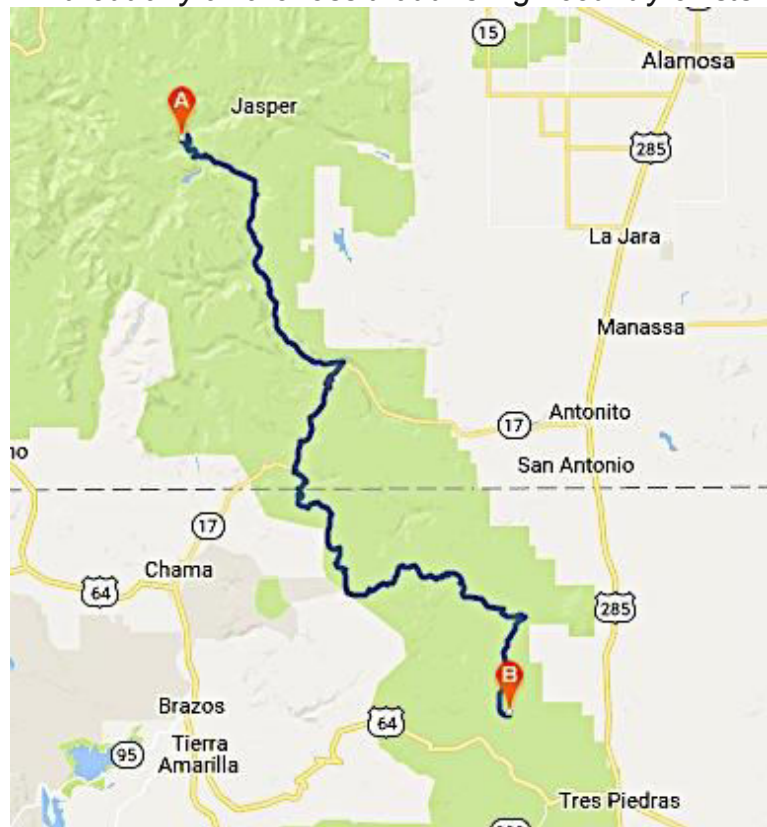


Day 24                      2<sup>nd</sup> July 2017  
Stunner Campground to rough camp on the Bonita Fire Reroute

136.3k / 84.7miles

2865m / 9399ft (2985m / 9793ft descent)  
42.1%↑ 49.2%↓ 8.7%→      20% max

*People spend their entire lives at those lower altitudes  
without any awareness that this high country exists* Robert M. Pirsig<sup>1</sup>



My scribbled notes for today start with ‘? Sunday today ?’. I have to admit I was not completely sure of the day; I was definitely in ‘bikepacking touring’ mode. The adage ‘eat, sleep, ride, repeat’ to the exclusion of everything else, including recognition of the day, was certainly applicable.

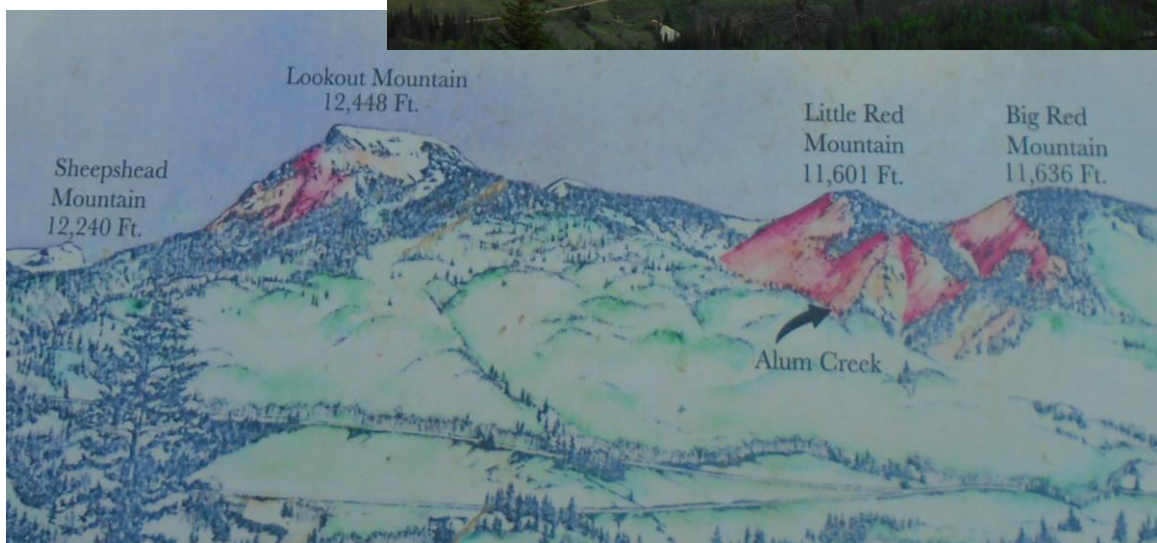
I left the Stunner campsite at 06.15, crossed the Alamosa River and immediately started the climb up the Stunner Pass. At 10,541’ yet another 10,000’+ pass.

