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Galibier. Image: Paolo Ciaberta.

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Sammi Runnels riding. Wil Matthews shooting.



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Silk Road Mountain Race. Image: Danil Usmanova/Silk Road Mountain Race.

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Much of the bonafide action displayed in *Peloton* magazine is potentially dangerous. All of the cyclists seen in these photos are experienced.

Do not attempt to ride beyond your own capabilities, use caution and discretion and wear a helmet and other appropriate protective gear.

Rubber side down my friends! *Peloton* magazine is published 8 times per year by Move Press, LLC, 308 South Fulton, Suite A, Ojai, CA 93023.

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The Racetrack

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Silk Road Mountain Race. Image: Daryl Lynamova/Silk Road Mountain Race.

47 MINUTES

In a cycling life there are always lulls in motivation and fitness. Some years hum by with big miles and big milestones and other months and years, not so much.

I'm in the middle of a not-so-much few weeks. I hike and try and run (slowly and more like a linebacker with a bad Achilles than an actual runner). It's easy to put on shoes and get out the door for 30 minutes and run around the neighborhood. Much harder to plan a ride, kit up and go out for a few hours. Hikes are great for podcast listening and as a break from all things for a few hours, but they aren't bike rides.

In the end, though, nothing heals and transforms me like a bike ride. I know there are people smarter than me who write about flow states and cycling as meditation and how the repetitive motion of pedaling combined with a heightened state of awareness does something magical to your brain and soul. It's all true. The gift is in the riding.

I know that when I ride my bike more, I'm better at everything. I'm a better dad, a better husband, happier and calmer. I think about things in a spiritual way more often. I work more efficiently, I have more ideas and I feel like the world is going to be okay. I sleep better and cook more inventive meals. I read more.

But, like all of us, I have periods where I can't seem to get out on my bike consistently. I have zero excuses. I ride bikes for a

living. It's part of my job. I can ride any time during any day and have a reason to do so. The *Peloton* office is filled with new bikes, products, kits, the latest innovations designed to make riding more enjoyable and, yet, I have periods where I just wander around the office, look at everything, then walk to Taco Tuesday at Casa de Lago.

Also, the local gym sends us its class schedule. I imagine myself in the front row of a Zumba class. I should also probably learn tai chi. The gym has spin classes every hour, every day. And it has a snack bar that serves a great club sandwich, with Topa Topa beer on tap. Tennis matches are on the television and there are swimming goggles on sale at the front desk. There are towels you can borrow.

All of it is just a distraction. What I really need to do is get out on a bike for 47 minutes; then ride again the next day; then plan a longer ride on Saturday with Sean and Dave; and then sign up for the Ghent-Wevelgem sportive or another event closer to home. And then the Greek chorus appears: Start riding more, don't stop, keep going.

In the end it's what we all need and it only takes 47 minutes to begin.

I'm done writing this. I'm going on a ride. You should too.

Enjoy Issue No. 91. *Pm*

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All images: Jered Gruber



Riding one of Tuscany's white roads near Castellina in Chianti, Italy.





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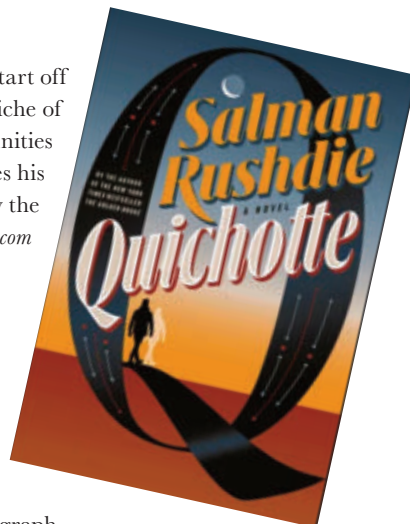
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“QUICHOTTE,” BY SALMAN RUSHDIE If you are looking for a book to start off 2020, consider this one. As Jason Sheehan at NPR said: “It is a pastiche of Cervantes’s Don Quixote that’s set among America’s immigrant communities and goes 110 percent off the rails almost the minute Rushdie establishes his connection to the source material.” That should peak your interest. And, by the way, “Quichotte” is pronounced the French way: “key-shot.” \$28. Powells.com



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FEEDBACK SPORTS TEAM EDITION TOOL KIT We have been using this kit for more than a month and are really impressed. It’s about the width of a laptop sleeve and conveniently hangs from a bike stand. Combine that with the build quality and the number of tools included and it makes doing everyday maintenance a breeze at home or on the road. \$249.99. feedbacksports.com Pm


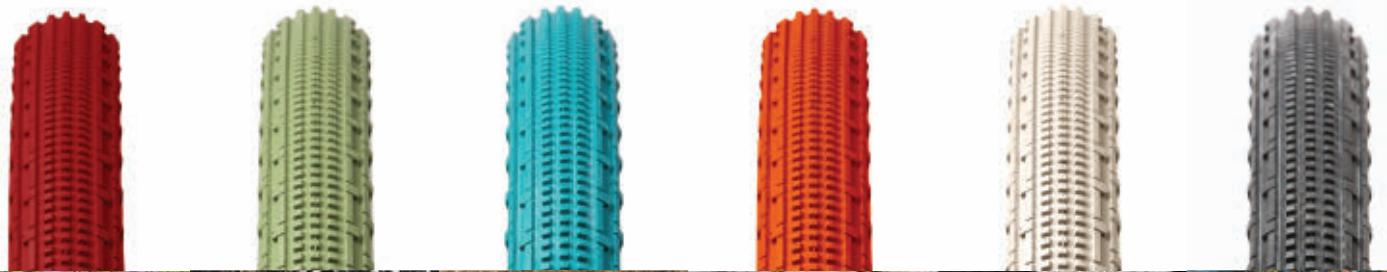




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LOOK 765 GRAVEL RS. Look has long been known for distinctive silhouettes and component integrations in its carbon bikes. So why should anything change for the French brand's gravel bikes? Maybe it's the beefy Look gravel-specific stem and the way it integrates

into the head tube, but we'd be able to immediately pick the 765 Gravel RS sans-branding out of a lineup. For its gravel debut, Look has started from scratch, concocting an entirely new carbon layup from multiple types of fibers tuned specifically to the demands of gravel. In the rear, curves built into the seatstays add additional flex to relieve road buzz. But even though it builds in some comfort, this bike still has the geometry to throw down in a race. A dozen points for bottle and accessory mounts allow precise placement of up to three bottle cages within the main triangle, with room for more on the top tube or below the down tube. Clearance for 54mm tires increases the versatility as well. Look hasn't skimped

anywhere on this build, with quality components like 1x SRAM Force and Mavic Allroad wheels. An in-house carbon seat post, gravel-specific alloy stem and flared handlebars round out this build that's sure to see you through many unforgettable rides. \$4,500; 19.45 lbs / 8.84kg (medium); lookcycle.com

REVELATE DESIGNS SHREW. Since its start, Alaska-based Revelate Designs has been all about bikepacking and adventure cycling, offering some of the first dedicated bike bags on the market. When it comes to single-day adventures, though, you don't need bulky frame or handlebar bags—all you need is a little extra storage. With a 3-liter capacity, the Shrew is perfect for gravel races where you need to hold a flat kit, extra food and stash some layers after the day heats up. Thanks to a roll-down closure, this 128-gram saddlebag is extremely versatile, adjusting to the load you're carrying. The straps that attach the bag to the saddle also double as compression straps, keeping your load as compact as possible. It can fold down small enough to be a reasonable everyday training bag, while being ready to pack away extra layers for longer days. It's even been ridden to first place in the 350-mile Dirty Kanza XL. Constructed from a fiberglass stay and RevX-Pac, a material that is twice as abrasion resistant as standard VX material, the Shrew will be your most dependable riding partner for years to come. As a bonus, when loaded up, the Shrew doubles as a mudguard. \$57; 128g; revelatedesigns.com Pm





GU LIKE ALY

Photo by Snorri Tryggvason from The Rift Gravel Race in Iceland.



Alison Tetric is a three-time Gravel World Champion and won the Dirty Kanza 200 in 2017. With a smile on her face, she crushes the competition while fueling with Cold Brew Coffee ROCTANE Energy Gel and Lemon Berry ROCTANE Energy Drink. As she likes to say, "Giddy Up!"





ALENTEJO: BEYOND ORDINARY

PORTUGAL can be a simple pleasure or a complex conundrum. The streets of Lisbon bustle with joy, color and music. A café in ancient Estremoz explodes with bouts of laughter and conversation. But the Portuguese would have us believe they are a melancholy people if you give credence to the sad longing and beautiful sounds of Lisbon's *fado* music, or their notion of *saudade*, a uniquely Portuguese word for longing, melancholy and sadness. Spend any time in Portugal and you have to wonder if all of this sadness business isn't just a rouse.

After a handful of very hot days in Évora, some merciful cloud cover and a strong wind gusting to the northeast sees me rolling out to explore some of Alentejo's back roads. Alentejo translates in Portuguese to "Beyond the Tejo River." The region and its walled medieval capital Évora have watched Portuguese history since the second century B.C. I pick my way through the cobbled streets of Évora's old town, crossing the main square, the Praça do Giraldo, where the city's 12th century cathedral is flanked by an ancient temple, one of the city's original Roman ruins.

The road out of town takes me through what feels like a residential neighborhood that could be anywhere in the world. Then I zig and zag through farmland until the road reaches into vast, open fields. I pedal a long straightaway with picture-postcard views in every direction. If there's a landscape image of Alentejo it is the quercus suber, the cork oak, standing alone in the undulating brown wheat fields of this part of Portugal's "breadbasket." As the road rises on the way toward Igrejinha I pedal between stands of cork oak, dotted with large white steer lounging in the shade. The suber oaks are beautiful trees from a distance, but they are bizarre looking close up.

These trees stand denuded, their bark peeled from the top of the trunk to the ground. They are marked in white paint with a number: sixes, eights, fours and threes painted against varying deep-red trunks. This is a unique element of

Alentejo's bounty, representing the world's largest source of corks, used as stoppers most notably in wine. The first harvest happens when the tree is about 25 years in age. Then, only every nine years or so, the cork is peeled again, always by hand. Once a tree's bark is peeled, a single digit, the last of the year when it was harvested is painted in white on its trunk.

If Alentejo has an equivalent elsewhere in the world, it's Italy's Tuscany. The hearty, rustic cuisine and the quiet bucolic country roads make this place a cyclist's dream. The other common thread is the wine. Though Tuscany's wines are all derived from one red grape, the wines made here in Alentejo count their origins from a number of indigenous varieties, both white and red. Alentejo has a winemaking history that predates the region's Roman occupation, and evidence suggests that during that time, the Alentejo wines were sent back to the homeland for their consumption.

In the small town of Reguengos de Monsaraz, just a few kilometers from the Spanish border, sits the Adega José de Sousa winery. Here, modernity and tradition come together in the production of some of Portugal's most highly regarded wines. As with other contemporary winemakers in Alentejo, the wine is fermented using a clay amphora, called a talha, in a technique that's been in use since Roman times.

These so-called talha wines have become trendy, particularly those from the former Soviet republic of Georgia. While

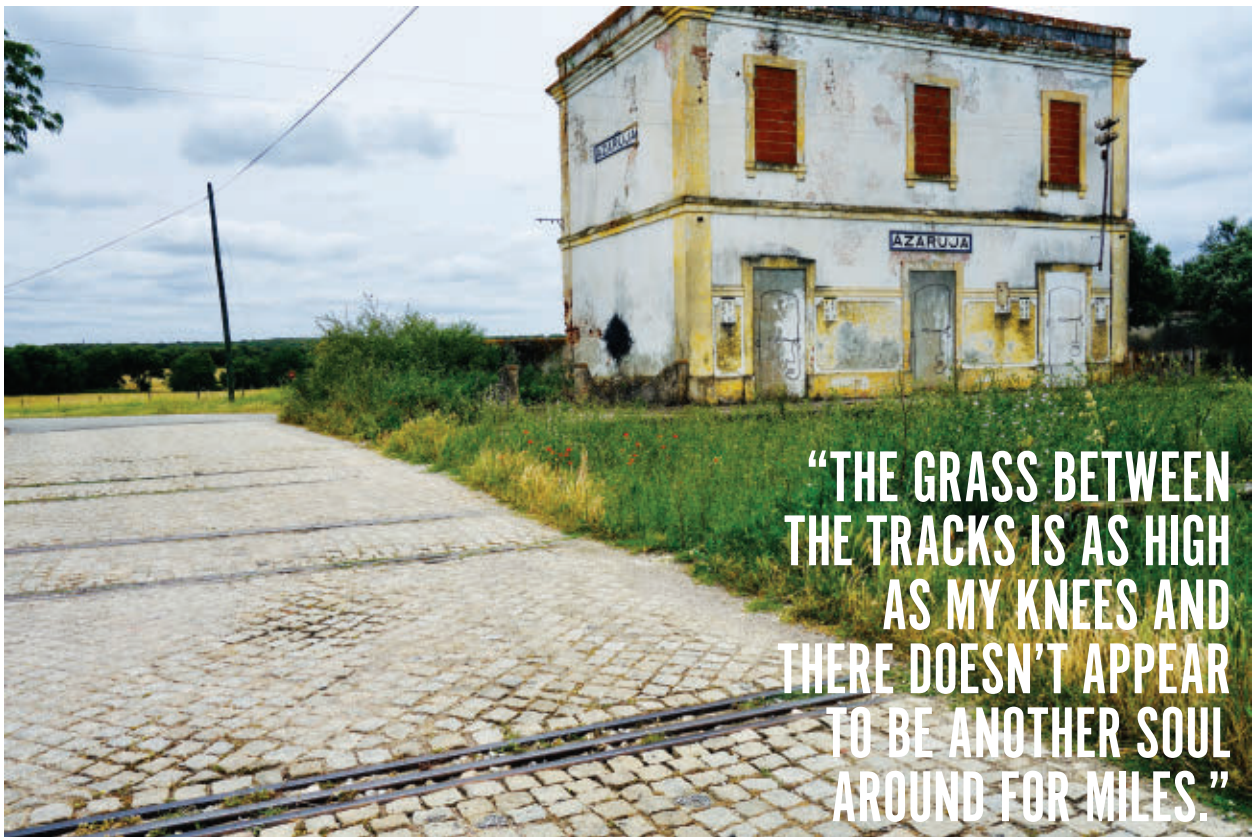
perhaps lesser known, the wines made in this part of Portugal follow the same principles—the grapes are crushed and then loaded into the 6-foot-tall clay vessels, where they ferment.

At Adega José de Sousa I'm standing at the epicenter of this tradition. There are 114 talhas in one room, many of them dating from the late 19th century. Sometimes, during fermentation, an amphora can explode without warning. But these unique wines are loaded with texture and character that you don't get from conventional modern winemaking.

Back on my bike, I coast through Igrejinha hoping to find an open market or even a gas station, having left Évora without as much as a water bottle. The air is still cool but I'm on a 100-kilometer route that I've never ridden before and it seems ill advised to ride much farther without hydration. I double back down a dead-end road and nothing seems open, so I press on.

Through more stands of cork, some climbing leaves me at what appears to be an abandoned railroad station with the word Azaruja tiled on the side. The grass between the tracks is as high as my knees and there doesn't appear to be another soul around for miles. To be exact, it's 4 kilometers to an actual town, the aforementioned Azaruja. Passing a couple of cork-processing facilities I head for the center of town hell bent to find myself some water, maybe a Coke, and whatever will pass for a Snickers bar.





“THE GRASS BETWEEN THE TRACKS IS AS HIGH AS MY KNEES AND THERE DOESN’T APPEAR TO BE ANOTHER SOUL AROUND FOR MILES.”

There is a green awning embossed with the word “minimercado” and though the lights are off, the shop is open. I purchase two apples, a banana, some water and a Coke. Outside, I guzzle the Coke, inhale one of the apples and take in my surroundings. Across the street, draped in gaudy banner ads, is a squat, round building, which I discover is the Praça de Touros de Azaruja. It was the first and most renowned of Portuguese bullrings, built in 1860. It’s rumored to have been the model used for Lisbon’s Praça de Touros do Campo Pequeno, one of the grandest bullrings ever built. Azaruja’s groundbreaking bullring has since fallen into disrepair and for a time was used to process cork. Today, it sits completely abandoned. And it’s for sale, if you are interested.

Leaving Azaruja, I pass quickly through Vale do Pereiro, turning left and climbing through cork forests. Wheat fields and fluffy clouds eventually give way to blue skies over vineyard rows. The long history of winegrowing in Alentejo has seen plenty of fits and starts, from Moorish occupation through internal political manipulation and the phylloxera blight—but these days it is becoming grounded as a wine destination and an important part of the preservation of Portuguese culture.

Like the Douro and Vinho Verde, the wines of Alentejo are made most notably from native varieties that you’ve likely never heard of. There are red wines made from Alicante Bouschet and white wines from Antão Vaz, a variety with enough structure and depth to pass for a white Burgundy

in a blind tasting. The wines made here offer something for everyone, the best of tradition and modernity and a young generation tremendously proud of and committed to remaking the region’s wine reputation.

On a steep climb toward Arraiolos the town’s 13th century castle looms large. Alentejo is dotted with fortresses, some dating to the ninth century, built to withstand a conquest from Spain, or beyond. This eastern frontier protects the capital and its valuable seaports, just a 90-minute drive away. A roundabout swings me past the castle’s visitor center into the town. Arraiolos is wildly charming, even with a little road construction, with its ancient buildings dressed in the signature white-and-blue paint scheme of the region. Cobblestones and flowering trees in the main square along with the town’s reputation as a classical rug-making town make it one Alentejo’s cultural must-sees. The narrow streets provide some shade and a reprieve from the afternoon’s rising temperatures, my last stop before I ride on.

Back in Évora, I end a beautiful day of riding in the countryside with a glass of the ubiquitous Portuguese beer, Superbock. Later, I ramble around the stone streets looking for Botequim da Mouraria, the first words out of any local’s lips for dinner in town. There’s a line already formed before the restaurant opens, but fortunately I’m seventh in line; there are nine seats total. I place my order, lots of local pork, and the owner says “fantastic” before taking back the menu, one of two copies in the whole place, and passing it to the next guest. I drink a few



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“THERE ARE 114 TALHAS IN ONE ROOM [PRODUCING] UNIQUE WINES...THAT YOU DON'T GET FROM CONVENTIONAL MODERN WINEMAKING.”

glasses of Mouchão, one of the region's flagship wines, paired with the most tender pork steak the size of my head.

Alentejo sort of sneaks up on you, especially if you don't bring expectations to the experience. My mood builds to a crescendo of authenticity and honesty, and then it leaves me wondering if I should even catch the flight home. The people, their warmth and the phenomenal food and wine they create is a tangible extension of their love for this place. Andy Levine of Duvine cycling tours and his local guru João Picado offer tours of Alentejo, and they helped me with my route selection. João speaks of his native Alentejo with an appreciation that I now have some small notion of—it's a feeling of discovery, a privileged sense of having seen something special and an eagerness to tell the world about it.

