

Day 25

3rd July 2017

Bonita fire reroute rough camp to alfresco campsite en route to Cuba

158.8k / 98.7miles

2459m / 8067ft (2810m / 9219ft descent)

40.1%↑ 50.1%↓ 9.8%→ 14.4% max

*When you say '9 out of 10 fires are caused by humans'
all I hear is there is a bear out there who knows how to use matches.*



Another 'what day is this?' entry in the diary - as it turned out I had correctly surmised it was the 3rd July. I was off by 06.30, religiously following my GPS route, as I was now well and truly off the ACA map.

As it turns out there was more descent than ascent today although, given the climb out of Abiquiu at the end of the day, I could be forgiven for not appreciating this. However I'm getting ahead of myself.....

*Early morning in
the Carson National Forest*

Having worked my way eastward I popped out of the forest onto Highway 285, turned south and shortly afterwards rolled into the thriving metropolis that is Tres Piedras (Spanish for 3 rocks), population 258.



It's the sort of place that makes a one-horse town look busy. If they put up a one way sign no one would be able to get back home!!

*En route to Highway 285,
now out of the trees,
hence the wide open vistas*

Tres Piedras does however have a food stop, and after all that's all that really matters. The establishment is called the Chilli Line Depot, named after the narrow gauge railway, which used to run through the place between 1880 and 1941. The old water tower remains.

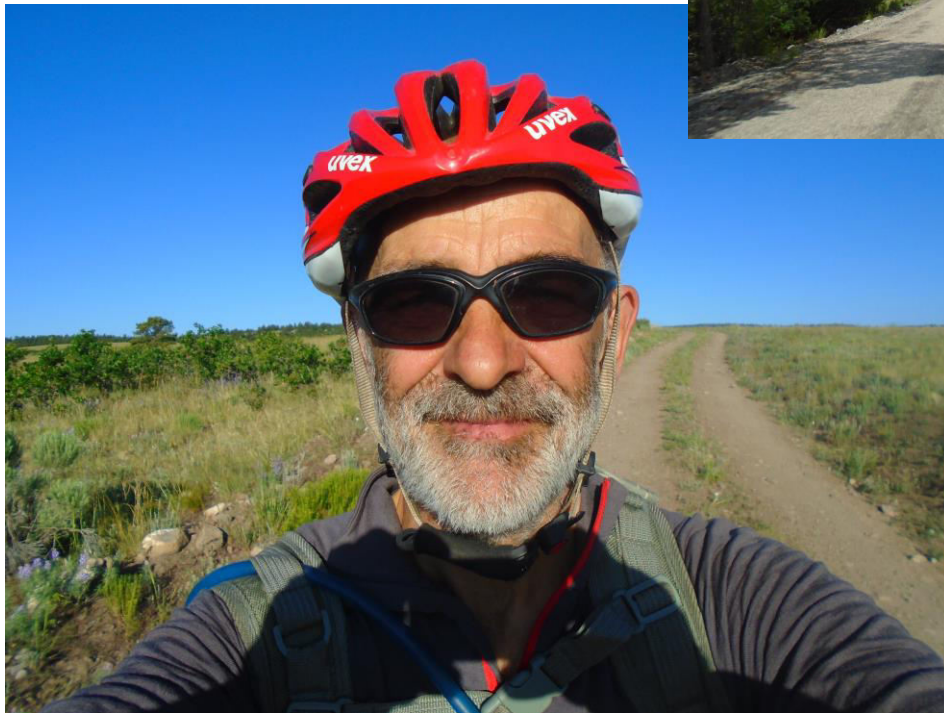


The very friendly desk lady/cook/waitress allowed me to operate their coffee machine while she was doing the cooking. Service was a trifle slow but I used the time to good effect by maxing out on the electronic charging front and establishing comms back home.

Had my first burritos of the trip.

On leaving Tres Piedras, despite being on a road, as I passed through some very isolated communities such as Las Tabas¹, I felt I progressing very slowly. It was becoming increasingly warm as I progressed south through New Mexico and I could only see it getting hotter. My temperature dependent bike creak increased accordingly. Nevertheless morale was much higher than last night.

Heading towards Vallecitos



Note the helmet's jaunty angle. A style adopted by seasoned TD riders!!

Turning right at Lamadera, and heading almost due north for 10k seemed just plain wrong. However this

was necessary as it allowed riders to rejoin the original route at Vallecitos, with its population of 92 (apparently all of whom were elsewhere when I arrived).

Just goes to prove that Vallecitos is indeed in the ass end of nowhere

Vallecitos, one of many communities I passed through in receipt of Federal Aid (never a good sign) boasts a very iconic garage sign. I could say something here about the service there being crap etc. but I will refrain from such lavatorial humour.

1. The most interesting thing Wikipedia has to say about Las Tabas is that it had a post office until 1995. Tres Piedras is thriving by comparison.





Typical views of this part of northern New Mexico



Deciding to give Vallecitos a miss - nothing much to miss actually - I pushed on over the 8,278' pass to El Rito, increasingly in need of some shade and fluid.