1. Robert M. Pirsig Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance: An Inquiry into Value

*View across  
the Alamosa River.  
My campsite was located  
in the woods, above  
the white building.  
Good view of eroded  
Little Red and Big Red  
Mountains*



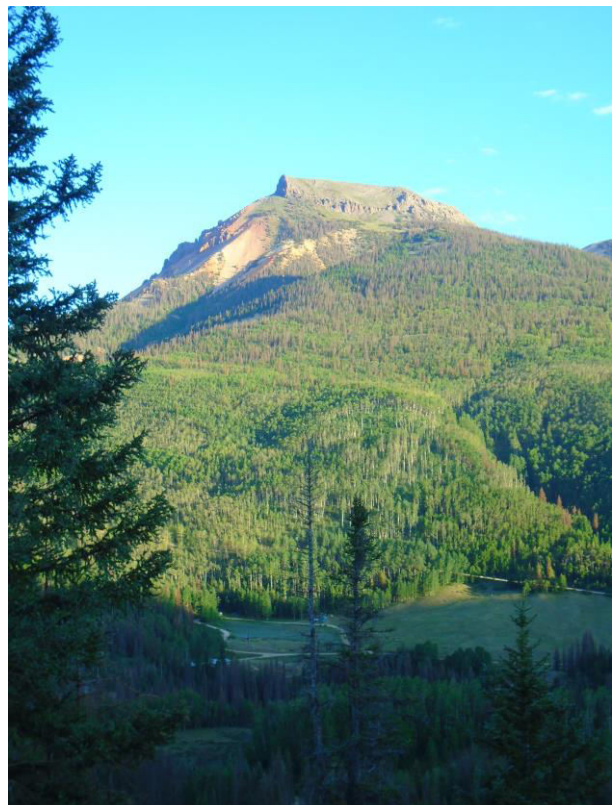
*Photo from nearby tourist  
story board (below)*



The story board described the weathering process and cited the fact that early prospectors considered the red iron oxide colour to be a dead give-away that there was gold in the area.

*Climbing Stunner pass,  
looking back at my campsite  
under Lookout Mountain*

I was looking forward to getting over the Stunner Pass and having a hearty breakfast in Platoro, where I would move onto ACA map number 6th (out of 7) for the route; then only another 688k to Pie Town!







*Stunner Pass - made it!!*

The descent was very pleasant, with views of Platoro in the distance.

I enjoyed the food, but discovered that the café was very expensive.

*Looking down on Platoro with the Conejos River in the distance.*



On the wall, next to where I was eating my breakfast, there was a chalkboard with the names of multiple TD cyclists who had passed through and eaten there – just room enough for my name to be added (right at the bottom in the middle)

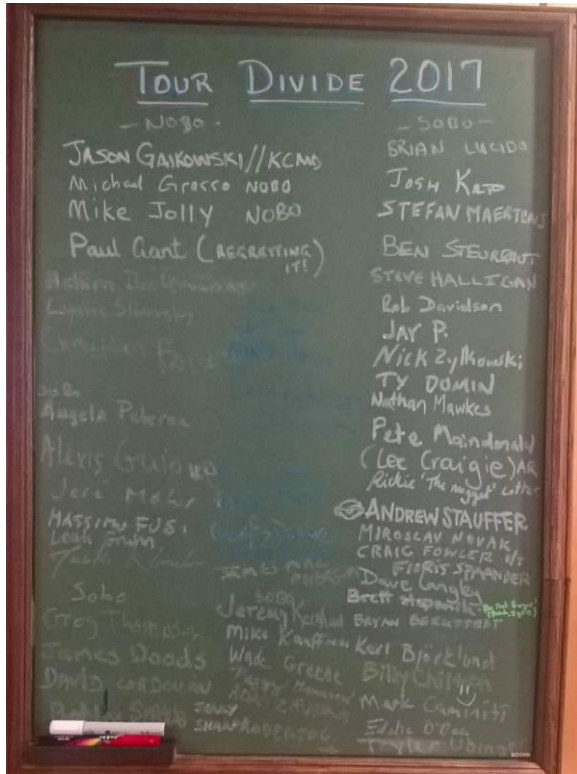
*Iconic sign in the cafe*

It was interesting to see the comment by SoBo rider Paul Grant who'd written *'regretting it'*. Interestingly his name does not appear on Trackleaders!!

