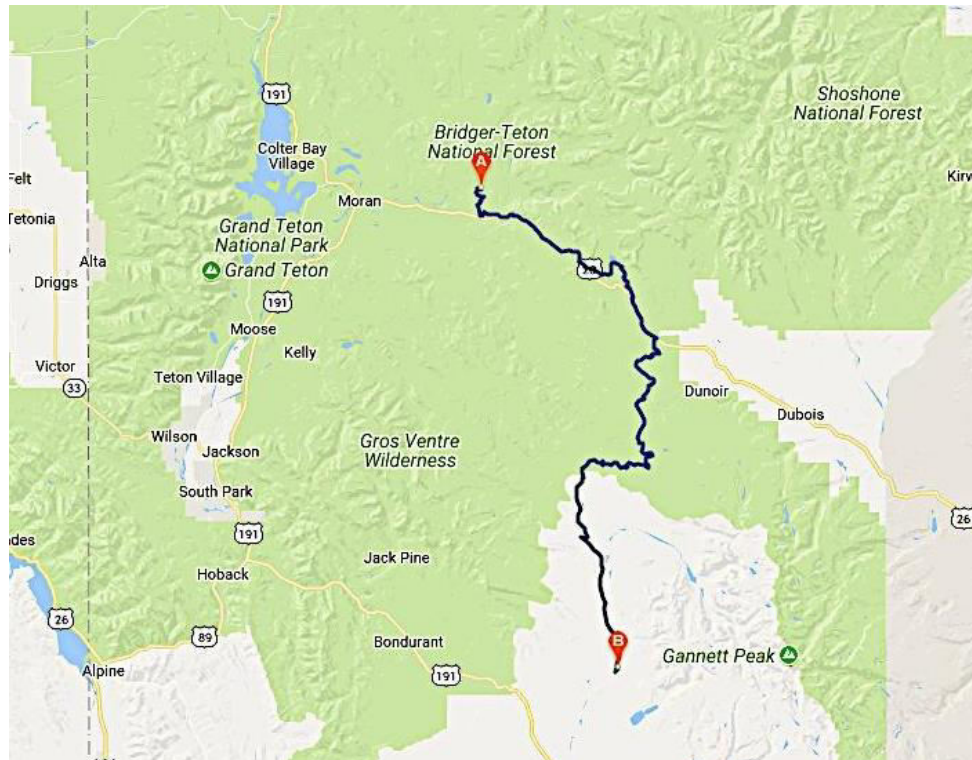


Day 14 **22nd June 2017**
Turpin Meadow Campground to 'cyclists only' cabin Red Willow Rd WY

139.3k / 86.6miles

2696m / 8845ft (2440m / 8005ft descent)
45.2%↑ 45.3%↓ 6.5%→ 16.7% max

*Because in the end....
you won't remember the time you spent in the office or mowing your lawn.
Climb that godamn mountain. Jack Kerouac¹*



My notes have today down as 'an epic' – it certainly was. Only 86.6 miles but this entailed nearly 9,000' of climbing. I was up at 05.45, principally because the equine cow bell chorus precluded sleep.

As I started the forthcoming climb (30k, 800m) I was surprised to encounter Rich & Mark (whom I had last seen at Squirrel Lodge) together with Bobby.

They had teamed up and negotiated accommodation for \$70 each at the Red Turpin Lodge.

1. Jack Kerouac (1922 – 69) an American novelist/poet He is considered a literary iconoclast and, alongside WS Burroughs and A Ginsberg, a pioneer of the Beat Generation.



Leaving camp at Dawn

After exchanging the usual pleasantries, we entered our individual cocoons of pain and suffering as we climbed up to Togwotee Lodge.

Under these circumstances I find that, when the slope's steepness exceeds about 9%, continuous weaving up the hill works best for me, slaloming uphill as it were.

This manoeuvre reduces the slope's direct line steepness by modestly increasing cycling distance. It also incidentally introduces an element of interest. I find estimating the number of turns required to get to an arbitrary point up ahead, and then counting these turns off, helps pass the time while simultaneously distracting my mind from both the physical pain and psychological travail associated with inching slowly up to a defined tree or prominent rock up ahead.