Fortunately I found both at the store in El Rito, where I drank my blood volume in iced tea and melted in the shade, while sitting outside on the floor.



The El Rito store, good for iced tea and shade

I had a quiet smile wondering just how many 60 year old retired consultant surgeons you'd find lolling in the dirt outside a two bit store in New Mexico; wearing clothing which hadn't been

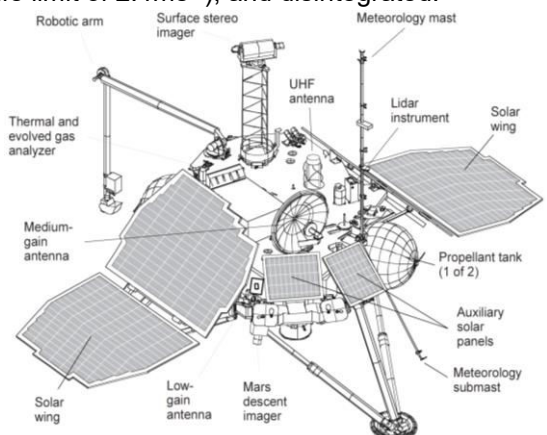
washed for 6 days and facial hair which hadn't been shaved for over 3 weeks!



El Rito boasts this highly unusual tower, named the Mars Polar Lander¹. Designed and built by Pedro Garcia, a local artist.

1. The Mars Polar Lander was lost in December 1999 when, due to the computer misinterpreting the jolt of the legs deploying for actual touchdown, the descent engine stopped prematurely 40m above Mars. Consequently the \$110 million lander hit the surface at 22ms^{-1} (vs the safe limit of 2.4ms^{-1}), and disintegrated.

Actual lander for comparison



The scenery en route to Abiquiu, while it was a new experience today, was to prove very indicative of much of the rest of New Mexico.

I will come right out and say it Abiquiu is shite
I realise I may be slightly biased here, but
you are not going to get me to alter my
opinion on this one.....



*Typical
New Mexico terrain*

As far as I am concerned it is populated by, at least, one total bastard, as well as an idiotic supermarket employee, probably more (of both).

Why the ire and negative vibe you ask?

Well I'll tell you - some thieving bastard pinched my ACA map from my bike's handlebars, while it was parked outside the Abiquiu supermarket¹ 'Bode's store' and what's more they did this while being watched by an employee of said supermarket, who was also outside having a smoke.

I had arrived in Abiquiu in the late afternoon and went inside to stock up. I bought my stuff, had a burger (you heated it up in a microwave) and went outside to commence the off road section to Cuba, only to find my map had gone.

Odd I thought.

I went back inside to ask if anyone had handed it in, thinking it might have fallen off the handlebars; although how I couldn't figure. Only to find that one of the employees had actually seen someone fiddling with my bike....

1. Didn't bode well did it (Sorry, gets hat and leaves)

I enquired *'Did they look like a cyclist?'*
 (ie smelly, dusty, tired, hungry, 1000 yd stare etc.)
She said *'No'.*
So I asked *'So why did you not ask what they were doing?'*
She said *'I didn't think about it'* words failed me.

Fortunately I'd had the premonition to up lock the bike – possibly the first time in 1000 miles. They had not taken my GPS because I had rendered it very difficult to remove easily – you need to take the back off which is totally counterintuitive and not easy if you have not done it previously.

I looked around outside to see if the map had been discarded in the bins; after all who would want a specialised map which does not show anything but the designated route. No joy.

Map holder on handlebars - no map.

I was therefore forced to rely solely on the GPS track – much like I had been doing on the Fire reroute yesterday.

Needless to say, when I left the cesspit that calls itself Abiquiu; I was not a happy chappie.

I channelled my ire into getting up the relatively steep and sandy slope alongside Cesspit Abiquiu Creek.



However I have to say my bad mood did not last long. I had the bike, I had a workable route and realistically the loss of the map was not going to stop me and at the end of the day, if that's the worst thing to befall me on this trip, well I will consider that I have got off lightly.

I honestly think that this trip has had a beneficial effect on my psyche. I consider that I am more chilled and calmer (some people may find this difficult to accept). I certainly was while on the tour. This may simply reflect the fact that I was under none of the stress associated with work / modern day life but I think its had a lasting effect. You certainly get time to think when you are cycling some 12 – 14hrs a day on your own – and that's going to have either a beneficial or a totally deleterious effect on your mind-set! In my case I think it definitely has had a beneficial influence and I have subsequently attempted to hang onto this aspect of the trip.

Again some people may not have noticed. But hey ho – (see there I go again chilled or what?).

Bet you didn't expect that last bit did you??!!

Anyway back to the cycling.....

*Long pull up the 7 – 10% hill
out of Abiquiu*

Not having the map, with the relevant profile, I was in total ignorance of the forthcoming terrain. Naturally I hoped that this hill would be short (it wasn't), and that there wouldn't be any hills thereafter (there were).