VINHOS DO ALENTEJO

2017 JOSÉ DE SOUSA RED

A blend of three different grapes, Grand Bouschet, Trincadeira and Aragonês, this wine is made with a combination of ancient talha techniques along with the use of stainless steel and oak barrels. Texture, depth, savory herbal notes and lots of black fruit and tobacco, this is a tremendous wine with a low alcohol percentage that will get your attention and a price tag you'll love. *\$18*

2013 ADEGA DO MOUCHÃO

If there is a cult wine in Alentejo, it's Mouchão. Tucked into a massive grove of chestnuts at the end of a dusty road, the winemakers at Mouchão are making the case for wines

made from Alicante Bouschet to have a place among the world's finest. Sappy fruit, floral notes, turned earth and extraordinary elegance. The Mouchão and the wines from Alicante Bouschet can lay down a long while; Mouchão recommends 10 years or so, minimum. *\$65*

2018 HERDADE DO ROCIM AMPHORA BRANCO

Made in the full talha tradition at the ultra-modern Herdade do Rocim estate, this wine is a blend of several indigenous grapes, including the star of Alentejo, and Antão Vaz, along with Perrum, Rabo de Ovelha and Mateúdo. A nod to tradition and natural winemaking, this white blend is all in, no temperature control, natural yeasts and some oxidation. This is a wild wine that gives us a sense of what went down in the region's wineries some 2,000 years ago. Aromas of wild flowers, beeswax and a waxy, nutty flavor profile with hints of cardamom and pear. This is history in a glass, an opportunity to appreciate a place and time for a wildly approachable price point. *\$18*

2018 VINHO FITA PRETA BRANCO

A conventional reflection of the region's native white grapes, this blend uses stainless steel fermentation to highlight the bright fruit character and vivid acidity of native varieties like Antão Vaz, Roupeiro and Tamarez, among others. Aromas of citrus, peach skin and wet stone open for a flavor palate of energetic key lime, and ripe pineapple flavors, the acidity zips and zings into the finish. A fresh take on Alentejo's signature white grapes. *\$22 Pm*



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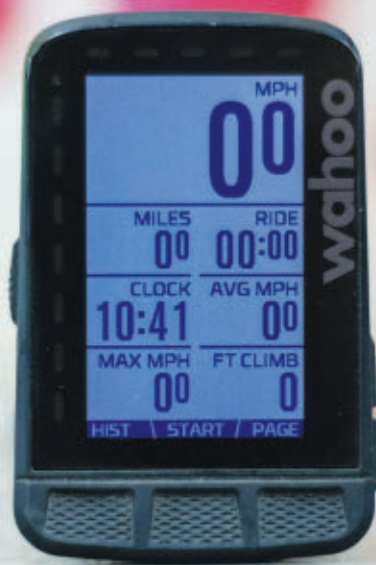
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Wahoo ELEMNT ROAM

For many cyclists, exploring new areas is a major appeal of the sport. But there are a lot of trails and roads out there and the farther you venture into the unknown, the more important a reliable GPS becomes. With the ELEMNT ROAM, Wahoo wants to help you spend more time riding new roads and less time deciphering how to get there.

THE DETAILS

With the same button layout as the ELEMNT BOLT, the ROAM retains a familiar feel—just in a slightly larger package. It features both the largest ELEMNT screen yet, a sizeable 2.7-inch Gorilla Glass display, and the first to include color. But there's intent behind when and why color is incorporated. Used sparingly, especially on navigation screens, colored elements catch your eye in a quick glance.

Navigation is the ROAM's *raison d'être*. It's packed with handy navigation features to take full advantage of the larger color display. One of the simplest yet incredibly useful features is "Get Me Started," which directs you to the start of a route with turn-by-turn directions. Once on the route, if you miss a turn, the ROAM automatically directs you back on track. And if you need to get back quickly, it can either flip your ride around 180 degrees to the start or take you back as fast as possible.

Spacious onboard memory allows for simultaneous storage of multiple U.S. state or county maps. And routes can be loaded from Strava or GPX files. A claimed 17-hour run time should be enough to last through most any ride.

THE PERFORMANCE

The ROAM had a few false starts. The initial release needed some firmware updates and the first batch of mounts weren't the most durable. But these problems have been taken care of and the ROAM is now living up to its potential.

The navigation features have seen us through both road and gravel rides into the backcountry. And every time we've gone astray, the re-routing or return-to-start functions have gotten us back to where we need to be—though on home roads, we noticed, it didn't always provide the most optimal route that a local would.

With Wahoo's ELEMNT app, the ROAM is easy to set up and pair with a phone right out of the box. Pairing external sensors—power meters, heart-rate monitors—couldn't be simpler either. Data screens are only adjustable through the app, which we don't mind because it works well, but some might dislike not being able to make adjustments directly from the device.

Battery life isn't industry leading, but it comes close to advertised, easily seeing the non-pros among us through a week or more of training—or through an epic gravel race. But one aspect of the ROAM shines bright. Perfectly readable in any lighting conditions, the display easily leads the competition. *\$380; 95g; wahoofitness.com Pm*

Salsa

GRAVEL SINCE THE BEGINNING



Warbird

SALSACYCLES.COM

BONTRAGER AEOLUS PRO 3V TLR. With a 25mm-internal rim width to support high-volume tires and unlock their full potential, Bontrager's Aeolus Pro 3V TLR wheelset was one of the first gravel-specific wheelsets to hit our service course. It didn't take long for us to fall for them. Other gravel-specific wheels have come along but this tubeless-ready \$1,300 wheelset hits a sweet tradeoff between price, weight and aerodynamics that you're hard pressed to find anywhere else. Thanks to a sub-1,600-gram weight and Rapid Drive 108 hubs that engage quickly, these wheels are lively out of the saddle and accelerate rapidly out of corners. The D3 Dual Directional Design of this 35mm-deep rim reduces drag at both the tire and rim leading edges, adding even more speed. Built from OCLV Pro Carbon, they're also durable—Bontrager doesn't even specify any rider weight limit. But things happen, so Bontrager offers a Carbon Care Wheel Loyalty Program with two years of free repair or replacement of the rims. And after that warranty period you're not out of luck: Bontrager will still rebuild or replace wheels at discounted prices for original owners. It's hard to go wrong with these wheels. *\$1,300; 1,575g; trekbikes.com*



EASTON EC70 AX. With a 21mm rim depth, Easton's EC70 AX wheels aren't going to win in an aerodynamics contest. But that's okay because they're not trying to. They provide a killer gravel experience and low weight, only 1,515 grams, without it. That low weight means a peppy feel, despite not having Easton's excellent, fast-engaging Vault hubs. Instead, these wheels benefit from Easton's X5CL hubs, which are still proven performers, even if a tad shy of the Vault's performance. With an eye toward high-volume rubber, a 24mm-internal-rim width provides a wider stance for precious off-road control. But they're meant to be durable enough to stand up to the rigors of gravel racing. A 3x spoke pattern of 28 Sapim straight-pull, double-butt spokes ensures a strong build. To be sure of the durability, these wheels have been field-tested by the Easton Overland team to many top tens on the gravel calendar—and notably a first-place finish at a certain Dirty Kanza 200 (you might have heard of it). And Easton has managed to do all this while keeping a reasonable price for these carbon hoops. *\$1,100; 1,515g; eastoncyclings.com*

MAVIC ALLROAD PRO CARBON SL. Road riders are well acquainted with the iconic yellow badge of Mavic. But what many of us on the road side are less familiar with is Mavic's history of making mountain bike wheels. With that off-road experience, it comes as a natural progression for the French brand to meld its road and off-road knowledge into the burgeoning field of gravel wheels. Tipping the scales at a scant 1,445 grams, the Allroad Pro Carbon SL is a lightweight choice sure to make any bike faster. Coupled with Mavic's Instant Drive 360 freewheel system, these wheels are expectedly nimble, spinning up to speed quickly and responding to acceleration thanks to the quick-engaging hubs. They come with Mavic's in-house Yksion Allroad UST tires already seated, though we had to play around with them a little to get everything airtight. The 23mm-internal rim width is much wider than its road counterparts, offering high-volume tire support. But it still feels ever-so-slightly narrow in a world where 24mm-wide rims and beyond are becoming the norm. Regardless, they are durable. After many unexpected hits that bottomed out the tire all the way to the rim, these hoops have kept rolling true. *\$2,100; 1,445g; mavic.com*



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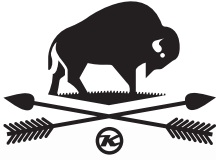


IRC BOKEN 650B 47C. To 650b or not to 650b, that is the question dogging the bike-equipment philosophers these days. And much like freshman-year, fall-semester philosophy 101, we're not going to wade in too deep on this one. There is a camp that wants as much volume as possible and has turned to 650b wheels as the answer. To those advocates we say: Volume is great, but let's make a compromise. Don't get us wrong, 47c tires are fun, but these 42c 650b Boken Plus tires from IRC are seriously fast. There's a 47c version, too, for the roughest roads but at 550 grams each the 42s save about 80 grams per set and add some aerodynamic benefit. Multiple tread patterns are rolled into one here. A slick center tread provides speed over tarmac while an inverted micro-diamond pattern provides wet-weather grip. Moving outward, the blocky tread provides flexibility to grip off-road surfaces. The most aggressive tread is saved for the outside, for cornering confidence. Tubeless ready, these tires can be run at low pressures for fast, comfortable rolling over the rough stuff. And when tubeless the gummy compound really shines, providing maximum grip. \$70; 550g; ircbike.com

MAXXIS RAMBLER. Not every off-road trip will be a simple hardpack or dirt affair. When your mixed-terrain route calls for a little something extra, the Maxxis Rambler provides a nice balance of tread for rough terrain while still rolling reasonably fast to keep up on smooth sections. Tight spacing of the center-tread knobs keeps these 38c tires rolling quickly yet provides some extra traction on the looser stuff. On the outside of the tire, spaced-out knobs keep you holding a line, letting you rip confidently and carry more speed through gravel descents. Featuring Maxxis' Dual Compound, these tubeless tires are in it for the long haul, offering more durability and trouble-free miles. And at sub-400 grams per tire, they won't slow you down on rollers that seem to find their way into every gravel ride. Though, for a 25-or-so-gram-weight penalty, you can get the same tire at the same \$60 price with the added protection of Maxxis' SilkShield. If you're going to be exploring gravel and unfamiliar roads, it can't hurt to have the most puncture protection possible. \$60; 390g; maxxis.com



PANARACER GRAVELKING SK. In gravel riding, tire selection is essential. But too often we find ourselves over-tired, held back by knobby tread when all we need is a bit of extra grip. Panaracer's GravelKing SK tires perennially sit atop the heap of rubber hoops in our service course, and for good reason. Beyond being an excellent deal at \$50 a pop, they offer a tread profile that's ready for a diverse array of riding. We've put these tires to the test many a time on our local gravel roads. They have plenty of traction for steep, rocky ascents, while still being smooth enough to roll quickly once on smooth roads. Panaracer's own ZSG natural rubber compound keeps the ride supple and rolling resistance to a minimum. Panaracer offers just about any size you could need, even making a 50c version, but we've found that for an all-around tire, a 38c suits us best. It's just enough volume to drown out the road buzz while not becoming onerously hefty at 420 grams apiece. A selection of limited-edition colors, including green, blue and white, as well as black or brown sidewall options, helps dial in the perfect look for your ride. \$50; 420g (38c); panaracerusa.com Pm



LIBRE



Tom Hill / Madeira Portugal. Photo: Joonas Vinnari

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BRAVING THE RUGGED SABOT

The Col du Sabot is a hidden gem nestled high in the French Alps. While it's located only 5 miles as the crow flies from the legendary Alpe d'Huez, which is overrun with cyclists from around the world, the Col du Sabot remains virtually unknown.

This remote mountain pass is higher and arguably harder than the Alpe, climbing 4,300 feet in 9 miles to its summit at an elevation of 6,890 feet for an overall average grade of 9 percent. I'm pretty sure you can't buy a jersey with the Sabot's name plastered all over it, but maybe that's a good thing. It's just you and a few sluggish cows or sheep as you struggle upward on the final switchbacks, realizing when you finally get to the top that you will most likely be the only one there. And no one, including motorists, will be around for miles!

There's a good reason the Col du Sabot has remained in obscurity. While the entire road on the south side is paved; on the north side, not so much. Actually, "not so much" is probably giving it too much credit. To be honest, there really

isn't much of a road on the north side at all. There used to be...well, okay, a trail. For many centuries the top of the Col du Sabot was the border between France and Savoy and served as a gateway between the two, complete with a customs house. In 1850, France annexed Savoy. The track on the north side looks like it hasn't been used since.

Here and there are remnants of travelers from days gone by. And, luckily, there are just enough landmarks to guide an adventurous cyclist down the north side to the Lac de Grand Maison about 3 miles away. This storage reservoir is located on the paved road up the Col du Glandon, which is actually lower than the Col du Sabot. If your climbing legs are still feeling a bit fresh you can tick it off, and the nearby Col de la Croix de Fer.

But getting there does require riding a bit of dirt, rock and grass. I guess it would make more sense to tackle the off-piste experience on a mountain bike, but do you really want to ride up the 4,300 feet south-side climb on such a heavy machine? Gravel bikes are all the rage and it might make a nice compromise, but if you are only going to take one bike with you on your trip to the French Alps it makes sense to bring your road rig. For sure, 25mm tires aren't the optimum weapon for the Sabot's north side, but you can do it and you will probably only have to walk a few short sections, even less if you have mad off-road skills.

To be sure, you can check off the Col du Sabot without having to hit the dirt. The south side is a memorable experience and not unlike L'Alpe d'Huez, it does have its place in professional road racing history. While Chris Froome won a stage of the Dauphiné in 2016 at the ski station of Vaujany, located about one third of the way up the climb, it was women racers who made this a staple of the Tour de France Féminin.

From 1991 to 2005, the women's edition of the Tour had an uphill finish at Vaujany and it always proved to be decisive. In fact, one year, it proved almost too decisive. The women had climbed the Col de la Madeleine and were summiting the Col du Glandon when a fierce storm hit the peloton.

On the long descent to the bottom of the Sabot hypothermia was a real risk, and the gaps between the riders grew as the struggle went from competitive to survival. Linda Jackson, who now runs the Tibco-SVB women's professional cycling team and finished third overall in that 1997 Tour, recalls the day: "I was having a really good race but froze up on the descent before Vaujany. I lost a few spots on the final climb. Jeannie Longo came flying by me. I told our director that after the race and he said, 'No, Linda, you were standing still.'"

The unveiling of the 2020 Tour de France route gave a small glimpse into what might lie ahead for the Col du Sabot. Villages and ski resorts, longing for tourist dollars in the summer, snowless months have been paving dirt roads and

small tracks. This explains the history behind the creation of the 2020 Tour's most anticipated new climb, the Col de la Loze, which connects the ski resorts of Courchevel and Méribel.

Rumor has it that the north side of the Col du Sabot is slated for tarmac. It would clearly make it more accessible as a loop ride and such a long and difficult climb on the side could not be ignored by Tour de France race director Christian Prudhomme, who seems determined to find new and exciting climbs to energize interest in La Grande Boucle. The Col du Sabot clearly fits that bill.

My lonely day up the south side and down the north side of the Sabot remains one of my favorite days of cycling in the Alps. I had absolutely no information about the route down toward the Grand Maison dam. But I could see the lake and the paved road on the other side and just knew that, somehow, I could make it down on my road bike. I had to walk down a couple of short, steep sections, but the riding was completely doable without much real risk of injury.

How will I feel if and when the north side gets paved? I had my memorable day and still look back on that fondly. Maybe this is a warning to those of you who would also like to experience the north side *au naturel*. Book that ticket and get over there. Hey, you can ride up to L'Alpe d'Huez on your rest day! *Pm*



CINELLI GOES GRAVEL

It's hard not to like Cinelli, the historic Italian bike manufacturer that defines words like "pedigree" in the cycling industry. But when the company breaks out a new gravel bike called the Zydeco King (*right*), well, there is just no way for it to go unnoticed. While its name conjures images of some serious New Orleans "fonkiness," as Dr. John would say, its looks are all about speed and elegance.

Its gently sloping lines and road-centric geometry simply look fast. And Cinelli says flatly that the Zydeco King is all about riding fast on paved roads or rough off-roads, as it mixes lightweight racing geometry while the frame can accommodate up to a 2.1-inch tire. Meanwhile the frame's double-response system allows for a seamless combination of stiffness and comfort. To achieve this, the Zydeco King's down tube continues past the bottom bracket to increase stiffness, while the continuous design of the rear stays into the top tube raises the comfort and allows the cyclist to ride for hours.

For those looking for the classic Cinelli steel feel on gravel, its traditional Nemo (*below*) gravel bike undoubtedly will click a lot of boxes. A traditional non-sloping main triangle confirms that the Nemo was born from Cinelli's timeless design. Yet the 2020 Nemo boasts subtle modifications like a frame geometry that allows for up to 40mm tires and extended rear stays that assure greater stability on fast, technical dirt tracks. Little matter if your tastes are more aligned with the old school or the new school of cycling, Cinelli's gravel bikes offer something for everyone. cinelli-usa.com Pm



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A MINIMALIST WINTER WARDROBE

Velocio's Alpha System

Marie Kondo's "Life-Changing Magic of Tidying Up" ethos has made its way to bike clothing this winter. For Velocio, minimalism is in. The New England-based brand is offering a solution for riding all the way into below-freezing temperatures using just two layers. It's called the Alpha System and it's here to pare down bloated winter wardrobes.

THE DETAILS

Velocio's Signature Softshell is a one-jacket solution designed to have you prepared for most winter weather, save for torrential rain. The brand partnered with eVent to create a three-layer shell that is breathable, wicking away any sweat and moisture, while trapping in heat. A 10K waterproof membrane rounds out the jacket, making it ready for most winter drizzles or snow flurries. An updated design features a silhouette that's most at home in the riding position and a cut that's slim but leaves just enough room for layering beneath. On its own, this jacket is ready for temperatures from 50 degrees Fahrenheit down to freezing point, but adding just one layer can extend that range significantly.

The Alpha Long Sleeve is a mid-layer that carries its weight several times over in providing warmth. Made from Polartec Alpha Direct insulation on the sleeves, chest and collar, this



lightweight layer traps warm air, while drying quickly to keep sweat from cooling you off mid-ride. In the back, soft yet abrasion-resistant Merino 210, a merino fleece/polyester material, aids thermoregulation. This made-in-Italy layer keeps a trim profile and significantly extends the temperature range of the Signature Softshell into the single digits. Bring on the cold.

THE RIDE

Velocio's two-layer winter combo is deceptively warm for how slim it is, in part thanks to the complementary fit of each garment. The trim cut of the Signature Softshell leaves just enough space for the Alpha Long Sleeve underneath, which conforms to the body to keep warmth close. The snugness of the cut extends through the sleeves to create a close fit with gloves, helping keep your hands warmer, too.

The Signature Softshell is perfectly cut for hour after hour in the riding position. And true to Velocio's word, light drizzles bead up instantaneously. But it's no insurance policy against every weather condition; it won't take long for a big downpour to ruin your day.

