes on the market today. Frame proportions were just right, including the length of the beautiful Nitto stem.*

Jamies Dakar



based on information that may or may not be relevant to you.

The Supergo Access is an impressive bike. For \$499, you get a frame made out of Columbus SL tubing equipped with excellent components. The frame, though on the heavy side, is very strong, even bomb-proof. Frame finish is fine and on a par with the better bikes that typically come out of Taiwan. Geometry is short and steep: 17.25-inch chainstays, 41.75-inch wheelbase, 70-degree head angle, 72-degree seat.

Handling is pretty much what you'd expect with excellent climbing traction, quick steering, etc. Unfortunately, we weren't able to fully extract its potential performance. The stem (a Ross Shaler-designed Salsa stem made in Taiwan) was entirely too short for all our testers even though the frame size was just right in every other respect. Exaggerating the problem was the rising handlebar so rider positioning was more cruiser oriented than performance oriented. A longer extension stem and flat bar should produce the kind of handling we expected. Why we didn't make those changes was because we'd no longer be testing the bike you'll order and when you buy through the mail and often you're unable to request such changes. Making those changes at your local shop can dramatically alter the bike's relative value. Nevertheless, Bikelogy is an old established bike shop and might quite willingly substitute stem and handlebar for you; no harm asking.

In every other respect, the bike is impressive. Our testers all work in a bike shop and all said without reservation that a comparably equipped bike off the floor would cost at least a hundred more dollars. Everything on the bike that needs grease was generously greased and all adjustments were right on the money, including the derailleurs. Putting it together was exceptionally easy and quick. Except for the stem and handlebar, the bike was nicely tricked out with Shimano Deore derailleurs, Shimano 600 EX freewheel (one place many a manufacturer saves money), SR sealed bearing hubs (including quick release in front), Araya RM 25 rims, stainless steel spokes, Ritchey Quad tires (unreal to see this good a tire on this inexpensive a bike), Biopace chainrings, a decent Vetta saddle, clips and straps on the pedals, pump mount behind the seatpost, even spare spokes on one chainstay. In short, it's an impressive package, especially if they'll switch the stem and handlebars for you at no additional cost.

#### Jamies Dakar

We first reviewed the Jamies Dakar over a year ago. We liked it. The design was fairly conservative, good for touring and adventure riding, and equipped with just about everything you'd need. Though the bike was evidently received quite well by shops and the buying public, Jamies didn't stand out with what they had. The '87 Dakar is not the

same bike and it's better for the changes. The chainstays have been shortened to 17.25 inches with a 42.25-inch wheelbase. The head angle is 70 degrees, the seat tube 73 degrees. The front/center distance measures 25 inches (20-inch frame size). These numbers or ones quite close are all but standard on most of today's high performance mountain bikes and for good reason; they work.

Slow speed handling is smooth and easy with enough weight on the front end to keep the wheel going where you aim it. Steep, technical climbs on loose soil require a balanced crouch over the top tube to maintain rear wheel traction and front wheel steering but when done correctly, the bike responds impressively. Fast riding over single-tracks brought out the very best in this style of frame geometry: effortless steering with the back wheel following the front in nice round curves. Steep, rough downhill were what impressed the test riders the most. They felt like they could really fly on the Dakar with excellent stability.

The Dakar is one of the best thought-out bikes on the market today. Frame proportions were just right for the test time, including the length of the beautiful Nitto stem. There's really nothing that needs to be changed for aggressive off-road riding, an unusual circumstance with production bikes. The entire bike is top-of-the-line starting with the nicely lugged Tange Prestige tubing. The list of standard equipment on the Dakar is impressive: Hite-Rite, straps and clips on Shimano Deore XT pedals, Specialized Ground Controls (rare is the bike that comes equipped with this good a tire), and quality rubber grips. Components consist of a Shimano Deore XT gruppo throughout. Rims are Araya RM 20's with the super hard anodized finish; spokes are 14-gage stainless steel. Brakes are Shimano Deore XT cantilevers in front, U-brakes in back. The more we've used these cantilevers, the more we've come to appreciate them. The opposite is true of the U-brake though as a back brake, it's fine - easy to adjust with good tire clearance. There are even pads around the top tube and seat tube for more carrying comfort.

We've only one gripe with the bike. First, the gearing is too high. Changing the 28/38/48 chainrings to 26/36/46 would help. Even better would be 24/36/46. Combined with the 12-28 freewheel, you'd have all the gearing you need with a 22-inch low and a 100-inch high.

Considering its approximately \$850 tag, the Dakar is competitively priced to boot.

#### Miyata Ridge Runner

Miyata's top-of-the-line and strikingly painted Ridge Runner is a conservatively designed performance bike with its 69-degree head tube, 72.5-degree seat tube, 17.5-inch chainstays, 43.5-inch wheelbase, and 2-inch fork rake (21-inch frame). We hadn't



Miyata Ridge Runner

*A more comfortable ride over rocky terrain than that of the RidgeRunner is difficult to achieve. It practically glides over the ground.*

ridden this conservative a design in some time and the experience was a reminder of why so many bikes were built with these angles.

What struck testers the most was the bike's comfort. The front end rolls over the roughest terrain with aplomb; all you need do is hang on and let'er rip. Climbing traction was better than might be expected considering the slightly long stays (though relative to the overall wheelbase, the stays are short). Still, climbing wasn't its strong suit. Stability and precise steering at slow speeds was pretty much what had been expected: a bit of wavering due to the subdued wheel flopping of the front end. Steep downhills required staying up on the saddle to maintain pressure on the front wheel or it pays little heed to steering directions.

A more comfortable ride over rocky terrain than that of the Ridge Runner is difficult to achieve. It practically glides over the ground. High speed downhills are even better. There's this very assured rider position that encourages pushing for more speed. That excellent rider position is what really turns this into a sweet bike. Through technical passages though, the bike gives up some of that performance, particularly out of the saddle. The trade-off of technical handling prowess for the smoothness and ability to hammer through unexpected obstacles is more than worth while for many a rider though and has from the beginning been the sport's strength. Riders new to the game are less apt to get in over their heads on bikes with this kind of design.

The handling is nicely forgiving and allows riders to get away with less precise though no less enthusiastic handling skills. For example, when you really push its front end into a turn, it tends to wash out and float

to the outside instead of diving into the turn with a clean, sharp curve. But if you inadvertently oversteer, you won't get knocked down; either, an attractive alternative for many a rider.

The Ridge Runner fills a space that's been developing with the trend to ever shorter and steeper frame designs, designs that require more skilled rider abilities. The bike has the latest rage in components - Shimano Deore XT gruppo, wheels built with Araya RM 20 rims, a beautiful Nitto stem with an excellent performance handlebar, and long SR Laprade seatpost - and set up for high performance but with a more forgiving geometry than many competing bikes. Not everyone wants or needs a steep, short bike yet they still want the best in componentry.

The approximate \$885 price tag also places the Ridge Runner in the midst of some pretty stiff competition but for those looking for an easier riding bike made out of fine tubing and equipped appropriately, the Miyata could be the ticket. Such designs are definitely becoming harder to find. But for the price, we'd like to see pedals with straps and clips plus high performance tires and saddle.

#### Diamond Back Arrival

Spotting Diamond Back's top-of-the-line bike is almost impossible not to do; the Arrival's bright yellow paint job fairly leaps out at you. It looks fast and it is with its 70-degree head tube angle, 73-degree seat tube, 42-inch wheelbase, 17.375-inch chainstays, and 2-inch fork rake. The frame is constructed out of moderately oversized aluminum tubing, tig welded and nicely finished.





