

The Triple Bypass—July 9, 2005

I had meant to begin this shortly after the ride itself, but time was short and life was busy. However, for the rest of Team Francis and other cyclists I know, I felt that a detailed account was expected for the encouragement of future participation.

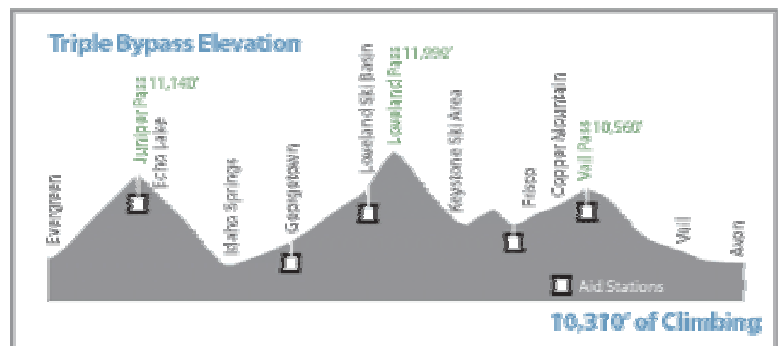
When I received my registration packet in the mail weeks before the ride, my anticipation grew as I realized the scope of this ride. As I read through the instructions to the start of the ride, the factoid “3000 riders” made me realize that this is in the magnitude of a one-day RAGBRAI (sans little towns with bars). What also struck me was the schedule of aid station closures; I have heard of events cutting off slower riders before—like the “Hotter-than-Hell 100” that insists that riders are at the halfway point by a certain time. Nonetheless, I have never ridden one with such a daunting requirement—I had no concern of being that far back in the pack, but the thought was in the back of my head. I was fortunate to have a family of trouperers that woke up earlier than they would like to drop me off at the start...even earlier than I had planned.

Darci commented on the return drive to Denver that our hotel was in a perfect location—and it was: the drive to the Evergreen exit was less than twenty minutes and Team Evergreen’s instructions to the start were impeccable; finding the fifth stoplight was as easy as 1, 2, 3...4...5. Rather than drive all the way into the specified parking lots, I suggested we follow the leads of many other riders and pull over as soon as conveniently possible to drop me off. There was no need to hurry; so I remember that getting the bike off the rack and my gear ready was like going in slow motion...how many times can I go over the same checklist in my head? Once I was ready, said goodbyes to my three-person support team, and rolled down the hill (in retrospect, I wish I would have gone up the small hill to the highway we came in on back to where riders were pedaling away on Hwy 103 rather than snaking through a bike trail—and riders on it—to the start).

Thinking back to the registration packet, I was impressed with the organization and forethought that Team Evergreen had in running this event. I remember that one of the more important items on my mental checklist was the included green wristband—like you’d wear in a beer garden; the registration information seemed to suggest that without said band, not only would fare at the aid stations be off limits, so would one’s admission to Hwy 103. As I rolled across the intersection, I did see a clot of riders, but no one was checking wristbands that I could tell. Later in the day, I met a rider from Denver who was riding “bandit,” or “poaching” as he called it, who obviously made it onto the route...but he was good enough to bring his own nutritional sustenance.

Once on the route, I tried to remember back to the information I had discovered from the hours I had spent/wasted obsessing about this ride. Already I had forgotten the length of the first climb: was it 13 or 15 miles? In the Midwest, two miles difference are—typically—nothing; in the mountains, it had me thinking...a lot. As a practice my computer is set to display time and speed; if I watched miles tick away to a targeted point, it would make it seem longer than it actually is. Nonetheless, I had decided that it was approximately 15-point-something miles, because the distance to Idaho Springs I did remember was 31-point-something and the pass was halfway to that. Still, I did not want to look at miles much during the ride at all.

Looking at the elevation profile, it appears that Vail Pass is the more gradual and shortest of the three climbs...that is deceiving. Because of the terrain of a bicycle trail (remember the steep, tight switchbacks, Mark E.?) and the fatigue at that time of the day and relative point of



the ride make it more challenging that it would seem to be...although, Frisco to Copper Mountain was not that difficult.

