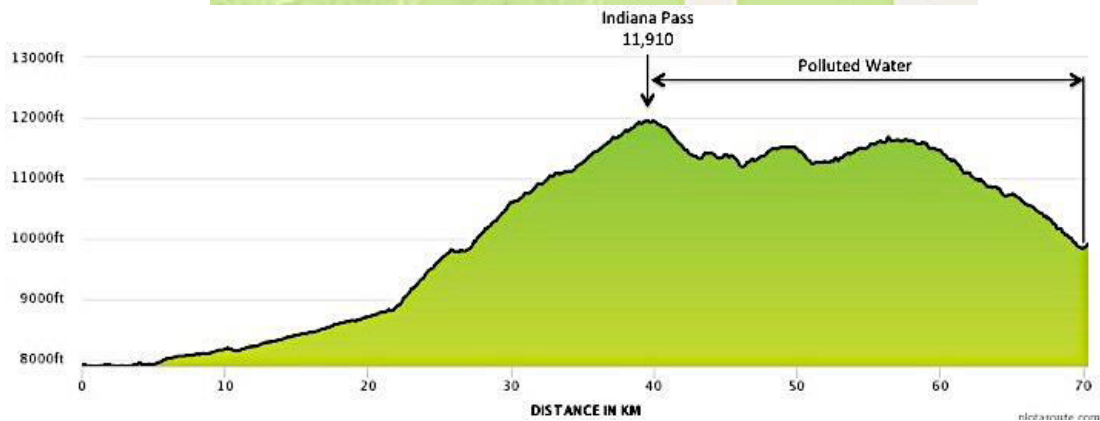
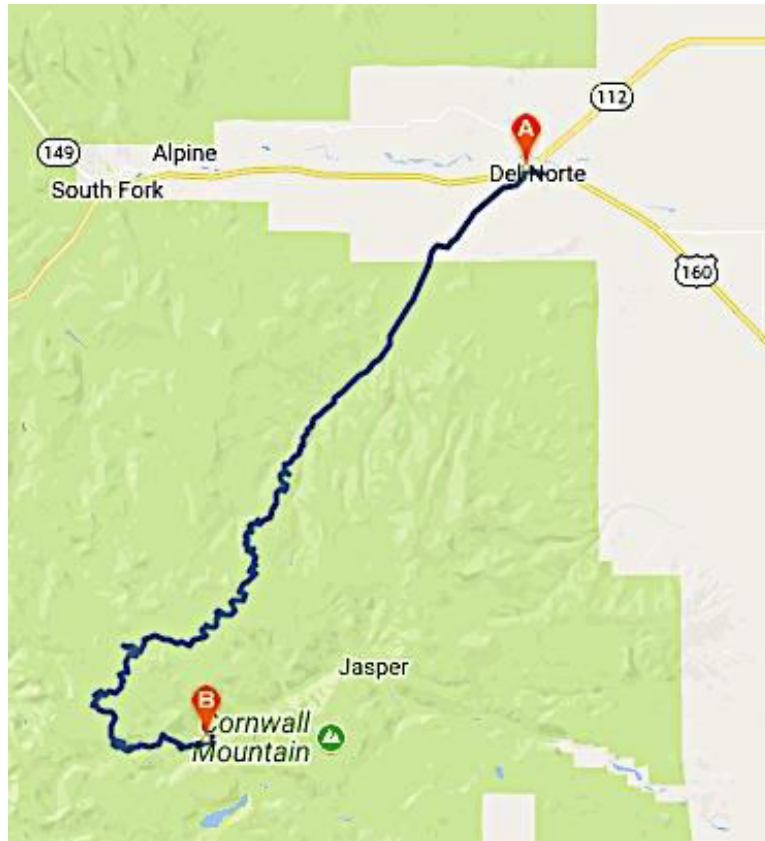


Day 23 1st July 2017
Del Norte to Stunner Campsite

70.3k / 43.7miles

1876m / 6154ft (1262m / 4140ft descent)
55.7%↑ 35.5%↓ 8.8%→ 22.2% max

Its a hill - just get over it



A hilly day today, but not as hilly as I had originally anticipated. Essentially this was because, despite the 1800m of climb, today's exertions only represent a half day's effort, because I only got started at 13.30.

To start at the beginning....

