

Mountain Biking the Kokopelli Trail

By Claire Fisher

It's not that it was the most difficult trail I've ever done, but more that it was the hardest four days of my life. We did the 142-miles from Fruita, Colo. to Moab Utah, self-supported. This translates to carrying your sleeping pad and bivvy-sack, two 100-ounce bladders of water, five ClifBars, one meat log, two tubes, an all-purpose tool and a piece for my derailleur, just in case. All this for zero incidences: not even a flat.

Stupid me, I didn't train with a 30-pound pack. I trained with a cozy Camelpak that fits snugly on my shoulders and curves oh-so-gently to the contours of my spine – unlike that devil pack I drug along with me to do this trail, which cut off the circulation in my fingers via my neck. But all bitching aside, had my front wheel-set folded, I would've been thankful that I had that meat log while hiking my bike out 15 miles to the road and waiting for a person to miraculously solidify in Cisco, Utah's infamous ghost town.

Day 1: A warm introduction to the heat I had laid before me. I felt confident climbing the slick-rock and loose gravel rollers of Mary's Loop outside of Fruita. And I giggled like a '69 Redford groupie when looking out over the Colorado River from the trail I envisioned as Butch Cassidy's getaway, looking behind me to see if a gaggle of law enforcers with wagons and rifles were trailing.

The day went on like this – me pretending to be The Sundance Kid, Fred yelling at me to hurry up while snapping photos of my shadow on the canyon walls; me feeling proud of my ass-endurance by mile 15, Fred telling me that we weren't even half way there; me cursing at our camp when realizing it was still three miles away, Fred hiking back down the steep rode to carry my bike the last mile.

Day 2: Forgettable by the foreshadowing of the day to come, but entrancing by the desert dance you do for 42 miles. After you wake up from your illusory slumber, you enter the land before time, with grey, vegetation-less mountains and black lava-rock beneath you. If you've properly acclimated to your environment, then you might even see dinosaurs selling Coors Light on the side of the trail.

Day 3 is a bitch: It is 27 miles, short in comparison, but it's the 6,000-foot elevation gain that's the kicker. By mile 17, you come to Rose Garden Hill, Kokopelli's little surprise, imbedded in the high cliff-lined canyon you spent the morning climbing. It feels like a 90-degree drop that takes you back deep into a valley, which you can now look forward to climbing out. It's hard to believe that at this point you aren't even half way as you still have a cool 4,000 feet of elevation to scale.

There is a section, right before you reach camp, that you can look out and see you're day's journey. Over that canyon, down into that valley, then out of the valley and up the side of the mountain, across the side to the top, to where you now stand, empowered, in awe, and exhausted beyond a need for rest. This is where the hind-sight kicks in and realize the true strength of your body and control of your mind.

It is by far the most challenging part of the ride, our guide book rated it 10 out of 10 for endurance, 10 out of 10 for difficulty, and a 5 out of 10 for technical. This is because you are on roads steeper than your childhood driveway, there's no glorious single-track to look forward to, and there is no relief. You climb out of your campsite in the morning and up to your campsite that night.

Day 4: Summit Fever. It's hard to realize the gravity of what you've done once you reach the look-out point at the top of the La Sal's. Your anguish from the entire trip seems to be glazed over by the finish line. You forget that your ass hurts more than a root-canal, that you smell like a foot, and that just the day before, you were going to dump your boyfriend, call in heli-rescue and quit.

This last day you have a short climb (only a 2,000 foot gain) from desert to aspen glens. Then, when you reach the summit, you get to wail down UPS, Moab's trail that gracefully preludes Porcupine Rim, and take the road (or the Rim if you're good) and fly at 30-miles-an-hour on a 17-mile, whirling downhill straight into McStiff's Bar and Grill.

This was a hind-sight trip. Afterward, you don't remember anything but the view from the canyons you would have never seen from the road. You remember the golden eagle that soared with you for a mile. The hike-and-bike that made you feel like a trail-blazer. And you remember how you cried when you reached camp after day three, because you kept going when you were set on quitting and you made it before dark. The Kokopelli Trail wasn't the most difficult trail that I've ever done, but it was the most rewarding four days of my life, in hind-sight.

