

GO HOP A ROCK!

By Glenn Odell
Photography by
James Cassimus

THE LARGEST OFF-ROAD EVENT COMES ALIVE

Rock•hopper /'Räk-häp-r/ [fr (assumed) *norcalese* (1982)] 1.(vb.) The act of gingerly negotiating a boulder-strewn trail. 2.(adj.) A rugged boulder and stone-littered path. Passable only by hearty hikers, brave horsemen, and daring fat tire bike enthusiasts. 3.(n.) One who hops the rocks on the previously mentioned trail.

There couldn't be a more suitable name for this 19-mile course which winds through Annadel State Park in Santa Rosa, California. By car, it's about an hour drive north from San Francisco. The Rockhopper, set in the green hills and valleys not far from the coast, is a true test of the mountain biker and his equipment.

The Rockhopper is organized as a fundraiser by the American Lung Association and supported by six area bicycle shops and Specialized Bicycle Components.

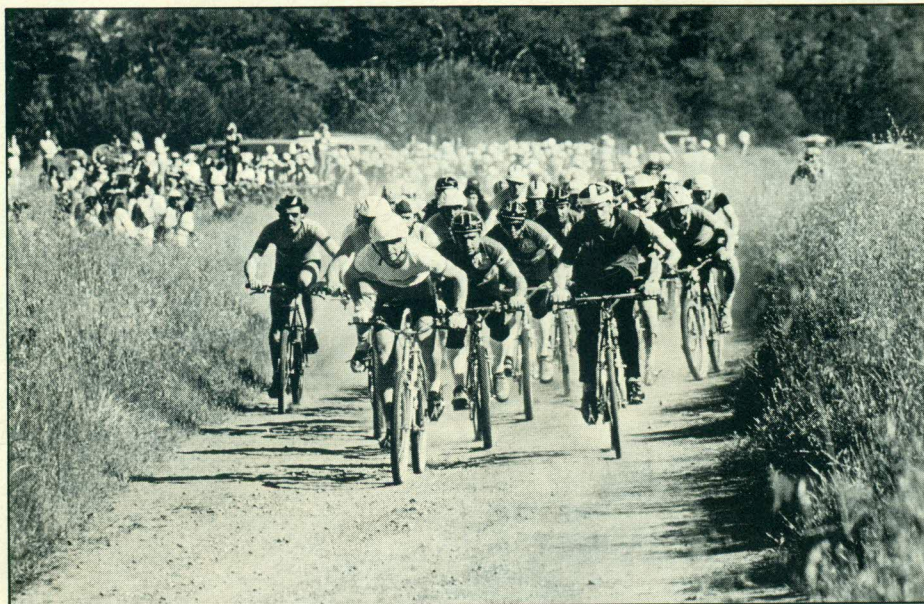
On May 15, 374 riders from all walks of life, all ages, and all skill levels converged on the site. Not only was this Rockhopper the largest off-road event to date, but it was also the debut of nationally ranked pro cyclists Eric Heiden and Gavin Chilcot, and the first off-road factory team, Team Ross. The sponsored team was comprised of Clark Roberts, Jim Harlow, Don Davis, Steve McIntosh, and John McCormick.

After anteing up registration fees, the participants were directed to the starting line. Once there, the experts were positioned at the front of the pack, ahead of the novices. (According to the event's sanctioning body, the National Off-Road Bicycle Association, you must register as an expert if you have finished third or better in any race.)

The air was charged with anticipation as the riders awaiting the starting signal. The word was given and they were off.

The start/finish line was drawn between two rock columns on the dirt road, which allowed approximately ten riders to pass abreast. Starting the entire crowd at once resulted in a Hong Kong style traffic jam complete with collisions, road rash, and choking dust.

Fortunately, after a quarter-mile down the one-lane road, the pack had stretched out and one could enjoy the view of the lush Northern California woodland.




In a cloud of dust, the tight pack of expert riders attacks the first stretch of dirt of the 19-mile Rockhopper course.

The Rockhopper route gains a total of 2,000 feet in three climbs over 9.5 miles. Negotiating the first climb gave a hint of the origins of the event's name. It

off-riders were treated to the sight of a meadow surrounding Lake Llsanjo and a refreshing splash as they skirted the water on the way to the next grade.

Halfway up the second climb, the riders reached the first of three aid stations which offered water and orange slices. Then the second summit gave way to a much appreciated downhill which dropped nearly to the starting elevation. The final uphill was a true test of the mind and body as the trail twisted its way to the last summit. The view from the top on that pristine spring day caused even the front-runners to take notice, and most participants did stop to let it soak in. The concluding descent was a thriller, to say the least, and caused the memory of grinding out the preceding ascents to fade.

The Rockhopper, like most off-road events, is geared toward both the competitor and the recreational rider. So if you haven't tried mountain biking yet, there's no time like the present. In fact, another Rockhopper along the same route will take place on October 9 at 9 a.m. All riders are encouraged to pre-register by contacting Lynn Woznicki of the American Lung Association of the Redwood Empire at Box 1482, Santa Rosa, CA 95402, (707) 527-5864. 

MAY ROCKHOPPER EVENT RESULTS

1. **Gavin Chilcot**, 1 hour, 25 minutes (expert class)
2. **Jim Gentes**, 1:30 (expert)
3. **Clark Roberts**, 1:32 (expert)
4. **Joe Murray**, 1:32 (expert)
5. **Mark Michel**, 1:32 (expert)
6. **Eric Heiden**, 1:34 (expert)
7. **Steve McIntosh**, 1:34 (expert)
14. **Paul Neussl**, 1:37 (1st man, novice)
32. **Jack Haugen**, 1:44 (1st man, 15-17)
33. **Jacquie Phelan**, 1:44 (1st woman, expert)
48. **Charles Kelly**, 1:48 (1st man, 35-up)
123. **Barbara Edelston**, 2:09 (1st woman, novice)

was quite a challenge pedalling up the rocky path, and there were plenty of riders who pushed (yes, walked) up the final section. Cresting the summit, the

There's no rule that says you have to ride your mountain bike only on trails. After you're done cycling through the hills, grab a couple of friends and hit the highway. Photo by David Epperson.