Diamond Back Arrival

*The Arrival's frame is what evidently attracts most buyers; aluminum is hot. The tubing is a high-tech 7000 series that's quite light and strong.*

There were two things every test rider commented on with the Arrival: its fine climbing ability and the too short top tube. As a result, the Arrival can be a frustrating bike. The rear end is great with plenty of stiffness for hammering and a reasonably tight triangle for performance. The front end is also quite nice with a wonderfully quick response and excellent stability and steering in technical passages. Where the problem arises is how they're joined together. The saddle is too close to the handlebars. Normally, installing a longer stem solves this but with the Arrival, the top tube is quite short and an especially long stem can be required. That in turn affects the bike's handling.

Long stems slow the steering down and increase the weight on the front wheel. Both results can be good, especially with quick front ends and for real carving power in turns but if overdone, can be a bummer. Consequently it helps if the Arrival is fairly close to fitting you as it comes out of the box.

Those who fit the stock Arrival and those who do after changing stems love it. The bike is light, stiff, and smooth. Fast downhill tend to be the order of the day due to the bike's stability and smoothness. Single-tracks are also a delight given its quickness and fine weight distribution. That weight on the front wheel really drives it into turns

when equipped with a high performance tire (not the stock tire). This is a bike that is meant to be ridden hard.

Components are mostly the Shimano Deore XT gruppo including the entire drive train, brakes, hubs, shifters, and brake levers. Rims are Araya RM 20's while the stem and handlebar are the really slick looking Nitto units showing up on more and more bikes. There are two major deficiencies in the bike's equipment: the saddle is the worst we've ever ridden. It's so wide not one tester could drop side behind it for steep descents. And this on an approximately \$850 bike! The tires are just as bad but not all the blame can be placed at Diamond Back's feet; stupid custom's rules are the reason. Still, for the price, hot tires ought to be standard. Everyone also felt that a bike with this much performance and in this price range ought to have clips and straps as standard equipment. (Though most still seem to prefer Suntour XC Comp pedals for use with clips and straps, a few have become ardent admirers of the Shimano Deore XT pedals with clips. They claim it rolls up nicely for an easy foot entrance and is much easier than the Suntour's.)

The only other gripe testers had was the too low bottom bracket; too often for comfort, pedals smacked the ground. True, the bike's excellent stability no doubt owes much to the low bottom bracket but the bike is also meant to be ridden in the backcountry and for that, there has to be ample pedal clearance. The Arrival was a bit lacking in that.

The Arrival's frame is what evidently attracts most buyers; aluminum is hot. The tubing is a high-tech 7000 series aluminum that's quite light and strong and can be tig welded without requiring heat treating afterwards, thus eliminating the possibility of crooked frames coming out of the heat treating process. The tig welds tend to disappear beneath the bright yellow paint job but look good up close too. Beautifully complimenting the main frame's cosmetics is the black, cromoly Unicrown fork. It all makes for one very hot looking bike and judging by the number of them we've seen so far this year, the Arrival has to be one of the most popular selling bikes on the market.

As stated at the beginning, the Arrival can be frustrating. It's basically such a sweet bike that the little things that kept popping up and stopping us from thoroughly enjoying it were a real drag. Those who fit it loved it and those who were close enough in size that a longer stem put them where they wanted to be were equally enthusiastic. Unfortunately, they were the exceptions rather than the rule. But by the same token, those riders who did fit the Arrival are the same ones who inevitably have one hell of a hard time finding a bike that fits their proportions; usually bike frames fit the rest of us and ignore those with shorter torsos and arms. So if that sounds like you, the answer to your needs exists at your nearest Diamond Back dealer.

# Tibet

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# Solitary in Tibet

by Pete Richards

My journal entry describes Sept. 14, 1986, as "one those memorable days I shall cherish forever." I mountain-biked to the top of 16,000 foot Khamba La pass overlooking Yamdrok Tso, the sacred Turquoise Lake of Tibet, and wrote: "The climb starts fairly soon after leaving the nameless village at 12,000 feet. The road is not terribly steep and, though not paved, in fairly good condition, nowhere as bad as the one I had been training on above Santa Fe. There is just a minor altitude problem. The first couple of hours went fairly well although my legs were aching. But by three hours, I was in the very lowest gear, biking 15 and resting 15 minutes, and eating up all my biscuits. Then, a kilometer or so from the top I saw the prayer flags marking the summit. This gave me a real spurt, though I would hardly say I was sprinting at the finish."

"...joy and elation, even now writing about it a day later I get choked up. Probably only someone who 'uses his body' can understand what it means to have put out 110% to achieve such a goal, and to have done it here, in magnificent Tibet, produced a high beyond description."

That day was during my second trip to Tibet. The year before I had made a more conventional, tourist-type visit. Like many of my generation, impressed by Hilton's Lost Horizon, I had dreamed of seeing the "roof of the world" and searching for Shangri-La. Lhasa, Tibet's major city, had just been completely opened to tourists, and I learned that future travel could be done independently and much cheaper. After having been driven up the same pass by Land Cruiser and seen the lake below and the surrounding Himalayas, I vowed to return by mountain bike.

One year later I was back in Lhasa prepared to bicycle the 210 miles to Xigaze, Tibet's second largest city, which would take me over Khamba La and an even higher 17,000 foot pass along the way. This may have seemed foolhardy for a 51 year old family man employed as a research physicist in Albuquerque. But, being a regular runner of the Pikes Peak race and having run the 72 miles around Lake Tahoe, it was not so far from my normal level of insanity.

Two important things, learned on the first visit, made the solo venture seem possible. First, Tibetans are very hospitable, and second, pictures of the Dali Lama are more valuable than money. I had bought a small picture on the street the year before and returned with a large supply of enlargements made from a photocopy. My assessment that the photos would assure ample food and lodging in the small villages was, if anything, an underestimate. At one point I revealed that I had many pictures, which was about as wise as flashing a large roll of money on the streets of an American city. Not that I was harmed or had any stolen, but the large crowd of beggars who gathered refused to comprehend that the pictures were for those who had helped me in some way, not for the whole population.

Communication was with a combination of broken Chinese and sign language. The former, of which I had learned enough to survive, is a second language to the Tibetans, not spoken by most of the villagers. Nonetheless, it is not difficult to make known that you want food and a place for your sleeping bag, especially if the request is accompanied by a smile and a Dali Lama picture.

I regularly biked up to 12,000 feet outside Santa Fe to train as best I could. But this is only "sea level" for Tibet, roughly corresponding to the starting elevation of Lhasa, the lowest point on the route. There is no adequate way to prepare for the major unknown of coping at 17,000 feet. Even a Pikes Peak runner like myself could get altitude sickness and should get down the mountain at the first sign of real trouble. Fortunately descending a dirt road on a mountain bike is quicker and easier than getting down from Everest.

My primary concern, though, was less with my own high altitude survival than with the bike's survival from Albuquerque to Lhasa. I opted for a canvas bike bag rather than a bulky box, and it proved to be equal to the challenge of international travel. The route included an overnight stop in Hong Kong where I secured a visa to China, now also good for Tibet. Such paper work is done much more readily in Hong Kong than in the U.S. One can also fly directly to Beijing or Shanghai and obtain a visa on the spot.

All air travel to Lhasa originates from the Chinese city of Chengdu. Securing advance reservations for domestic flights of CAAC, the airline of the Peoples Republic of China, is about as easy as finding Shangri-La. The mad dashes through airports with the bike bag and being told that my "confirmed" reservations were invalid all seem pretty funny now, and are a story in themselves. They weren't so funny at the time. This difficulty, as well as that of getting hotel rooms in the main cities of China, is not faced by the less-adventurous traveller in an organized group, and is something the independent soul has to be aware of.