The Alpha Long Sleeve really impresses. Where has it been all our lives? It's like your favorite fleece jacket, somehow made even softer. But, unlike most lightweight fleece layers, you begin to feel its warmth in seconds—you won't want to dillydally in your heated house once you've put this on. With a jacket added into the mix, the Polartec Alpha Direct insulation helps trap another pocket of air for maximum warmth into low temperatures. You really are set to venture into well-below-freezing territory—well, the top half of your body at least. *\$300 (jacket), \$200 (mid-layer); velocio.cc Pm*





Road Less Traveled

ALL NEW: RLT 9 RDO, RLT 9 STEEL, RLT 9 ALLOY



PELTON GRAVEL MOB 2019

The origins of the Peloton Gravel Mob are admittedly a bit selfish. Maybe we were a little fed up with the prospect of yet another road race, dizzyingly lapping a nondescript office park for the nth time. Or maybe we just wanted an event right in our backyard where we could sleep in our own beds the night before. Either way, we just wanted to ride local gravel with great people. Never did we think that years later this event would grow to include more than 300 competitors across two rides, selling out months in advance.

This mid-November Saturday in Ojai, California, represents what gravel riding is all about: weekend warriors and current and former pros—a handful of former U.S. national champions among them—mingling together, some showing off their best form, others taking a more leisurely pace to enjoy the expansive coastal views and well-stocked GU aid stations. Former world cross-country champion Ned Overend chose the former, returning to show everyone how it's done and earning the first sip of Topa Topa beer at the finish.

Family members made a weekend of it, arriving Friday evening for drinks, live music and dinner, and sneaking away during the event to take in one of SoCal's best weekend getaways.

The core route remained intact this year, featuring the signature views from Sisar Canyon Road, culminating in a 5,000-foot peak with mountains on one side and the Channel Islands beyond a steep drop-off to the other—possibly the best photo-op of the year for Salsa's famed chaise lounge. But a washed-out Howard Creek Trail meant there was a new descent from the ridgeline via the steep Rose Valley Lake Road, letting the mountain bike specialists show off their bike-handling skills.

At the Mini Mob, Sulphur Mountain reprised its role in one of the most challenging, yet rewarding, shorter-route options of any event—everyone earned their post-ride La Fuente tacos.

But a larger turnout meant some change was in order. The Mob Shop, home to the start and finish of past editions, was becoming too cozy for all the gravel camaraderie. A move to the spacious Soule Park down the road gave everyone more breathing room—and space to learn about the latest tech from Salsa, Pinarello, Look, Haley, Calfee, Felt, SRAM and more.

Moving to a new start/finish presented another opportunity. In the event's brief history, we've ridden over the expected: dirt, sand and gravel. This year we added a public golf course to that list, possibly a first in gravel racing.

None of this would be possible without the continued support of our sponsors—Easton, Wahoo, Salsa, Panaracer, Pactimo, Floyd's of Leadville, GU and GoPro—that help make this event exceed our wildest expectations year after year. We'll see everyone for another epic day next November, but remember to keep an eye out for registration to join the fun before it sells out! *Pm*

NED OVEREND (far left) took the "Full pull" title while 2018 winner BRANDON BAKER (center) took second.



IAN BOSWELL





MORE THAN JUST A FACE-LIFT

Shimano GRX

Shimano has peered into its crystal ball and knows that gravel isn't going away. In fact, it's only going to become more popular and important. The Japanese component giant is putting its full weight behind the burgeoning discipline by releasing GRX, an entirely new line of dedicated gravel components. Somewhat like how Shimano's road components are stratified—105, Ultegra, Dura-Ace—GRX is not a single group. Rather, it's comprised of an 11-speed top-tier 800 series in both mechanical and Di2, with lower-cost 600 series components available for cranks and shifters. A 10-speed 400 series version is available too. Not every component is new, though. Chains and cassettes come from existing road components.

You'd be forgiven for thinking Shimano's trying to pull a fast one on us. Is gravel really different enough to warrant not just a few specific components, but an entirely new series separate from the road or mountain bike categories? Don't we already have hydraulic disc brakes for road and an Ultegra RX rear derailleur with a chain-guiding clutch? Well, as it turns out, Shimano's on to something—GRX is more than just a face-lift.

We have spent a lot of time with the mechanical 1x GRX, though with just the shifters, brakes and rear derailleur. We've not yet had meaningful time on the new cranks or front derailleur, or with the Di2 version. We'll have a feature on a full 2x build soon, but for now we have these four takeaways.

1. EXCELLENT ERGONOMICS. Providing all-day comfort when riding in the hoods, the new shifter ergonomics is the single most important upgrade in GRX. The secret is a flatter design on the brake lever that feels more like a vertical version of mountain bike brakes, allowing easier and more confident braking from the hoods with one or two fingers. Being able to apply less force for braking also means less hand fatigue, which becomes crucial as the hours tick by in a gravel race.

2. CRISP SHIFTING. Shimano wouldn't be where it is today if its shifting weren't impeccable. Luckily, nothing has changed here. Any rider coming from Shimano road or mountain components will find the same familiar, flawless and reliable shifting with a distinctly gravel-purposed lever and derailleur.

3. YOU'VE GOT OPTIONS. GRX brings several new possibilities to gravel riding. When running 1x, you can get a special version of the left brake lever that can control a dropper post, seriously simplifying your cockpit by removing a dropper lever from your handlebars. With that additional space, you can add a set of horizontal brake levers to the tops, so you're always in the right position.

4. WIDER GEAR RATIOS. GRX cranks feature a wider, 17-tooth gap between chainrings, up from the 16-tooth gap on the road cranks. That means you can run a 31/48 crankset and pair it with a 11-34 cassette for a wide range that should see you through any ride with no problem. The rear derailleur comes in two cage options as well: a short one for up to a 34-tooth cassette and a long one for up to a 42-tooth cassette on 1x setups. bike.shimano.com *Pm*

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DON'T CALL IT A THROWBACK

Merlin Sandstone

The Merlin name conjures up images of mid-1980s titanium perfection. Created in 1986 by Gwyn Jones, Mike Augspurger and Gary Helfrich in Cambridge, Massachusetts, Merlin Metalworks has an incredible history. Early mountain bike champ Joe Murray rode one. Frame designer Tom Kellogg came on board and created a 3-2.5 road frame. The Subaru-Montgomery team rode Merlin in the early 1990s. And Greg LeMond rode a Merlin Extralight. The brand then went on a bit of a walkabout and was out of the mainstream, but it's thankfully now in the skilled hands of designer and master frame builder John Siegrist. Merlin is back and better than ever.

We need to pause here in our review for some transparency. We are reluctant to write this bike review of the Merlin Sandstone because as soon as it's published, we will have to send the bike back to Siegrist and crew in Colorado...and we don't want to send it back. Maybe we are nostalgic or going through a mid-life crisis of sorts with all the carbon bikes in the world, but there's just something about the look and feel of this titanium gravel bike that makes us want to hold onto it forever. Here's why.

The details on the Sandstone are almost perfect: the bird-of-prey head badge, the S-bend stays, the welds, the aerospace-grade titanium. It's like a rideable piece of art that needs to both be on display at your home or office and ridden constantly and forever.

THE RIDE

We took the Merlin on an adventure to Vermont to ride

the Peacham Fondo, because it seemed fitting to bring it back to its New England roots and also because it gave us a chance to spend time on it in a gravel event. The bike was a definite conversation starter. People were blown away that Merlin was back and equally inspired by the welds, design and look of the Sandstone. Aside from needing a few more gears due to the never-ending punchy hills around Peacham, we categorically loved riding this bike on gravel. It's fast, it handles really well, corners, descends and climbs gracefully, and has a "feel" that makes you want to ride more and farther.

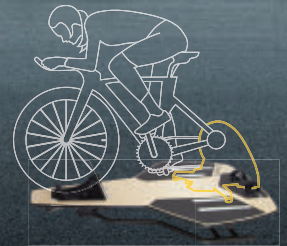
The frame is beautiful and the build was pretty spectacular too: SRAM Force eTap AXS, Knight Composites wheels, Ritchey WCS cockpit, Selle San Marco saddle and Challenge Gravel Grinder TLR tires. We strongly suggest you consider a Merlin Sandstone for your next bike purchase. *Starting at \$2,800. merlinbikes.com Pm*



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MP1 Nfinity Trainer Platform

BUDGET GATEWAY TO GRAVEL

Ocoee Boundary

Riding gravel need not be overly expensive. At least not with Ocoee, a new direct-to-consumer bike brand from the same people behind brands such as Litespeed and Quintana Roo. Ocoee offers its Boundary gravel frame in a wide range of builds, all the way to Di2—with GRX builds available soon. We got our hands on the most entry-level 105 build, at \$2,600.

THE DETAILS

Ocoee may be a new brand but the people behind it are far from novices. With the Boundary, they have created a bike that can tackle a diverse array of off-road pursuits. Thanks to a dropped-chainstay design, it has a massive tire clearance for 700x45c or 650x53 wheels—with fenders—and room for a 48/32 crank.

Ample gear mounts beyond the standard two bottle mounts, and front and rear rack mounts, prepare this bike for all-day and all-week adventures alike. Additional gear mounts on the



fork expand your options even further. An endurance-frame geometry makes the long days in gravel riding very possible.

Customer service is at the core of Ocoee. The team will work with you to dial in the bike how you like. If Ocoee has access to the parts you want to spec, they'll be on your bike. Each bike is assembled in Tennessee, providing the brand complete control over build. Pulling the Boundary out of the box and having it ready to roll in well under a half-hour was a pleasant surprise. The tires were even already set up tubeless with sealant, an appreciated touch.

THE RIDE

The Boundary feels like a tank, confidently rumbling over any terrain in its path. As tested, with the included 43c Panaracer GravelKing tires, it comfortably tore through miles of gravel roads with a steady line. The wider tires can make it feel a bit sluggish getting up to speed but once it's there it doesn't want to stop.

Shimano 105 continues to be an excellent and reliable budget option but we would hold out for an entry-level GRX build, which offers better brake/shifter ergonomics and a rear-derailleur chain stabilizer that keeps chain slap out of your ride.

The Boundary is not the lightest option, weighing in at over 21 pounds. Given a stable of bikes, it wouldn't be our first choice for racing. But most people don't have a stable and that's kind of the point of this bike. Want to go bikepacking one day and put every single gear mount to use? No problem; it handles up to 300 pounds and rides steadily weighed down. Want to tackle a gravel race? Throw on some 38c or 35c tires and you've got a capable all-day racer. Whatever you want to do, you'll have a bike that's a willing companion for a good price.

Shimano 105 hydraulic; Praxis Alba Alloy 48/32 crank, 11–34 cassette; Panaracer GravelKing SK 700x43c tires; Sun Charger Comp Tubeless wheels; Ocoee stem, bars and seat post. \$2,600 (as tested); 9.62kg/21.22 lbs (size medium); ocoeebikes.com Pm





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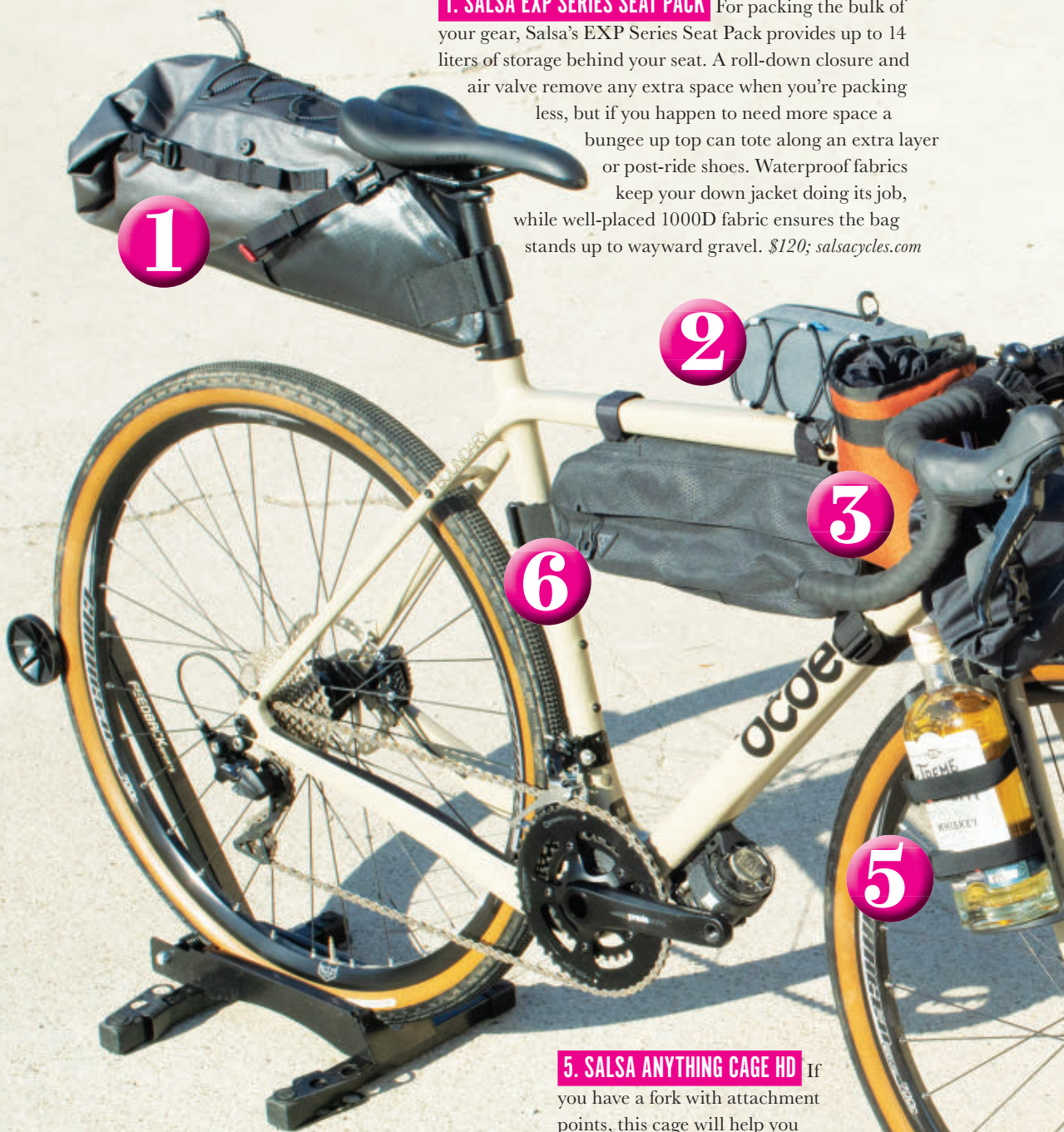
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1. SALSA EXP SERIES SEAT PACK For packing the bulk of your gear, Salsa's EXP Series Seat Pack provides up to 14 liters of storage behind your seat. A roll-down closure and air valve remove any extra space when you're packing less, but if you happen to need more space a bungee up top can tote along an extra layer or post-ride shoes. Waterproof fabrics keep your down jacket doing its job, while well-placed 1000D fabric ensures the bag stands up to wayward gravel. \$120; salsacycles.com

6. TOPEAK MIDLOADER Topeak's MidLoader occupies the unused space in your bike's main triangle. With four points of attachment to the frame, it's an extremely stable option for your heaviest cargo. Two-sided entry provides easy access to any of your gear, no matter where it is in the pack. Every trip is different, so Topeak offers 3-, 4.5- and 6-liter options to fit a variety of frame sizes and adventures. We're using the 3-liter version here to maintain easy bottle access. \$50 (3L); topeak.com Pm

5. SALSA ANYTHING CAGE HD If you have a fork with attachment points, this cage will help you make the most of them. Attaching via three bolts, this cage has multiple points for strapping up to 3 kilograms (6.6 pounds) of extra cargo with the two included nylon straps. From dry bags to large bottles, this heavy duty, impact-resistant nylon rack hauls it all and adds just 149 grams. At just \$35, be sure to get one for both sides. \$35; salsacycles.com

ADVENTURE BAGS

2. PRO DISCOVER TOPTUBE BAG The perfect solution for carrying a wallet, extra food or anything you need quick access to, the Pro Discover Toptube bag is an unobtrusive way to expand your storage. Featuring a waterproof canvas build with a waterproof zipper, it keeps your belongings dry, even through stormy conditions. If the 0.75-liter capacity isn't enough, an exterior bungee cord allows you to expand storage. And a high-contrast blue liner makes finding what you need quick and easy. *\$50; pro-bikegear.com*

3. ROAD RUNNER BAGS LARGE POINT 'N' SHOOTER This handmade-in-Los Angeles bag from Road Runner offers padded protection for midsize cameras so you never miss another shot. Made from a 1000D Cordura fabric with a lightweight Ripstop nylon liner and drawstring top, it's durable and keeps out the dust. Three mounting points mean the bag stays perfectly stable over the roughest roads—and can be reversed to fit on either side of the bars. When not toting a camera, it also doubles as an extra bottle holder. *\$70; roadrunnerbags.us*

4

4. TOPEAK FRONTLOADER Topeak built the FrontLoader to handle bulky, lightweight items like sleeping bags and jackets with ease. This bag is really a full handlebar storage system containing a separate 8-liter drybag, with a two-sided roll-down closure for easy access, which straps into a handlebar-mounted cradle with quick-release buckles. Included external straps allow an additional bag to be strapped to the front, for up to a total capacity of 5 kilograms (11 pounds). *\$85; topeak.com*



UP THE GRAVEL GALIBIER

Italian bike racer Giovanni Gerbi, born in 1885 and known as the Red Devil, was a pioneer of the heroic cycling era—that old-school cycling period that featured steel bikes, single-speed gearing, wool shorts and jerseys, hard leather shoes and gravel roads. When Gerbi took part in the 1904 Tour de France at age 19, he rode his bike 800 kilometers from his home in Asti to the start in Paris.

More than a century later, we are headed into the Alps from Turin, just 50 kilometers west of Gerbi's hometown, on a trek to watch stage 19 of the 2019 Tour de France on the Col du Galibier. We climb the alpine pass on carbon-fiber bikes with dozens of gears, wearing Gore-Tex clothing, soft leather shoes, Lycra shorts, merino wool jerseys and fashion sunglasses. For sure, times have changed, people have changed and the materials have changed; but one thing has remained the same: our passion for cycling, the desire to pedal and discover new roads, with a gentle breeze on our faces.

Early on the morning of the Tour stage, we ride up the *ancien route du Galibier* to the summit, a totally gravel road that's not so long but hard to climb on a sunny day in July. Since it was first included in the Tour in 1911, the Galibier has become one of the Tour's most prestigious and famous climbs. And this "old road" was the original route before tarmac was invented. Today, cows graze quietly on the mountain slopes and grass sprouts from the track once ridden by the heroic champions of yesteryear.

Pedaling up this ancient pathway, we share elements that we've always loved: stunning mountain views, thin air, silence and no motorized traffic. It seems like a normal day in the Alps but it's not a normal day when we embrace the scene at the top of the Galibier. After the peaceful climb we find the storm, not a climatic one because the sun still shines strongly, but a storm of people waiting for the Tour de France. It's hard to express our feelings, but to find so many people from all

over the world united for the same passion that motivates us, it's a poem to joy, a hymn to cycling.

