

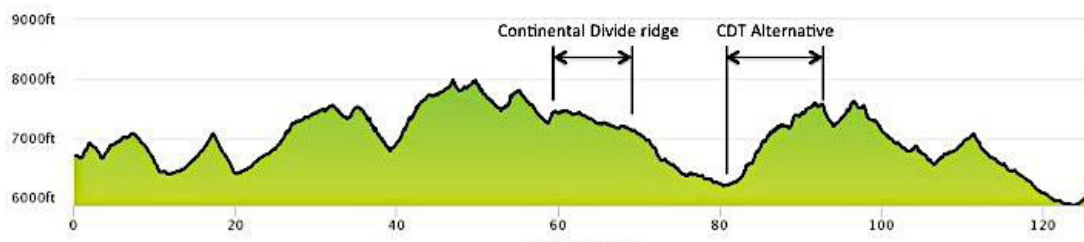
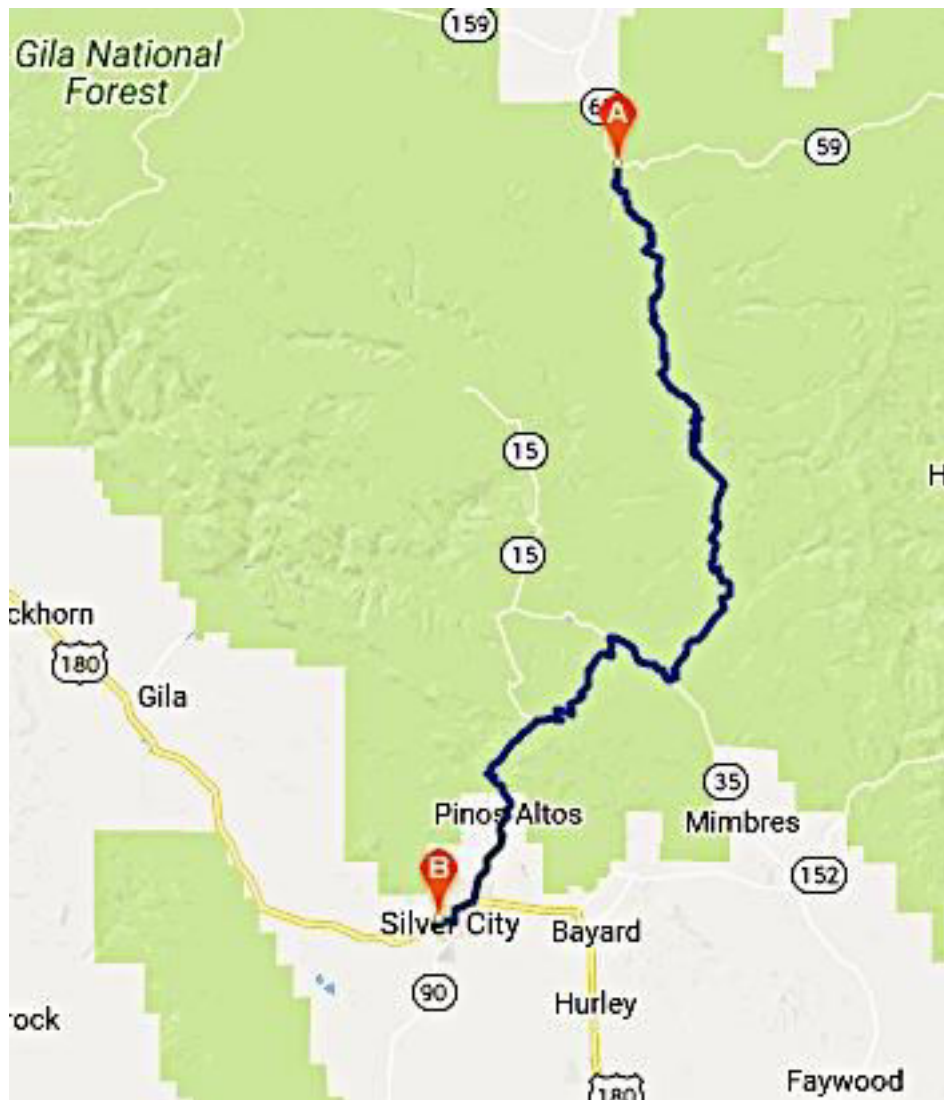
Day 29 7th July Day
Beaverhead Lodge site to Silver City

125.6k / 78.1miles

2773m / 9097ft (2978m / 9770ft descent)
44.4%↑ 48.6%↓ 7%→ 27.8% max

All calculations, based on experience elsewhere, fail in New Mexico

Lew Wallace



I awoke early and was pleasantly surprised to find that I had not been eaten by bears overnight; I considered this a bonus.

In all honesty I was knackered when I went to bed last night and, although I had positioned my food some 75yds away from where I slept under the fallen mobile sign, I was not sure that that was really far enough to escape from a 'troublesome' bear, especially as I had no bear spray.

As I packed up I told myself that, in the spirit of the roller coaster that had characterised this journey, if yesterday had been hard today wouldn't be too bad would it?

Shortly after I had set off I came across Marty still in his bag. The hill had defeated him too and he had only got about 100yds up it before also crashing out on the road side. Glad to see I was not the only one who was finding it hard.

The aim today was to reach Silver City regroup, rehydrate and resupply – my major concern was my lack of food and to a lesser extent the water situation, especially given the fact that the day looked set fair to be another scorcher.

Today started with a relentless series of sharp uphill with subsequent downs, hence the saw tooth appearance of the transect above. I was in the Gila Wilderness, part of the Gila National Forest, which measures some 872 sq. mi. (for those who measure things in the size of Belgium that's 0.07 Belgium units).



