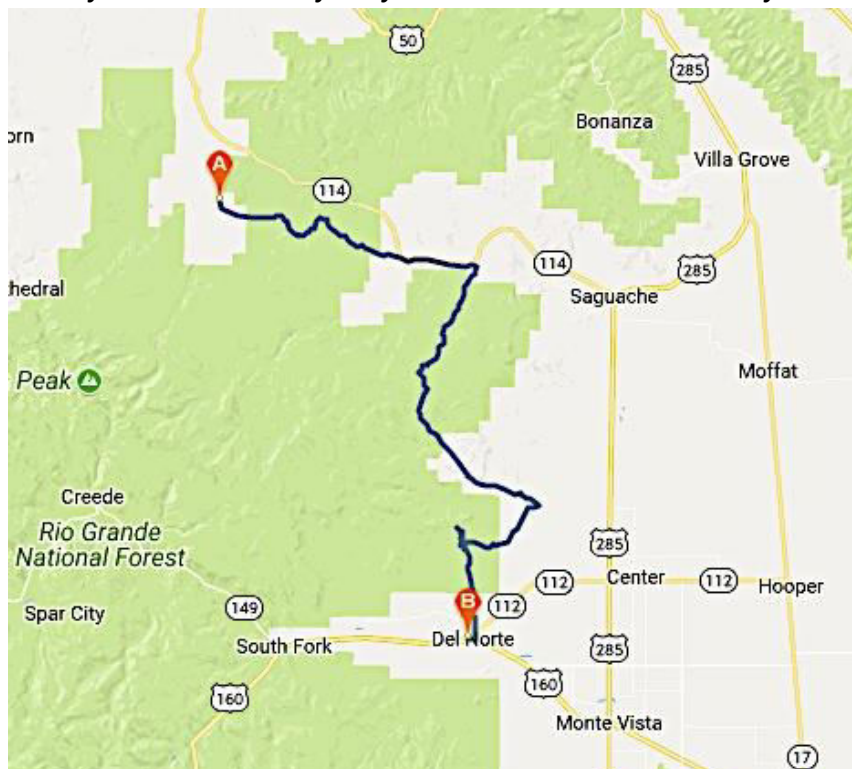


Day 22      30<sup>th</sup> June 2017  
Upper Dome campsite to Del Norte

124.6k / 77.4miles

1736m / 5695ft (2117m / 6945ft descent)  
40.8%↑ 46%↓ 13.2%→ 16.7% max

*My biggest fear is that, when I die,  
my wife will sell my bicycles for what I told her they cost*



I started off early today – 05.30.

I had slept remarkably well in the wash house/toilet block known generically to TD riders variously as a Montana / Wyoming / Idaho / Colorado Hilton. Choose your title dependent upon which state you are in.

The last time I remember sleeping in a toilet block was when my brother Andy and I bummed round Iceland in 1976. Our tent had been blown down in a hail/snow storm in midsummer and we took refuge in the geothermally heated toilets!!

I was keen to get on my way because first thing in the morning it was cold, the ambient temperature being in stark contrast with the temperatures expected later in the day.

Merino top, jumper, and wind stopper together with thermal gloves and dancing on the pedals to generate heat was definitely the order of the day.



*The square box in the centre of the picture is my Upper Dome 'wash house' Hilton*

