

Mountain Madness 2005

(If this is Madness, Let's Make the Most of It)

DAY 1 -FRONTRANGIA

Sunday June 19, Lakewood to Silverthorne (84 Miles)

This ride starts out on the west side of Lakewood and winds its way out of town through quiet residential neighborhoods, across the shoulder of Green Mountain, over Dinosaur Ridge, and through Red Rocks Park. From Red Rocks Park, the ride will climb up Bear Creek Canyon to the town of Evergreen (the type locality for mountain sprawl in Colorado). After Evergreen, the Route will follow U.S. 6 from El Rancho to the gold mining towns of Idaho Springs, Dumont, Downieville, Georgetown, Silver Plume, and Bakersville on the approach to Loveland Pass. The high point of the day will be Loveland Pass (11,990 ft. elevation) where you will cross the continental divide. From Loveland Pass it's downhill to the Comfort Inn Suites in Silverthorne.

The principal difficulties for the day will be the long gradual climb of the Loveland Pass approach, and of course, Loveland Pass itself. Accommodations and amenities in Silverthorne are uptown (pool, hot tub, Starbucks, bakeries, nice restaurants and high end retail). Exercise facilities are also available if you need a supplemental workout after hauling your carcass over Loveland Pass. Me, I'll be hanging out in the hot tub eating pastries.



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DAY 2 – SKI COUNTRY

Monday June 20, Silverthorne to Leadville (77 Miles)

Today's tour traverses Summit and Eagle Counties where they mine gold the modern way, tourism and skiing. The route crosses Swan Mountain (a mere bump) with beautiful views of Lake Dillon before picking up the bike path in Frisco. From Frisco, the bike path will take you through Copper Mountain and up over Vail Pass (10,700 ft.) before dropping into the Vail valley. Hang onto your billfolds y'all! After Vail the route passes through Minturn on the way to Battle Mountain Summit (9,295 ft.) and Red Cliff. The view from the bridge at Red Cliff is one of the most scenic vistas in Colorado. From Red Cliff the road climbs past Camp Hale, home of the 10th Mountain Division and up to the continental divide at Tennessee Pass (10,479 ft.) before reaching the day's destination of Leadville (the highest incorporated town in the U.S.A at 10,210 ft.). Leadville is a turn-of-the-century mining town with lots of Victorian charm.

The principal difficulties of the day will be Swan Mountain, Vail Pass, Battle Mountain and Tennessee Pass. Accommodations in Leadville at the Timberline Motel are rustic (Colorado code for a little funky) but clean. The motel has a hot tub and is located in the historic downtown area near nice restaurants and watering holes. It is also within walking distance of the National Mining Museum which is worth a visit if you have time.



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DAY 3 – ROARING FORK

Tuesday June 21, Leadville to Basalt (78 Miles)

Three thousand feet of climbing is hardly worth getting on your bike for, but if you ignore the first and only climb of the day, the five thousand-foot descent over the last forty miles of the route should result in Lance-like improvements to your average speed. The ride follows highway 24 south out of Leadville along the foot of the Sawatch Range before turning west at Balltown to start the climb up Independence Pass. The 14 mile climb to the continental divide (12,095 ft.) gains almost three thousand feet as you pass between the Hunter-Fryingpan and Collegiate Peaks Wilderness Areas. Descend into Aspen at a high rate of speed applying your brakes as needed to miss the beautiful people. Be sure to enjoy the view of the Maroon Bells as you pass through Aspen. The road from Aspen descends gently to Basalt at the confluence of the Roaring Fork and Fryingpan rivers.

Only one difficult thing today: Independence Pass. Enjoy. Accommodations in Basalt are located on the Fryingpan River at the Best Western Aspenalt Lodge (hot tub, continental breakfast, and wall-to-wall trout). Shops and restaurants in downtown Basalt are just a block away.