I slept remarkably well – probably a subtle combination of 4 beers, a full belly, a proper bed and tiredness. Then again the chronic lack of oxygen in the sleeping accommodation could have had a significant soporific effect.

I say this because all night an absurd volume of gastrointestinal gas¹ was being continually produced by my fellow TD riders. By Dalton's law² this would have displaced a large proportion of the oxygen in the room thereby reducing the partial pressure of oxygen pO_2 to potentially life threatening levels.

I thought it would be ironic to have survived bears, mountain lions, river crossings and potential death by dehydration in the desert only to succumb in my sleep to fart asphyxiation.

I've never ever heard so much flatulence in one room; including sleeping in army barracks. There was an incessant low, occasionally high, volume rumble - quite incredible. I of course was completely innocent and a mere observer.

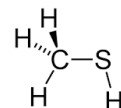
I was up early and breakfasted on a huge meal at the adjacent Mystic Biscuit cafe. I discovered and highlighted a large hair in my meal and the proprietor gave me the food for free. I had such a large meal (as usual I chose the minimally fartogenic option) because I was anticipating significant expenditure of energy today getting over the 'big one' – the 11,910' Indiana Pass - and the hilly terrain thereafter.

However, as arranged, first I had to return to the Kristi Mountain Sports bike shop to get my new rear cassette and chain fitted. Accordingly I was there, ready and waiting, when the staff arrived at 09.00hrs. Jupe, the bike mechanic, quickly put on a new rear cassette and chain and I cycled back to the Divide Rider's Hostel intending to load up and proceed (slowly) up Indiana Pass.

However, as soon as I started in earnest, I realised that something was seriously wrong; the front cassette would not retain the chain when any serious pressure was applied to the pedals. I limped back to the bike shop and we discovered that essentially the whole drive chain needed replacing as the teeth were worn on the front cassette too – in retrospect this would explain the chain suck problems I had on day one, and intermittently thereafter, whenever the chain was very muddy.

Things now started to go decidedly pear shaped. It turns out that the bottom bracket on my bike had an unusual rectangular rather than square arrangement of screws and was not compatible with any of the front cassettes in the stock.

1. A typical fart is composed of the following gases:
59% N_2 , 21% H_2 , 9% CO_2 , 6% CH_4 , 4% O_2 and 1% H_2S & Mercaptans



2. Dalton's law of partial pressures states that the total pressure of a mixture of gases is equal to the sum of the partial pressures of the individual gases in the mixture. This equality reflects the fact most real-world gasses act like ideal gasses and don't interact.

Thus $P_{tot} = pO_2 + pN_2 + pH_2 + pCO_2 + pCH_4 + pH_2S + pCSH_4$ etc
Where P_{tot} = Total gaseous pressure of the system

The nearest replacement was located in Denver but they were closed in Saturdays. Tuesday was the 4th July so realistically I was not going to get a replacement until Thursday 6th July some 5 days hence.....disaster.

Jupe and I thought long and hard (well he thought; I just teetered on the precipice of depression!!) and he suggested cannibalising the whole drive train off one of the shop bikes, complete with a new bottom bracket etc. A call to the of the bike shop owner confirmed that this suggestion was acceptable and so he commenced work but inevitably the donor bike's bottom bracket proved impossible to remove so we had to progress to a (more expensive option naturally) on another bike in the shop.

Meanwhile other customers where queuing up, wanting bike mechanical issues sorting but Jupe was on a mission and completed the task admirably – normally I don't tip willingly but he more than earned my praise, thanks and the tip I gave him. In fact he said it was too much – we agreed to differ!!

I also gladly wrote a very glowing review on Google for the shop.

I kept the smallest ring from the rear cassette as a souvenir of today's events.

*One very relieved cyclist
and his saviour Jupe.
Unfortunately his halo has
not come out very clearly in
the photo*

Consequently it was one very thankful and happy TD rider who finally left Del Norte at 13.30; some 6 hrs later than originally planned.

Naturally all the other fartophiles who had occupied the Divide Rider's Hostel the night before had already gone – whether they had cycled off, or died and been taken away by the undertaker, I never did ascertain.

As it subsequently transpired I would not see another TD cyclist for the next 360k.





I turned south down FR14, the beginning of the 36k route to the summit and I saw a herd of bison¹ on my right in a nearby field.

Progressed along the Pinos Creek, I could see the hill, way in the distance.



Bison basking in the sun



View of my forthcoming climb, from the Pinos Creek road

The climb proper stated after 10k - just under 4000' in 26k.

