



Kay Peterson:

The Fat Tire
Earth Mother
of Crested Butte

BY P. YURI SAMER

In the summer of '79 she was just a spunky kid who had to get away from San Pablo. So Kay Peterson went to visit her stepbrother in Crested Butte, a sleepy ski resort back corner of 800 year-old residents at the end of Colorado Highway 135. It just happened to be the same place Joe Breeze, Wende Cragg, and a couple of their buddies had visited the year before, building national connections for a new backcountry sport.

Kay stayed-on in Crested Butte even after her stepbrother moved back to the Bay Area. The following summer Don Cook cobbled together a klunker for her from an old Montgomery Ward SE frame, preferred for its ability to pull out the rear triangle and get a strong brake installed, so she could do the Pearl Pass tour with the gang two weeks later.

"We didn't know bonking existed," says Peterson. "We simply did it."

Fourteen years later the three great loves Kay Peterson discovered then are still hooked in her heart: She and Don got around to getting married last February, she's in her seventh year as director of the original Fat Tire Bike Week, and she still "gets off on sharing the beauty of the place on a mountain bike."

"It is so special," says Peterson, with the matter of fact earnestness of a true believer.

In '81 locals noticed people were "racing" to the trailhead for the the pass tour. So '82 saw a fat tire circuit race right in town, since only two streets in town were paved. Next the organizing committee added a race down Washington Gulch and across Paradise Divide. The Paradise Divide Stage Race was born. Peterson had a new Ritchey (number 2 of the mass-production series) and thought she had found the volunteer passion of her life—helping promote and stage the Fat Tire Bike

Week. Which she did until small town politics between bike shops knocked her off the committee for three years.

She settled in, developing a routine revolving around the seasonal economy of Crested Butte—teaching aerobics, riding her Ritchey, becoming the working partner in a Mexican restaurant, and buying a house from a female mentor who had taken an interest in the young woman from California.

When promoter Keith Murdock succumbed to burn-out in '87, Kay and a couple cohorts were rested, ready, and willing. "I get so excited. Every year there's letters from women who went on a week of rides and write to say they were inspired to enter races, or messages from ranchers saying how impressed they are that mountain bikers get off their bike when they meet on a trail, and are so polite."

Since Peterson volunteered as the director of Fat Tire Bike Week, now a registered non-profit organization, the festival draws about 1,000 paying participants and another 2,000 hangers-on each July. And she spends three months getting in shape for the fun.

"Fortunately, the way the snow recedes there's a handy series of 10-mile, then 20-mile, then 30-mile loops, just about the time you're ready for them," she says, professing to still love the bike time even though she gets out of riding shape each winter.

"After you get through the crying phase each spring, it's a great time," she claims, perhaps occupying her mind memory with visions of Fat Tire Bike Week's daily tours, five-hour bike rodeo (bike limbo, log pull, and barrel racing), polo clinic, trials stomp of old Chevys, or maybe just the wedding picture of her and Don riding down the dirt roads of Crested Butte, tails of tin cans tied to their fat tire bikes.