

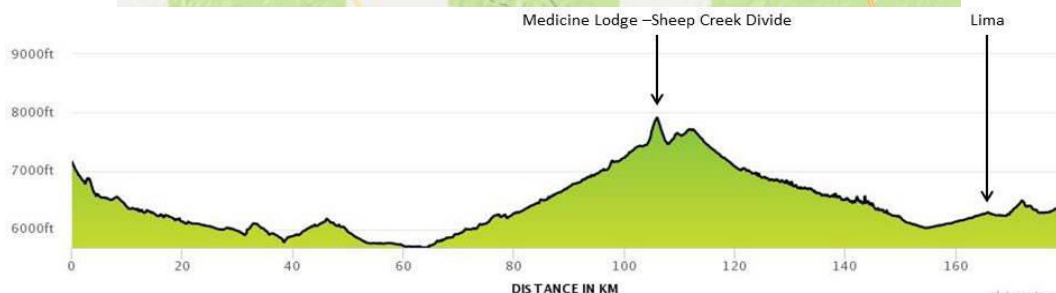
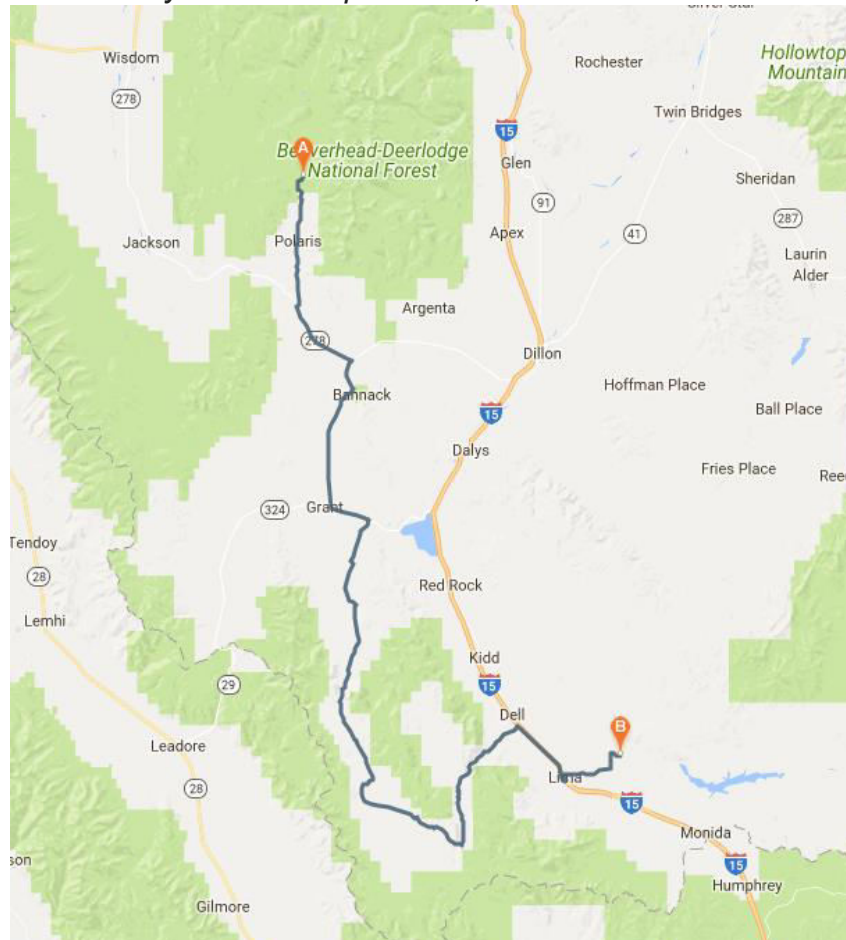
Day 11 **19th June 2017**
Elkhorn Hot Springs to past Lima

178.5k / 110.9miles **1986m / 6515ft (2271m / 7306ft descent)**
41%↑ 43%↓ 16%→ **22.2% max**

*Why bother sleeping in a 5 star hotel,
when you can sleep outside, in a billion star room*

Loesje¹

L



I had planned for a 06.15 start after an impromptu early breakfast, as the standard breakfast started at 07.00.