Lhasa itself is such a delightful place that a certain amount of inertia has to be overcome to leave it. The Jokhang Temple and surrounding square is the center of activity. One can spend endless hours fascinated with the throngs of devout pilgrims and irresistible smiles of the Tibetans. Lhasa was even better this time because I stayed at the Snowland Hotel just off the square instead of the pricey new tourist hotel where I was the year before. An accurate statement about the Snowland from a guidebook is: "It's impossible not to like the Tibetan women who run the place with laughter and waterlights." This more than makes up for the lack of such amenities as running water and indoor toilets.

After a few days of acclimating I remembered the main purpose of the trip and pedaled away from the charms of Lhasa. The five day trip would take me over the 16,000 foot Khamba La, 60 miles from Lhasa, down to Yamdrok Tso at 14,500 feet, to the village of Nagarze at the end of the lake 32 miles from the summit, up and over Karo La pass at 17,000 feet and 16 miles out of Nagarze, 47 miles down to the town of Gyangze at 13,000 feet, and the remaining 55 level miles to Xigaze. One of the more adventurous features of travel in Tibet is that there are no detailed maps, so I didn't know for sure where I might find villages. The year before I had spotted the first night's stop 35 miles out of Lhasa just before the climb starts up Khamba La, but after that it was anyone's guess. Presumably these villages have names, but there aren't exactly big signs announcing them. Even if there were, they of course would be in Chinese characters and/or the Tibetan alphabet—not too helpful.

The first 30 miles were on the same paved road that leads to the airport. A tail wind and the company of two Chinese teenagers on their one-speed bikes made it a fact, easy ride. Non-orientals are not uncommon in downtown Lhasa; so one can bike around without being mobbed. But once in the country it's a different story. Every rest stop, even in a desolate area, brings a crowd of curious children and adults. My first such encounter, repeated frequently during the days ahead, came shortly after leaving the paved road and my biking companions. All my items had to be examined, camera lens looked through, and, most of all, the strange bike thoroughly gone over. All would dearly have liked to ride it, but I drew the line there, especially since none had ever ridden one with gears. Body hair, scarce among orientals, is also an item of great interest and often gets tugged. I could always get a laugh by showing how comparatively little there was on top of my head.

The first night's lodging was authentic Tibetan farm life with chickens running around the dirt floors and jumping up on the dinner table. The meal consisted of barley which is the staple of the Tibetan diet and all one gets in the country aside from the ever resent yak-butter tea. This, as the name implies, is tea into which yak butter, the more rancid the better, is dissolved. It is the

national drink which is served continuously. Many have described it as undrinkable, but I rather like the stuff. The ultimate Tibetan delicacy is hot breakfast cereal of barley flour mixed in the tea and eaten with fingers in place of chopsticks. Although sanitary practices in China and Tibet are best not discussed while eating, my stomach survived. This may have been pure luck, but I did take the precautions of peeling all fruit, eating only well cooked vegetables and Katadyn-filtering all water that I had not seen boiling.

After the dinner of barley soup, barley beer and tea, I was given a soft comfortable place to put my sleeping bag, there to dream of the big day ahead. That of course was the ascent of Khamba La described at the beginning. The journal's narrative continues with my elation at the top: "I yelled, I screamed I cried. Only someone made of stone would do less. Close by was an older Tibetan



woman who witnessed all this. Instead of thinking me a lunatic, she understood perfectly. Mountains are part of her religion too. She had come to make offerings at the prayer flags at the summit. She gave me some bread and examined my bike. I gave her some water and a Dali Lama picture. She then let me take her picture, something very rare for a Tibetan woman. Our common experience brought about a strong rapport.

"Although I would have liked to savor the view and our companionship much longer, it started sprinkling which forced a quick 1,500 foot descent to the lakeshore. It was so beautiful and its

"Tibet, a Travel Survival Kit", by M. Buckley and R. Strauss, Lonely Planet Publications, Berkeley, Calif., 1986.

Overleaf: Thief's bridge, Lhasa with the Potala palace in background. Top: Top of Kampa La Pass. Bottom: Potala palace, Lhasa.





water so clear that if I had a tent I would have stopped immediately for the night. Instead I continued a dozen or so miles to a village where I was happy to call it quits. There was the usual crowd when I stopped, and shortly arrangements were made to put me up for the night. Later I was quite ready for bed which, similar to the night before, was outside but protected by an overhang. Stars came out, the first time I had seen them because of overcast. Watching them in the clear night sky was the perfect end to a perfect day.

The following day required rest, and I only biked less than 20 miles to Nagazze at the end of the bike, stopping frequently to admire views of the distant Himalayas. Although there are now more donkey carts than motor vehicles, Nagazze is a major truck stopover with a hotel and restaurant where I had a single room for 80 cents and ate something other than barley for the first time since leaving Lhasa.

From there I had only two more days to get to Xigaze, still 118 miles and a 17,000 foot pass away. The Karo La pass immediately outside of Nagazze is much easier than Khama La. I was starting at 14,000 feet and now had the confidence. The road follows a stream between 23,000 foot peaks. Nothing could match the excitement of the first summit, but I was only slightly more in control of my emotions at the top. And this time I had more people to share them with. A truckload of Tibetans pulled up followed by a Land Cruiser with a couple of German tourists. The Tibetans cheered with joy upon reaching the top (given the condition of their vehicle, this was probably warranted). After making offerings at the prayer flags, they made offerings to me in the form of hard boiled eggs and a bottle of beer. No beer has ever tasted so good, and I couldn't have cared less about its possible effects at 17,000 feet. From now on it was to be all down hill.

But alas it wasn't. After the initial drop to 13,000 feet, there were many ups and downs, including one climb of a few hundred

feet which by then felt like Everest. I was totally bushed and ready to quit for good after finally arriving in Gyangze.

Gyangze is an old and charming city, almost purely Tibetan with little Chinese influence. There I met three other bikers whose fears made mine seem minimal. Two were New Zealanders biking all the way across Asia from Hong Kong. The other was a young woman from Flagstaff, Arizona, who was on a solo three-year bike trip around the world, stopping to teach English when she ran out of money. Among the pleasures of travelling off the beaten path are these encounters with young people out to see the world.

I would have liked to spend a day in Gyangze and forgo the remaining 55 miles to Xigaze, but learned that Xigaze offered the only assured transport back to Lhasa. Fortunately the road to Xigaze is level, and would have been a breeze if I hadn't been so worn out.

I pulled into Xigaze hot, tired and happy. Five days for 210 miles at those altitudes was pushing it. An extra day or two would have been about right. Unfortunately my unchangeable budget return air ticket didn't permit extensions. A less rigid schedule next time may be worth the extra cost.

The bike rode on top of the bus while I sat next to the driver for the ten hour trip back to Lhasa. I felt a secret pleasure everytime the engine wheezed to a halt on the passes, and we had to wait for it to cool off. The old bus was having at least as much trouble as the old man.

A hero's welcome and a room to myself with three beds for the price of one was waiting at the Snowland. The next day I said my goodbyes. The smilingest and liveliest of all the smiling and lively girls at the hotel engaged me in a water fight at the well, which I took as the greatest compliment. I told here I would be back next year. Not to return to Tibet is unthinkable.

## Hold the Yak Butter

By Gay Hendricks

When I was a young and impressionable 10-year old, I read a Hardy Boys mystery about Tibet. On the spot I decided I would go there someday. Subsequent interest as an adult in meditation and Buddhism strengthened my desire to visit the Land of the Snows. Then, when I got seriously into mountain biking, I developed the ultimate fantasy - I would cruise into Lhasa on fat tires.

A few months ago, and about 30 years after I first got the idea, I finally did it. It was one of my life's premium experiences, although it had a few rough edges to it.

In retrospect, I'm glad I was with a group, although I had to stifle the urge on several occasions to wring the necks of a couple of my fellow travellers.

I joined a group of 12 other cyclists to make the journey. I had mixed feelings about being with a group, since I had only travelled solo or with my wife before. In retrospect, I'm glad I was with a group, although I had to stifle the urge on several occasions to wring the necks of a couple of my fellow travellers.