Once I topped out the ground opened up and I could see hills in the far distance. I wondered if I could see a lone cyclist in the far far distance, just about to enter the shadow cast by the hill Cerro Pelon. It was difficult to be sure as I was looking directly into the sun.



Flatter ground post hill climb

As the trail continued inexorably towards the hills it became increasingly apparent that the Abiquiu hill was not the end of today's climbing.

*Impressive cactus on the plain below
Polvadera Peak*

The series of photos below illustrate the approach to the hills. Once the climb recommenced the trail became increasingly rugged with curious horizontal ruts apparent in the multiple sections of solid rock which stretched across the trail.

My suspicion that there was a cyclist up ahead proved correct because I caught up with Leah Gruhn whom I had last seen in Del Norte.



We exchanged pleasantries; she was grinding away in the granny ring but I was in the groove and as my natural pace was faster than hers (obviously otherwise I wouldn't have caught her would I?) I pressed on.

Readers (sorry THE one, and only, reader) of this journal may well think that this was a heartless thing to do as it was coming on to evening and we were miles away from anywhere but

- a she would have continued on if I had not come across her,
- b amongst TD riders it is recognised that, riders are ultimately on their own, unless someone has a major (health related) problem. It's the whole essence of the race after all.
- c she probably would have been offended if I had slowed down just for her. If the roles had been reverse I certainly would have been unhappy.



A series of sharp inclines, with some sand and rubble thrown in for good measure, meant that I had to concentrate on picking good lines.

I was starting to get tired but as there was still light I pushed on.



*Slowly progressing towards the gap
between
Polvadera Peak 11,232' on the left
and Cerro Pelon 9,367' on right.
My route swung round behind
Polvadera Peak onto Polvadera Mesa*



I was starting to think I would look for somewhere to stop in about 45 mins when, while I was progressing down the Polvadera Mesa, completely unexpectedly I came upon 4 hombres setting up their camp around a blazing fire. It was a collection of 4 of my fellow TD riders, some of whom who I had been seeing intermittently since Butts Patrol cabin on day 2.



*Setting sun looking west
(obviously!!!)
just before I met up with
my 4 friends
with close up of the
distant extinct volcano*



They were Rich, Ko, Philippe and Massimo.

We played the 'Where's Jerry?' game, and exchanged war stories.

They were very interested to hear about my drive train problems and were impressed with the fact that I had caught up the half day lost after they had all set off up Indiana Peak while I was left in Del Norte two days ago.

They said Marty had been with them but had elected to carry on. I said I was thinking of doing the same but they persuaded me to stay.

It was a happy friendly group of individuals and we all went about sorting out our kit and getting ready to bed down.

Massimo went around with his Go Pro and we were asked why we were doing this while he filmed. It was an interesting question:

For my part I mentioned that the Tour represented a complete change from my working life; doing something way outside my comfort zone (both physically and mentally) afforded an appealing challenge. Coupled with the fact that I may never get the chance again both logistically and health wise (age, illness etc.). Ko who had been listening said he thought it was a good answer.

I took a few photos of the guys and the camp itself - see the following. My photo was subsequently sent to me via email. I think from Ko



Ko
Smiley chap,
Built his own bike with a bamboo frame.
Seemed to swing from looking like he was about to collapse and would never get there to appearing looking fine having pulled an all nighter.
Works with computers



Massimo.

Italian. I encountered him together with Philippe at the Butts Cabin day 2. However the main interaction I had with him was when we both stopped at the bottom of the Boreas Pass during the Cold Dust debacle. We had both passed the turn off and ended up at the bottom. I persuaded him he needed to go back up. He was not too sure at the time!!

Lively

Remarkably good English



Philippe
Quiet Frenchman
Wingman for Massimo- I don't think they knew each other before the Tour.
Unfortunately he had to withdraw because of a leg problem
English not his forte



Rich

Tennessee drawl.

Very intelligent chap, on his second Tour (that having been said, perhaps not so intelligent after all!)

Said this Tour was harder

70+ aiming to achieve the oldest rider to finish, while still retaining the blue Trackleaders lozenge.

Subsequently has put a lot of the trip on YouTube including 'Falling off the Wall'



Me
Idiosyncratic (should that read idiotic?)
Somewhat accident prone
Happy as evidenced by the picture
There is a journal about his trip somewhere if you can find it (usually out of print)



I realised that I had not taken many photos of my camp site/tent; usually because it was either dark or I was too tired!!

Hopefully rectified with these pictures!



Leah cycled into camp shortly after we had bedded down and we all greeted her arrival. We were getting quite a group.

I was pleased to have caught up with the crew, despite the hold up in Del Norte. Obviously disappointed to have lost the map but the unexpected discovery of tonight's camp was a pleasant counter. Typified the cycle of ups and downs throughout the Tour.

Lying in my tent I was conscious of Leah's cough. Many cyclists on the TD seem to suffer respiratory problems so far this had not been one of the hurdles I had had to deal with. Time will tell.

As to tomorrow well I haven't a clue what's in store – no map and I way past the point where I managed to do my map appreciation. I will check one of the other's map before I set off tomorrow but I'd worry about that then.

I slept well.