They had a 'eat your way through a mega meal free if you manage it' challenge – only one success if I recall. I didn't attempt it.

I did however load up with a HUGE cinnamon roll (in hindsight I should have bought two).





*TD 2017 participant board*

While I was stocking up I asked about the water potability in Platoro and how they managed as the ACA map specifically states that Platoro water is polluted. The lady behind the counter replied that the water was fine and for the last 8 years they had been trying, to no avail, to get the ACA to change their statement on the map – seemed a little odd. I accepted her reassurance.

The next few miles were adjacent to the Conejos River; Conejos is Spanish for rabbit; the Spanish influence was steadily increasing as I moved south. After a long period of neglect the river was now being managed and had been stocked recently. It appeared to provide free trout fishing, albeit with a small max day limit.

I reckoned that the fact that the fish were thriving also helped demonstrate that the river was not polluted.

*Aptly named ranch situated in the Conejos valley*

I stopped by the river surprisingly soon after my big breakfast. Ever hungry I felt the need for a cinnamon roll top up.

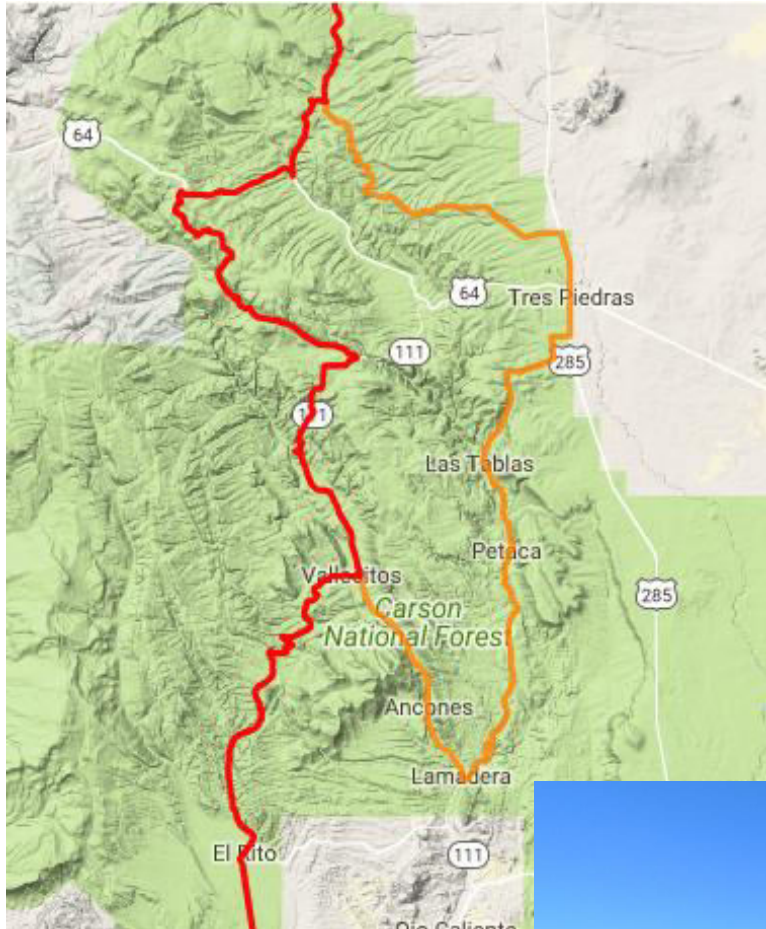


The temperature had risen; a combination of the sun having risen and my descent to lower altitudes, and it was very pleasant. However needs must and I was back on the bike very soon.

*The Conejos River.*



The Platoro café staff had confirmed that the fire reroute was in operation. I had uploaded the GPX file while I was at Brush Mountain Lodge so when I commenced on the new ACA map I made sure I was confident I knew the exact point where this now mandatory reroute left the map track. I did not want any repeat of the Gold Dust Trail debacle.