On the plus side of travelling with a group was that we had the services of an experienced Asian traveller as a tour leader. We also had several excellent bike mechanics, a physician, a psychologist (me), three lawyers and a couple of computer types. So no matter what kind of problem emerged - from dysentery to depression to a broken spoke - we could fix it. It was also great having someone else be responsible for worrying about lodging, meals and transportation. On a previous solo journey to Asia, I found that I spent roughly half my time handling logistics.

On the down side, I sometimes went batty putting up with the antics of other tour members. On two occasions I had to room with a man who was a world-class, window-rattling snorer. His combination of grunts and squeals sounded like a pig on LSD. Then, there was the Woman-Who-Was-Always-Late. She kept the rest of us waiting frequently, nearly triggering a lynch party once when she held us up for an hour. There were other quirky aspects to deal with, but by and large they were fine companions, and some of us became good friends.

After spending several days sightseeing in Beijing and Chengdu, China, we flew to Gonggar Airport, two hours outside Lhasa. There, we assembled the bikes, Peugeot's which had been purchased in a lot from a California bike shop. We had the option of bringing our own bikes, but after thinking of trusting my beloved Klein to a month's worth of baggage-handlers, I opted to ride the group bike.

Most of us suffered from altitude effects the first few days. Although I live at 6,000 feet in Colorado, I felt spacey and headachy the first two days at 12,000 feet. It soon passed, and even when we would go up to 17,000 feet on a pass, I was never bothered again. In fact, our group stayed relatively healthy. Except for colds and stomach bugs, there were no major health problems on the trip.

We spent several days in the capital of Tibet, Lhasa. I finally got to see the golden roofs and 1,000 chapels of the Potala Palace, former home of the Dalai Lama. We toured the murky, fascinating interiors of a number of monasteries and temples, including the Jokhang Temple, Tibet's most holy site. A memory I will always have is the smell of yak butter lamps illuminating the interior of the temples and monasteries. A dank and musty smell, cloying beyond description, yak butter left a real impression on most of us. About

once a week, I find myself thinking, "Thank God I haven't had to smell yak butter for a while."

After a few days in Lhasa, we left for a circuit of outlying areas, including Tibet's second and third largest cities, Shigatse and Gyantse. Gyantse is famous for a temple which draws thousands of pilgrims each year, many of whom were prostrating themselves in the courtyard the day I was there. It is also the site of the fortress from which the Tibetans tried unsuccessfully to hold off the British in the 1904 expedition led by Francis Younghusband. Tibet finally got to him, however. He had a mystical experience before leaving Lhasa, and abandoned the military life forthwith.

Shigatse is the former home of the Panchen Lama, the second most powerful lama in the country. While visiting his former monastery, Tashilumpo, I was fortunate enough to see a procession of lamas blowing long trumpets and crashing symbols as they carried a holy tapestry to a temple. One of the paradoxes of visiting Tibet is the combination of tourists and authentic pilgrims at the holy sites. Occasionally I felt guilty as I watched in fascination at the people going about the practice of their religion. How would I feel if my whole country and its customs were turned into a museum?

Our group was a curiosity wherever we went. Particularly in the small towns, a group of westerners, all of whom are riding green mountain bikes, is a real treat. Sometimes wildness would ensue. In some places the kids, who are legion in Tibet, would chase us, grabbing at our bikes. Speaking of kids, if you go to Tibet, consider taking some inexpensive pens and small pictures of the Dalai Lama. The children all love pens, and as for Dalai Lama pix, be prepared for a mini-riot when you hand one out.

Some of our days were clear and glorious, others cloudy and windy. Dust is a factor in Tibet; one of my most important pieces of equipment on the trip was a surgical mask. Roads were generally good by Asian standards. Except for one brain rattling day of corrugated road, our journey was mostly on good dirt or reasonably paved roads.

Travel in Asia is seldom smooth, and sometimes a disaster. One day I remember with vivid clarity. We began an excursion to Tibet's oldest monastery, Samye. After a 45-kilometer ride over very rough road, we collapsed on a barge which was supposed to take us across the river. Mid-way through the 2 hour crossing, a squall blew up which soaked our t-shirt clad group in freezing rain and sleet. We literally huddled together for warmth. When we got off, grouchy and hungry, on the far side, we ran afoul of the wrath of a truck driver who was supposed to give us a lift up to the monastery. I'm still not sure what he was upset about but the bottom line was that we ended up having to walk about 5 miles in bad weather to the monastery. Shared suffering brought the group closer together though and morale was good for the rest of the journey. And compared to what the old-time traveller in Tibet had to deal with, our journey was a picnic.

After leaving Tibet, we spent two days in Hong Kong, tasting civilization again. Accommodations on the trip ranged from luxurious to semi-pig-sty. Be prepared for some breath-holdingly bad toilet facilities. Food in Tibet is generally poor; understandably so, when you see how little of the land is arable. Much of the food has to be trucked up from China.

But don't go for the food and lodging. Go for a culture that is steeped in religious tradition, and where smiles are common on native faces. Go for the fascinating monasteries and the uniqueness of the Potala and Jokhang. Mountain bikes are the perfect mode of transportation in a country where almost everything is off the beaten track.

I had a great time and would go back in a flash. I just wonder why the Hardy Boys never mentioned the smell of that yak butter...





## Scot Nicol



The ideal mountain bike frame shop is in northern California near Sebastopol in the midst of an orchard with a prolific garden just outside the shop door. Beyond the orchard are pastures, more orchards, and scattered small farms. The frame shop is in a garage whose front door is normally wide open. Music from an extensive stereo system, including the latest compact disc player, rolls out across the fields, muting any sounds of frame building. The setting is so rural and picturesque that it could have leapt out of a Norman Rockwell painting. It didn't; it's the product of Scot Nicol and Ginny Allen's imagination. It's also the source of some of the world's finest mountain and trials bikes, Ibis Cycles.

In the race for the hottest mountain biking logo, Ibis Cycles' abstract flying bicycle is securely in the lead. The logo looks like something Picasso could have done, one of those designs you either look at and see or you don't; there's no in-between. I used to wonder if it wasn't too abstract since so many seemed to miss it. Then the first time my son spotted the logo, at age 3, he immediately recognized the bicycle.

The logo is appropriate for the Peripa-

tetic owner of Ibis Cycles, Scot Nicol. There's a featheriness to Scot's designs, a sense of lightness and minimalism. The lines are clean and sparse and thoroughly modern. There's also this quick humor, the kind that makes a person do a double-take, that becomes particularly evident in the paint jobs many an Ibis wears. Scot's bikes are almost always recognizable.

If you're wondering about the name Ibis, it's a bird, a heron-like wading bird, lean and delicate of line, always in poised balance. The ibis was venerated by the ancient Egyptians and something about it struck Scot and Ibis Cycles was born.

Scot may well be the best known custom mountain frame builder in the country. Why isn't it really clear? It's certainly not because of intensive marketing efforts on Scot's part. He's one of the most relaxed people you'll ever meet. Being pushy isn't his style; he just quietly goes about building mountain bike and trials bike frames, seeking no notoriety, just wanting to build as good a bike as there is. He's been doing that for six years now.

Like his logo, Scot's bikes have been unique from the beginning. His geometry is

and always has been closer to that found on road bikes than on the original mountain bike designs derived from the old Schwinn Excelsiors. This was partially due to his not having been part of the early Marin County mountain biking scene. Scot was from across the Bay, beyond the hills behind Oakland and he'd been riding fat tires on the dirt since he was eleven, twenty years ago.

"I don't know, I just liked riding on the dirt. Ten-speed racing bikes never appealed to me much. While my friends were spinning around on their drop-bars, I was doing wheelies up and down the street and pedaling off into the woods."