There's a longtime intercourse between Europe's grand tours and their fans that culminates in the mountain stages. Here, the real contact takes place—touches, whispers and screams. We feel the intimacy of the race and let the passion take over. This is where the sport of cycling reaches its climax with a passion that's found nowhere else.

Once on the summit we have to wait for the peloton, standing beneath the sun, looking at the long and winding climb that opens up the snowy peaks. The switchbacks resemble an immense snake, a harmless one if you aren't in the race, of course. Then, in the late afternoon, the first riders appear from the belly of this snake. Only a few remain ahead of the peloton and just one dominates the rest. Moments later, between the rocks that line the Galibier, emerges the native Colombian profile of Nairo Quintana.

Gerbi never tackled the Galibier, but the year it was first climbed at the Tour, in 1911, he was racing on the gravel roads of the Giro d'Italia, placing third overall. We think about Gerbi, Quintana and his modern counterparts as we leave the Alps on our return home. More than ever, we feel that our sport is timeless. *Pm*

Words/images: Paolo Ciaberta





PEDALS & GRAVEL

*Meet Josh Scott:
Guitar effects pedal master builder*

While the connection between guitar effects pedals and bikes may not be immediately evident, for Josh Scott at JHS Pedals their relationship has become interdependent. Scott founded his company over a decade ago and has quickly become a leader in the boutique guitar pedal industry. Looking for the ultimate fuzz or distortion pedal? JHS has it. And it makes some pretty mean delay, tremolo and reverb pedals as well. Today in fact, his guitar pedals can be found on the pedal boards of many of the music industry's biggest stars. But while Scott's company boomed, he struggled to keep up. Overwhelmed physically and mentally, he soon found that cycling provided many answers. It allowed this one-time basketball player to get back in shape, as well as provide him with the perfect moment to reflect on his company or his next dream pedal. Today, you can often spot him sporting his latest cycling-themed shirt on the JHS YouTube channel; and he tries to average 200 miles per week on the roads around his home in Kansas City. A recent graduate of the Dirty Kanza 100-miler, Scott is already training for the 200-mile event next year.

*Interview: James Startt
Images: Courtesy of Josh Scott & James Startt*



At the finish of the 100-mile Opal Wapoo Gravel Grinder.



Hey, Josh, it is great to catch up with you. As you know at *Peloton* we like to connect cycling with other walks of life and that often takes us to music. We did a feature a couple of years back on John Stirratt, the bass player for Wilco, and last year we rode along the Natchez Trace from Muscle Shoals to Tupelo. Wow, that's amazing. That's where I'm originally from. I grew up there and my first band in high school recorded our demo there at the Jackson Highway Sound Studios.

Wow, this is a small world! You are obviously passionate about guitars and effects pedals. And you are a big bike fan too. What came first for you, the effects pedal or the bicycle? Oh, effects pedals and guitars for sure. I started in high school. I heard a Pearl Jam cassette tape on my brother's floor and I freaked out and said, "I gotta have a guitar!" So I got a guitar and joined a band and that pretty much took over my life. It turned into full-time music. I graduated from high school, did some college, but just decided that college wasn't for me and I started touring, doing session work, producing and songwriting.

The whole pedal thing was an accident really. Around 2006, I had a broken pedal and I fixed it and then I just wanted to know how everything works. I mean, I was the kind of kid that would take a flashlight apart. I just got into it and the company just kind of started in 2007. I have no business background, and nobody does in my family. But now we are around 12 years in with 25 employees. It's been a wild ride.

That is a wild ride. Did you ever imagine when you started out that JHS pedals could grow into one of the industry leaders? No, I never could have

imagined that. It is a miracle that I didn't destroy it at some point! It's been really fascinating.

Well, I really love your YouTube channel and the pedal show. I've learned a lot actually as you break down the history of fuzz or distortion, or delays. Yeah, it's been so fun. We started the show, conceptually, about two years ago and started filming about a year and a half ago. I got really burned out about 10 years in and really didn't want to even see a guitar. I love history and just started talking through the history of effects pedals and fell in love with it. I wanted to do something on the internet, but I wanted to do something different than just a demo of my own pedals. It makes me feel like a used car salesman! But I literally fell back in love of the guitar through its history and sharing these stories.

And cycling? Ah, cycling is much more recent. There was this point about nine years into the company, so about 2016, I was dealing with a lot of stress and anxiety regarding the company. I was traveling a lot and was unhealthy. I am six-foot-six and I played basketball in high school, but at this point I was just deteriorating and I was just like, "I've got to do something physical." I remember going out for my first ride and doing like 5 miles and felt like I was a pro athlete or something. It was just amazing. So I kept sticking with it doing these out-and-back routes. And one day I got about 40 miles out and had to ride 40 miles back.

Mostly road or off-road? Well, I really got into gravel. I can be a real hermit, you know—just put me in a dark room with



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Josh (middle) after finishing the 100-mile Dirty Kanza.



a book. I think the anxiety was coming from just all of the constant stuff that was coming at me regarding the business. But when I got back out on a bike it was just me. I live in South Kansas City and there are a ton of farmlands and gravel roads. And the first time I put fat tires on my bike and went out there I just found it to be magical! I mainly ride solo just because I like the solitude and it has been massively life-changing. Everything I got into it for, I found. I lost like 50 pounds. It cured the anxiety and stress. Cycling has just been amazing for me.

I got a sense that you were quite a bike fan, because I noticed all of these cycling-themed T-shirts on your YouTube channel. Are you even aware of how many cycling T-shirts you wear on the guitar pedal show? No, not at all. But my favorite T-shirt company ever is Thread + Spoke. They also do DNA, and I love their products, and I just love their cycling T-shirts. My wife makes fun of me because they are almost all black and she is like, “You could maybe work in a little color!”

Well, I really love your pedal show for the content too. It is really open and organic. I mean, you talk about other brands—potential competitors—really freely. And it is very informative. How did it all develop? Well, as a company, we are in the internet age of guitars. And the last 10 years has been a really different way of thinking for companies. It has been challenging trying to find our place in Instagram and Facebook posts, etcetera. I really wanted to get away from me from doing a demo of a pedal in front of a black wall. There is nothing wrong with that but I wanted to do something different.

Now I really love history. One of my most fond memories from childhood is watching “The Civil War” by Ken Burns with my dad. My passion is for the history and philosophy of guitar pedals and I wanted to take a bit of what Ken Burns does and put it toward the stories of guitar pedals. I get to meet so many great people and I wanted to talk about the people, their stories and the history. I firmly believe that when the tide rises we all benefit. And I just want people to enjoy and love pedals and guitars more.

Well, you obviously spend a lot of time working on your guitar pedals. Do you enjoy working on your bike too? Oh yeah. I made a little bike shop in a corner of my garage. Winters in Kansas City are pretty brutal, but I set up a Zwift trainer bike in the corner with a workbench. One of the things I love about it is that I am back to the guy that is learning. With guitar pedals I am the guy that knows everything. I am consulting others frequently, working on the tour rigs of musicians, etcetera. But with the cycling thing, it has been fun because I get to go back and see something from a customer’s perspective. I am asking questions like, “What do I do with this derailleur?” I built my own single-speed and enjoy learning how it all works.

Are there similarities with cycling and building an effects pedal, or do you go out and come up with the new effects pedal you are going to produce? I definitely have the best ideas on the bike in the middle of nowhere. I used to listen to podcasts or music but now I just listen to the wheels. There is something magical when I hit 40 miles. My brain lets go and my ride suddenly becomes the ultimate escape. I end up fixing problems I didn’t even know



INTO THE HEADLANDS



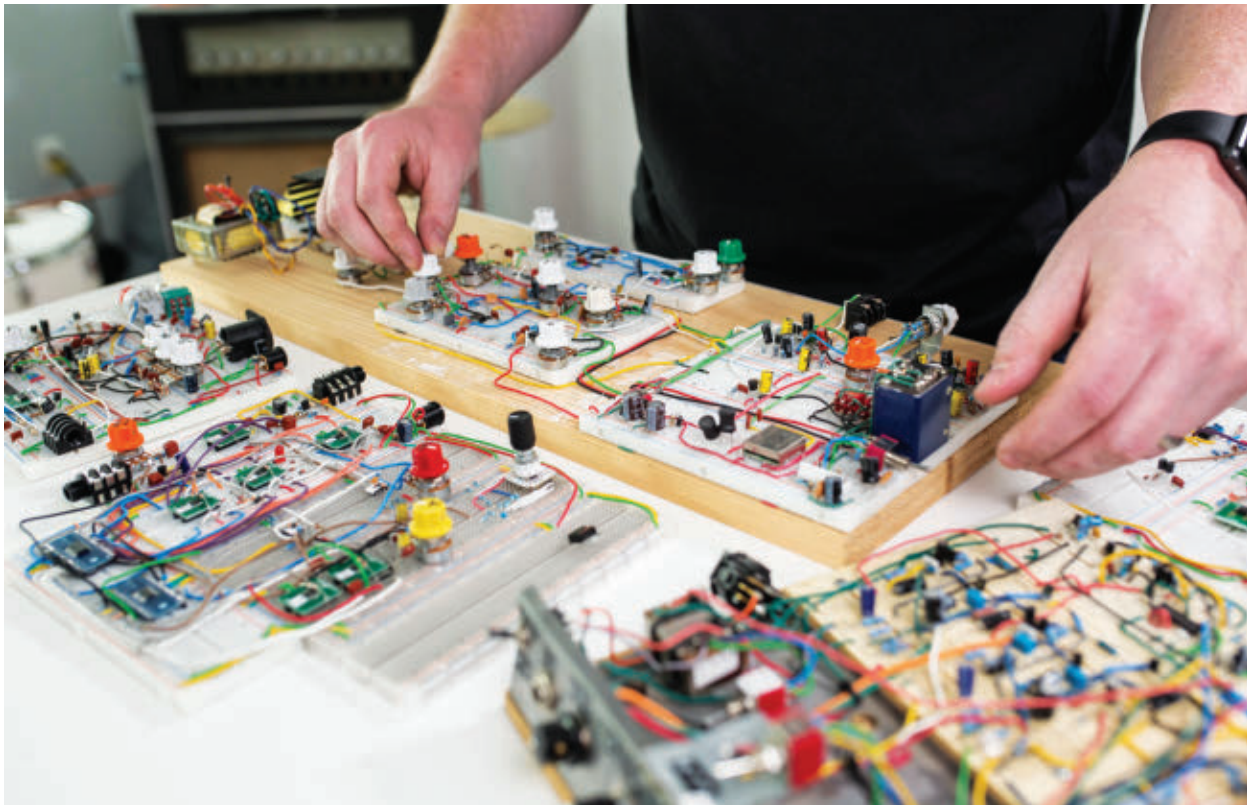
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- TWO BUILD LEVELS



HEADLANDS



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I had and coming up with all kinds of cool ideas. Running a business can be intense and when I get out there on my bike it is the only thing I have found that truly unplugs me.

You just rode the Dirty Kanza. What was that like? Well, I did the 100-mile event this year and want to do the 200-mile event next year. It's a brutal course but I loved it. I've done a couple of gravel events that actually felt harder, but the Kanza terrain is just nuts. It's become a big event and it is a fun race. It was my first experience with the big-time cycling culture. Riding out with Ted King and guys like that. It was just a blast! I think the culture of these longer endurance rides is really taking off here in the Midwest.

How often do you get out? Well, I try to do about 200 miles a week. A lot of times I only get to 160 or so, but that is my goal.

That's serious cycling.... Yeah, I really try to be consistent. It can get hard with traveling but I often take a bike with me and try to get out a bit even when I am on the road.

What would you say is your favorite-ever effects pedal? Well, I would say that my favorite effect is probably the Fuzz pedal. A good, classic germanium fuzz is way up there. And the only thing that comes close to it would be a good analog delay. My favorite pedal company would probably be BOSS. I am just a huge fan of their stuff.

And your favorite bike ever? Oh well, I would say my Black Mountain Cycles Monster Cross. I started with steel frames

because I am so tall and needed a 64cm and that can be tricky. But I love this one! I ride it in road group rides or in dirt. It is the ultimate bike to me. I can take it camping, ride the road, gravel, whatever, you name it.

When you are out on a ride dreaming up effects pedals, is there an end-all pedal that has never been done that, if you could wave your magic wand, would appear? Well, there is the pull inside that is kind of haunting, that is saying to me, "What's not been done?" And that is a really hard question. The closest we've come has been our Color Box pedal that duplicates a recording studio console. It goes after The Beatles' White Album sounds a bit. Sometimes you kind of stumble into it, but it has been wildly successful.

And what would be your dream bike? Hmm. Well, you know what's wild, and I can say this in all honesty, because you've watched my show and you know that I am a serious collector.

Well, you definitely have a few guitar effects pedals.... Yeah, I have like 2,000 pedals; it's a museum of sorts. My amp collection is huge. My vinyl collection is huge. But with the bike thing I am super-satisfied—which is wild for me. I have an obsessive personality and I have just been shocked that the Black Mountain Monster Cross, well, I just love it to death. I will admit that I would love a custom Ti, so probably if I got another bike it will be a custom Ti frame like this bike. I think it would basically be the bike I have but in titanium. *Pm*

Check out jhs pedals.com

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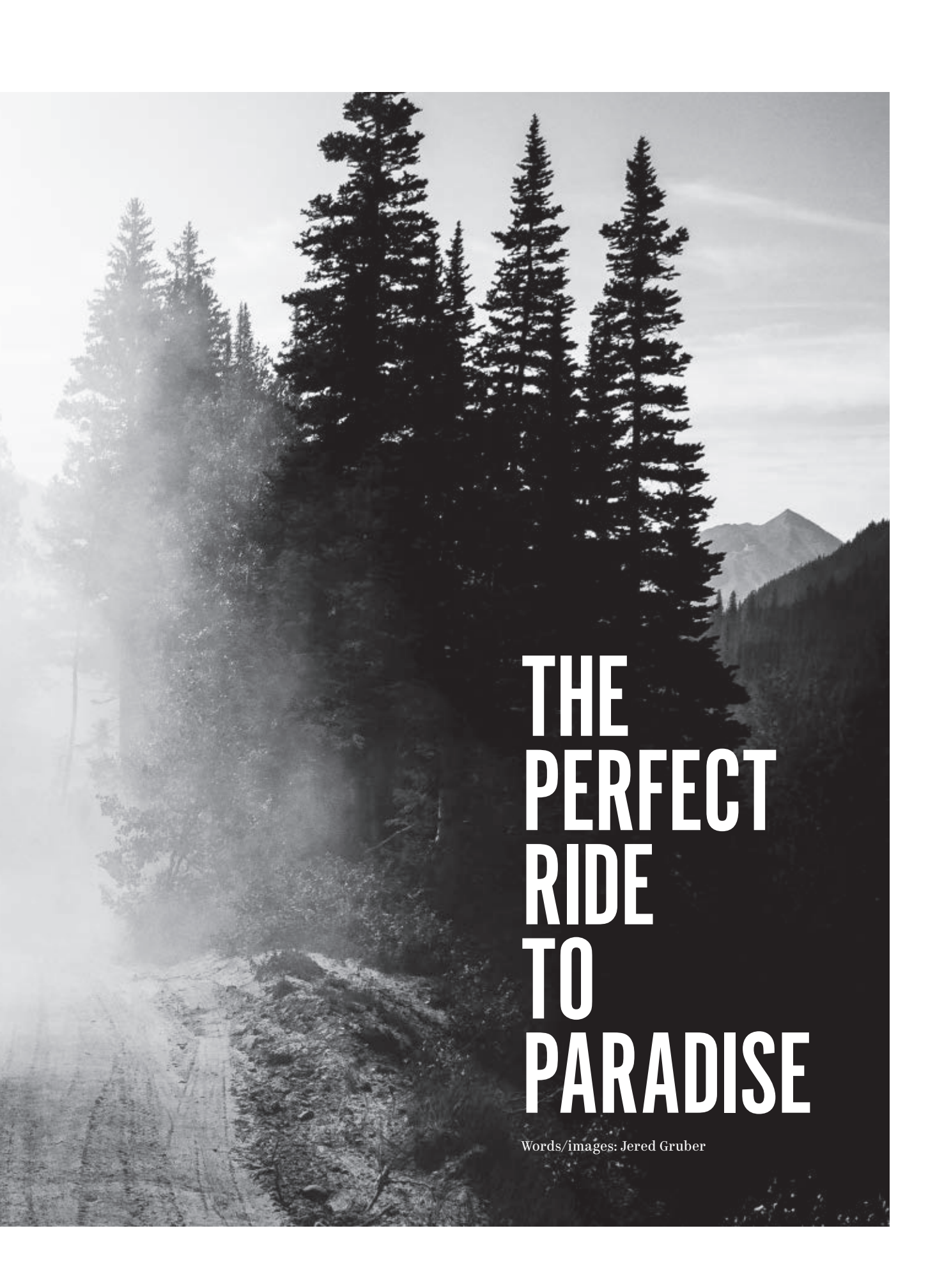
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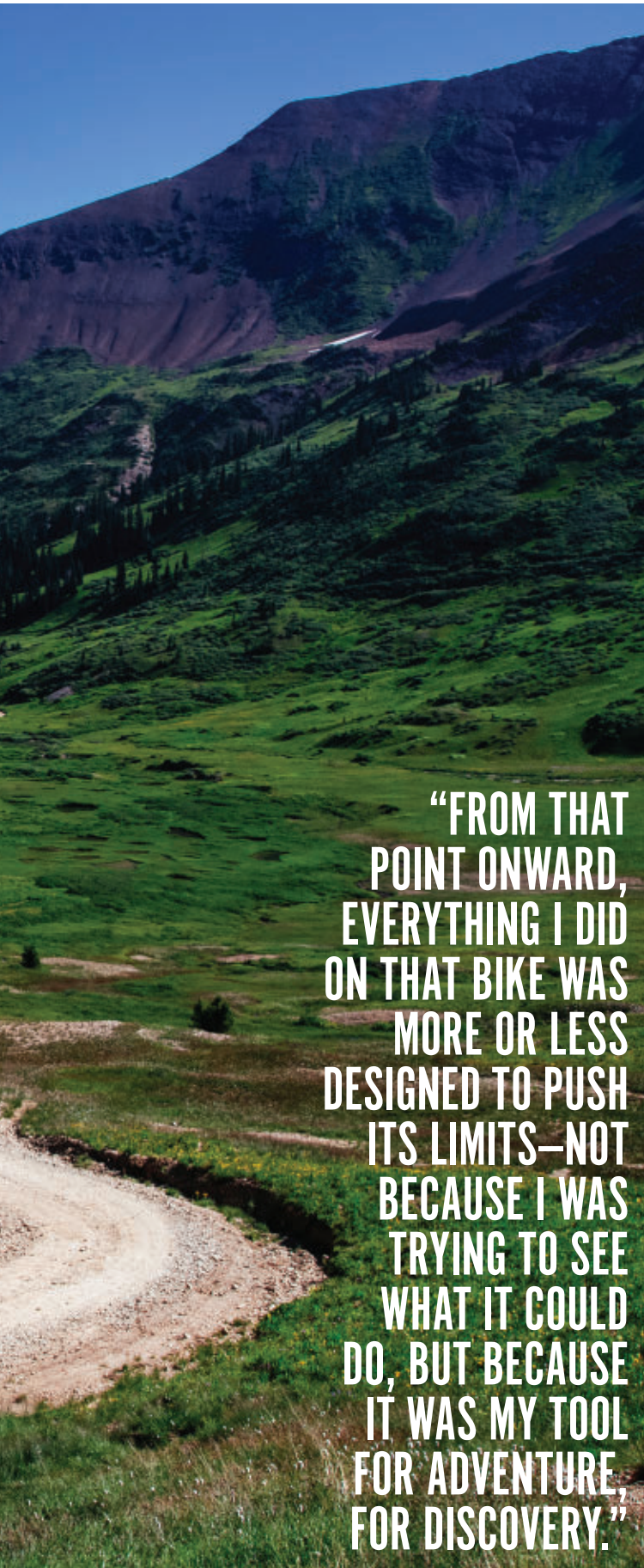




THE PERFECT RIDE TO PARADISE

Words/images: Jered Gruber





“FROM THAT POINT ONWARD, EVERYTHING I DID ON THAT BIKE WAS MORE OR LESS DESIGNED TO PUSH ITS LIMITS—NOT BECAUSE I WAS TRYING TO SEE WHAT IT COULD DO, BUT BECAUSE IT WAS MY TOOL FOR ADVENTURE, FOR DISCOVERY.”