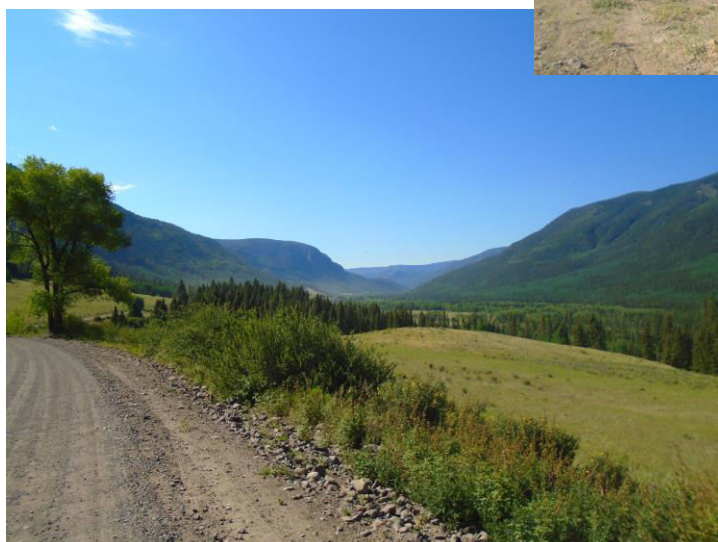
*Fire Reroute in Yellow  
Original route in red  
(shorter naturally)*

I took it steady down the Conejos valley and did not stop in Horca, situated as it is immediately before the long pull up the La Manga Pass.

On the way up I stopped on a couple of occasions in the shadow of rocky outcrops to eat the rest of the cinnamon roll. It was becoming increasingly warm.

*Views under a cloudless sky prior to the turn off up the La Manga Pass.*

*Looking west towards the San Juan Wilderness (left) and further down the Conejos Valley (below)*



I eventually reached the top and got to enjoy the view. I got talking to a group of leather clad 'hairy bikers' who were very interested in the TD concept.





They did express the opinion that the route would be better experienced from the back of a motor, rather than a pedal, bike. Having just sweated up the pass I said they might have a point!!

*La Manga Pass*

They took some photos of me and my one man powered steed but as evidenced by these pictures all the photos have my face in dark shadow.



After starting again it was a pleasant cycling on tarmac through meadows, with scattered copses and the absence of steep inclines. I just had to watch out for obscenely large motor homes cruising past, 2' from my left shoulder.



I came across the Cumbres & Toltec Scenic Railroad as it takes a huge loop around a valley. The 3' narrow gauge railway is 64 miles long. It is jointly owned by Colorado and New Mexico and featured in the 1988 film 'Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade'

*Views from the catchily named Los Caminos Antiguos scenic and historic byway*





I turned off the byway, crossed the railway and commended onto a trail once more. In no time I was crossing the border from Colorado into New Mexico. This was a great boost to morale as it meant I had entered the last state of my tour<sup>1</sup>.

As if to put a bit of a damper on things the weather now began to turn a bit iffy.

Clouds built up very quickly the wind increased significantly and thunder was heard. I found I was being chased by a storm.

Although I did not actually see any lightning I elected to take shelter just before I was about to cross the rather exposed Brazos Ridge.

Consequently I was fortunately not out in the open when significantly sized hailstones started to fall.

Thankfully the storm did not last long

The whole area felt very remote and I made sure I was careful on the rocky bits once I restarted. I definitely didn't want any mishaps up here.

*Ascending up to  
Brazos Ridge,  
before the storm*



1. Had I known the extent and severity of the riding in this State I might not have been so euphoric. I still had more distance to travel than from Land's End to John O' Groats and over much harder terrain than the usual LEJOG routes.

*View across the  
Cruces  
Wilderness*

Progressing along  
the ridge I had  
lovely views of the  
Cruces Basin  
Wilderness  
directly to the east.



*Panoramic views while on  
Brazos Ridge*

I reached the turning onto  
the 'Fire Reroute' safely,  
just before sunset, and as  
I was totally on my own  
and would be moving off  
the ACA map I elected to  
camp shortly after  
commending on the  
alternate.

I was looking forward to  
some chilli bean spread purchased at the Del Norte Family Dollar - a  
renowned gastronomic emporium (not).

Knowing the place I should have expected what I discovered - unfortunately  
when I opened the tin I found the contents were really quite disgusting;  
essentially inedible and believe me I can usually eat anything, except  
anchovies (Devils spawn), shellfish (make me ill) and half and half!!.





I disposed of the toxic concoction but thought in retrospect it would probably have acted as a marvellously effective bear deterrent – even a bear would not have contemplated eating that stuff.

As I bedded down I found I was strangely slightly out of sorts, on edge a bit.

I don't know why but I found the woods to be 'unfriendly'. That's not quite the right word and I realise that's a daft thing to say after all a wood is a wood but this part of New Mexico left me strangely unsettled.

Slept well(ish).