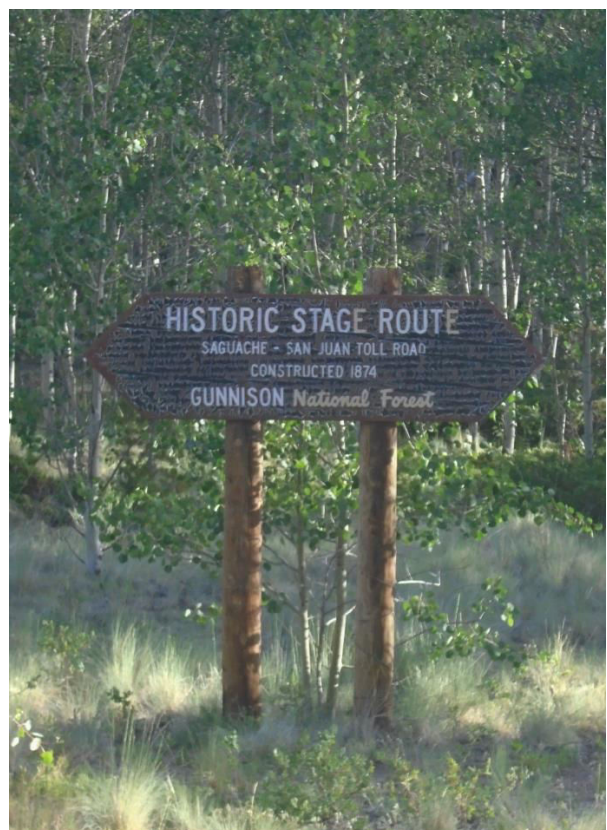
My aim today was to reach Del Norte, some 77 miles away, and reassess, possibly pushing on from there if there was the opportunity. However the forthcoming Indiana Pass (11,901') loomed (literally) in the consciousness and I thought it would probably be prudent to stop and refresh in Del Norte before attempting the hill the next day.

Meanwhile two major passes were to be negotiated today, both over 10,000'. The road surface was mostly good, as a significant proportion of the route followed the historic Saguache – San Juan Toll Road constructed by Otto Mears and Enos T. Hotchkiss in 1874.

#### *Cochetpa Pass Toll Road sign*

After cycling through an extensive aspen forest the Cochetpa Pass (Pass of the Buffalo), at 10,067' (not 10,032' as stated in the *Cycling the Great Divide* 'Bible') was my first pass of the day<sup>1</sup>..

1. If you are REALLY interested you can view part of the climb on <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x6jy4nYPqhg>



The route then runs east down Saguache Creek for 18k before joining Highway 114.

The trail was characterized by prominent rocky outcrops and canyons; reflecting the tumultuous volcanic history of the area. I was travelling along the eastern border of the San Juan Volcanic Fields which contains the La Garita Caldera<sup>1</sup>.

*Various volcanic rock formations encountered. The road in the photo is on FR114 heading east.*



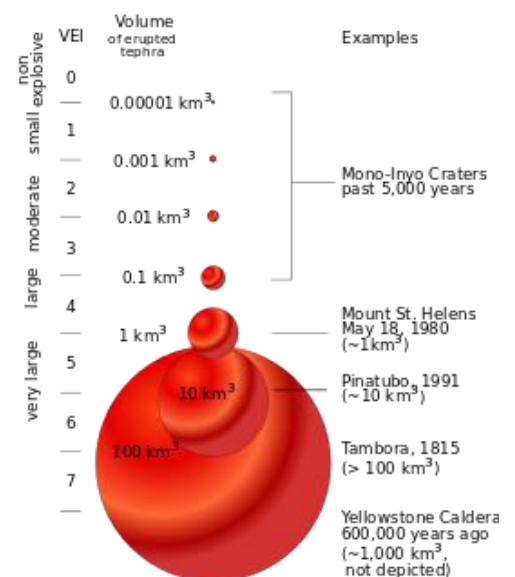
I then turned south and I commenced the 1,800' climb up my second pass of the day the 10,166' Carneo Pass.

1. Between 25 - 40 Million Yrs Ago (MYA), during the Oligocene Epoch, this part of Colorado, Utah & Nevada underwent a massive ignimbrite flare-up, culminating (ca. 27.5 MYA) in a truly enormous eruption which created the La Garita Caldera, one of some 15 – 18 in the region.

This eruption was the biggest volcanic explosion in the last 450 MY, estimated to be 8 on the log scale Volcanic Explosivity Index (VEI)<sup>2</sup>.

Some 1,250 Cubic Miles (5000km<sup>3</sup>) of tephra, known locally, as Fish Canyon Tuft, was produced during this eruption.

2. VEI. The volume of products, eruption cloud height, and qualitative observations are used to determine the explosivity value. The scale is open-ended with the largest volcanoes in history given magnitude 8 (see pictorial representation on right).





*Proof that I actually did reach the top of the Carnero Pass.*

A 13k south easterly descent from the summit follows along Middle Fork and Carnero Creeks and Coolbroth Canyon and culminates in dominating basaltic 'gates'.