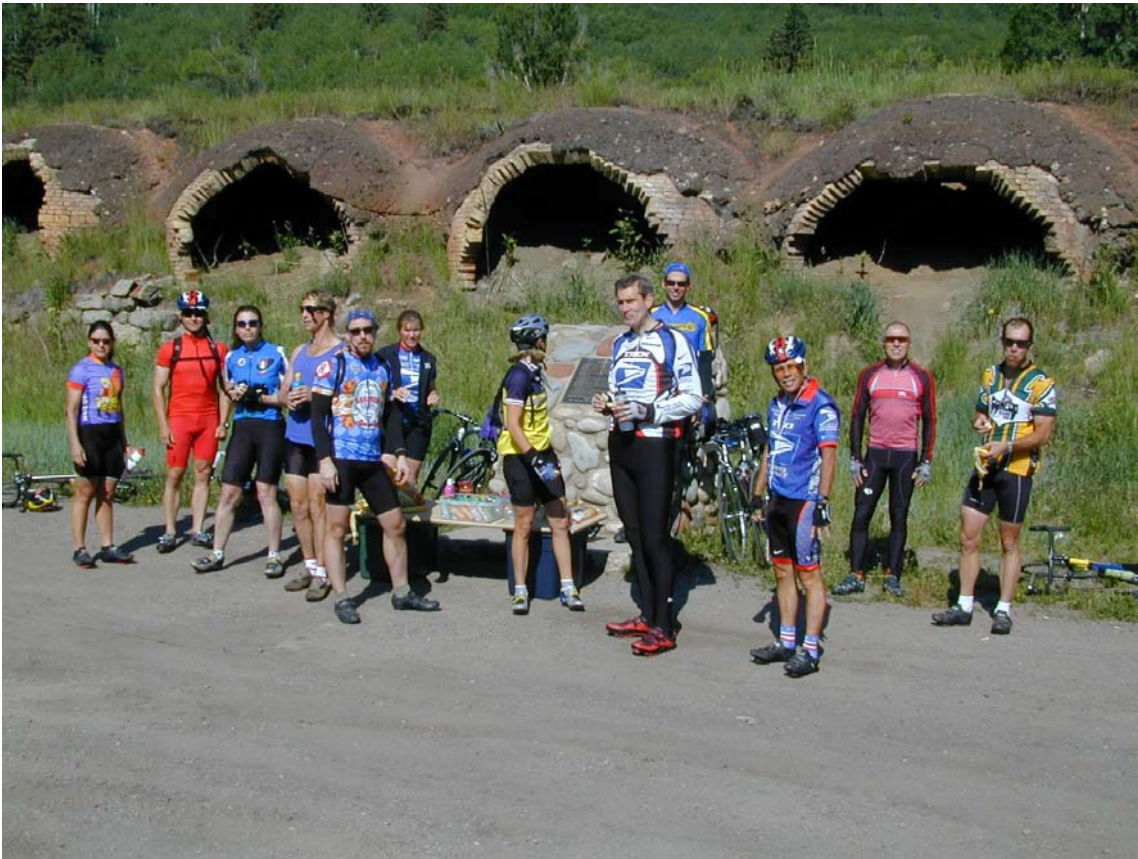
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DAY 4 – WESTERN SLOPE

Wednesday June 22, Basalt to Hotchkiss (77 Miles)

Today is another one-humper. The only thing that stands between you, a beverage, and some well deserved rack time is McClure Pass. The route from Basalt to Hotchkiss follows the Crystal River from Carbondale through Red Stone and Marble to the top of McClure Pass at 8,755 feet. Carry a camera as this is one of the most beautiful areas in the state. From the top of McClure Pass you will descend into coal country and pass through the mining towns of Somerset, Bowie, and Paonia before reaching your hotel in Hotchkiss. The struggle for the west is in full swing here with hairy knuckled miners and oil drillers battling bunny-hugging trust-a-farians for control of the local politics. Paonia is home of the Mountain Coal Company, West Elk Mine, High Country Citizens Alliance, and world headquarters for the High Country News. Be sure to argue politics with the locals as you pass through.

McClure pass is the only obstacle on today's ride. Enjoy the short day as the next three are going to be long. Accommodations are at the Hotchkiss Inn. Sorry, no hot tubs or other luxuries, but you will have a shower and roof over your head for the night.



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DAY 5– BLACK MESA – BLUE MESA - POWDERHORN

Thursday June 23, Hotchkiss to Lake City (114 Miles)

The route today follows the north rim of the Black Canyon, skirts Blue Mesa Reservoir and ends in Lake City, home of Colorado's most famous cannibal, Alfred Packer. The road from Hotchkiss rolls gently through Crawford (Joe Cocker, the musician, owns the only bar in town) before climbing up to the top of Black Mesa which forms the North Rim of the Black Canyon. Enjoy spectacular glimpses of the canyon over the next 20 miles, but don't over cook the turns on the descent while gawking at the scenery. Cross the canyon at Blue Mesa Dam and ride along Colorado's longest reservoir for the next 17 miles. After the reservoir, the road climbs and descends over Nine-Mile and Powderhorn hills before gradually climbing up to Lake City. Towns and traffic are sparse in this part of Colorado. Don't miss any opportunities to eat or fill up a water bottle.

The principal difficulties of the day will be Black Mesa (9,130 ft.), Nine-Mile Hill (8,957 ft.), and Powderhorn Hill (8,934 ft.). Accommodations in Lake City are at the Silver Spur Motel near the historic town square and within walking distance of restaurants and saloons.