I say this because the first climb was probably the “easiest” and most enjoyable of the day; here is why: First, weather all day was near perfect; I will comment later on winds at the end of the day, but the temperatures were great, there was very little precipitation (at least, where I was), and the sun shone most of the day. So the ride up Squaw Pass was most enjoyable. The temperature was in the 50’s, but there was a noticeable difference when I passed into the shadows. These temperatures were perfect as overheating was not probable with these conditions. Also, the grade didn’t seem steep, but I was fresh—as were we all. And everyone seemed to be very methodical with pace, knowing that there were many miles to go... (“before I sleep”).

The landscape was gorgeous on this road for multiple reasons. First, this was the most tree-lined *road* we were on all day; the trails up and down Vail Pass also had trees, but their proximity made it a bit claustrophobic. Add the cloudless sky hanging its blue radiance over us creating a picture worthy landscape: greens, oranges, blues with riders on a gray-ribbon road—does it get any more perfect than that? Finally, there is nothing more glorious to look at than the melding of man and machine. I think we can all agree that riders that take on endurance events—even when it’s noncompetitive—are fit...otherwise, finishing can be jeopardized. Even when some “excess baggage” was seen, it wasn’t so much that prevented a cyclist tackling this challenge. I was surprised by the three or four risers that seemed to be unaware of quality cycling garb as they rode in t-shirts and baggy shorts (the absence padding was, to me, inconceivable)—but they all rode together, so it must have been *a thing*. I also saw a group of women with “Title Nine Sports” kits on—I tried to keep most of them out of my sight.

I, as I know you all know why, enjoyed looking at the bikes themselves. I didn’t see a lot of “crap”; a lot of LiteSpeeds that rivaled Treks in number, quite a few Serotta’s (so Mark E. is not as unique as he appears, though I didn’t see a twin to his new bike), few Cannondales (surprisingly), a multitude of Giants, only one Gunnar (mine). I spoke to one rider of a newer Salsa (not of your classic vintage, Lonnie). Most were road bikes, but there were some “serious” hybrids—this is where I saw a few Konas, Lance; but saw nothing like your “Old/Big Red” Daimondback, Mark T. I only saw four recumbents—I can understand why due to the nature of the ride, but was also glad (my nose was high in the air when I passed three of those).

There seemed to be an unspoken energy and understanding as the peleton neared the top of the pass. I can’t explain it, but it was clear that the end was near. However, as I crested to a descent, I heard someone mention a “false” pass; and we did start climbing about a mile later, but only for another half mile before the first aid station.

SQUAW MOUNTAIN STATISTICS: 16.01 miles, 1:41:57 riding time, 9.4 mph avg.

The aid stations, or “rest stops,” were awesome. My only criticism is that they need to find an alternative sport drink sponsor than Accelerade—I hope it’s good for you, because it tastes like shit! In fact, as we were driving back to Denver, we stop to get gas and a guy from a van next to us jokingly yelled at a colleague to say that he still had a bottle of Accelerade—my knee-jerk reaction was “That stuff tastes like shit!” We—two strangers with a common experience—laughed. Nonetheless, the chance to get off the bike and out of saddle was refreshing enough, though there were not many places to sit. Instead, I rested on two feet...waiting in line for food, beverage, and to go potty. It was fun striking up an occasional conversation, and I usually tried to sneak in that I was a flatlander riding in the mountains; the poacher I spoke to at the lunch stop shook his head and stated that he always wondered how we did it. I quietly gloated.

Months ago, I had made contact with a TE member and mentioned that I was thinking about doing the Triple and was going to use the early-June Elephant Rock Ride in Castle Rock as a measuring stick of riding at altitude and with climbs unlike the flatlands of Nebraska. Her response was positively that it

was a ride worth doing; that though there were three ominous ascents, there were also three awesome descents. That alone probably made me mentally committed to the prospect of the July ride. As Larry will attest, the Elephant Rock Ride was one worth doing and doing again; it had also told me that my training up to that point was on course for bigger and better things a month later.

