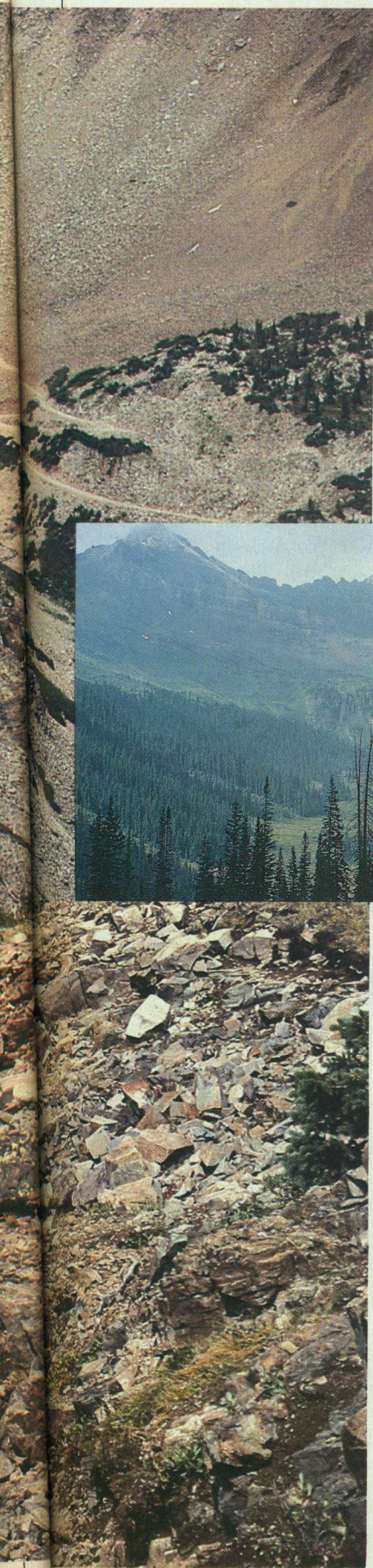


UPFRONT



PHOTOS BY FRANK STAUB



TRUE GRIT

Pioneer Spirit

and Lots of Mud

Vitalize This ATB Roundup

Don Cook sat on a fence rail with a beer in his hand. There was mud crusted around his eyes and mouth and just about everywhere else on his red and blue jersey.

In this circle, mud—no matter the quantity—is worn proudly. It is not to be washed off the body, at least not just

yet. A few would hose down their bicycles on the way to the bar, where the deck had come alive with a small post-race gathering of mud-encrusted people.

Cook was relaxing, enjoying his beer, and “chewing the fat” with friends and racers—trading trail stories as the sun set on this year’s roundup of fat-tire “cowboys.”

Fat Tire Bike Week in Crested Butte, Colorado, carries a nine-year history, and the annual journey by those who have discovered the joy of mountain biking is something akin to a pilgrimage to Mecca.

Part of the experience of Fat Tire Bike Week is the scenery that Colorado affords during this autumn event—delicate aspen trees start changing from a soft luminescent green to stunning shades of yellow and gold. The draw is mainly the camaraderie that exists among riders—pioneer spirit and the opportunity to make new friends and explore new terrain.

“How can you skip Colorado in the fall?” asks Neil Murdoch, who for the past five years has organized the Pearl Pass Tour—the event that has been the foundation for Fat Tire Bike Week.

By Cheryl Lindstrom

The view from atop Pearl Pass (above) is well worth the climb. Cycling the wide open spaces (left) sometimes gets lonesome, but there'll be plenty of companions at the saloon tonight.

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Actually, the event originated in 1976 when a few Crested Butte locals decided to do a little barhopping in Aspen, some 20 miles away as the crow flies. Rather than travel by car, they instead turned the journey into a two-day affair by bicycle. The 42-mile route included riding through the treacherous 12,000-foot Pearl Pass.

Crested Butte Showdown

Word of this bizarre, adventuresome affair soon traveled. In September 1979, hordes of cyclists showed up at the rally straddling sophisticated mountain machines.

In 1981, Cook and his brother Steve began the Fat-Tire Stage Race to accommodate those with a competitive component in their blood and to let the tour be more of what it was billed to be—a relaxed excursion into the high country. All in all, good times and special friendships came out of the week.

As the event continues to evolve, the race may develop into the main attraction. In fact, the Pearl Pass Tour as we know it may fade into the history of this upcoming ATB race. But, tour or no tour, there will always be fun and any number of spontaneous jaunts with fellow riders.

"I always looked forward to meeting someone new from some other state and going for a ride," said Cook, "This is the land of a million roads."

All in Good Fun

What makes this event so unusual is that although Fat Tire Bike Week has become more commercial, it still boasts a camaraderie not found in road racing. At the race's finish, for instance, there's no mad dash for the team vans; the ATB riders merely grab a beer and relax.

As Don Cook explained it, taking the last swig of his beer: "This is nothing but large fun."○





Sundown in Crested Butte (top) casts shadows on a leisurely ride. A new breed of bucking broncos (middle) compete during the Fat Tire Rodeo. You can lead a horse to water (bottom), but . . . Pioneer spirit and a sturdy mount (left) can conquer any trail.