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DAY 6 – SOUTHWEST STYLE

Friday June 24, Lake City to Monte Vista (101 Miles)

Today's ride may cross the continental divide at Spring Creek Pass (10,898), but it will seem like a bump in the road after the climb up Slumgullion Pass (11,536 ft.). The road from Lake City starts climbing immediately, passing the Alfred Packer Party memorial on its way up to the summit of Slumgullion Pass. From the top of Slumgullion, it's downhill (more or less) all the way to Creed. Stop and enjoy a cappuccino (or whatever) in Creed because the rest of the day should be pretty easy compared to yesterday. After Creed the road gradually descends passing through the towns of South Fork and Del Norte before arriving at the day's destination in Monte Vista. Monte Vista is located in the San Luis Valley, home of one of the hottest water wars in the west, and is one of the oldest (and poorest) sections of the state. The ambiance in Monte Vista is down to earth with a heavy Spanish influence. Mexican food is the best bet for dinner.

Accommodations in Monte Vista are at the Comfort Inn. Have a margarita, soak in the hot tub, relax in the pool, but be sure to get a good nights sleep because tomorrow will be a long day in the saddle.



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DAY 7 – UFO ALLEY

Saturday June 25, Monte Vista to Gunnison (105 Miles)

Look for space aliens and alligators as you ride up the San Luis Valley between the Sawatch and Sangre de Cristo mountain ranges. The route today follows the gun barrel through the northern San Luis Valley which is the home of Colorado's hot spring alligators, UFO fly-bys and many other unexplained mysteries. Enjoy a fast ride along the flats for the first 22 miles. Civilization ends at Saguache so stock up on water and snacks. Head west at Saguache and follow the road gently upward toward the summit of North Pass. Descend through beautiful Cochatopa Canyon into the Gunnison Country. Today's stop is the home of Western State College and some of the toughest cyclists you will find in Colorado.

The principal difficulty of the day is North Pass at 10,149 feet elevation. Accommodations are at the Hylander Motel. The owner is an old roommate of mine who would gladly share the dirt on me from my college days. Don't trust him.



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DAY 8 – TAYLOR PARK

Sunday June 26, Gunnison to Buena Vista (67 Miles)

Today's ride heads north out of Gunnison toward Crested Butte. Follow the Gunnison River to Almont and head up Taylor Canyon. Look for bighorn sheep and rock climbers on the left as you ride up the canyon. The road rises gently up to Taylor Reservoir where the climb over the continental divide begins. The road over Cottonwood Pass includes a 10-mile dirt section which runs from Taylor Park to the summit. It's a good dirt road with a hard mag-chloride surface. If you really, really, really, don't want to ride it, we will give you a bump to the top. The back side of the pass is smooth pavement, downhill all of the way to Buena Vista. We might even be able to arrange a tail wind.

The high point of the day will be Cottonwood Pass at 12,126 ft elevation. It's a short day and a one-humper so take your time and enjoy the scenery. We will be staying at the Great Western Sumac Lodge in downtown Buena Vista. It is strategically located near Bongo Billy's for those of you who need an espresso fix to get going in the morning. The evening's entertainment will be a T-shirt exchange organized by Susan.



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DAY 9 – ARKANSAS RIVER VALLEY

Monday June 27, Buena Vista to Westcliffe (71 Miles)

Buena Vista to Westcliffe is a short day with no major mountain passes. Cruise easy and take a recovery day on the bike. The ride heads south out of Buena Vista along the Arkansas River. Enjoy the rolling terrain and beautiful views of the Sawatch Range as you ride along Highway 285 toward Salida. The valley hosts a thriving river rafting industry with boating companies stretching as far as the eye can see. Turn east at Salida and follow the Arkansas River into a red granite canyon to the confluence with Texas Creek. At Texas Creek, the road will climb gently (mostly) to the co-joined towns of Westcliffe and Silvercliffe. Westcliffe and Silvercliffe have a long and storied gold and silver mining history. Go poke around the mining ruins east of town and enjoy spectacular views of the Sangre de Cristo Range with the knowledge that you won't have to climb them in the morning.

It should be an easy day. Accommodations will be at the Westcliffe Inn which is a short walk from town. No frills but you can visit the library, have a cappuccino or just hang out and relax.