It rapidly became apparent that the decision to stay at the bottom of the hill had to be a good one; given the nature of the trail, it's steepness and my tiredness yesterday I definitely would not have got to the top in daylight. Furthermore it transpired that there were no camping facilities anyway up at the Togwotee Mountain Lodge, which was more upmarket (expensive) than the Red Turpin Lodge.

We arrived individually and tucked into complementary coffee and a well cooked, albeit expensive, breakfast while Bobby proceeded to berate the reception staff on their appalling telephone customer service – always interesting to see stropo Americans in action!!

Togwotee Mountain Lodge, en route to the top of the pass



The Togwotee¹ Pass 9,658' is located on the Continental Divide, some 15k past the Mountain Lodge.



The Pass is situated between the Breccia Cliffs (Absaroka Range) to the north, and Two Ocean Mountain (Wind River Range) to the south.

Summit signs

Despite the sun it was still quite cold at this altitude. The residual snow even now showed that it would get very cold indeed in the winter.



Views from the Pass were exceptional, helped by the bright blue cloudless sky.

1. The Pass is named after Togwotee, an Indian guide and sub chief under Chief Washakie of the Tukudika/Sheepeater tribe, a branch of the Shoshones. The Pass, which receives up to 50' of snow annually, was used as a trading route by the Tukudika people.

Looking back towards the Teton Range, some 40 miles away



Breccia¹ Cliffs (10,800' – 10,500')

1. *Breccia (Italian origin) is a rock composed of broken fragments of minerals or rock, cemented together by a fine matrix that can be similar to, or different from, the composition of the fragments. A variety of origins are recognised viz: sedimentary, tectonic, igneous, impact and hydrothermal.*



Two Ocean Mountain¹

At the Pass we the route left Highway 287/26 and started back off road.

In stark contrast to the highway, progress here was slow, secondary to a significant amount of mud, created by snowmelt.



Off road mud and melting snow

1. Two Ocean Mountain is so named because, running off it's southern slopes, through a Pass of the same name, is found the North Two Ocean Creek. Uniquely at the '*Parting of the Waters*' this stream has two distributaries; Pacific Creek and Atlantic Creek. Unsurprisingly given their names these watercourses ultimately flow into their respective oceans:

Pacific Creek; via the Snake and the Columbia Rivers

Atlantic Creek: via the Yellowstone, Missouri and Mississippi Rivers



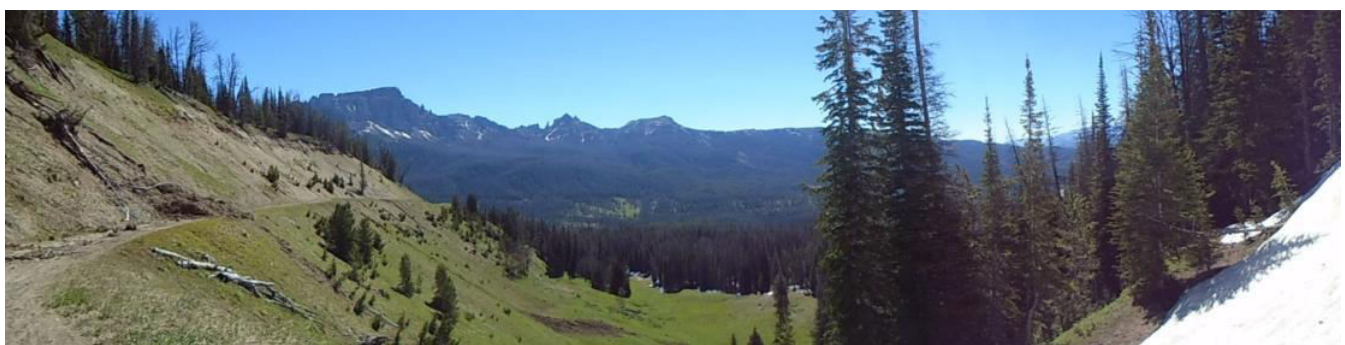
More mud!!

One particular feature, on this segment, was the obstruction caused by avalanche debris.

This necessitated a short element of hike-a-bike.

Avalanche debris, redolent of the route obstruction on Day 2, in Canada.

Despite the obstacles, the route afforded great views of the mountains which are found in the southern Absaroka Range.