The route is strewn with iconic rock formations - redolent of wild west 'Lone Ranger' films. I constantly expected to find John Wayne or Clint Eastwood lying in ambush.



In actual fact in the past it would have been the Ute Indians I would have had to fear.

*Typical rock formations descending from the Carnero Pass*





*Curious Basaltic rock pillar*

I visited the small settlement of La Garita (Spanish for Lookout) and I had a bite to eat in the La Garita cash store.

La Garita lost half of population in the 1918 influenza pandemic

Despite boasting selling the best burgers in the valley I was not over impressed - it's probably the ONLY place selling burgers in the valley.



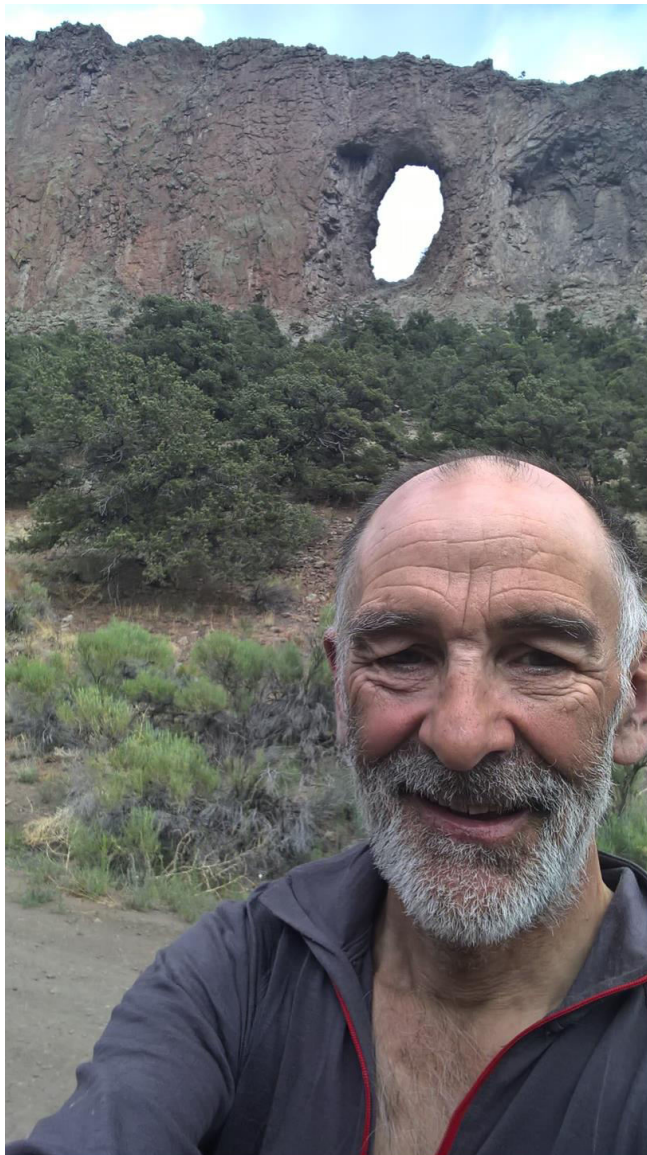
While waiting for my meal I took the opportunity to scribble some entries regarding the last couple of days in my note book.

*The dominating Basaltic Gates at the eastern end of Coolbroth Canyon*



The trading store menu offered the choice of meat and vegetable soup for starters. I ordered vegetable. When it came I noted it had meat in it! I queried this and was informed the starter was meat AND vegetable soup not (either) meat OR vegetable soup!! I never did identify the meat – it was probably dead previous TD riders, frozen until needed. I say that because realistically they would still have had some meat left on then by this stage of the trip.

I asked if I could replenish my water bottles but the hosepipe I was directed to outside was lying out in a yard liberally covered in dog crap so I elected to pass on the offer – God knows what the hygiene in the kitchen was like. In THM I elected to ignore it and carry on regardless. Upon leaving La Garita I was immediately back on a trail which soon deteriorated to a track.



The map highlighted a 'short' detour to La Garita Natural Arch *aka* La Ventana (Spanish for The Window), and, having decided to stop off in Del Norte tonight, uniquely I had time to spare so I elected to visit it. It was further away than I had anticipated and there were some steep short pulls but eventually I arrived at the end of the trail under a thin long dyke which had a hole in it – not apparent until you were almost upon the feature<sup>1</sup>.