THIS IS A BORING STORY—OR MAYBE IT ISN'T. There's no struggle. There's no worry. There isn't even a flat tire. This isn't a story about gravel bikes gone mountain biking or road bikes gone wild. It's not a tale of slumbering mountain bikes on double track either. It's a tale of hammer and nail, saw and wood, peanut butter and jelly—in other words, just right.

I didn't start riding bikes until pretty late in life, and when I got one it was a road bike. I jumped right into the road world and never thought too much about anything else. Sure, I knew that mountain biking existed, and I certainly played on dirt roads as much as possible, but everything was done through the lens of a road bike...meaning, I flatted a lot on dirt, crashed a lot on trails and generally made my road bike do all the things it wasn't supposed to do. I did exactly the same thing everyone else did and who now puff up their chests about it in pride and say: "I've been riding dirt since before it was a thing." I love how prideful we all can be about doing something as simple as riding dirt roads. I'm serious about that; and that's not meant in any kind of negative way.

That's always just been the way of things for a lot of us. I had just a road bike for years and years, so I rode those 23mm tires on road, dirt, trails, everything. Then, back in 2016, Stephen Fitzgerald at Rodeo Labs let me use his gravel bike, the aptly named Trail Donkey. I fell in love. It changed my bike-riding life. Full stop. From that point onward, everything I did on that bike was more or less designed to push its limits—not because I was trying to see what it could do, but because it was my tool for adventure, for discovery. I wanted to see all the things, ride all the mountains, go to all the places. In my mind, Donkey equaled unbounded possibility. At one point, it resulted in a new word: cyclo-mountaineering. It was bad slash good slash terrible slash amazing.

Writing that out, it sounds a little funny; but again it makes sense when you realize that it was the only off-road-capable machine I had. So, of course, I took it mountain biking, and I will continue to. I love my gravel bike. I feel good on it, at home, ready for anything. And why not? Most of us are roadies after all, and at this point I've spent easily 10,000 hours in a road-like position. Is it all that difficult to imagine that I feel better on a road-bike-type thing over bars that are twice as wide and a position that's very nearly straight up and down and bounces?

In long, I'm a fierce defender of the gravel bike and its utility. I love it. That said, the chorus of my friends singing over and over again—"Why don't you just get a mountain bike?"—eventually hit home.



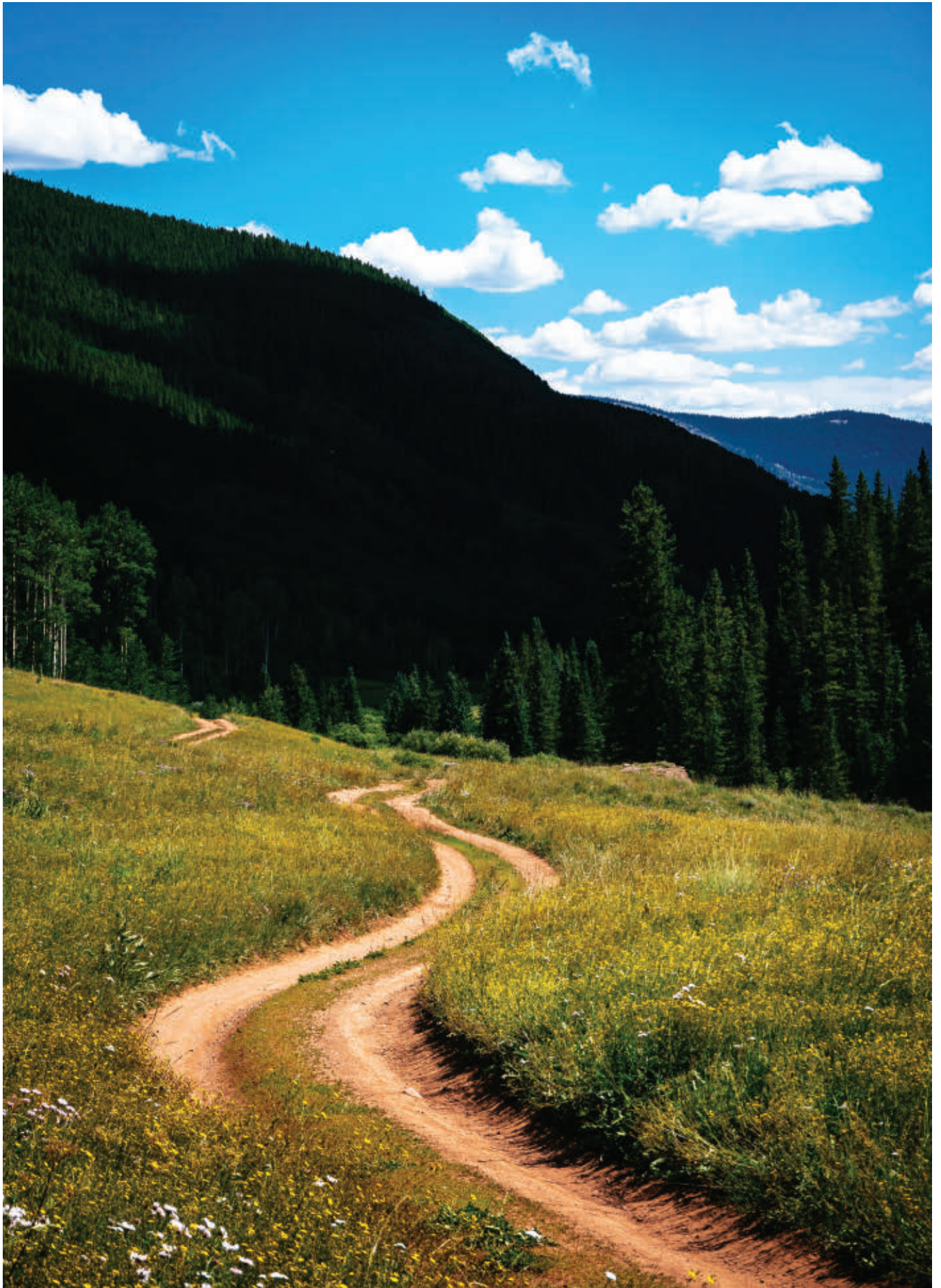
So I eventually did. And then we went to Crested Butte, Colorado, this August as a sort of family vacation. Every year we get together with a piece of our chosen family, and we play. This time we were there to ride mountain bikes—in other words, we were going to scare the hell out of this poor roadie-turned-dirt lover. (That’s an entirely different stream of consciousness filled with much falling down, bruises, bleeding, terror...and a lot of fun. We’ll save that for the hopefully not next one, the umpteenth piece on roadie meets mountain bike. A tale as old as time...yawn.)

I’m almost ashamed to admit it but, even in this mecca for mountain biking, we still had gravel bikes in tow. We had this idea that we’d ride Pearl Pass: the crowning obstacle in one of the earliest mountain bike races in the world. The first running was in the middle of September 1976, starting in Crested Butte and finishing in Aspen. Fifteen part-bad-ass, part-crazy humans pointed their bikes up toward the distant Pearl Pass on a quest to make it up, over and down to Aspen. They rode what amounted to the most primitive of machines, these clunkers, resembling far more the gravel bikes of today than mountain bikes. They were the bare essentials: one gear, fattish tires, handlebars, pedals and a chain. And fueled by lots of alcohol. This was a race only in name.

Fast forward about 43 years...we started up the long, long road to Pearl Pass, working our way past the trails that had been our joy the last few days, past Strand Hill, Teocalli Avenue and on to a destroyed, rotten dirt road. We had heard there were avalanches up ahead after a particularly severe winter, but we thought we’d push onward. But it didn’t feel right. I had never felt like I was forcing it on these types of rides before.

I knew going in that there would be a solid chunk of cyclo-mountaineering. I knew there was a distinct chance we’d be turned around by the remnants of a monster avalanche. I knew there’d be a supreme dearth of usable oxygen. I knew I’d get a little woozy and wonder why in the world I was doing this. I understood all of these things. But for some reason the echo of the “why’s” started bouncing around in my head—across to Ryan, to Jonathan, to Ashley—and then back and forth like some malevolent ping-pong ball until it became impossible to pretend that it wasn’t throwing a party in our thoughts.

At that point, we did something funny: We called it and turned around. We were nowhere near the top, but it just wasn’t happening. Instead, we went back down, rode mountain bikes and had an amazing day. Like I said, this isn’t





**“AS WITH MOST
EVERYTHING IN THE
BIG MOUNTAINS OF
COLORADO, WE WERE
TRAIPSING THROUGH
THE WORKSPACE OF THE
MINERS OF YESTERYEAR.”**

a story about pushing limits. It's certainly not about walking. This is pretty firmly the exact opposite. This is a story about riding a bike on the terrain it was designed for.

Two days later, we tried our gravel bikes again—this time to a climb that sounds actually as good as it is: Paradise Divide.

The bike: a Cervélo Áspero with SRAM Mullet build, a 38 chainring in the front, party-time 10–50 in the back and 40mm tires. It was the modern, perfect adventure tool for moderate off-road fun—with a huge asterisk (that is, it's also fun for outrageous off-road adventures that make zero logical sense but are still fun—just not on this day).

It's an amazing feeling to use the proper tool for the job.

A road bike is wonderful on the road. A full-suspension mountain bike is an incredible machine on some wild Crested Butte single track. A gravel bike is an ideal piece of possibility on a dirt road or some lighter side trails—and, for once, we did just that. We took our gravel bikes on a series of beautiful, tough but not too tough, dirt roads. We laughed at how silly it all was: Can you imagine such a ridiculous thing as a gravel bike on...just a normal dirt road?

We climbed through the cold morning shadows in the still-shaded valley until we broke into the light about halfway up as the sun peeked over Snodgrass Mountain. To our left,



the mountains of the Ruby Range glowed in that hyper-real way the mountains always do at sunrise (something I've been resolving to see more of in the future for a long time, but always, always failing). We passed through a sea of wildflowers: fireweed, fleabane, Aspen sunflowers, Indian paintbrush... and so many more that I don't know the name of. I wish I did, because if you're not into flowers after a high-country Colorado experience in the summer you're missing out.

As with most everything in the big mountains of Colorado, we were traipsing through the workspace of the miners of yesteryear. In this case, we ran smack into it as we made our way up the hardest part of the day by way of a venomous wall of dirt road into a mostly abandoned collection of houses known as Elkton (thanks be to that 38x50 easy gear!). Quick history note: Elkton was established in the 1880s to service the silver mine just outside of town. There were boarding houses, cabins, a store, even a post office—but only for one year. Like many ghost towns in Colorado, Elkton more or less died in 1893 with the demonetization of silver.

Just above Elkton, there's an immense switchback—the only one of the ride so far—with huge views. This is right below the fantastically named Painter Boy Mine. I didn't know it that morning, so I won't pretend that I did. We had a little impromptu photo shoot in that beautiful switchback though.

After that, we made our way slowly, but without any real difficulty, farther up Washington Gulch—past Gothic Mountain and then a real-deal shelf road, carved precariously out of the Mount Baldy slopes as it makes its way up to Paradise Divide. It was a beautiful stretch of road: just the three of us making our slow way up closer and closer to the bright morning light that bathed the top of the climb.

We arrived to Paradise Divide two hours into our ride. We had only climbed about 2,000 feet over approximately 10 miles; but this wasn't a day for smashing. It was a day for chill, and for once we followed that directive. The top is a beautiful mini plateau with a pond, seemingly infinite views and little trails going every which way. We played on them for



a little bit, took some pictures and then turned our attention to the basin that lay before us.

The top had been gorgeous, but when we started our way in the forward direction to continue our loop, we were confronted with this valley of utter peace and solitude and beauty. It was easily 9 a.m. by this point, but there was still no one around. It's just this perfect high-mountain valley with a small dirt road winding its way between Cinnamon and Baldy: the Paradise Basin. And for a bike rider it really does have that feeling.

After a descent complete with an ice-cold mountain stream crossing, we climbed a little bit more to the top of Schofield Pass and began the ripping descent back to Crested Butte.

From this point, on a normal day, we would have taken our gravel bikes and gone toe to toe with one of the more famous sections of single track in Crested Butte, perhaps in the entire United States: the 401 Trail. As previously mentioned at least 10 times, we were not to be distracted by challenges like that on this day. Instead, we headed straight down Schofield Road, over the semi-permanent section of snow that blocks the way for most cars and into one of the more unique experiences for any of us.

Brown powder!

I didn't know there was such a thing, but I knew it was a thing as soon as our tires and most of our rims disappeared into dirt the consistency of powdered sugar. Even the slowest movement brought up great plumes of dust. It was like those pictures from Roubaix, but without the bumps, without the crazy 200 riders, without the 50 lead cars, without the caravan. We were just three bike riders swooping around making the biggest clouds of dust we could ever dream of making. It felt like we were in a cartoon, and it was amazing. I never knew dust could bring so much joy. It was just pure fun to make giant clouds everywhere we went—laughter, smiles, clouds. They chased us all the way down to the tiny collection of buildings called Gothic and the last little bit back home.

I've made a life of sorts out of using the wrong bike. I will continue to do so. I'm not so ridiculous though as not to recognize the absurdity of that game. I'm certainly no Luddite. All that said, I can say without exaggeration that a pure gravel ride in the immense theater of the mountains around Crested Butte aboard a gravel bike was one of the more satisfying things I've done in a while.

I hope to find a perfectly reasonable, logical use for my gravel bike soon; but first I think I'm going to try this sick 50-mile mountain bike loop. I think it's doable. *Pm*

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DAYTIME FLASH + LED ALLY APP

The smart way to wirelessly customize your LED lights. Smart Connect is an innovative technology we developed in-house to control, simplify and customize compatible Lezyne LED lights. Using the free Lezyne LED Ally phone app, Smart Connect lights can be controlled and programmed either as a combo or individually. The simple interface of the app can be used to control your lights on the fly, or to custom program the modes. If the front and rear are linked, the front light will now wirelessly control the rear light as you toggle through the modes, even if you are not connected with the app.



A BOLD FIRST STEP INTO GRAVEL SUSPENSION

Niner MCR 9 RDO

Gravel bike design is like the Wild West right now.

Companies are trying anything and everything to create more comfortable and faster off-road machines. Simply tuning the ride through carbon layup now seems quaint. In frames and forks, we've seen compliance added through pivots built into chainstays, leaf springs and frame decouplers—not to mention compliance added in other components, including seat posts and stems. It was only a matter of time before full suspension found its way into the mix. It took Niner, which pushed the 29er concept

in mountain biking early on, to lead the charge into this virgin territory with a “magic carpet ride” that could very well represent the future of gravel.

THE DETAILS

We need to make something clear right off the bat: The MCR 9 RDO is not a mountain bike with drop bars. Yes, it has full suspension, but the similarities end about there. The basic concept behind this bike is that you're faster when your tires maintain constant contact with the ground, not when they're getting bounced around constantly. The MCR aims to create the smoothest ride possible, a magic carpet ride of sorts—that's where the MCR name comes from. And by doing so, riders should get less fatigued and be able to ride farther and faster.



With 50mm of travel from the rear shock and 40mm from the Fox fork, this bike has about half the travel of a traditional mountain bike. Instead of being prepared for absorbing the impacts of huge jumps, it's tuned for the constant high-frequency vibrations inherent in gravel riding. In the rear, Niner's Constantly Varying Arc (CVA) suspension system helps maintain a controlled ride through any terrain, with a suspension curve optimized for a seated rider pushing out the watts. And the MCR 9 RDO's steep geometry is also firmly rooted in gravel bike territory, fully encouraging all-day seated pedaling.

With suspension to do the heavy lifting, the tires (up to 50c) get a reprieve from being run at super-low pressures to mitigate the worst effects of road chatter. Tires can be inflated higher to minimize on-road rolling resistance—meaning more speed during mixed-terrain days and races. As gravel turns back into tarmac, the rear shock can lock out with a remote trigger on the handlebars; the fork lockout is accessible while riding too. Including suspension, though, means there's a sizeable weight penalty—a size 56cm totals more than 25 pounds.

THE RIDE

Riding over washboard roads and flat gravel, the Niner really shines. It offers the plushiest off-road ride we've experienced, to the point where you don't feel any road bumps. The Fox 32 SC fork is quite good too, providing a responsive feel.



But weight is a glaring factor holding this bike back from being a gravel racing champion. With premiere and upstart gravel races alike featuring thousands of feet of climbing, the 25-plus pounds of weight simply holds back too much anyone accustomed to the pointy end of races.

It's also important to remember the boundaries of this bike. Again, it's no mountain bike. Experienced off-road descenders might be tempted to push the envelope because of the suspension, only to find that the tires and geometry can't keep up.

But for those less concerned with racing who encounter a diverse array of off-road terrain beyond gravel on their local trails—including a bit of tame single track—the MCR is worth a look.

This is by no means the final version of what a suspension gravel bike can be, but it represents a promising start. Gravel suspension has arrived, now we eagerly wait to see just how far the technology can go. *Pm*



SPECIFICATION

ninerbikes.com

\$7,000 as tested; 25.73 lbs. / 11.7kg (56cm)

Shimano GRX 800 2x group, 11–34 cassette, Easton EA90 47X32T crankset; Niner RDO stem, Easton EA50 AX handlebars; Stan's NoTubes Grail CB7 wheels; Schwalbe G-One Evo SS tires (40mm); X-Fusion Microlite shock; Fox 32 SC Float AX Performance Elite Evol Fit4 fork.