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DAY 10 – SOUTH PARK

Tuesday June 28, Westcliffe to Fairplay (104 Miles)

No major mountain passes again today, but after Canyon City, the road will climb generally upward to Fairplay. Head east out of Westcliffe past Querida (an old mining district that once had a population of over 10,000). The road descends along Hardscrabble Creek before heading toward Florence and Canyon City. You can stop in Canyon City and tour the old Super-Max prison facility if you are so inclined. From Canyon City the route heads past the Royal Gorge before turning north on Highway 9 to South Park. South Park is notorious for some incredibly foul-mouthed little kids, and yes, the creators of the cartoon really grew up here. The final destination is Fairplay which is a turn-of-the-century mining town that was settled by miners from Cripple Creek who were looking for a better deal.

The principal difficulty of the day is the length of the stage which gradually climbs. Accommodations are at the Fairplay Hotel which was built in the late 1800's. No hot tub, but you can get dinner and a drink in the lobby. You can also stick your finger in the elk's nose if you want to.



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DAY 11 – THE OTHER TRIPLE BYPASS

Wednesday June 29, Fairplay to Winter Park (85 Miles)

This is the other Triple Bypass. The day's route starts on the eastern slope, crosses the continental divide to the western slope, crosses the continental divide again to the eastern slope, and finishes back on the western slope. The ride goes up or down without much flat in-between. Start from Fairplay and ride north through Alma to cross the continental divide at the infamous Hoosier (Who's Your Daddy) Pass (11,542 ft.). Descend to Breckenridge and ride over the hateful hump (Swan Mountain) to Frisco. Climb over the continental divide again at Loveland Pass (11,990 ft.). Descend to Empire and start climbing again over Berthoud Pass (11,315 ft.). Did I mention that this route is incredibly beautiful when viewed through the fog of oxygen debt?

Accommodations in Winter Park, are at the Sundowner Motel. Enjoy the hot tub, fine dining, and lick your wounds. We will be climbing again tomorrow.



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DAY 12 – ROCKY MOUNTAIN NATIONAL PARK

Thursday June 30, Winter Park to Estes Park (79 Miles)

Today is another beautiful ride. Head north out of Winter Park toward Granby and Grand Lake. From Grand Lake the route follows Trail Ridge Road into Rocky Mountain National Park and crosses the continental divide at 12,183 ft (the highest paved through road in the United States). Fly down hill from the summit passing tourists, Winnebagos, and other slow moving vehicles while being careful to keep it on the road and avoid the chasm below. Estes Park is all about tourism, and can be congested in June. Watch out for elk jams, goat jams and other wildlife induced traffic hazards that can cause erratic driver behavior.

The day's ride is only a one humper, but it is a big one. We will be staying at the Alpine Trail Ridge Inn. It is close to Rocky Mountain National Park, Town, and Mini Golf. The evening's entertainment will be a competition to crown the Mountain Madness Mini Golf Champion.



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DAY 13 – PEAK TO PEAK HIGHWAY

Friday July 1, Estes Park to Idaho Springs (74 Miles)

Today's ride rolls along the Peak to Peak Highway from Estes Park to Idaho Springs. Head south out of Estes Park on Highway 7 enjoying beautiful views of Rocky Mountain National Park and the Indian Peaks Wilderness. Along the way you will pass some interesting (eccentric?) old mining towns like Ward (famous for the documentary movie "Grandpas Chilling in the Tough Shed") and Nederland. Farther down the road, the route goes through Black Hawk and Central City which have replaced mining with casino gambling as their primary source of income. Please feel free to stop and donate to the local economy.

Accommodations in Idaho Springs are at the H and H Motor Lodge, complete with hot tub. For a more alpine experience, cool your toes in Clear Creek, which is just a stones throw away. Check out the mill tailings and the historic Argo Mill, which offers tours of the mine and mill, or just hang out and enjoy your last evening in the high mountains.



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DAY 14 – SQUAW PASS AND MT. EVANS

Saturday July 2, Idaho Springs to Lakewood (82 Miles)

Today is your chance to ride the highest paved road in the United States (or not, if the barn is calling). From Idaho Springs you will climb up Squaw Pass to Echo Lake. At Echo Lake you will have the choice of riding up to the summit of Mt. Evans at 14,264 feet or you can take the short way home by continuing over Squaw Pass (11,067 ft.) to Morrison. Those of you who choose to climb Mt. Evans should be aware that some cyclists spontaneously combust above 13,000 feet. Bring extra clothes because summer never happens at 14,000 feet. From the Mt. Evans cul-de-sac you backtrack along the road you came up, finish Squaw Pass, and descend to Evergreen. It is a short descent from Evergreen to Lakewood, the final destination of the trip.

Accommodations will be at the Stonebridge Hotel, the place where this whole adventure began. We will have a final dinner and party together somewhere to say goodbye and celebrate not having to get up and ride our bikes on Sunday.