Then one day he read an article about some crazies in Marin County who were racing over the trails and fire roads on so-called mountain bikes. Scot drove over to find out what was happening, met Joe Breeze, Charlie Cunningham, etc. and that was it.

"It just clicked. I knew this was what I wanted to do."

He ended up working for Joe and learned how to build frames. But he wasn't satisfied with the design. The bikes didn't feel the way Scot wanted his bike to feel. He decided to



## By Hank Barlow

build one his way. The frame had 70-degree parallel angles, 17.25-inch chainstays, and a 42-inch wheelbase. Remember, most off-roads then were sporting 18 or 18.5-inch chainstays, 44 or 45-inch wheelbases, and 68 or 69-degree head angles. The only other builders at the time with similarly designed bikes were the two unrelated Cunninghams, Richard in S. California and Charlie in Marin County.

"My geometry basically hasn't changed at all since the first frame I built in 1981. I'm proud of that fact too. Especially since at the time, my first frame was pretty radical - steeper and shorter than any bike around."

What made him go so dramatically against the grain?

"The bikes then felt cumbersome. I wanted something light and agile. A shorter wheelbase, shorter rear triangle, and steeper head angle seemed like they'd give me what I wanted. And they did. To such an extent that today's frames are almost unchanged, a bit steeper seat tube and sometimes a tad shorter wheelbase is about all."

Considering the eventual evolution of mountain bike geometry, obviously Scot was way ahead of his time. If it sounds like

blind luck that he hit the geometry right on the money the first time he built a frame, it wasn't. Scot is one of mountain biking's most thoughtful builders. Everything he does has been carefully considered for some time. He is not a chaser of wild hairs. He studies what's been done, why it works or why it doesn't, what effect changes will have. Then he arrives at his own conclusions. Every time he hears about a frame breaking - any frame - he checks it out if possible. The information he gleans is then filed away in his memory bank for later use.

Scot wasn't alone in his experiments either. One of mountain biking's greatest strengths is the camaraderie that exists between builders. Information and construction methods are cheerfully shared. For example, the first time I talked to Scot for this profile, he was aligning forks in Ross Shaler's Salsa Cycles shop. The True Temper fork blades Scot was using didn't fit in his equipment so he drove down and used Ross's machine. Midway through the process, Ross turned Scot onto a faster, easier method of making one adjustment. There were no egos involved, no clashing of wills, just the simple sharing of information between two craftsmen.

So it wasn't as if Scot was alone in conceiving up his design in a vacuum of information when he built his first frame. Charlie Cunningham was of a similar mind and encouraged Scot in his pursuit. Without the support, encouragement, and shared enthusiasm of the other northern California builders, Scot may never have become building better and better bikes still exists within that mountain biking community. More impressively, companies as large as Specialized have become ardent supporters of these custom frame builders' efforts.

Scot walked into this scene at its inception and instantly recognized it. That was his world. If there is any such thing as karma, Scot's was to build Ibis mountain bike frames.

There had been absolutely nothing in his life to that point that could ever be construed as evidence of events to come. He graduated from the University of California at Davis (a town renowned for its intensive network of bike paths) with a Soils and Hydrology degree. He didn't have any particular goal in mind in such a course of study; he just found it interesting. He liked growing plants and wanted to learn more so that became his major. After graduation, he got a job in Alaska as a hydrologist for the U.S. Forest Service.

He fell in love with Alaska. His work for the Forest Service was practically a vacation. After that, Alaska became his summer home with sea kayaking along the spectacular Alaska coast his main activity. A few summers were also spent commercially fishing Alaska's waters.

Back in California, he worked at an environmental awareness school for kids where he met his future wife. At the end of that first season of teaching, he and Ginny began running the school. Teaching full time and managing the school's business end took up the next few years with extended vacations back in Alaska.

That background inadvertently provided Scot with a unique perspective on the entire mountain biking/environmental controversy - or non-controversy in Scot's view. The only conflict is social - between mountain bikers and hikers.

"I could set up a study and prove beyond a doubt that fat tires cause less damage than vibram-soled boots. It's simply a matter of selecting the right boots, the right walking style, the right riding style, the proper soil type and slope, etc. Anybody could do it. I could also do a study that proves skidding tires cause environmental damage. It's just a question of selecting the appropriate conditions to prove whichever point you want. But the bottom line is and always has been the social conflict between hiking and biking. The environmental issues essentially don't exist."

Unfortunately for mountain biking, there's currently no forum where Scot's



## The Rest of the Story

Ibis Cycles is far from being a one-man show with Scot always the star. It's a team effort and that fact doesn't take long to manifest itself to any visitor.

"The dedication and enthusiasm of the guys working with me has allowed me to make more bikes with higher quality than ever before."

According to Scot, Wes Williams, Ibis Cycles production manager, deserves more recognition than Scot does. Most of the painting responsibilities are handled by Lawrence Alberti. And despite her somewhat peripheral position with Ibis Cycles due to her own career, Ginny has played an integral part from the beginning. The Ibis logo and many of the most dramatically modern

paint jobs are all her work. Whenever a new design challenge presents itself, everyone, including Ginny, work together to come up with a solution.

Yet despite the professionalism of their combined efforts and the long hours of work they put in, they make a point of maintaining a perspective on life. They work hard but they play hard too. None are adherents of the fifty-week-a-year-and-two-weeks-off work schedule; two to three months off each year is more to their liking. That way they don't get burned out and they can maintain their enthusiasm for their efforts.

Still, while Ibis Cycles is a team effort, Scot is clearly the leader of the pack. His ability to delegate responsibilities and inspire all to their highest abilities is what has made Ibis Cycles what it is.

I spent a late afternoon and evening on Moab's Slickrock Trail with Scot and Joe Breeze and by the time we'd returned to the car at dusk, Scot had dramatically raised the trail's riding standards and designed in his head a bike specifically for the Slickrock. He rode his Trials bike and what he did out there with it had to be seen to be believed. But as impressive as his and Joe's riding were, it paled in comparison to the sheer fun they had. Both were like kids let out at recess with the world at their fingertips. It was an evening of magic that more graphically than any words ever could illustrate why mountain bike frame builders like Joe Breeze and Scot Nicol are as looked up to as they are and why the sport has taken off the way it has.

reasoned voice on the entire mountain biking/environmentalist argument can be heard. Scot's main problems with the entire mountain biking/environmentalist conflict are photos and text that all too frequently appear in magazines, photos of bikes in the air, dust flying, the rider "totally rad" and text that makes the sport sound like just the thing for the marginally insane.

"In the first place, that's just not what mountain biking is all about. That's BMX stuff. In the second place, those pictures constantly reinforce the Sierra Club's image of out-of-control bikers destroying the backcountry."

Anyone who has ever seen Scot precisely maneuver his trials bike over logs, rocks, etc. would instantly recognize that the popularized gravel spraying riding style has nothing to do with his vision of backcountry cycling. For Scot, mountain bikes are a land form of the sea kayak, a tool with which to pass through the backcountry, quietly and cleanly with respect for the land itself.

Scot's skill at building and riding trials bikes may have done more for his reputation than his mountain bikes. He's one of the best trials riders in the country and a leader in trials bike design. His designs have evolved in direct response to his and other's experiences riding. He's also remarkably open to suggestions and new ideas. That's how he

got involved with trials in the first place.

"I got into trials somewhat by accident. Tom Hilliard had weekly trials events going on in Santa Rosa and I showed up to see what was happening. I found out I had a natural affinity for trials. I did quite well on my early attempts and quickly gained the confidence to do more and ended up winning every event I entered that first year. I also had the advantage of being able to build my own bikes and those bikes gave me a tremendous advantage over the others. Now that more and more good trials bikes are available, the competition has really gotten tough."