SELLE ITALIA SLR BOOST GRAVEL SUPERFLOW

A long day on the road can cause some discomfort with the wrong saddle; a long day on gravel roads can be even worse. Selle Italia has taken notice of gravel riders and has responded with a saddle tuned specifically for their needs. The gravel version of the SLR Boost saddle features a similar design to the original, with a large cutout, but features the brand's Light Gel to mitigate the continuous buzz of gravel roads. But comfort need not mean a weight penalty. Thanks to features like titanium rails, this saddle weighs in at just 204 grams. And for those times your ride goes a bit longer than expected, hi-vis inserts in the rear provide some extra visibility and peace of mind. *\$320; 204g; us.selleitalia.com*



BONTRAGER RHYTHM MOUNTAIN GLOVE

While we're split here between glove wearers and hand naturalists for road riding, we at least all agree on wearing gloves off-road, preferably the full-finger variety. It's as much about alleviating the vibrations of a long day of riding as it is an insurance policy against road rash. Breathable enough for hot days while still offering rugged protection, Bontrager's Rhythm Mountain gloves are a great choice for gravel. With pre-curved fingers and stretchy AX Suede Quattro palms, the fit is close and comfortable. Plus, they help out with more than just making the ride a little bit cushier and protected. Silicone grippers ensure your fingers stay in contact with the brake levers when you need them the most.

And because operating almost any GPS or smartphone today requires using a touch screen, the touch-screen-compatible index fingers and thumbs are less a luxury and more a necessity. *\$55; trekbikes.com*

ORANGE SEAL SUBZERO SEALANT

Once winter rolls around, you can camp inside on the trainer for only so long. At some point you'll want to head outdoors, but first make sure your tubeless sealant still works! For those who live in very cold environments, Orange Seal has developed a special Subzero formula designed to keep working through the coldest days, down to minus-20 Fahrenheit. It fills punctures up to one-eighth-inch and slices up to a quarter-inch. There's a tradeoff in sealing capability compared to the regular sealant, but with a lifespan of up to 180 days, the Subzero sealant should keep you rolling trouble-free all winter long. *\$22 (16oz); orangeseal.com*



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VOLER CALIBER SEQUOIA THERMAL JERSEY

All-day adventures and off-season training call for comfort, not skintight aero fabrics. Voler's Caliber Sequoia Thermal Jersey is a cool-weather garment featuring the brand's relaxed club cut. But just because it's cut looser doesn't mean it's not a performance piece. Made entirely from GeoTherm fabric, this long-sleeve jersey retains warmth while still remaining breathable and quick drying. Additional details like a locking zipper allow for easy one-handed operation while eliminating any excess material from the zipper area. And a silicone gripper in the waist keeps your jersey in place all-day-long. For \$89, this jersey is a great deal that will keep you going strong through the cool-weather months. *\$89; voler.com*





ASS SAVERS BIG

When it comes to design, simpler is better. And when it comes to mudguards, it doesn't get much simpler than the Ass Savers Big. This is a larger version of Ass Savers' rear saddle-mounted mudguard, for 30mm to 50mm tires. This fourth-generation design is a single piece of polypropylene that, with a few folds, is ready to go in minutes—no tools and no fuss. It's just as simple to remove, but you won't mind keeping it on your bike at all times, just in case, thanks to a low weight of only 26 grams. And with a secure Flip-Tip front you can ride through any gravel roads, assured that your Ass Savers Big will stay put to keep your back mud-free. *\$12; 26g; ass-savers.com*

PEDAL ED TOKAIDO ALPHA JACKET

The PEDAL ED Tokaido Alpha Jacket was born out of the need for versatility on ultra-long-distance bikepacking events, such as Europe's Transcontinental Race and Kyrgyzstan's Silk Road Mountain Race. From mountain peaks to cold desert stretches, this jacket is ready for the winter months. It features Polartec Alpha fabric, which regulates core temperature both during activity and at rest. In the back, two large cargo pockets haul along anything you need quick access to. And when not needed, the whole jacket packs into a tiny pocket, taking up no more than a jersey pocket's worth of space. That's an incredible amount of warmth in a small package. You'll want this piece along on any journey where temperatures are expected to dip. *\$264; pedaled.com*



CAMELBAK PODIUM FLOW BELT 21 OZ.

The best rides require more than two bottles. Now, when it comes to where you store that extra water, you have options. You can map out water refills ahead of time; you can find a bike with three or more bottle cage mounts; or you can throw on a backpack. Not every bike has more than two cage mounts, and a bag can be cumbersome—or even overkill for a ride. For many gravel riders, CamelBak's Podium Flow Belt may be the perfect solution. This 190-gram pack is just the right size, securely holding an included 21-ounce Podium Dirt bottle—one of our favorites—and two liters of gear. Bringing extra food or layers is no problem, and an integrated tool-organization section makes roadside maintenance fast and easy. Plus, with its breathable air-mesh waistband, you'll stay cool and comfortable on hours-long days. *\$45; 190g; camelbak.com*

PIRELLI CINTURATO GRAVEL MIXED TERRAIN

For off-road days with a variety of terrain, turn to Pirelli's Cinturato Gravel Mixed Terrain tires. Featuring tight tread spacing in the center, these tires are able to maintain some of the fast rolling of a slick tire on hard terrain and flats. But through muddy or loose conditions, the rest of the tread profile has been designed to limit deformation and shed excess grime. Combined with Pirelli's special SPEEDGRIP compound, these tires strike a nice balance between rolling resistance and grip. Available in 35c, 40c and 45c, as well as in 45x650b and 50x650b, there's a version optimal for any riding style. Come rain or shine, hardpack or loose gravel, this is Pirelli's answer for cyclists who demand a tire that is prepared for anything. *\$60; 500g (40c); pirelli.com*



STAGES DASH

A power meter is the single most—pardon us—powerful tool a cyclist has for training. More people than ever are riding with one, but its raw numbers are useless without being able to decode what they mean. The Stages Dash M50 features color-coded heart rate and power zones for seeing real-time effort at a glance. The Dash can determine your FTP (“functional threshold power”) based on recent training history—or you can manually enter your settings for maximum control. And for structured training the M50 comes preloaded with dozens of workouts, so you can put your power numbers to better use from the first ride. Plus, all data screens are fully customizable, both on the Dash itself or through the Stages app—you can even change from portrait to landscape mode. With bike-specific navigation and more than 12 hours of battery life, this is a full-featured GPS for any type of riding. *\$250; 94g; stagescycling.com*



DAWN TO DUSK KAPTIVE 10

The humble bottle cage is one of those things most people pay little attention to—until it fails to do its one job in a critical moment of a gravel race. You’ve lost your bottle and have no choice but to stop, lose the group you’re riding with and grab it, or else risk dehydration and cracking miles before the finish. Dawn to Dusk has a simple solution. Its Kaptive series of cages is ranked by grip force, from 8 to 14 pounds. The Kaptive 10 falls in the middle of the range, featuring 10 pounds of grip force that will ensure you never experience an errant bottle mid-ride again. And at only 39 grams, this 120mm-long carbon cage isn’t a weight liability on days when the elevation total hits five figures. *\$65; 39g; dawntodusk.bike*

POC WOMEN’S ULTIMATE VPDS BIB SHORTS

Not all bibs are created equal. POC isn’t the first company to release women’s bibs that allow for a bathroom break without removing the jersey, but with the Ultimate VPDS Bib Shorts, the Swedish company thinks it has the most advanced pair available—and these bibs are made by women, for women. They feature a new more comfortable strap design, with a single strap up front that splits into two traditional straps in the back. Adding to the comfort is POC’s women-specific chamois, featuring silicone inserts for vibration dampening. In the back, an overlapping fabric construction allows enough stretchiness for a nature break, while maintaining the compression needed for riding. And to keep things as fast as possible, the fabric features an aero print and integrated leg grippers, with everything sewn together with minimal stitching. *\$200; pocsports.com*



DT SWISS GRC 1400 SPLINE 42

Gravel wheels are having a moment right now. With most powerhouses in the bike-wheel game getting behind gravel, we’re enjoying a wellspring of excellent, purpose-built wheelsets. DT Swiss is right there in the mix with an entire line of gravel wheels, but it’s the GRC 1400 SPLINE 42 that has really caught our eye. Built for the gravel racer, this 42mm-deep wheel focuses on maximizing aerodynamic performance. With a 24 mm internal rim width, it provides ample support to high-volume tires for optimal rolling resistance and improved cornering. The company’s own testing shows 35mm slick or low-profile tread tires paired with this wheel to be the optimal tradeoff between aerodynamics and grip. But don’t be afraid to push the limit with your fancy new wheels. With features like durable DT aero comp spokes, they’re designed to take a beating and handle 130 kilograms (286 pounds) of system weight. *\$2,436; 1,611g; dtswiss.com Pm*

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STAGES DASH. GET TO WHERE YOU'RE GOING.



ALL-IN ON THE NOTION OF GRAVEL E-MOTION

Pinarello Dyodo Gravel

Pinarello is known for making Tour de France-winning race bikes, for a distinct Italian heritage and for attention to detail. The brand was born from the money Giovanni Pinarello won from earning the *maglia negra* jersey in the 1951 Giro d'Italia. Instead of continuing to race bikes, he took his winnings and opened up a shop in the historic town of Treviso, began making frames and the Pinarello name quickly became synonymous with race victory. The Pinarello story continues into the burgeoning gravel space with the impressive Grevil.

Arriving on the heels of the successful Pinarello Dyodo road e-bike, we quickly got our hands on the Dyodo Gravel and ended up spending the majority of our local gravel rides on this machine. We loved the Pinarello Grevil, so we were excited to see what the masterminds in Treviso would do with a gravel e-bike. The interesting thing is, the Dyodo Gravel really is a blending of the Dyodo and Grevil, and it takes much of its prowess from the success of those two models. Kudos to Pinarello for going all-in with the Dyodo platform, while many brands were playing the watch-and-wait game.



THE DETAILS

The Dyodo Gravel uses the same T700 carbon used on the Grevil but comes with the Ebikemotion X35 unit in the rear hub and the iWoc One controller on the top tube, with the 250wh battery stored nicely in the downtube. The wheelbase is similar to the Grevil with room for 42c tires as well as a 650b option. The range of the battery really depends on the rider's weight and modes used, but we easily managed two-and-a-half-hour rides with 3,000 feet of climbing on one charge. If you want to go farther (of course you do), there is now a better extender available for the Ebikemotion X35 system that will give you 208wh more for longer rides. The Dyodo Gravel is available in 46.5cm, 50cm, 53cm, 55cm and 58cm sizes.

THE RIDE

The Ebikemotion system is really intuitive and you will have it figured out in minutes, and once you do a few rides on your local gravel loop it will become clear to you when and where to save battery power and how to manage your ride. We realized a few things on the Dyodo Gravel. One, it's clearly a Pinarello with decades of design, race wins and attention to detail. It's also aesthetically on point with its smooth, Italian lines and muted, gray finish with a pop of orange details. It reminded us of a Paul Smith-designed Land Rover.

The other thing we noticed was the variety of riding we could pull off on the Dyodo. There are days when you want to go really hard and you can get a similar workout on this bike as on the Grevil; you just end up back home much quicker. On recovery days, it made the longer, slower climbs more



manageable and we could recover faster. We are spending a large portion of our riding time now on dirt and gravel and the Dyodo has become a worthy and trusted companion on the trails and hills around our Ojai HQ.

If you are looking to get into the e-bike game and spend enough time on gravel to warrant a new machine, you can't go wrong with the Pinarello Dyodo Gravel. The design, the rear hub system with the new range extender option, the build and the pricing put this bike at the top of our list. The Dyodo Gravel will make you want to ride more and more often, it's as simple as that. *Pm*

SPECIFICATION

pinarello.com
\$8,000; 27 lbs./12.3kg

Shimano Ultegra; Vision Trimax Wheels; Most Jaguar XA Aero Stem; Most Tiger Alu Aero Saddle; Most X3 seat post; Vittoria Terreno Zero Tires.



SRAM Red AXS

It's a fact of life that people expect more with passing time—more data from a phone plan, say, or more soda in a Big Gulp. Cyclists just want more from their bikes. They want to go more places and explore new roads. And they don't want to sacrifice on-road performance to do it. With the release of SRAM Red eTap AXS earlier this year, we were intrigued to see just how much ground an electronic road group updated with more gears and a damper-enabled derailleur could cover, from traditional tarmac to Big Sky Country gravel roads. So we got our hands on the group, built onto an S-Works Diverge, and put it to the test.

THE DETAILS

When component manufacturers have introduced extra gears in the past the change has, functionally, only decreased the jumps between cogs. For the latest Red group, it's not the fact that SRAM has gone to a 12-speed cassette that matters most, it's how the company has done it. By introducing a new, shorter XDR driver, SRAM has managed to squeeze in a 10-tooth cog. That changes gear ratios forever. In an innovation SRAM calls X-Range, you can run smaller chainrings up front but still achieve a higher gear than a standard 53x11 and simultaneously have lower gears—all while having smaller jumps between cogs. In the widest 10–33 cassette, there are five single-tooth jumps; in the other two cassette options, it rises to seven.

There's no need to check cassette-derailleur compatibility. Each Red AXS derailleur cage accepts up to a 33-tooth cog. And the rear derailleur has another trick up its sleeves. A silicon-fluid damper system removes the constant resistance of a friction-clutch system, allowing the derailleur its full range of motion. During quick, big hits that can derail chains, the damper prevents the cage from bucking around, keeping you riding through practically anything.

The AXS (pronounced “access”) in the name means this group has cross compatibility with other SRAM AXS



components. Most importantly, this means that for those looking to adventure around mountainous terrain with ample steep roads you can swap in an Eagle AXS mountain bike derailleur, which has room for up to a 10–50 Eagle cassette—now that’s an adventure rig.

AXS also means control through the SRAM AXS phone app—a single spot to set up the group, update firmware, check battery life and even keep track of mileage and maintenance. The app even allows you to customize how the group operates, offering sequential shifting for instance.

With our eyes toward off-road/on-road versatility, we tried a group with 46-33 chainrings paired with the 10–33 cassette. That means a 1:1 low gear for uphill slogs with enough gears to power downhill after.



THE RIDE

Where the front shifting was once lagging in eTap, it has caught up to Shimano Di2, now shifting under power with ease. We spent an entire ride diabolically trying to throw this group off its game (and probably looking like fools to anyone passing by). Front shifts under power—up or down; shifting through the cassette, shifting the front halfway through, then running through the rest of the cassette, all in rapid succession—everything just worked. The most convoluted shifting scenarios we could think of, we threw its way. Then we did it all again, full gas on a rutted-out dirt road, through bumpy descents and sandy corners. Again, flawless. The rear derailleur damper system keeps the chain in commission over any terrain. Having now put in extensive time with it on both a gravel bike with 40c tires and a traditional road bike, we haven’t experienced a single mis-shift in the rear or, more importantly, in the front. The reliability has been impressive.

SRAM’s paddle-shift logic (right hand is harder, left hand is easier and click both simultaneously to shift the front) remains



a favorite at *Peloton*. The tactile feel of the paddles is superb, providing a satisfying and audible click with each shift. Granted, there will be occasional scenarios where being able to access the full range of either the front or rear derailleur with a single hand would be beneficial, like while trying to eat or grab a bottle during a race, but the times when that truly makes a difference are few and far between.

The shifting speed is now faster than the old eTAP, a welcome improvement. And while there’s no option to change the shift speed, SRAM has gone ahead and made this group shift as fast as it can while allowing the necessary split-second for the system to determine whether a front or rear shift is being requested. Those shifts happen precisely every time, but if the rear derailleur gets slightly off it can be adjusted on the fly from the shifters by holding down the paddle and shifter AXS button simultaneously—the right trims the derailleur toward the dropout, the left toward the wheel.

For anyone seeking one bike to race road and gravel, a dedicated gravel racer or a traditional road bike, Red eTap AXS has to be at the top of the list. The new, wider gearing made possible by the 10-tooth cog has been a game changer, allowing us to arrive at the steepest parts of grueling climbs with a couple of extra gears and plenty to race back down; shifting is smooth and reliable; and the battery life is holding up to the advertised 60 hours. Simply stated, this group rolls with the punches, performing spectacularly, no matter the conditions. *Pm*

SPECIFICATION

sram.com

\$4,158 as tested (2x, hydraulic brakes, power meter),

\$3,648 (same group without power meter); 2,554g (2,518g without power)



HAVE YOU EVER HEARD OF SUPER MAG?

VAAST A/1 Gravel

Let's set one thing straight right from the gate: This bike will not spontaneously combust mid-ride, no matter how spicy your climbing skills are or how high your max wattage reads. Yes, magnesium lives in the backpack of many a former boy scout, ready to help start a fire in the wilderness if so needed. But no matter how much your riding buddies joke otherwise your ride isn't about to require a mid-ride detour to the firehouse.

THE DETAILS

VAAST is not the first company to dabble in magnesium. Both lighter and stronger than aluminum and titanium, the material's potential has been known since bike wheels started turning. Notably, Óscar Pereiro rode a magnesium Pinarello to the top step of the 2006 Tour de France (after Floyd Landis was DQ'd). But magnesium has been a difficult material for frame builders to work with and is prone to corrosion.

That's where AE81 Allite Super Mag, a magnesium alloy developed for aerospace applications, comes in. This particular



alloy is designed to be easy to weld and has corrosion resistance properties on par with aluminum thanks to its high purity, use of rare-earth metals and a Plasma Electrolytic Oxidation coating on the inside and out. Also, under extreme temperatures, it melts instead of burning—not that you'll be encountering many 1,200-degree days. And while once available only to classified government projects, you can now own a complete bike built from this material for \$2,500.

Super Mag is in the same price ballpark as aluminum, but VAAST is not comparing its bike to other metal ones; it has its eyes set on carbon. With 20 times greater vibration damping than aluminum, the A/1's ride characteristics are more similar to carbon, perfect for a bike designed to ride gravel with up to 700x40mm tires. And the weight, 1,200 grams for a medium frame, is even lower than some comparable carbon frames. With fender and rack mounts, the A/1 also brings more versatility for on-road uses like commuting than other gravel frames.

Super Mag has another benefit not talked about much in bike production: environmental. Carbon frames ride brilliantly but they are essentially bits of plastic epoxied together, making end-of-life-disposal options practically nonexistent. One crack and your carbon frame is a very expensive piece of trash. Like other metals, Super Mag is 100-percent recyclable. But VAAST also estimates it takes about 40-percent fewer resources to produce on the frontend than other frame materials.

VAAST plans to start shipping bikes in January.



THE RIDE

An entry-level (at least in our world) bike from an upstart brand made from a material with a checkered past had all the alarm bells going off in our heads. But it didn't take long to come around. Really, all it took was one trip off-road.

The A/1's vibration-damping prowess through the low-frequency buzz of gravel is quickly apparent. Long days on gravel roads will have you wanting more, rather than beelining for the ibuprofen. And the frame's low weight also shines through, with the bike finding a comfortable pace quickly.

While not competing with the highest-end carbon on stiffness, it still feels snappy, able to jump out of corners on the road or navigate technical dirt roads with frequent speed changes. Our only concern with durability is how one section of the dropped chainstay will hold up after gravel chipped away some of the paint. But so far it is fine through a couple washes and multiple rides near the coast.