Panorama of the same part of the trail, with avalanche obstruction on the left



Brooks Lake

The old adage of what goes up must come down was true today as, after the top of the Togwotee Pass there was 16k of downhill, 9k of which was off road, with the rest being on tarmac as we re-joined Highway 26/287.



I encountered a posse of tourist riders on horseback. Their leaders urged me to walk past as the horses were 'skittish' – to my mind this rather begs the question as to why they use such animals for tourist riders.

But hey ho
It was too nice a day to get upset.

Once back on the highway the ride down was a blast.



However, despite having recently had a substantial breakfast, half way down I skidded to a stop at the Lava Mountain Lodge for something more to eat and also to warm up from the descent. I had a coffee and a jumbo sized muffin. In retrospect, as per usual, I should have had 2 muffins!

Lava Mountain lodge was noticeable for the fact that the waiter appreciated that, when I asked for milk to go with my coffee, I wanted milk to go with my coffee and not the Devil's spawn which is 'half and half'.

Hitherto a typical coffee related conversation had gone as follows:

Waitress Do you want cream with that? (that being the coffee).

Me No. I prefer milk. Do you have milk?

Subtext No. I prefer milk. Do you have milk?

Waitress We have half and half.

Subtext I am ignoring your direct question but superficially trying to be helpful

Me Do... you... have... milk??

Subtext If I had wanted some half and half I would have helped myself to some of the crap, which I can see is readily available. Oddly I don't want half and half, what I do want is simple pure unadulterated milk PLEASE. Hence my question!

Waitress We have half and half.

Subtext What's milk and why would you want to put it in your coffee when you can mix it with a combination of fat free milk (ie water), corn syrup, artificial 'color' (titanium dioxide), sodium citrate, vitamin A, carrageenan, potassium diphosphate (mono and di)glycerides and palmitate. (I know because I read the label!!)

Me I'll take that as a no you don't have any milk then.

Subtext And if you did you won't be getting me any

Waitress We have half and half.

Subtext Either I'm so thick I don't really know what milk is and I don't want to admit it or I am disinclined to walk back to the kitchen to find out if there is any. Probably both

Me Hmmmm.

Subtext Why don't you go forth & multiply and then promptly die!

Waitress You have a nice day now.

Subtext I think my facile 'end of conversation' trip switch just engaged.

Sign seen at a diner.
Probably erected to prevent frustrated British TD riders, who want milk with their coffee, from shooting the waitress when they answer:
'we have half and half'
Personally I think sanctioning this action would help strengthen the entire human gene pool.



While we were in the Lava Mountain Lodge, Rich, who had ridden the route several years before, mentioned that the Union Pass was 'tough'. I said that was alright as we didn't have to climb it because we were being routed via the Fish Lake Bypass!!

He was dubious in the extreme, however graciously accepted his error when shortly after the Tie Hack Memorial¹ the GPS duly indicated our route turned south, over the Big Wind River, some 8k before the Union Pass turning.

I suspect that the river name is probably an oblique reference to the amount of beans consumed by Wyoming cowboys in the past – think 'Blazing Saddles'.



Fire damaged forest

The climb started immediately after crossing the Wind River and it was steep, an average of 8% but that includes significant downhill sections within in the next 10k+.