I have to say I've never had blue Cheerio's before, and believe me they tasted just as 'good' as they sound.

1. Loesje, a Dutch international free speech organisation, started in 1983, aims to spread creativity, positive criticism, ideas, philosophical ponderings and thoughts on current events via short slogans on signed posters. Loesje, apparently represents 'a world wide collective who aim to make the world a more positive creative place'. Rock on !!

I had packed most of my kit the night before but I was still waiting on the electronics to top up the batteries fully. Consequently I finally left at 07.15.

My bike was in the room, as there was plenty of space, and I was able to cycle right out of my accommodation, down the corridor, onto the wooden porch and then down the grass bank and away. Very like skiing from your door when in the Alps.

The first 40k on the Pioneer Mountains Scenic Byway were downhill and it was cold.

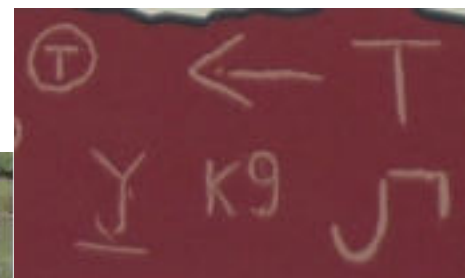


*End of downhill,
taken after some
feeling had
returned to my
hands*

I passed Montana High Lodge (\$78 B&B per person with 2 sharing). Lots of TD racers stay here but I think I made the right choice last night.

I cycled through Polaris and in so doing moved seamlessly onto the next section of the ACA map (number 3 out of 7). Polaris, big name on the map; in fact is nothing but an isolated post office.

Cycling along the Grasshopper valley, I saw herds of cattle and curious wooden edifices called Beaverslides, hay staking structures invented in 1908 – now obsolete.



*Historic cattle brands
and
feeding Shorthorn
and Herford cattle*

I turned onto the dead straight Highway 324, skirting the southern part of the Pioneer Mountain Range.



*The dead straight Highway 324
with the obligatory selfie, taken during breaks in the 'heavy' traffic*

Turning off the highway, up Medicine Lodge Creek I found myself cycling in 'wide open' Montana. The ACA maps says:

The next 47 miles are very remote
and they are not wrong...

The sheer size of the place really reinforced the enormity of this cycle ride but there was nothing to do but suck it up and continue. It turned out to be an enjoyable but tough day – which is something which could be said about virtually all my days on the TD.



Looking south east towards Sheep Creek Divide

Approximately 110k into today's cycle, I was passed, at speed, by two cyclists. Having come to the end of nominal 'Day 9' GPS track I had stopped to upload the next route's display on my Etrex. I was having an '*Oh shit*' moment because, having uploaded my 'Day 10' file, I found my location arrow was nowhere near the portrayed route. The issue was quickly resolved when I realised that back home I had been in the process of altering the projected daily routes but had had to stop at Day 9 due to Mum's illness and visits to hospital etc. I quickly found my correct file labelled as 'Day 14' and was on my way, mightily relieved.

I could have carried on satisfactorily as I had backed up the whole route in a single file but the file size meant that the GPS tended to run slowly with this file uploaded and I suspect it also consumed more battery power.

It would not have been a 'game stopper' as it were but it would have led to a bad day, although not as bad a day as that recently experienced by the dead rattlesnake I saw shortly after restarting!

Talking about live animals I saw multiple rodents / chipmunks. They universally look at you and then, when prudent, dive into nearest burrow. I also saw 3 pronghorns. Despite their appearance these artiodactyl (even toed ungulate) mammals are not related to antelopes of the old world, due to parallel evolution, they have developed in a similar manner to exploit the same ecological niche.

I stopped to eat the orange and apple I had remaining from my Elkhorn breakfast. In contrast to the early morning it was becoming very hot and liberal suncream use was mandatory. I had worried about water but this proved not to be problem today.