*A 31 million year old relic in the Rio Grande National Park (choose as is appropriate).*

While I was on my detour to the Arch threatening clouds had started to form and a few spots of rain started to fall.

I was starting to regret my decision as I returned to the route because I could well envisage the track ahead

deteriorating markedly under the onslaught of this thunderstorm.

<sup>1</sup> La Ventana is a natural arch eroded into the long, narrow wall of one of the most prominent dikes radiating from an eroded Oligocene stratovolcano located in the eastern San Juan. It is 40' wide and 60' high.



*The La Garita Natural Arch  
The darker rock to the right of the hole  
is said to represent a wolf protecting the Arch*

The area became increasingly remote and rather intimidating to be honest.

While the clouds continued to loom ominously, the rain fortunately held off but the temperature dropped considerably. I continued to have a distinct feeling of unease as I cycled through barren terrain – one of only two sections of the whole route where I felt this.

*Clouds heralding possible rain en route to Del Norte*



I was conscious of the remoteness of the area and the fact that the increasingly ruggedness of the track meant that I had to take things cautiously.

Especially as I found myself unexpectedly chewing dirt when my rear wheel skidded out from under me in sand.



*Panoramic view of the 'Badlands' I was cycling through*

Less than 30 seconds after I had spat out the dirt and restarted cycling I happened upon the snake below. It decided to scarp as I cycled up to it.



I was glad I hadn't come a cropper in it's near vicinity when I had my fall.

Subsequent research identifies this snake a Lined Snake (*Tropidoclonium lineatum*) which is reported to be harmless

*A Lined Snake*







Once I had cleared this 'badland' region I found myself on a section of badly washboarded gravel track<sup>1</sup>.

Washboarding was a common feature throughout my trip and provided hours of endless 'entertainment' as I decided which part of the trail was least affected; invariably the other side of the track from where I was currently cycling

*Typical Washboard surface.*

The road led to the border of Del Norte airport; an airline hub which has yet to rival Heathrow, Chicago and Amsterdam in its importance.

Absolutely no air activity whatsoever took place while I was cycling around the perimeter.

*Perimeter signage at around Del Norte aerodrome*



1. Washboarding, see Appendix 6 for background on this phenomenon – its complicated!!

As I rolled into Del Norte proper I passed the Kristi Mountain Sports. I thought it would be prudent to visit and have the bike checked out especially as the next few days were likely to be isolated in the extreme.

The shop staff seemed very friendly. Jupe (odd name), the bike mechanic had a huge laugh when he measured my chain for stretch. Chain stretch is assessed using a chain tool, when the chain tool indicates a value of 0.75 this suggests the chain should be replaced. If it is over 1 it definitely needs replacing. Mindful of the fact that I'd fitted a new chain before I started we were both amused to see my chain probably reached 1.2!! This implied I probably needed a new rear cassette too. Inspection of the relatively new rear cassette showed that the cogs were all worn in a similar manner - the usual teeth have a flat top mine all had sharp points (think shark's fin).

As it was fast approaching closing time. We agreed that I would return first thing on the morrow for a new chain and a rear cassette, with the intention of getting on my way shortly thereafter.

Pleased that I had had the opportunity to visit the shop I found the Divide Rider's Hostel on the edge of town.



*The Bike Friendly Hostel (red roof)*

Floris the Dutchman was already in residence (how come he was still doing this thing gibe his speed he should have finished days). Massimo, Philippe, Marty and Ko all polled up at various times during the rest of the day and the accommodation was filled up with 2 independent none TD tourers and one lady (? Leah Gruhn ? Jacki Klancher I cannot remember).

I visited the local Family Dollar food store (they don't stock fruit!!) while I was charging my batteries both literally (and figuratively). I visited the micro brewery just up the street had a few beers and some food accompanied by the two independent non TD cyclists staying at the hostel.

Back at the hostel an extra bottle of beer appeared, courtesy of one of my fellow occupants and it would have been rude to not to have accepted. I retired to bed, tired and happy, with the emphasis on the word happy!

*Arial view of my route over the last 3 days*