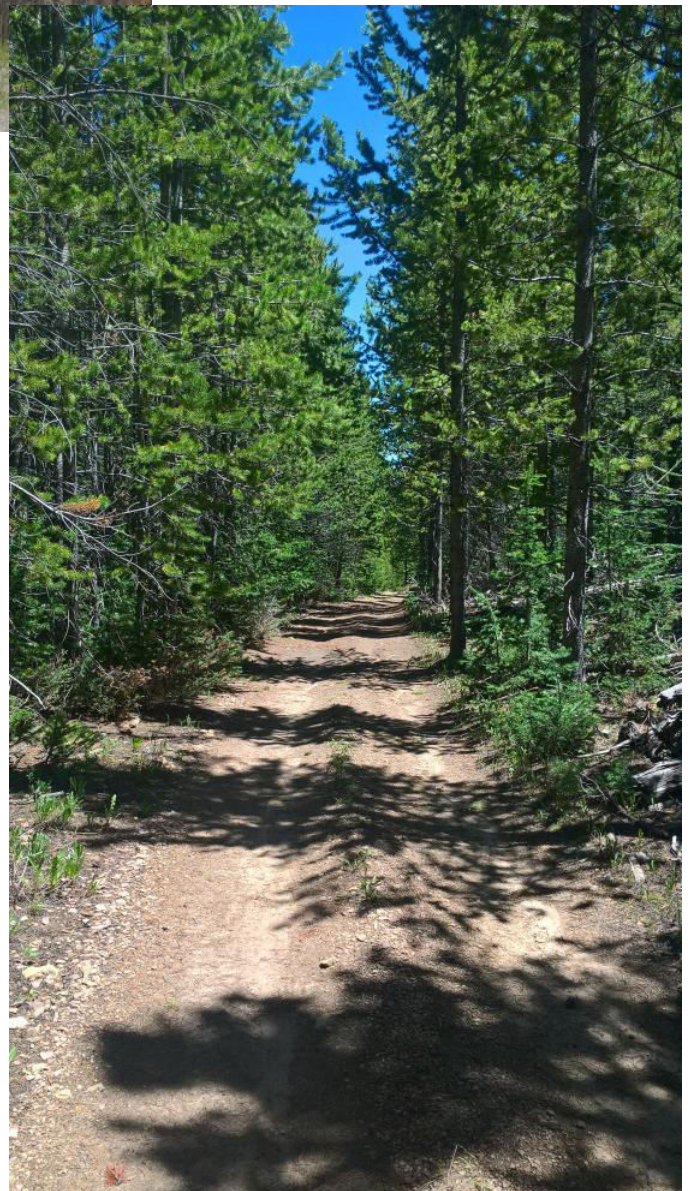
Determined to take this next climb steadily I promptly went into uphill 'weave' mode.

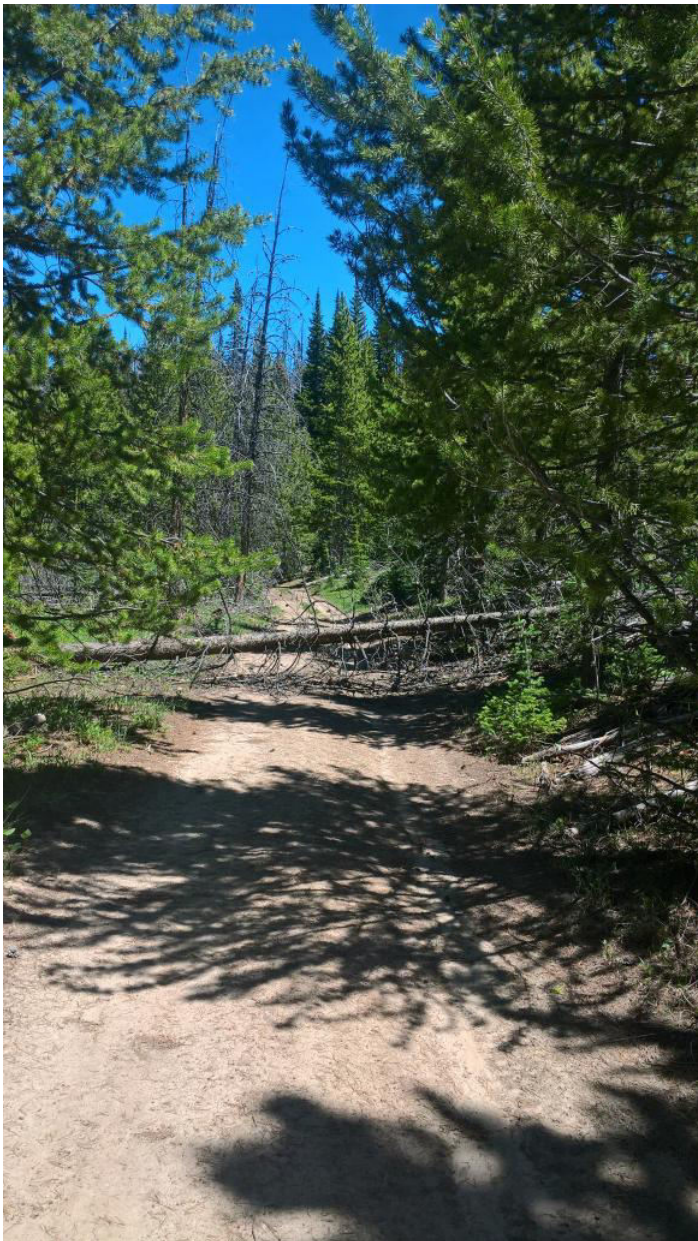
Despite taking it 'easy' I soon found myself progressing on my own at the front. I am always surprised at my ability to climb but not be fast on the flat.