Part of that is Scot's own doing. At almost any observed trials competition, Ibis trials bikes sporting their distinctive paint designs will be seen. That trend will undoubtedly increase in 1987 with the introduction of Scot's made-in-Japan trials bike, a bike that is almost identical to the custom models he normally builds except the price is less than \$500. The combination of high performance, low cost, and the Ibis name will no doubt insure the bike's success.

If the cycling industry had a recognized haute couture, Scot Nicol's name would be one of first to be mentioned. Despite - or perhaps because of - his environmental, adventurer background, he is thoroughly modern and into high tech. His home incorporates the latest in passive and active solar

systems while his shop is outfitted with the best frame jigs and tools on the market. Soon, Scot will be one of the only custom builders with a computerized system for keeping track of business. Knowing Scot's penchant for creative exploring, no doubt the computer will also be used in frame designing.

Yet were you to drive up to the shop, more than likely you'd find Scot on his knees rooting around out in the garden beneath a row of tomato plants heavy with prize tomatoes. Or out pruning a fruit tree or planting an experimental hybrid. Ibis Cycles is a curious mix of high tech industry and self-contained farm - by design. Selecting the Sebastopol area as their home was not an act of blind faith or accident. He and Ginny studied charts on northern California's various climates until they located what they consider the ideal climate. Their home is balanced between the rain forests of the California coast and the hot, dry inland valley. It's a climate in which just about anything that Scot wants to plant will grow. And plant he does. To listen to him and to watch him work around his home might convince you he's a farmer who builds bike frames in his spare time instead of the opposite being true. Judging by the output of both bike shop and garden, it's obvious that for Scot, the climate is ideal in its fertility for more than just plants.

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# New Products



Peggy Hatlem taking a spin in Pieter Muller's Pro Leisure SportArt tights & Lake shoes.

## Shoes

Most off roaders' attention is currently focused on the click-shifting derailleurs and latest brakes, both are making major changes in many riders' perceptions of mountain biking. Meanwhile, there's been a quiet but equally important evolution going on—the development of excellent mountain biking shoes. More and more shoes specifically designed for off-road use are on the market and the more there are, the better for all of us.

Feet are funny things. Not every foot will fit every shoe last even when the sizing is correct. Skiers are particularly aware of this. Some have Lange feet; some have Nordica feet. That's just the way it is. Same with cycling shoes. So the more there are to choose from, the better your chances of finding a

shoe to fit.

Lake has come out with a new mountain bike shoe, the Mountain Light in high-top and low-top versions. We've been wearing them for a month now in a variety of conditions and can report they're excellent in every respect. The sole design is the best we've tried yet, similar to the Rivat sole but better, with parallel grooves slanted at an angle for easy entry into clips and straps. Sole stiffness is excellent yet the shoes are great for walking in.

The shoes are well made and seem to run fairly true to size. The only complaint we heard was a desire for more width in the front but this is also typical of cycling shoes. The high-tops are great if your back-country cycling covers rugged terrain and should answer many a biker's complaint about the lack of a good high-top moun-

tain biking shoe. So far, have to give these Lake mountain biking shoes very high marks and a strong recommendation.

## Pieter Muller Pro Leisure Tights

Tights are in. The evidence is seen on every running track, climbing crag, football field, and bike path. No doubt about it, a pair of slick tights are sharp looking and rarely fail to add to an athlete's looks.

Now you can have quality tights that are guaranteed unique with the Pieter Muller Pro Leisure SportArt tights. Beautifully striking abstract designs are painted on each pair of tights by Colorado artist Carol Conner. The tights themselves are quality products with a fine fit and feel but it's the art work that really makes them stand out. Every design is signed by the artist and every one we've seen so far is a guaranteed eye-catcher.

Pro Leisure cycling shorts with SportArt insert panels painted by Carol will also be available.

Pieter Muller Pro Leisure, Box 1138, Crested Butte, CO, 81224, wholesale and retail prices available

## Avocet

We've become addicted to cyclometers. We've been using an Avocet Cyclometer for a few months now and having nothing but good to say about it. The four functions—speed, time, trip distance, and total distance traveled—are easy to read except at high speed on rough ground. Changing modes is accomplished with a large, hard-to-miss button. Accuracy can be as close as 99.9% for those into accuracy.

Mounting on a bike is a snap and even easier done than reading the directions. Avocet has also recently come out with an improvement have solved the only gripe we had with the unit. The standard transmitter fits onto the fork tips but because mountain bike forks are thicker than road forks, the fit is not always too good. What they did was come out with a rear transmitting unit that mounts on the seatstay. The ring that goes on the wheel also has a larger diameter and is attached to the spokes with straps instead of

snapping onto the flange, simultaneously solving the problem of wheels with high flanges.

The system works fine but for one slight problem—extra wheels. Because the ring is permanently attached with the straps, when you change wheels, your Cyclometer is either non-functional or you need a second ring. The transmitter also needs a piece of no-slip tape stuck to the seatstay or the unit slips around too easily. Either that or you have to tape it on.

Though we haven't tried this yet, it looks like the rear sending unit will also mount on the fork, answering the only other complaint we've heard. The wires running back to the rear sending unit aren't particularly attractive. What's needed is some sort of internal wiring system.

We also reviewed the Avocet Fat Slicks some time ago. We liked them for road riding but really loved them on the Slickrock. We still do. But while they were good on pavement, we thought they were unnecessarily fat and said we wished they'd come out with a 1.5 slick. Well, they have and these skinnier slicks are distinctly faster than the fat versions. They're great town tires. But on the rock, stick with the fat ones; you'll need the extra air volume for comfort and the extra surface area for traction.

## Spenco Hot and Cold Wraps

If you have to ice your knees or anything else regularly, go buy some of these Spenco Cold Wraps. They're the ticket. We saw them advertised in our magazine and decided to find out if they work. They do, superbly. All you do is store them in the freezer and they're always ready. Just wrap them around the knees - or elbow or whatever you need to ice - and sit back and relax. There's no holding an ice bag on or pools of water forming on the floor as the ice melts.

Cold Wraps come in three sizes but if your knees are the problem, get the largest size. A long elastic belt wraps around to hold them in place. Evidently the contents are some 95% water but the rest of the ingredients are a secret. Whatever it is, they work great.

We haven't used the Hot Wrap but, based on how well the cold version works, there's no doubt the Hot Wraps do too. The Hot Wraps can be heated in a Microwave oven or regular oven then you just put them on just like the Cold Wrap.

## Wilderness Trail Bikes Grease-Guard Hubs

Wilderness Trail Bikes (WTB), the folks who brought you the original Speedmaster roller cam brakes, grafted shifters, fixed angle seatposts, Toe Flips, and modified Zelal Solibloc seatpost pumps have now introduced their Grease Guard Hub.

All high performance mountain bikes have some sort of sealed bearing hub. But in truth, sealed hubs are not totally sealed. Water and water-borne contaminants still get in. That contamination is slow but it occurs, necessitating periodic re-greasing of the bearings. This is also one are of bicycle maintenance that is invariably ignored until it's too late.

The WTB Grease-Guard hub solves this dilemma. What

they've done is borrow an idea from the car industry; zinc fittings are built into the hub design. A special grease gun is included with every set of hubs. All you have to do is stick the gun into the zinc fitting and inject grease until you see the clean grease squeezing out. By pushing the contaminated grease out, the bearings are cleaned and lubed at the same time. It's a trick idea and works exactly the way it's supposed to.

The hubs themselves are very light, strong, and beautifully machined and polished while the bearings themselves are oversized and built to exacting standards. Quite a few excellent hubs are on the market but with WTB's introduction of the Grease-Guard system, the others are going to have to come up with something equally dramatic to compete. The hubs aren't cheap; in fact they're expensive. But in the realm of high performance hubs, their lubrication and cleaning system makes them exceptional plus their life expectancy should be exceptionally long since they will always be lubed with clean grease.