I finally reached the Indiana Pass summit at 11,910', after a 4³/₄hr slog.

1. Bison There are currently some 20,000 American Bison left. Interestingly the American bison has 15 ribs but the European bison only 14. As they have the same overall number of vertebrae, the American bison only has 4 lumbar vertebrae vs the 5 in the European sub species. Bison have been bred with domestic cattle (genus *Bos*) and found to produce fertile (usually only the female) offspring. These are called beefalos or cattalos (American) or zubrons (European). This journal truly is a mine of information!! Zubron good word for Scrabble.

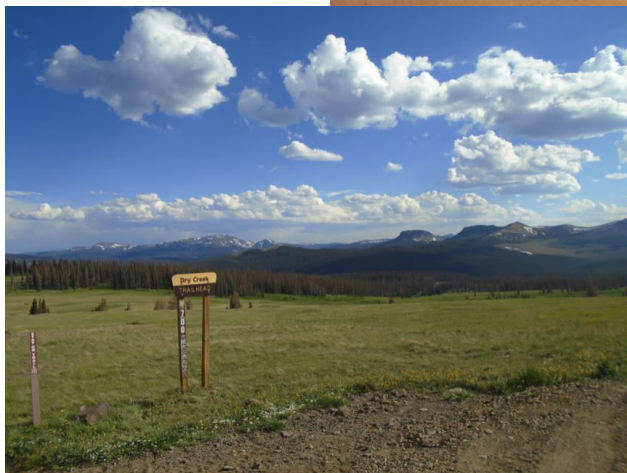
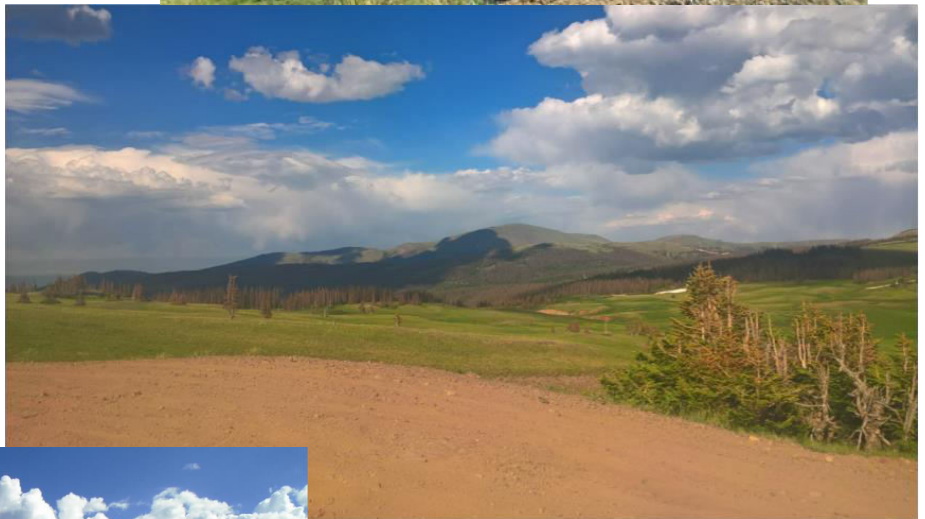


*Views en route
to the summit
I told myself
I was
getting closer*

The top was remarkable for the fact that there was nothing there. No sign post, no cairn, nothing. I took a few random photos, caught my breath and pressed on. I felt none of the effects of altitude and presumed that I was well and truly acclimatised to the oxygen levels by now.