This section proved to be a bugger – beautifully sunny, with variable snow sections and steep rocky elements both required pushing, but a real bugger.

It was like the Lava Trail on anabolic steroids; personally I found it harder than the Day 2 KoKo Trail reroute although thankfully it was not as long.

1. The Tie Hack Memorial remembers the annual floating of (railroad) Ties or sleepers as we know them down the Wind River. This took place between the late 19th and mid 20th Centuries.





The route was totally devoid of any other people and very peaceful (apart from my laboured breathing and groans of pain).

I was forced to take several breaks to get my breath back, fully expecting other riders to catch me up but none appeared – they were obviously suffering too.

Standard TD obstacle

Paradoxically, despite the effort required, the route, and the overall experience was very pleasurable.

In hindsight I think that this was one of the most enjoyable segments of the whole trip.

At the top the route levelled out and yielded wide views in all directions. The trail (indistinct at times) follows the actual course of the Continental Divide for some 3 – 4k.



As with all 'steepness' photos the severity of the gradient is not apparent from these pictures.



Similarly the following wide-angle shots from the top of the Fish Tail Bypass do not depict the enormity of the views and represent but a small selection of the multiple pictures I took here.





The area receives considerable snow and I noticed on a 'TD rider's' blog a photo of the area illustrating the snow encountered.



Interestingly it is possible, by using an isolated pine tree, to correlate their 'snow' picture overleaf with some of my photos, taken in the same area.



I came across several snake like soil tubes on the surface. I surmised that they were rodent tunnels, left after the overlying snow had melted. Looking on T'internet' it appears that this is correct and that they are called eskers.



Eskers - winter (sub snow) earth lined animal runs

Given their size I suspect that they were created by Botta's pocket gophers¹ (*Thomomys bottae*).

After transiting the Divide line the Fish Mountain Bypass re-joined the ACA route some 6k south west of the Union Pass. Thereafter the route progressed in a general westerly direction before turning southerly and descending to the Green River valley.

1. The only problem with this hypothesis is the fact that gophers are not supposed to inhabit Wyoming!! Voles could be the culprits, but given the size of the eskers, and their likeness to this typical example below I think I am correct.



A Botta's gopher



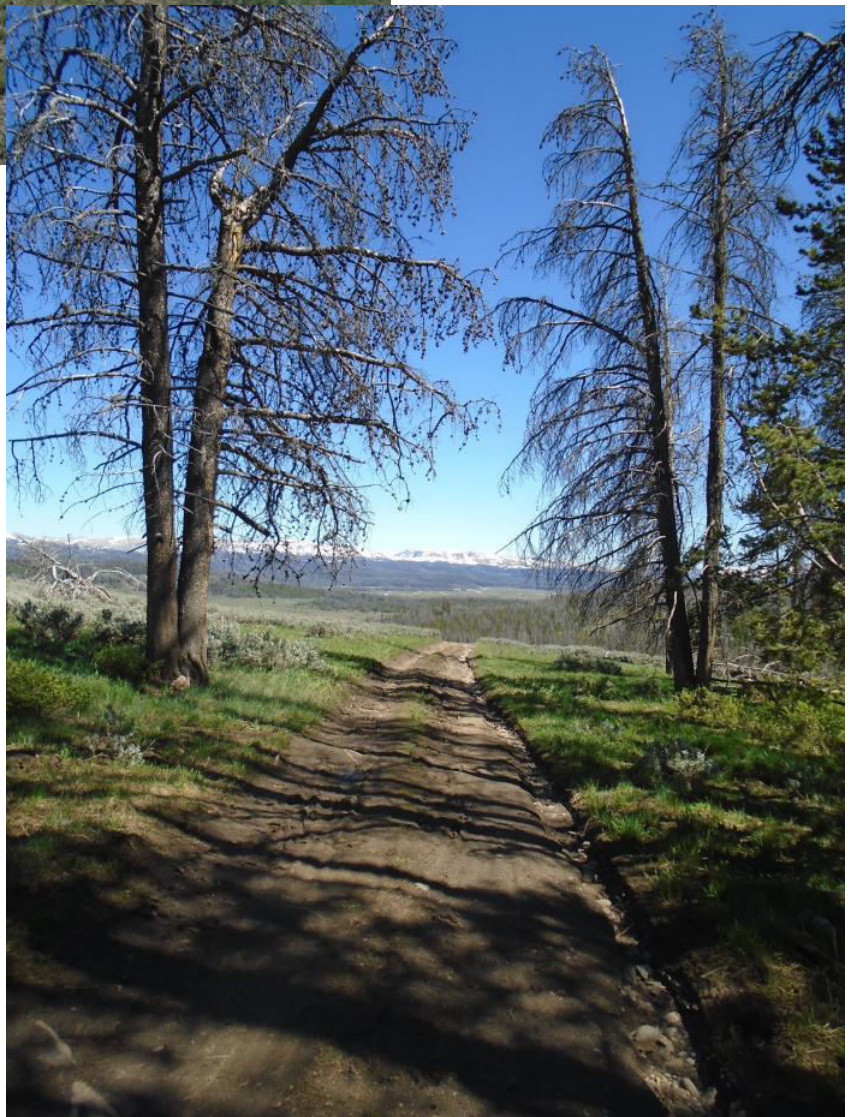
*View while cycling
along the
Continental Divide
on the
Fish Mountain Bypass*