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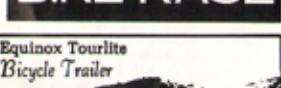
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Courtesy of Calypso Tours

Lunchbreak on the summit of  
Whitecap Mountain.

Across the water a pair of fishermen were preparing to sally forth to earn their evening's meal.

I suddenly felt hungrier than I had in months so we reluctantly wheeled home. A vague while later, as I decadently devoured one last morsel of succulent lobster meat, Tom mentioned the possibility of a sea-kayaking trip in the days ahead. That night, just before drifting into a blissful sleep, I dreamed of pedaling a sea kayak over rolling hills on dogwoods in the beach... sort of like Lucy in the sky with diamonds!

One of the advantages of adventure vacations is the chance to get up early and still relax - no breakfast indigestion, no traffic to fight, no deadlines or bosses yelling at you. No matter what the day's schedule calls for, you are in omnipotent control.

In my case, the plan was a short car trip to the Rockport/Gloucester area with Bill Armstrong, one of Tom's competent and friendly tour leaders, and Clark, a member of Tom's mechanics corp. Bill turned out to be a virtual scholar/historian of the Northeast coastal area with years of road and off-road riding experience to his credit as well as extensive winter backpacking expertise in New Hampshire, Vermont, Massachusetts, and Nova Scotia. Clark, a high school junior, was working for Tom as a bike assembler and mechanic to earn money for college and, perhaps more importantly, a new mountain bike.

We rode through the "Dogtown" area, a hilly, forested land once infamous for the packs of wild dogs running rampant. As we pumped up the twisting trails and passed old granite quarries, Bill informed me the area was popular with both mountain bikers and "au naturel" sunbathers, not mutually exclusively. I had borrowed a Cammendale bike from the shop and it proved it's mettle on the steep, rocky single tracks. Most of the time I was off the saddle, wrestling with the bucking trail with one part of my mind and screaming in pleasure with another. Clean passages required practiced technical skills, especially when making the transitions from granite to loose gravel and dirt.

More and more I learned to appreciate the need for what I once thought of as a mythical East coast geometry. Somehow the tight, squirrely, on-the-edge riding style evoked memories of my first experience with short ski mogul bashing. Quickness and finesse, along with few inhibiting fears, made for the best package of fun on the hairier sections. I was enjoying the ride so much, I completely forgot to shoot any photos and returned later in the day to do so.

Another precious day was spent and that night my dreams featured whale-sized mosquitoes catching rays in the moguls.

## Maine and Beyond

by Graham Ullrich

I sweltered in the throes of a blazingly humid Houston summer afternoon, perspiration streaming over my stress-contorted facial features. Muscles were taut with concentration, the intensity gripping my body like wood in a vise.

Was I attempting to clean a tricky section of trail on my mountain bike? Fear! I was ensconced in another heat-shimmering ocean of vehicles stuck in the rush hour jam, desperately maneuvering to avoid imminent collisions at every creeping mile of the way.

Buckling my seat belt in preparation for landing at Boston's Logan International Airport, I shuddered at the recollection and gave thanks for having momentarily escaped the Texas heat. I'd signed up for a short vacation with Tom Horton, owner of Calypso Excursions in Newburyport, Massachusetts. I walked out of the airport and inhaled the pungent Atlantic ocean air mixed liberally with the smell of exhaust. I breathed deep in anticipation of adventures to come.

Tom proved an extremely capable, interesting, and friendly host. Alternately wearing hats of tour guide, business manager, bike mechanic, general catalyst, and bizarre philosopher ("All things are liquid"). Tom seems at once a man of intensity and action with a sense of humor just this side of a Salvador Dali version of George Carlin. He started his business by renting bikes on the dunes of nearby Plum Island, soon bought a Park bike stand, and eventually developed a booming rental/repair business. Since then, Calypso Excursions has developed into a hotbed of mountain biking entertainment

catering to fat tire enthusiasts of all ages. Mountain bike balloon chases, rum-rides (my term) in Hain and Jamaica, rum hopping in Mexico, even combination sea-kayaking/ island biking are all included in the Calypso adventure library along with a variety of local tours, several of which I was about to experience.

Tom suggested we start with a ride to Plum Island on road bikes so, after a Clark Kent change, we launched ourselves over the bridge and out along the beach road. Most of the island is a thirteen to fourteen-mile stretch of wildlife refuge sheltering nesting terns plus the long beach has some of the best body and wind surfing along the coast. As long as you avoid the carnivorous "green head" fly season, the pristine beaches and sparkling water can do miracles in clearing out the societal "rush, rush, rush" webs most of us city dwellers too often become entangled in.

Later that day we sped north a few miles to one of the local's favorite rides in the nearby Modjeski Estate. This beautiful four-hundred and fifty acre area of rolling hills was willed to the state several years ago and is now a state park. Within its borders are sixteen miles of marked trails and many more unmarked trails, all open to hiker, biker, and horseback rider alike. We rode over mown fields of grass and through forests of pine and oak and lingered near a waterfall before following a path strewn with dogwood blossoms and lined with flowering mountain laurels. Emerging from the cocoon of flowers, we were presented with a splendid view of the Merrimack River valley.



The following morning was overcast as a coastal front moved in. I approached the sleek, ruddered sea kayak with considerable trepidation; I'd never been in any boat more tipsy than a canoe and the wind was blowing about fifteen to twenty-five mph. We paddled out past the Ipswich yacht club (with stiff upper lips) and out toward the southern end of Plum Island. After a spartan lunch, my companions decided we should try some wave "surfing" before heading home. Suffice to say my inglorious exit from the kayak and subsequent chilly paddle home wore me out completely so once again I was in bed early, but this time no dreams enlivened my sleep.

I met Lucille Lucas, another Calypso tour leader and enjoyable macro-individual, the next morning at Middle Street Foods where we had breakfast and picked up our lunch (they supply the most delicious, elegant tour lunches I've ever eaten) prior to our departure for Maine.

We rambled into East Andover, Maine several hours later, followed back roads and eventually ended up at the Norwegian-styled Calypso Lodge overlooking Lovetoy Valley in the Mahoosuc Mountains. The rest of our group, having arrived earlier, were out on an exploratory ride so Lucille and I unshipped our gear, suited up, and blazed away.

I've mountain biked in Utah, Colorado, Texas, and Cape Cod but none of those experiences had prepared me for the aura of wisdom emanating from the old mountains surrounding us. We were riding on Farmers Mountain near the Ellis River and I felt such an age-old grace permeating the area that I rode as quietly as possible. Jeep trails penetrated most of the nearby mountains and Lucille led me on a majestic ride over and around Black Mountain and Horseshoe Pond, arriving back at the cabins amidst the shouts and laughter of our buddies.

Two of the cabins' most intriguing and

enjoyable features were their complete lack of modern plumbing and electricity. If this sounds like tongue-in-cheek sarcasm, it isn't. We cooked on gas stoves and drank cold beer from a gas-fired refrigerator. A superbly furnished indoor chemical toilet was available but I preferred the two-seater outdoor house with its rack of reading material. Finally the warm glow of gas lamps helped ease the transition from boisterous dinner and card playing to deep slumber beneath mounds of quilted blankets.

I awoke ready and eager to ride. Several of the group had found an "awesome" track the day before and we took off after them into the woods. After several miles of overgrown jeep trail, we spilled out into a clearing of sorts and held a quick "what to do if you get lost" council. Yesterday's scout had marked much of the trail with survey tape so the word was "stick to that tape and you can't get lost."