*A small part of
Gila Wilderness*

Above 9,000', spruce-fir and quaking aspen forest prevail, between 6,500' and 9,000' one encounters ponderosa pine, and below 6,500' pinyon-juniper woodland, desert vegetation and

dry southern slopes occur locally; brushy areas, grassland, and recently burned forests are also common and this is certainly what I experienced today.

Mike McCoy's definitive 'Cycling the Great Divide' book describes the terrain within the Gila as being '*demanding*, packed as it is with:

'moderately long, immoderately steep climbs and moderately long equally steep downhill.'

This time he is definitely not wrong!

I stopped at one of the very few streams I passed to replenish my water, using the Go bottle to ensure that I didn't get the dreaded *Giardia* at this late stage in the journey.

However by early afternoon I had totally run out of food. I took it slowly not wanting to completely run out of energy (or bonk as it's known to cyclists).

Yet more views of the Gila



Turning west onto Highway 35 for 8k proved a temporary relief before commencing on the Continental Divide Trail (CDT) Alternate.

The short but welcome Highway 35

The ACA map reports the CDT to be:
narrow and challenging where good technical riding skills are necessary.
The map goes on to state:
you will encounter two 50yd short steep 'hike a bike' sections



Yer rightfor *two* read *ten+*
and for '*short 50yd sections*' read *tough 250yd sections*.

Whoever wrote the above description would probably portray Ghengis Khan and Attila the Hun as '*not very nice men*' rather than despotic tyrants!!

The first problem was actually locating the beginning of the CDT segment; it starts from the south east corner of the Sapillo campground. However several trails lead off into the bush in this area and it took sometime, and several false starts, before I succeeded in identifying the correct route.

Intermittent blue CDT signs confirmed that I was on the correct path, with the emphasis on the word path. The beginning was not cycleable.



*Typical
'hike a bike'
section of the
CDT showing
the blue sign
clearly*



*Presumably one of the 'just two' short steep sections
30% slope in 30+°C heat*

Brief rest at the top of the steep section shown above

After topping out of an exposed ridge the route followed a single footpath with steep drops to the side.



Views to the right (top) and left (bottom) of the exposed ridge (middle), at the beginning of the CDT proper. You did not want to fall down either side exposed and unforgiving.



Frequently this footpath was obscured with overhanging bushes which had to be either driven through, or negotiated on foot.





*One very tired TD
bikepacker,
at the end of the
CDT Alternate*

I was not sorry to finish the 19k section that is the CDT Alternate and be spat out, rather unceremoniously, onto Highway 15 which, with the exception of one addition sharp steep uphill, afforded swooping downhills both to Pinos Altos and eventually Silver City.

The views to the south showed the wide open vista towards Mexico.

*Fast downhill towards
Pinos Altos*

The combination of:

- these downhills,
- the realisation that I had finally finished with significant hills and
- the prospect of food/water in Silver City had a most beneficial effect on morale.



*Slightly blurred view towards Mexico
taken while hurtling downhill
at over 45kph.*

Despite being desperate for food I elected to bypass Pinos Altos and press onto Silver City, the last big centre of population on the trip.

I had noted on the ACA map reference to a 'cyclist only lodging' on Montana Street in Silver City so, after a drink stop I thought I would head for that. It took a bit of finding as it did not have a sign outside. Anyway I eventually arrived.

Somehow, as I walked round the side and across the yard it didn't feel quite right. I passed through a side door expecting to find other cyclists but to my surprise I saw two kids, a couple of dogs, chickens and several rabbits definitely no bikes. Odd.

The kid's mum came out and we had a chat. I explained my expectation regarding cyclist's accommodation and it turned out that the 'cyclist lodging' owners had moved about 6 months ago and she had not been aware of the previous history of the place when she and her husband bought the property.

She phoned her husband and they kindly agreed that I could stay. They had an outhouse which had been recently vacated by her visiting brother in law and she said I could stay there provided I was aware that it had an infestation of Arizona bark scorpions¹ and if I got up in the night I was to make sure I put the light on before I got out of bed!! She was very keen to ensure that I knew of this fact.

A picture of the infamous Arizona Bark Scorpion, with scorpions (baby scorpions).

Hey what's an infestation of poisonous scorpions to a chap who camped out in close proximity to a 'troublesome' bear the night before? Once again tiredness trumped danger and I readily said 'no problem'.

The children were lovely and I was proudly shown the tarantula owned by the young lad as I ate the left over pulled pork Mum was going to throw away!!



1. The Arizona Bark scorpion, *Centruroides sculpturatus* or *Centruroides exilicauda* (depends upon source), is 2.7 – 3.1 inches in length. It likes dark and damp places and its venom is dangerous to humans. This causes severe pain in the affected area, tingling, vomiting and general illness which can last up to three days. Although the cases of death are a few; pets, young children and older adults are very vulnerable to the dangerous consequences of stings - I wasn't certain if I qualified as an older adult. Fortunately there are effective antivenoms but I have since learnt that they ceased production in 2004. I subsequently also learned that the Arizona bark scorpion can climb virtually any surface except glass and clean plastic so I was definitely safe in my bed then!!.

*The delightful, if rather excited, kids
who now had a captive audience for viewing all their animals*



I retired to my scorpion hostel and busied myself with the bike stuff. I called Jeff Sharp and arranged to meet him at the trading post in Hachita on the morrow.

*Tarantula with truncated
back right leg*

Looking at the map, and allowing for the fact that I had to backtrack to get back on my official route, I was just over 200k away from the finish - gulp.



Rather than push on and attempt to do this in a oner, I thought it would be best if I split this distance into two legs as this would allow me to arrive in the daylight.

I note that I wrote in my notebook at the time:

What a couple of days nearly broke me physically as well as psychologically and with that thought in mind I drifted off.

Heard no scorpions.