*Commencing the
descent into the
Green River Valley*

Akin to the Wind River, on the other side of the Divide, the Green River was also the site of a Tie Hack in both 1867 and 1868.

Similar events did not occur in subsequent years, presumably because they had denuded all the available trees!

The sandy trail was much less rugged than on the other side of the hill. However, it was still steep in places and, because I was feeling tired I took easy. I didn't want to spoil a great day out in Wyoming.



It was while cycling along the sandy trail in the valley that I came across the footprints illustrated in the photos overleaf.

Originally I thought they were bear prints but this is not the case. Bear prints do not look like these - they are different in both shape and size.



Green River panorama overlooking the Bridger Wilderness, with the Wind River Mountains in the distance.

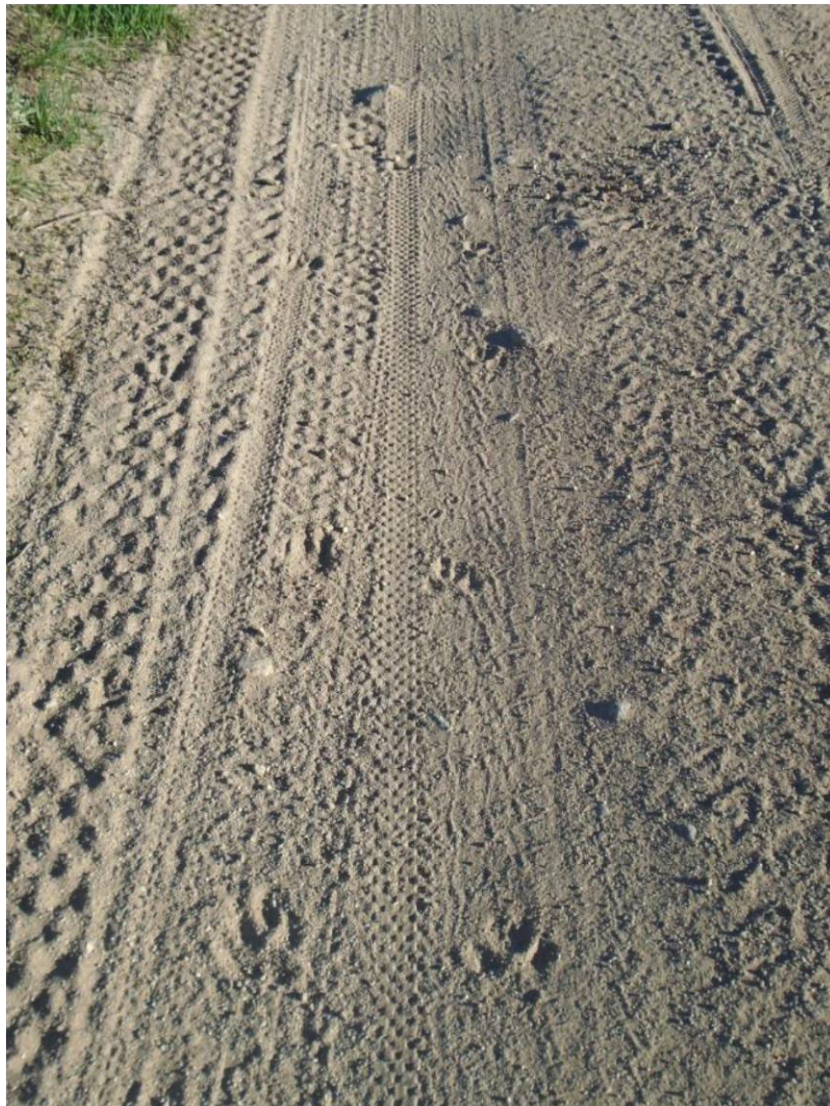


Some form of big cat prints; see description below and make up your own mind as to which one! For scale the tyre width is 2'- 2.4" which implies the prints are some 3" – 3.5" wide. Therefore the straddle is more than 9".





*Close up (above) and
linear wide angle view (below)*



Based upon the details below I suspect they were made by a mountain lion but accept a lynx is a possibility.

Lynx

Description: a medium-sized cat (15 to 30 pounds), with long legs and large feet. Color is mottled tawny, brown, black, and white. Ears have long black tufts of hair on their tips, and the lynx's tail is short (4 to 5") with a black tip. Ear tufts, long legs, and large feet are key to distinguishing lynx from bobcat. Track Description: lynx usually walk in an alternating pattern (See Track Patterns), rarely dragging their feet or bodies. In deep snow the hind legs sink, making a "handle" on the print. The track pattern and print size (greater than 3.5" long and wide) are similar to those of mountain lion; however, for lynx the straddle (measured between parallel lines along outside edges of two successive prints) is generally smaller (less than 9"), foot pads are usually obscured by dense hair, and tracks do not sink more than 8" into snow. For both cats, the foot pad makes up nearly 1/2 of the entire print, and claw marks are almost always absent. Lynx trails tend to meander through the forest, unlike the straight line trails of coyotes and wolves. [Click Here](#) to learn more about the Lynx.