The red color is gorgeous, sparkling in the sun—when not covered in dirt. And with quality components like the gravel-specific Shimano GRX build and Maxxis tires, VAAST hasn't skimped where it matters most while outfitting the A/1. Its build isn't holding it back. It's a capable off-road bike that's quite a bit of fun. *Pm*



SPECIFICATION

vaastbikes.com

\$2,500; 8.96kg/19.75 lbs. (size medium w/o pedals or cages)

Shimano GRX ST-RX600 shifters; GRX RD-RX812 rear derailleur; KMC X11 chain; GRX RX600 brakes; Praxis Zyante carbon crank 42; 11-42 cassette; Stan's NoTubes Grail S1 wheels; Maxxis Rambler 38c tires; WTB Silverado 142 Comp saddle; VAAST seat post, stem and handlebar.

DOWNTOWN NEVADA CITY.



Images 2x: Tim Schamber.

THE GETAWAY: NEVADA CITY, CALIFORNIA

“NEVADA CITY EXISTS IN TWO PARALLEL UNIVERSES,” reads a hand-lettered sign in a downtown storefront. “The 19th century mining camp of our imaginations and the present day town of ‘reality.’”

Looking around this Northern California town in the Sierra Nevada foothills, an hour’s drive north of Sacramento, this tidbit of window wisdom seems more true by the second. On the surface, Nevada City maintains the mid-19th century charm of its Gold Rush mining-town roots, complete with wooden sidewalks and gas-powered street lamps. In the event of a power outage, the city falls back in time even more, lit only by the soft glow of those lamps.



CARRINGTON'S FINE WINES.

But behind the Old West storefront façades lie fully modern restaurants, bars and small businesses, each with its own small-town charm. A fulfilling weekend can be spent mostly in the downtown area, in and around the mile-or-so course of the famed Nevada City Classic.

Perhaps one of the toughest circuit races around, the Classic's winners list is a who's who of American road racing, including Greg LeMond, Levi Leipheimer and Lance Armstrong. Half of this grueling circuit is uphill, with steep grades—and just walking it is enough to instill a sense of how hard this race is. The city's 2,500-foot elevation does its part too, at least for those of us who live at sea level. This coming June marks the event's 60th anniversary. But there's more riding here than this classic road race. The Tahoe National Forest is just outside of town, offering quick access to gravel and mountain bike trails.

Today, 3,000-and-counting people call Nevada City home, down a bit from its population peak in the 1800s when swarms arrived to try their luck at gold mining. But despite the small population, it packs in restaurants and businesses that would make large cities envious, in a gorgeous setting full of fresh air. Our hosts for this trip were Kurt Stockton and Robin Farina and we want to thank them for the generosity showing us the best spots and rides in their hometown.

WHERE TO EAT & DRINK

FOXHOUND ESPRESSO & COFFEE BROASTER. In a world where every coffee shop feels like it's following a formula (use this lighting, these mugs, these chairs), Foxhound Espresso breaks the mold. It's a place where people read books and talk to one another, instead of plunging their heads into a laptop keyboard. The coffee is hand roasted and made to order, served in handmade ceramic mugs. Music is played on a record player, with LPs available for purchase—it might be the only place left in town to buy vinyl. Finding it can be a little difficult, but just look for the red building on Spring Street.

THREE FORKS BAKERY & BREWING CO. We could recommend Three Forks for its baked goods or beer—both made from scratch on site—and we do; but it's the meals that will have us coming back. Three Forks takes the farm-to-fork idea seriously, sourcing ingredients from local Nevada County farmers and even making condiments from scratch. Waste is kept to a minimum too, with food scraps going back to the farms to feed animals. Good relationships with farmers are core to Three Forks. Our first night in town, they were holding their annual appreciation dinner for the very farmers who grow their food. We would recommend a few dishes, but the menu changes constantly based on what's fresh. Order





Image: William Tracy

YOU BET! BICYCLE SALES & SERVICE.

some vegetable dishes, salads and a few pizzas baked in their wood-fired oven and enjoy everything family style.

MI PUEBLO TAQUERIA. We are unapologetically a Southern California-based publication, so we can't resist the pull of a good burrito, no matter where we are. Mi Pueblo Taqueria is a classic Mexican restaurant in the heart of Nevada City. Simply put, it has no right being this good this far north of San Diego County. The menu is expansive enough that finding what you really want isn't a problem. But the California burrito with carnitas, washed down with an imported Mexican cola made with real cane sugar, is a delicious "go-to" that will satisfy any post-ride cravings.

CHIEF CRAZY HORSE SALOON & GRILL. The Old West feels very alive at the Chief Crazy Horse Saloon. Okay, the doors don't swing open like they do in a classic Western film, the 10-gallon hats are mostly replaced by mesh trucker hats and no one is dueling in the street, but the façade maintains a historic feel. Inside, the bar is updated for a new era with an atmosphere all its own. Catch live musical acts multiple nights per week with a lineup as eclectic as the people Nevada City seems to attract. The bar's fully stocked, but with an old fashioned, just-right feel.

WHERE TO SHOP

YOU BET! BICYCLE SALES & SERVICE.

Located just a short walk or ride from downtown, You Bet! is

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CARRINGTON'S FINE WINES. One of our favorite stops in Nevada City, Carrington's Fine Wines is a must-visit. Cal Carrington is a local legend in the wine industry and has been gracefully managing this shop for 30 years. Housed in a historic building built in 1861, his eclectic selections and wine-tasting schedule are inspiring. We happened to stop by when Robin Farina and Cal and friends were sampling a 1990 Dunn Vineyards Howell Mountain Cabernet, which was a treat. Cal doesn't ship, so you have to stop by to pick up your wines. We like that. Open Thursday, Friday and Saturday. carringtonwines.com

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LEAVE THE ROADS BEHIND

—



photo : Damien Rigondeaud

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UTOPIAN STONE. The Gold Rush is alive and well in Nevada City. There aren't exactly miners walking around in Levi's toting pans and pickaxes, but there happens to be a world-class gold jewelry store right in town: Utopian Stone. Operating in Nevada City since 1974, this store houses several master jewelers creating one-of-a-kind gold jewelry for life's most important occasions. If you're not in the market for a custom ring or necklace, you can catch a glimpse from Pine Street of the jewelers hard at work as you pass by—it's almost as exciting as finding a nugget of your own.

WHEYWARD GIRL CREAMERY. One of the coolest cheese shops we've visited in a while, with a stunning amount of options to choose from, located right next door to Three Forks Bakery, Wheyward Girl Creamery also offers cheese-making classes if you are in the area for more than a day. Make sure to try the Casatica di Bufala from Bergamo, Italy, and thank us later. wheywardgirlcreamery.com



Images 3x: Tim Schamber.

WHERE TO STAY

GOLD CREEK INN. A four-story Victorian home from 1861 nestled along the Gold Run Creek, the Gold Creek Inn offers a quaint bed-and-breakfast experience close to downtown. The inn features five bedrooms, each with a private bathroom, and some with a private balcony overlooking the creek. Grab a quick bite from the daily continental breakfast, or stick around on the weekends for a hot morning meal. With all the comforts of home, including full access to the kitchen, a grill, WiFi and a 24-hour coffee-and-tea station, this is the perfect home base for your getaway. And just a few minutes walk out of town, you can easily return for a midday nap or take a break out in the yard or patio. goldcreekinn.com

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THE NUGGET. With more than 4,000 feet of climbing in 27 miles, many on maintained county dirt roads, make sure you bring your climbing legs with you. Ride Broad Street north out of town, cross Highway 49 and continue as it becomes Bloomfield Road. Follow Bloomfield until it reaches a T-intersection, where you take a left, then an immediate right onto Lake Vera Purdon Road. Take a right onto Rock Creek Road and then turn left onto Bloomfield-Graniteville Road. A bit after crossing the Yuba River, take a left onto Grizzly Hill Road. Turn right onto Tyler Foote Road, then a left onto Jackass Flats Road. Keep following that road after it becomes Blind Shady Road, and then turn left onto Purdon Road. Continue along as Purdon becomes Rector. Rector meets back up with Rock Creek Road; then just retrace the first part of the ride back to the start. *Pm*



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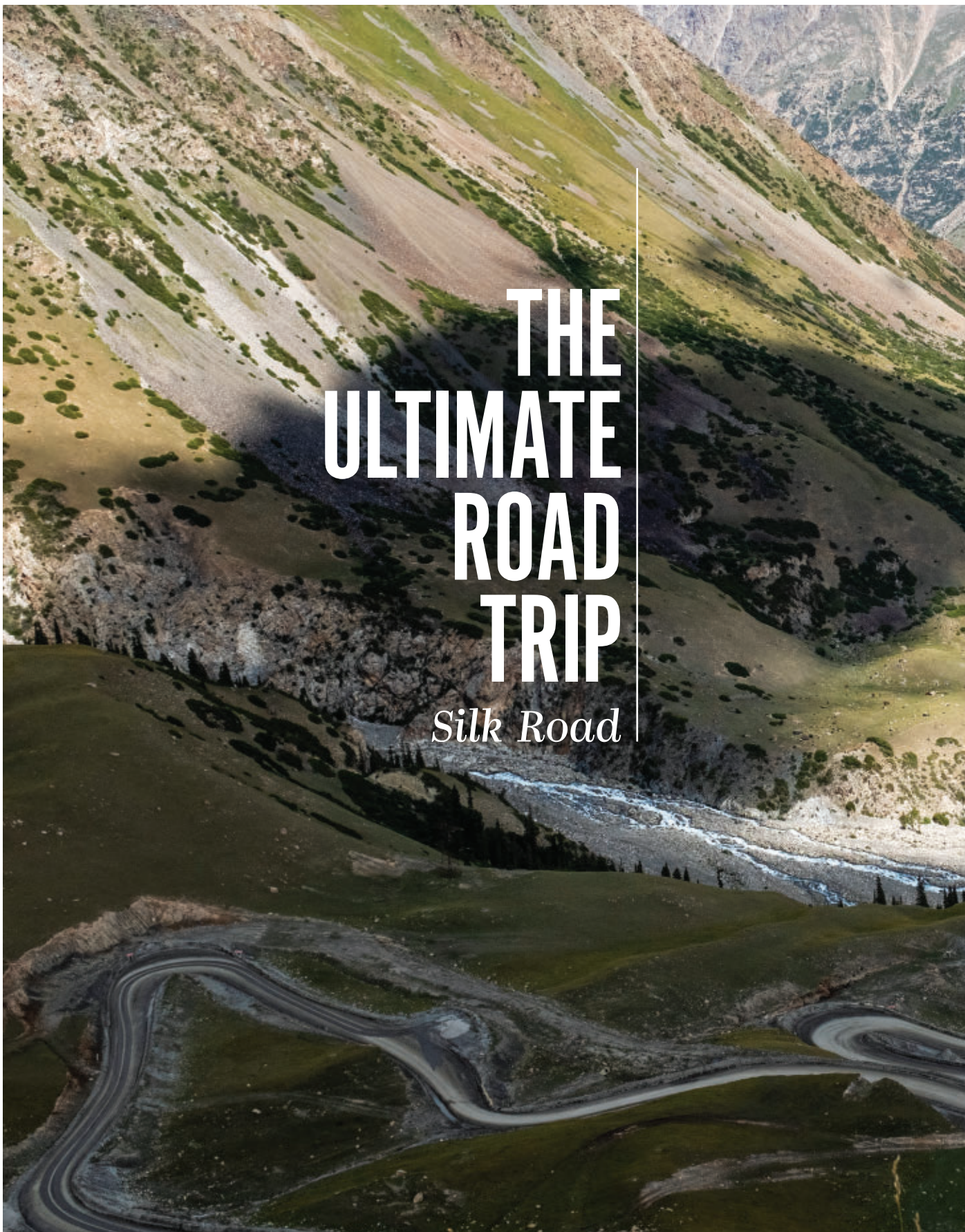


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THE ULTIMATE ROAD TRIP

Silk Road



Words: James Startt
Images: Danil Usmanova/
Silk Road Mountain Race



Great road trips, there are many. But long before Route 66 was paved—indeed, many centuries before—the ultimate road trip was trekking the Great Silk Road that joins Europe with Asia. In its heyday, even before Columbus sailed the blue, travelers and traders made their way from the Mediterranean to China. Sure, fortunes were made on the silk trade, but anything from spices to bows and arrows could seemingly be found along these storied routes. And while many of the old roads and passageways have long since been abandoned, a new cycling event celebrates this legendary historic journey.

Simply titled the Silk Road Mountain Race, this one- or two-week affair (depending on your performance) is quickly making a name for itself on the ultra-distance cycling calendar. Situated in remote Kyrgyzstan, the event offers cyclists from around the world a chance to return to the once-illustrious crossroads of this historic trading route. Founded just over two years ago by British-French bikepacker Nelson Trees, SRMR is quickly becoming a goal for cyclists looking for an ultimate adventure.

“To be honest, my main concern at the start was simply whether we would even get enough people to come out for the race,” Trees says. “But quickly I realized that we hit a chord. We had 90 starters the first year and 135 in our second edition.

“Several years ago, I was living in China and I rode from Shanghai back to Paris with a friend of mine and when I passed through Kyrgyzstan I just knew I wanted to come back at some point in my life. The people, the scenery, it’s just amazing!”

And despite the relative obscurity of this former Soviet country, Trees insists that Kyrgyzstan is actually quite

accessible: “There are flights from Europe from 350 to 400 euros and, unlike many countries in this part of the world, there are virtually no visa requirements.”

Himself an ultra-distance rider and three-time veteran of Europe’s Transcontinental Race, Trees wanted to offer cyclists an ultimate adventure, one that combines extraordinary landscapes with an ultimate sporting challenge. “I definitely thought of the event from a rider’s perspective as I designed, and then scouted, it. Having ridden it all, I could see how it would play out in the race,” Trees says. “For the overall format I was inspired by the Transcontinental where the staffed checkpoints really add something to the experience. And that is especially true in Kyrgyzstan where riders are out in the wilderness and exposed to the elements; the checkpoints are like islands of warmth and comfort. There’s a great atmosphere in the yurt camps as the riders come through and get the chance to share what they’ve just been through.”

For the record, from the physical aspect, the SRMR is plenty challenging as there is about 1,800 kilometers of riding that includes over 30,000 meters of climbing. But the dividends





are readily visible with unique views from 4,000-meter-high climbs or memorable encounters with local children only too happy to give you a bottle of horse milk on a hot day.

Cyclists, however, must really be prepared for just about anything. “Only about 20 percent of the event is on tarmac,” says Trees. “But that is Kyrgyzstan tarmac, which is often not the best. And the rest is some kind of gravel, anything from smooth gravel roads to washboards to really rough 4x4 tracks and even small bits of single track and animal tracks.”

Like so many of the ultra events, the Silk Road Mountain Race is virtually unsupported and participants must carry all supplies with them. Camping gear is a must as are clothes that will allow them to ride from extreme heat to sub-freezing conditions.

“It is very difficult to guarantee anything,” Trees says honestly. “Every rider has a spot tracker with a GPS function and we have two medic cars on the course that are tracking the different participants. This is not about marginal gains. It is pretty minimal. You have a start point and a finish point. And you are on your own. It’s not intervals and watts. It’s just a bunch of people out in wild conditions.”

While the event has already attracted specialist racers, the majority of participants are amateurs in search of an ultimate adventure. And some, like South African Guy Jennings, are clearly learning as they go along. “You know, the next time

when a race manual states ‘we strongly advise using a tent,’ I think I may just listen,” he says. “I bedded down at about 3,400 meters on the first night, only to awake frozen solid at minus-10 degrees.”

Jennings earned the name “One-Pedal Hero” for a series of mishaps. Breaking his crank one day he actually rode nearly 160 kilometers to the finish of the stage. But then, to continue, he first had to take a 300-kilometer taxi ride for an unprecedented pit stop to Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan’s capital city,



DARE TO WIN



Photo: Danny Munson

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to get a new crank before returning to the race. Still riding within the cut-off time, he then broke a pedal climbing the Tong Pass, had to ride back down until he was able to bargain for a plastic pedal from a child's bike, before riding back over the mountain and eventually finishing.

"It was a huge sense of relief and satisfaction just to finish," Jennings says unsurprisingly. "With each one of my mishaps, I kept calm and just thought of how to sort the problem out. But sometimes I did think 'WTF, what next?!' But I really was determined to finish this race and it just felt wonderful to cross the line. The ice-cold beer served was pretty fantastic too!"



And while Jennings came solely for the adventure offered by such an event, those that came here to race were equally satisfied simply to finish. "Honestly, winning doesn't mean a lot to me," says American Jay Petervary, who won the first edition and finished third in 2019. "Yeah, I'm proud, but what I really like is reflecting on everything that I have gone through to get to the finish. A lot happens in eight days on the Silk Road Mountain Race route.

"For me the real beauty comes from learning and understanding from everything that happens. Most people could not comprehend all these situations that occur, things like wearing holes in my shoes, sleeping in the rain at high altitude, lifting up a sheep on to a horse, negotiating to get into a guest house late at night, tripping over and through mountain passes, fixing multiple flat tires daily, you name it. But firstly I am in a race against myself and a clock, not others."

Even for race organizer Trees the finish line is pretty special. "My biggest satisfaction is talking to people at the end of the race and seeing how it affects them, and the impact it has on their lives. Often it's the tough times that stay in their memory and really give them that sense of satisfaction of having overcome something when they get to the finish line," he says. "That's why we do this sort of thing!" *Pm*

The third edition of the Silk Road Mountain Race starts on August 20, 2020. silkroadmountainrace.cc



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DAWN DUSK





GRINDING THE OREGON TRAIL

Words: Yuri Hauswald
Images: Adam Lapierre



Turi "Blue Steel" Hauswald.

NO ONE DIED OF DYSENTERY.

There weren't any encounters with "hostiles." Scurvy was kept at bay. No prairie schooners broke down. No riders or livestock were lost. And, unlike the hundreds of thousands of pioneers of yore who braved the 2,000-mile Oregon Trail route from Independence, Missouri, to Oregon City, Oregon, participants had to cover "only" 350 miles in the span of five days. Yup, I'm talking about the inaugural Oregon Trail Gravel Grinder (or OTGG), a first-of-its-kind gravel stage race that traversed some rugged and remote alpine zones in the Deschutes and Willamette National Forests, where racers literally traced history by riding some of the very same wagon-train roads used by the early pioneers.

The OTGG is the brainchild of Chad Sperry, an event promoter with two decades' worth of experience that includes such iconic races as the Tour of Utah, Mount Hood Cycling Classic and Cascade Cycling Classic. Chad knows a thing or two about event production and, as of late, he has turned his attention to gravel. According to Chad: "As riders are fleeing from road racing, and even road riding in general, due to ever-increasing traffic and greater safety concerns with distracted drivers, gravel is becoming a sanctuary for these riders."

What is OTGG? It's a challenging point-to-point, five-day gravel stage race that explores regions where you can still

find historic wagon ruts, old-growth forests and high alpine vistas. Chad said, "We wanted to create a big five-day stage race that offers both a super-tough course for pros and accomplished amateurs and a moderately difficult course focusing on attracting recreational riders looking to challenge themselves." Mission accomplished.