Our path wound up the side of Whitecap Mountain, elevation 2100', roughly following a dry stream bed. Dismounting to push through particularly thick vegetation soon stretched the group out over several hundred yards. Soon, too soon, mosquitoes discovered us, fresh for their drinking pleasure, so out came the repellent, a "natural" Maine blend that worked the wonders it's label boasted of even in the sweating heat of the day.

The trail had become considerably steeper and I was reduced to pushing my bike more often than not. Just when my mind had deduced the hounds of hell had me in their grasp, we broke out into a scattered stand of scrub pines. Ahead we espied splotchy patches that quickly resolved into a quilt work of lichen, brush, pines, and granite mountain top. Mountain top? We had made it to the top! My relief was so great I recklessly pedaled helter-skelter and promptly lost my bearings. Luckily Lucille had managed to keep me in sight and while

hearing me back to the group, reminded me that lichen were living plants and extremely delicate. I looked back on my destructive pedalling spree with chagrin and vowed to respect my elders (the lichen) from then on.

We found shelter from the cool mountain breeze in a cove of pines and proceeded to break out the eats. Everyone was quiet and contemplating the scenery extending beyond the limits of our vision for miles in every direction. All the mountains in sight were tree covered and stooped with old age like the rounded shoulders of my grandfather. I felt once again that extremely wise enveloping touch in my mind. After resting for an hour, we packed up and made tracks for home. Tom reminded everyone to keep an eye on the survey tape. I was cruising with the slower riders and the front group was quickly lost to sight.

Leave it to me...I forgot what color tape we were to follow. So had the others. We spent some forty-five minutes wandering around the mountain top like lost sheep trying to find the one correct trail down. Survey tape was everywhere (presumably from other groups) and we ran the goose chase down and up, down and up until one rider finally yelled, "Hey, fresh tracks!" My feeling of relief lasted all of five minutes until we moved off the relatively flat hilltop and onto the ever-steeper sides. Tree branches whipped past and brakes squealed in protest as our tires slipped on the pine needles and loose gravel. This was a downhill learning experience the likes of which I had never before seen.

We finally hit bottom and after several missed turns and a disconcerting bridge which kept appearing and disappearing as I crossed and recrossed my tire prints, we arrived at the lodge completely spent. A fantastic steak dinner finale revived me and as I washed down my second helping with some fine Moosehead, I reflected on a vacation which left me tired but rested, elated, and gloriously happy with life. The hard work and new experiences, the challenges I might not have sought alone, the friendly people I wouldn't have met otherwise completed a wonderful week of fun and adventure with Tom's Calypso Excursions. The tense traffic and heat and humidity of summer-time Houston wouldn't be any better upon my return but at least I had a memory full of wonder to enjoy. More importantly, my thirst for adventure, rather than being quenched, was spurred on to ever broader horizons. The light home was spent reading Tom's catalog of trips and dreaming about mountain bikes in far away places.

For more information write or call:

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## Staff Comments

Every once in awhile, we receive a letter complaining about photos we run, specifically photos of bikers in the midst of wildflowers. According to these readers, such pictures are horrible for the image of mountain biking and worse for the environment and they are generally outraged that we would run such photos. They are of course correct. It is definitely not wise to ride off through fields of wildflowers or any other fragile environment; that's why we have never run any such pictures and why our editorial position has consistently respected such environmental concerns.

What we have run and will continue to run are pictures of riders on trails that traverse fields of wildflowers. Many of our favorite rides around Crested Butte are our favorites precisely because of the wildflowers. Following a single-track through meadows of flowers is absolutely grand, one of those things you've got to do to fully believe. By mid summer, those flowers are waist deep and catching on the handlebars. We ride through waves of pinks, yellows, blues, purples, and reds.

Naturally, when the vegetation is that deep, photos of riders passing through rarely show the trail. Heck, sometimes the trail is almost impossible for the rider to see so thick is the vegetation.

Some folks will probably claim that we

shouldn't even run such pictures whether the rider is on a trail or not because readers might think that there isn't a trail and that therefore it's okay to ride through wildflowers because they saw it in MBM.

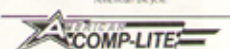
First, I believe our readers are more intelligent than that. Second, if the magazine really has that powerful an influence on people's actions, we're in the wrong business; religion would be a far more profitable course for us. Third, anyone who really believes that mountain bikers can go anywhere they want is dramatically exaggerating the capabilities of mountain bikes. As phenomenal as these wonderful bikes are, they're still limited as to where they can go. Without a trail, the bikes won't go very far.

So we will continue to feature photos of mountain bikers in beautiful settings; such settings are why many of us ride the bikes in the first place. And no doubt, the trail won't be visible in most of the pictures. We will also continue our editorial policy of promoting environmental concerns and responsible backcountry riding. And for anyone's information, the photo on page 49 of the May/June issue was taken along the Teocalli Ridge trail near Crested Butte, one of Colorado's finest mountain biking routes and the site of the Fat Tire Bike Week State Race. Believe me, following the trail is plenty of challenge without attempting to ride that terrain with no trail whatsoever.

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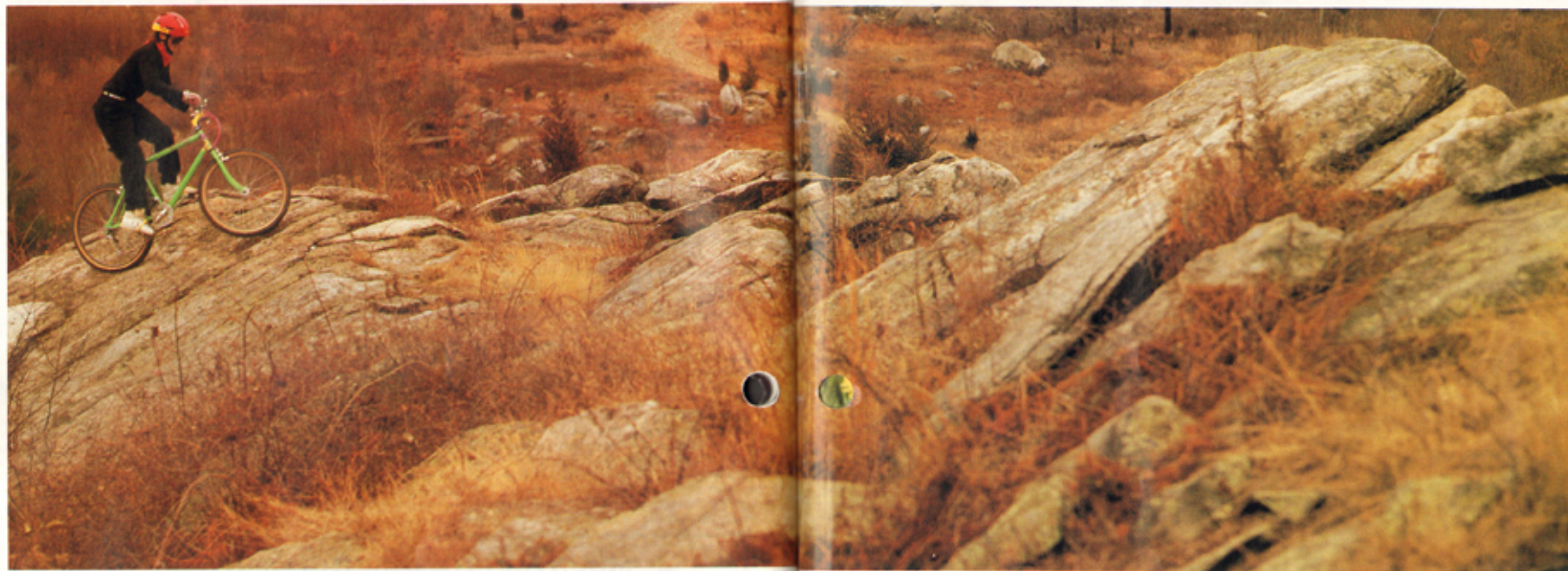
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