While cycling in the wide open plains that are Montana in bright sunshine, with no shade, I suddenly found myself in deep shadow. To say this was a surprise and slightly off putting would be an understatement.

It transpired that I had been dive bombed by a huge raptor. It didn't actually touch me but the size and intensity of the shadow showed it must have been very very close to my head. It flew off to my right but unfortunately I didn't get a chance to identify it – Golden eagle?, Bald eagle? not sure but believe me it was BIG.



*Big Sheep
Creek*

While in my own little reverie as I was cycling north (yes north) through a rocky valley on the Big Sheep Creek Backcountry byway road I was passed by a lone rider. Given the setting it reminded me of the Bug's Bunny Road Runner... 'Beep Beep'.

I heard him shout,
'I'm feeling great'
as he disappeared along the gravel to the Interstate and then along the road adjacent to the Interstate towards Lima. I remember thinking
'he's obviously feeling better than me'
because, despite upping my speed, I saw him steadily disappear into the distance.



The rider proved to be Marty Johnson; veteran of several Tour Divides and the chap I had meet up with several times previously and would see again.

I was pleased to pass under the I15 and roll into the 'thriving metropolis' that is Lima (population 227). I had tried not to get my hopes up too much about this upcoming township and this proved to have been wise.

At the 'restaurant' in Lima I met up again with Tim and Craig, the Canadian father and son partnership I had met at Elkhorn Hot Springs.

I was surprised to see them having not appreciating that they were the couple who had breezed past me when I was figuring out the GPS track issue earlier in the day.

They asked me to sit down and join them once again.

Jan's Café receives 3.8/5 stars on Google - heaven knows how / why. The service was slow and I was well into my second beer, having had innumerable glasses of water, long before my meal arrived. I have to say I'm curious how, given the time required, you can produce such lukewarm, lumpy, partly cooked mashed potato. It also wonder how, despite the manifest failings, I still managed to polish it off with alacrity.

Tim was worried about the bikes outside being pinched while we were all waiting for our food and said:

'We will be in a very awkward position if they are pinched'.

I said:

'We will be in a very awkward position if they aren't pinched!!'

Dad laughed.

Jim and Craig had already scouted out the possibility of accommodation in the only motel; however no additional rooms were available. This settled the issue as to whether I was going to be continuing that evening. I was not really bothered at this as I thought sleeping out in the desert, with potentially no light pollution, would be an experience and it would be nice to see the Milky Way in all its glory. The weather looked set fair as I set off again, shortly before 8pm. As it was I only managed some 16k before it started to get dark and I elected to stop.

I decided to sleep in the inner part of my tent. This meant I could zip myself up creating an improvised bivi which would, at least partly, protect me from snakes and scorpions etc, while at the same time allowing ready access to look at the night sky.

I am delighted to say that my hopes for a clear sky, with no light pollution were fully realised and the result was stunning. This night will definitely be remembered as one of the trip highlights. Unfortunately my simple camera was not up to the task of obtaining a representative image of what I saw.



*Last light
clear sky*

Whereas the stock photo I present here gives a very good impression of the sky with the Milky Way, occasional shooting stars and several satellites visible in all their glory.



I felt I had made good progress today and, although I was obviously tired, I sensed I was settling much more into 'long distance bikepacking' mode. It had been a most enjoyable but decidedly tough day (unlike all the other tough days you could remark). Despite the enormity of the distance yet to complete I felt I was doing OK.

My only slight concern was the fact that over the course of today the rear tyre seemed to have developed a slow leak, with occasional patches of what appeared to be 'Stans no Leaks' on the rim. I'd not seen this before and it was a little odd but no great shakes. Accordingly in THM I chose to ignore it because, other than having to pump the tyre up slightly more often than I had expected, I couldn't really do anything about it anyway.

In the event I slept well, waking for short spells periodically during the night, during which I took the opportunity to look at the sky again. As I say it really was stunning and it makes you appreciate, in urban UK, just how much all the inherent light pollution isolates us off from the night sky.