Lynx track

Mountain Lion

Lion tracks are very similar to those of lynx. Pattern is usually alternating (See Track Patterns); sometimes hind feet do not register directly on top of front -foot prints. Prints are as wide as or wider than long (greater than 3.3"). Toes and foot pads often register clearly in the snow (unlike lynx's); and foot pads, which make up nearly 1/2 of the entire print, sometimes show lobes at front and rear of pads. Prints rarely show claws. Trails are mostly straight and direct, and may lead to trees, which lions climb.



Mountain lion

On reaching the floor of the Green River valley I dunked the bike in the river to clean the chain and prevent chain suck, which had started again.

I was conscious of the fact that, after the Whiskey Grove campsite, there were no designated camping grounds for some 120k, although there would be some motel type accommodation at Pinedale in about 60k.

Given my misapprehension as to the presence of 'bears' in the area I was not keen on camping in the vicinity so I carried on; but I was getting tired and it was starting to get decidedly dusky.

On the ACA map I noted reference to a 'Cyclists Only Lodging' some 1k off the main route in about 15k and thought this would be an excellent option.

On arrival at the place and I was greeted by a very friendly (very large) dog. The only problem was, when I opened the gate and I cycled onto the property, I discovered that the place was deserted. I noted an isolated log cabin some way from the main building which, on investigation, proved to be the cyclist's cabin. It was unlocked.

Having no other realistic option I went in, having hidden my bike behind the back of the cabin, and connected my electronic gizmos (the power was on). I elected not to put the light on in case the owners arrived and ascertained that their property was occupied.

I located a visitor's book and discovered that the last entry was Sept 2016, some 9 months previously!!



My overnight accommodation

I waited up till quite late but there was no sound of the owners returning so I climbed in to my sleeping bag on top of the bed and slept relatively well but I did have half an ear out for returning vehicles.

None came.

Not sure how the dog got fed.