How did each day unfold out on the Oregon Trail? Well, daily preparations began at 6:30 a.m. with coffee, served very fittingly out of a prairie schooner of sorts—a late 1970s Volkswagen van retrofitted to dole out copious amounts of morning motivation. Hearty breakfast grub was next and then the daily two-step of tent breakdown, race-day prep and gear packing began. With stages starting at the respectable time of 8:30 a.m., or thereabouts, the mornings didn't feel too hurried or hectic. And with the exception of one stage, all started with neutral roll-outs of various lengths, which was a great way to shake off sleep, build camaraderie among the pedaling pioneers and get a good warm-up in the process.

"By the time you hit the historic Santiam Wagon Road at mile 16.2 it is a full-on tough time. Remember that all wagon roads are rough, rutted and challenging! Riders will cross creeks, rocks and sand for the next 3 miles before reaching Aid Station 1." When these words are the official race message

A cyclist in a dark and orange jersey is riding away on a wide, light-colored gravel path. The path is flanked by green grassy hills. The cyclist is wearing a helmet and a backpack. The scene is brightly lit, suggesting a sunny day.

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for stage 1, you know you're in for a real humdinger. Chad's a straight shooter when it comes to course conditions, so it wasn't surprising that the wagon road ate a few folks—but, boy, did it make for a kick in the pants. And the ripping 12-mile descent to the finish filled riders with so much stoke that they forgot about the rutted-road misery earlier in the day.

So what were the other stages like? Well, we pedaled through pioneer history, tackled massive fire road climbs that followed tracts of harvested forests, traced old wagon roads through the Cascades and experienced remote zones that very few folks get to see, even Oregon locals.

Unlike the early pioneers who had to manage their own food, livestock, gear and wagon loads at the end of each weary day on the trail, OTGG participants were well taken care of by the event crew that did everything from help breakdown and set up tents to load luggage and make sure there were snacks and beer at the finish. And speaking of the finish, on two of the five days there was musical entertainment to be had and bucolic riverbanks to sit by, while soaking in the Oregon outback beauty.

Looking to hitch your two-wheeled wagon to an epic event? Enjoy exploring remote terrain? Like breathtaking views? Dig riding various types of gravel? Well, check out the Oregon Trail Gravel Grinder, this five-day gravel race will take you deep into the Wild West of the Cascades. Go on, give OTGG a try in June 2020. Cuz who doesn't want to be a pioneer? *Pm*

ATTENTION TO DETAIL

Wrapping her bars with fresh tape is a technical luxury that Ayse always embraces with critical excitement. This time, she's installing the Nastro Piloti Bar Tape. With an eye for perfection, she is meticulous with every detail of her wrap, then smiles and whispers to herself, "this is a game changer." From installation to post-ride clean-up, Nastro Piloti out-performs the competition with the world's most advanced foam laminate technology. *Enjoy the superior comfort, durability and grip in even the most extreme conditions.*

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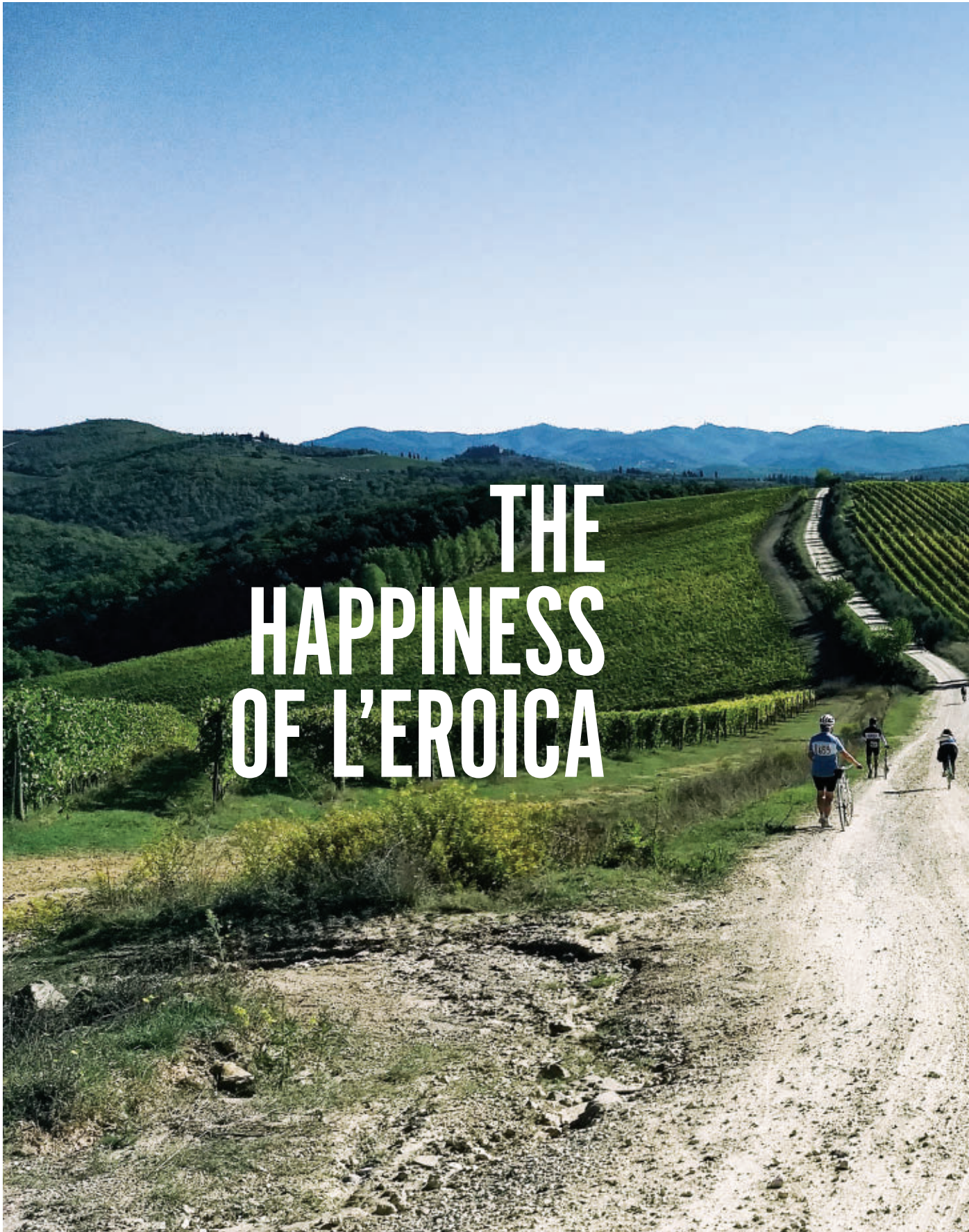
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THE HAPPINESS OF L'EROICA





L'Eroica has the power to catch you by surprise when you least expect it. Instants filled with never-ending streams of riders, dramatic views and untold feelings that last forever. That's how I enjoyed my first Eroica in 2017. The ride was exhausting, 75 kilometers of pain, pushing me to my limits. But once I glimpsed the finish line, joy and emotion suddenly burst from inside and I forgot all the suffering, bringing extraordinary feelings that are hard to describe, even by this modest journalist. But those feelings are why I returned to Tuscany to celebrate the 23rd edition.

The first icon of L'Eroica, Luciano Berruti, wore a handlebar mustache, tweed cap and oversized goggles, and he rode the bicycle of 1907 Tour de France winner Lucien Petit-Breton. Luciano died in the saddle in 2017, but his son Jacek Berruti continues the family's love for vintage cycling. "L'Eroica is the drumroll that starts to beat within us long before the event," he says. "The intensity of the drumroll increases day after day, and then it's time to get ready: grease the gears, air your clothes, polish your leather shoes. And on starting I find myself struggling, eating dust and hearing the rumble of dirt roads beneath my wheels. If, at that moment, someone asked me to define happiness, I would reply: L'Eroica."

Founded in 1997 by Giancarlo Brocci, one of Luciano Berruti's friends, L'Eroica is a vintage bike "race" that takes place under the Tuscan sun on the region's unique white roads with a start and finish in Gaiole in Chianti, near Siena. There are no official winners. It's a feast, a celebration, a party dedicated to cycling. Its slogan—"the beauty of fatigue, the thrill of conquest"—was coined by Brocci. He's right. Fatigue

and conquest go hand in hand, up and down the endless hills of Chianti and the Val d'Orcia, surrounded by vineyards, olive groves and cypress trees, along with the rattle of wheels plowing over the gravel of the Renaissance-era *strade bianche*, the white roads, preserved thanks to L'Eroica itself.

Reflecting Jacek's actions, I begin preparing my 1985 Francesco Moser bike well in advance of the 2019 Eroica. The year of manufacture is important. The rules speak clearly. To participate, the bike must be built prior to 1987, pedals must have toe clips and straps, and brake cables must pass over the handlebar. Wool shorts and jersey likely complete your outfit. This revival event carries a much deeper message, reaffirming an authentic cycling culture based on a healthy suffering that made the great Fausto Coppi and Gino Bartali such heroes. It's a cycling culture that maximizes your body's limits, succeeds in spreading respect and leads to bonding with fellow cyclists.

On Eroica eve, I spend the day photographing and meeting friends old and new. Happiness is mounting. Gaiole's streets



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are in party mode. But you can feel that everyone's minds are already on the Sunday ride. Some will wake up at 3 a.m. to ride L'Eroica's long route of 209 kilometers—including my friend Paolo Rinaldi, whose friends know him as a Bartalis alias. You can choose from four other routes: the one over 135 kilometers; the new 106-kilometer challenge, dedicated to the late Felice Gimondi; the still-challenging 81-kilometer that I will ride; and the 46-kilometer stroll.

On race day, Sunday, October 6, I start at 8 a.m. The air is cold, you have to dress warmly to avoid freezing on the descent before the first hill, the one topped by the Castle of Brolio. Along the way, candles are still alight on the roadside, reminding us that, like my friend Paolo, some riders passed this way before sunrise. The undemanding climb is as beautiful as the descent, where I see a sweep of vineyards unfold. A few kilometers later at Leccione, I pass the famous tree under which Lucy Harmon in the Bernardo Bertolucci film "Stealing Beauty" lost her virginity.

After Pianella, we climb to Vagliagli, where I crashed two years ago. This time I descend with caution toward Radda in Chianti, one of the most beautiful villages in the region, where I eat and drink (water only). After the scenic road to Panzano, another climb awaits me, the damned Volpaia. I

had to walk this one before, but this time is different. I climb slowly on my 42x25, enjoying the people who applaud and encourage us and giving me the strength to get to the top. The worst is over. It's straight on to Gaiole, but the final 20 kilometers seem endless. I feel the joy rising as I use all my strength until the finish to feel and love the same happiness as Luciano Berruti experienced on his 20 years of riding L'Eroica before he died.

The following day I talk on the phone with my friend Paolo about his ride on the long route. He says, "I can't find words to describe it. I thought I wouldn't manage to finish, but after I crossed the line at 9 p.m., I could have cycled another 100K. The most fascinating aspect came after the 4:30 a.m. start. Reaching the hills approaching Radi, the sun started to rise, creating second after second of picture-postcard moments. I then realized that we all are part of this beautiful scenery and that the satisfaction comes from living this moment that can't be stopped in time or replicated."

Indeed, it doesn't matter how many kilometers you choose to undertake. Whatever the choice, it won't fail to be a challenge. Every route will be L'Eroica. And it will definitely equate with happiness. *Pm*



THE HIMALAYAN CONQUEST

*An exclusive interview with
record-breaking climber
Nirmal “Nims” Purja*





“AIN’T NO MOUNTAIN HIGH ENOUGH” was the title of a classic Motown hit. But in the case of Nirmal “Nims” Purja, the lyrics recently became reality as the Nepalese mountaineer, who’s also a citizen of Great Britain, established a daunting record by climbing all 14 of the world’s 8,000-meter (26,246-foot) Himalayan summits in six months and six days. Such a feat previously had only been accomplished in a little under eight years, and just climbing all 14 peaks in a lifetime is considered the cornerstone of a mountaineer’s career. But Purja, 36, shattered that achievement by literally transforming mythic climbs like Lhotse and Everest into his own personal pursuit race. “My whole style of climbing is very different,” he told *Peloton* in an exclusive interview. “It is not like I work my way up from one base camp to the next. For me, I am racing!”

We had a chance to catch up with Purja while he was in London recovering and digesting his historic feat. But as he looked back over his recent achievement, he did so with an almost uncanny modesty. Perhaps for Purja himself the achievement has yet to sink in.

Nims, firstly congratulations on climbing all of the 8,000-meter summits of the Himalayas in record time, something no human has ever come close to achieving. How does it feel to have accomplished something truly unprecedented? Well, I actually feel normal to be honest. I am both happy and humble at the same time. I am back in England now for the first time in a while and I don’t really know what to say.

How did this idea of climbing all of these mythic peaks in such a short period of time even crystalize in your mind? Well, I only started really

climbing in 2012 and just wanted to make it up one of these climbs. But then I just really got into it. When I first climbed Everest and Aulagiri it was just about getting up one of those climbs. I never thought I would be doing this. But then in 2017 I climbed Everest, Lhotse and Makalu, three of the world’s five highest mountains, in five days and I still had more. And at that point I just realized that I had so much to give in the mountain world.

At the time I was a member of the British Special Forces, as I was a member of the army for 16 years. And I proposed to them to attempt to climb all five of the highest mountains in 18 days. But they said no because they thought it was too much of a risk. So I decided to leave the Special Forces and just focus on climbing. But then I had the time and I just thought, “Why only five summits? Why not just climb all 14

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of the highest mountains in the world?” It’s funny because some people think that because I was in the Special Forces it was normal that I could do this. But for those that understand mountain climbing, no one thought this would be possible.

How do you train for something like this? I mean it is not like you do laps or intervals up and down Mont Everest! Or do you? Do you run, bike or work out in the gym to build your core strength? If I am being completely honest, mate, I didn’t train at all! We only had 12 months to prepare for this and in the last three months I really had to spend a lot of time working on raising money because the whole year had a budget of about 750,000 British pounds [just under \$1 million]. I really wanted to spend the last three months before the trip training, but I just couldn’t because we were behind on the funding. And if there is no funding there is no project. So unfortunately I couldn’t really train.

Wow, you are a force of nature! Ha-ha!

How did you define the order of the climbs? Was it by proximity? Yes, that was part of it. But also we did a lot of research with my team looking back over the past years when those climbs were summited to guarantee the best conditions and then their proximity to one another.

Is there any one climb that is the hardest? I know Everest is the highest. But is there another climb that is particularly challenging for reasons we might not consider? No, not really. But then my whole style of climbing

is very different. It is not like I work my way up from one base camp to the next. For me, I am racing! For Aulagiri, for example, we climbed that in 60- to 70-kilometer [per hour] winds with no ropes, no fixed lines. It was like four days of no sleep at all. And there are other climbs like Kangchenjunga, the world’s third-highest mountain, that I summited straight from the base camp right after Aulagiri—[that] is almost a suicidal mission. And then I went up K2, which 90 percent of the climbers give up on. Every aspect of a climb is different based on the conditions of the moment. What the lines are like, what the oxygen levels are. Everything is always changing.

Your entire support team consisted of climbers from Nepal. Why are they considered the best climbers in the world? Well, to be honest, they are the only team that could have kept up with me in terms of speed and intensity. I had a team of five, but only perhaps one of them would make it to the summit of any particular climb.

How many times have you climbed Everest? Five times.

And what is that like? Is it like an old friend, or is it always special? It’s always special, because it is always different. Of course there are similarities, but even if you take the same route, it is always different.

You took that amazing picture of a long line of climbers waiting to reach the summit of Everest this year. More and more people it seems are making it to the top. But there are more and more casualties too. And this year in

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particular was devastating. Why are there so many deaths? Is it just related to the sheer number of attempts? Well, to be honest, the number of climbers on Everest this year is no different than last year. But what happened this year is that the fixed lines went up late and there was only a small window of opportunity for people to make it up, so it was really a combination of the amount of people trying to summit at a particular time.

Can you describe to those of us that have never climbed more than say 3,000 or 4,000 meters, what it is like to be climbing at 8,000 meters? Is there a zone at 6,000 or 7,000 meters where you really feel a difference, where oxygen or other factors come into play that we could never imagine? Well, I would say that as soon as you climb into that 8,000-meter line you are crossing into that zone. There is a huge difference between 7,000 meters and 8,000 meters. You just enter into a threshold where no human being can really survive. The oxygen is just too thin. So once you cross that threshold, you are essentially dying! It's just a matter of when. Some of us can last longer than others, but our time is limited. The whole human body depends on oxygen. Everything is just super

tiring. But it is a voluntary pain. We chose to be there, so it is about how we deal with that pain.

But then at the same time there must be an incredible high that goes along with the experience. So there is a sort of payback? Yes, especially when you are just five meters from the summit and you know you are going to make it to the summit. That said, as soon as you make it to the summit, you know you have to make it back down. And you have to do that as quickly as possible too!

That's interesting, because there are a lot of great climbers in bike racing, but often it seems they forget that they must also descend just as well. And in mountain climbing this seems to be just as true. I mean getting off a mountain can be just as complicated as getting up it, right? Absolutely. A lot of people give 100 percent, but they forget that they have to get back down and that is often the hardest part. If you look into the index of where the most accidents happen on the 8,000-meter peaks [it's] on the way back down. People forget that it takes just as much effort and energy to get back down. You have to make it back to the base camp.

Where do you go from here now that you have mastered all of the mythic climbs in the world's highest mountains? Well, it's been a hell of a journey! Right now I am in London and working on a full-length documentary that will be released in January of next year and I am working on a book that will come out in June or July, so there is lots of stuff coming up. And then I will be back guiding on Everest, K2 and Lhotse next year. And beyond that you will just have to wait. *Pm*



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WORLD'S LIGHTEST SADDLE

Carbon wonder saddle? No. This is from the 1930s French saddle maker, Continentale. Tagged “Bauriat” on the back, this saddle was quite popular in its day. However, improved technology and changing fashions ultimately shifted saddles away from steel and leather to synthetic materials, space-age metals and aerodynamics.

This saddle's showcased weight of 43 grams (just 1.5 ounces!) is not an error. But it would be a very small rider who would be able to use it. It's all of 14cm long and 9cm wide (5.5 by 3.5 inches). In fact, the saddle is a salesman's sample. As was common at the time with nearly every conceivable hard good that was sold, from furniture to bicycle saddles, samples were rendered in a diminutive scale so the buyer could see a scaled-down version of the salesman's offering.

For more than 20 years, I kept an eye out for a vintage bicycle component salesman's sample. I think I gave up at least a decade ago assuming if such a thing ever existed it had been absorbed into other collections or simply thrown away. Then, in mid-November, while visiting a friend in Belgium during the Ghent 6, on a side table at his home, there stood this saddle. After some discussion, the saddle went out the front door with me....

It's great when such a small, relatively inconsequential item can bring such a sense of joy! *Pm*

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