As I was at the first aid station, a cyclist that I saw at our hotel emphasized that now would be the time that my arm warmers would come in handy—the speeds of the descent on the shadowed side of the mountain could get chilly. However, I don't know that I ever really noticed the chill because I was going so freakin' fast for so long! What I found interesting is that the pack of riders more noticeably strung out on the descents more than the climbs: rather than seeing a hundred-plus riders slowly climbing along any straight away, I would see fewer than 10 (or so) on a comparable straightaway going downhill. My rule of thumb as a rider—wherever it may be—is to stay to the right. We all know, even on training rides, that it is the logically safest part of the road. In addition, I try to follow this rule even on descents at higher speeds. This created a problem on this and the other descents throughout the day: I was astounded at the number of riders who would ride down the middle of the right-hand lane or, more annoyingly, along the center line. My descents were fast: coming down Squaw Pass, I exceeded 47 miles per hour numerous times. My brakes got a workout like no other, decelerating to less than 20 mph for some hairpin turns. Not that I had a passion of going any faster, or that I was impatient to get to the bottom, I did want to go as fast as I felt I could safely go; however, there were a couple of riders that had every opportunity to follow the logical “rules of the road” and get further to the right, but didn't causing me to have to slow *for them* not because of the necessity of the features of the descent. The closer we got to the bottom, the more the road straightened out and I could move clear of these riders and other riders could go past me.

Two humorous notes of the first descent: First, I was running out of gears. I told the guys at the Olympia Cycle when I first built up the Gunnar that I had never had the opportunity or leg to use all the gears of the 10-speen rear when in the big ring. In Nebraska going downhill with a wind at my back, I still struggled to use the combination of 53-12. On the Elephant Rock Ride, I did; but that ride also told me that I needed more gears at the other end for the amount and length of climbing that would present itself on the Triple. I replaced the cassette with a 13-29, which did help on the climbs; however, I would always run out of gears on the downhill side—a 53-13 was not enough. The second funny thing was seeing a suicidal squirrel dash out in front of another rider about 10 yards ahead of me. As I rolled up to her at about 30 mph, we had a bit of a chuckle about what almost happened. When I passed her on the Loveland Pass climb, I reassured her that squirrels didn't live at higher altitudes.

In Breckenridge one year, I climbed a pass road on my mountain bike and it took me 90 minutes to get to the top, but 30 minutes to get down. This formula rang true again: It took me about 90 minutes to get to the top of Squaw Pass, and an estimated 30 minutes to get down. Therefore, climbing in the mountains must typically take three times as long as the descent of the same mountain, or same distance.

$$T = (d+3d) \times \text{mph where } T \text{ is total time and } d \text{ is time of descent.}$$

Larry, on a side note, I passed Team Bad Boys on the Squaw Pass descent...I never saw them again.

When riding alone with 3000+ other riders, I had a tendency to eavesdrop on passing conversations...either that I passed or those that passed me. In doing so, I had been “alerted” numerous times that the most difficult part of the ride—the stretch that many riders dreaded—was that between Idaho Falls and Loveland Pass.

This year was exceptional for one detail that made the beginning of this stretch arduous. When I had finally jumped online the night before after having been on vacation and away from the world of the internet for about five days, one e-mail was an update from Team Evergreen that there was road construction at Idaho Falls that would cause a slight change in the route. The first gave riders a choice: one could hike up a hill for about 100 yards to get to a bike path or ride a quarter mile on a rough, dirt access road. I put my unquestioned faith in my Continental *tyres* and chose the latter. It really wasn't that bad except for slower traffic that I had to be patient for and eventually walk the last 50 or so yards.

Once on the paved bike trail, it was smooth sailing until we all hit a sign that said (and I missed), “Walk your bikes.” It didn’t take long before I joined all the other walkers; this, again, wasn’t bad but wasn’t expected and Look cleats are never fun to walk in. But we all survived and made our way out of the detour.