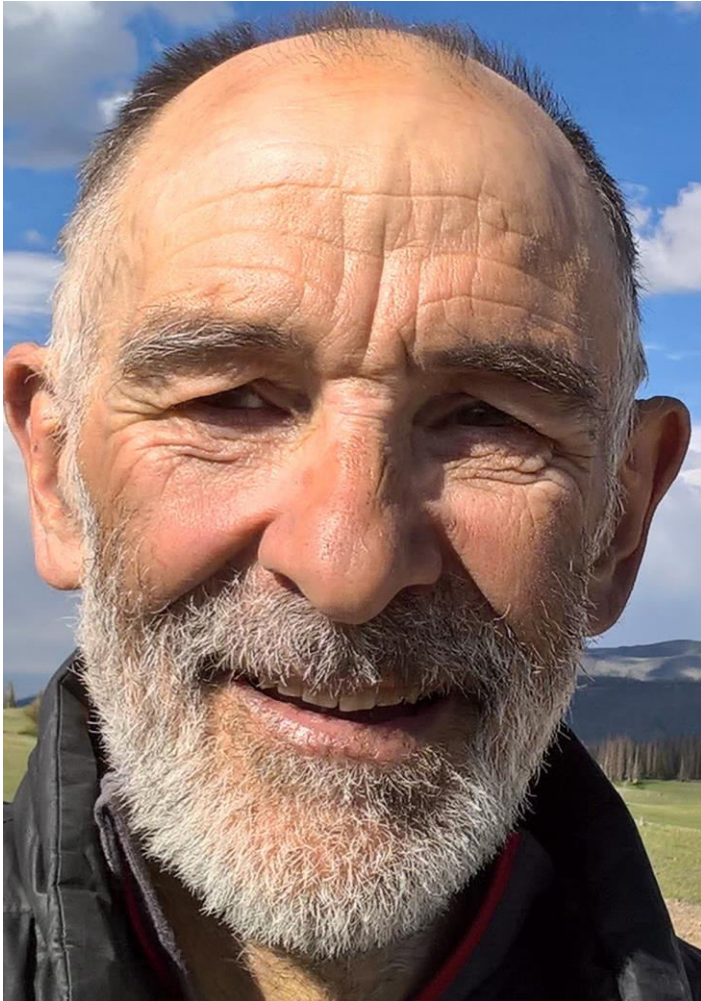


The ride up to the top was not followed by a corresponding big descent. Instead there was a residual degree of climbing still to be negotiated as I passed the Summitville mine superfund site.



*Views from the top of the Indiana
Pass at 11,901'*

The mine, abandoned in 1992, caused significant pollution. So far over \$150 million clean up work has been performed trying to minimise the on going toxic effects of the mine tailings leaching into the local Alamosa River.



One happy, and somewhat relieved TD bikepacker, at the top of the Indiana Pass

At one point all 11.7 miles of the river which drains to the east was dead to fish/aquatic life, secondary to heavy metal and cyanide pollution.

While what has been done to the environment is criminal, it must be recognised that the natural leaching of minerals and ions from the mountains resulted in naturally acidic, and relatively toxic watercourses, long before the influence of man; as evidenced by the names of local creeks such as Alum Creek, Iron Creeek and Bitter Creek, all named before the serious mining started. However the mining activity has increased the heavy metal levels to mega toxic levels.

This pollution continues and consequently all the water running in the creeks in the area remains contaminated and non-potable.



Summitville Mine, located at dispersed trees in centre of picture, situated below Big Red and Little Red mountains. My route swung to the right and passed behind these mountains.



*Summitville Mine holding pools
NOT suitable for a quick dip!!*



*High Country
(>11,000'), some of
the surrounding
hills reach up to
more than 13,000'*



The red hue on the exposed hillside of the Red Mountain massif illustrates the extensive natural weathering process.



*Little
Red Mountain
en route to
Stunner campsite*

The weather continued fine and it was difficult to comprehend that this area is reputed to receive 37' of snow a year.



*Privately owned lake
Doesn't look polluted but no camping and definitely no drinking of the water*

Dusk was falling as I came arrived at the Stunner campsite. This is at the base of the Stunner Pass and I decided to check it out rather than attempt the climb as it became dark.

*My camping spot
in the
Stunner Campsite*

There was a big party going, on amid a collection of large RV's and I wondered if I could get an invite but enquiries as to whether the local river was polluted did not lead to anything.



I found a campsite and then paradoxically the couple in the lone adjacent small campervan invited me over for a chat – they were intrigued about my bike set up etc and in exchange for detailing my journey so far I was entreated to have some left over steak and a beer. Naturally I took a lot of persuading.

As I bedded down I was very mindful of the fact that I could have still been stuck in Del Norte, I was very pleased to still be ‘in the game’ as it were;

I had contemplated at one point putting the old cassette and chain back on but Jupe ‘my’ mechanic seriously counselled against this, citing the fact that things could totally fall apart on the hills to come. Given the fact that the next bike shop on the route was 643 miles (nearly 1000k) away and knowing now the nature of the terrain I had to traverse to get there I think that this was very sound advice.

It got really quite cold overnight, probably reflecting the altitude.