One thing that I heard about this stretch is the potential for heat. Once able to ride again, I stripped off the arm warmers and lathered up with sunscreen—this day was perfect and with the moderate temperatures, the thinness of the air made the sun more intense. In one of the overheard conversations, I think I heard it described best: that this stretch can be “a cooker,” and with the combination of perfect, cloudless conditions, the lower altitudes with higher temperatures, plus add the fact that this whole stretch is in a canyon, all the heat is concentrated at the bottom of it which is where the roads run.

So we rode along. This stretch was also a nice reprieve from the noticeable climb that the ride began with. Looking at the elevation map, it is apparent that this is a gradual climb that goes on for quite a while, but also gets steeper the farther you go. My plan was to not break any speed records—beginning to end (not counting the descents)—and I had to remind myself of that here; it was tempting to be in that mentality of “catching up” to that next group or rider, but I refrained.

On a couple side notes.... At the beginning of this stretch, I saw a jersey that advertised The Bike Way in the same font as the shop in Omaha. I rolled up and asked her if it was the one in Omaha and she said yes, with a tone surprised. Turns out that she used to live in Omaha, but lives in Colorado now; she had also done this ride before which was encouraging for the flatlander in me. I also had a genteel, yet fruitless conversation with the owner of a sweet looking bike. When considering frames for my new bike, I was intrigued by the Salsa Campeon scandium frame, but had no knowledge of its performance and ride. So I kept up with this guy for a while and asked him if he like his Campeon—he did. I asked him how it rode—again, he said that he has liked it so far, but hadn’t had a road bike before...he was primarily a mountain bike rider, it was his first road bike, and he had nothing to compare it to. I did envy him, though: he found this complete bike (and it looked new) on E-Bay for the price it would have cost him to get just the frameset at his local shop. He rode off and I plodded along.

This stretch was dominated by gentle rollers, but somehow not like eastern Nebraska’s. Finally, the swarm of riders at the Georgetown aid station was in sight at it was time for another break.

GEORGETOWN STATISTICS: 42.71 miles, 3:03:29 riding time, 13.9 mph avg.

I didn’t stay long at this aid station. It was flat and crowded and I wanted to keep rolling. I commented to another rider that I hadn’t seen many bars on this route, our standard RAGBRAI desire. He looked at me somewhat seriously and said, “You won’t see many on this ride.” Actually, I was just joking, but retrospectively I *was* surprised at the absence of civilization that we rode through. I think there are a couple of reasons for dictating the route in such a way. Out of practicality, I can see that if we were guided through the center of the little towns, it would have created a traffic problem; more patrolmen, disgruntled citizens, etc. In a good and bad way, it inhibited individuals’ support folk from clotting up the route; the fewer vehicles, the easier for the cycles and the number of them—but it would have been nice if there were more opportunities to navigate to the aid stations, at least. Nonetheless, some unofficial fan clubs made their presences known along the route: stemming from what is done in Europe, I frequently saw the same crew encouraging *everyone* with cheers and clanging cowbells—thus, often was heard, “We need more cowbell!” In fact, I saw the portly, suspended “patriarch” of that group at the end and told him that I saw them all day and it was great what they were doing—“As long as we could keep you going...” Finally, I think there was also an anti-RAGBRAI thought on not going through the heart of these communities: the organizers wanted to keep riders riding—to not get distracted, stay the course, and finish the ride in a timely manner. To this I agree: my goal was to finish under eight hours of riding time (and I came close), but I was out there for close to eleven hours; nonetheless, we all needed to stay the course.

This next stretch was probably the most tedious of the ride. To refer to the elevation map again, it is a gradual climb all the way. It did begin with a ride on the bike trail that quickly climbed to the level of the interstate, but the rest seemed flat and unvarying, though I could tell that there was a steady climb all the way. So the pace, most of the way, was in the neighborhood of 12 mph, which seemed slow but necessary. This stretch reminded me of the hardest stretch of my ride to Grand Island on Fathers' Day weekend: even without the wind, I could always *see* where I was going and that made it seem long...it just took a long time. So too was this stretch: the terrain was varied enough that I couldn't see my destination, but I knew that at this pace it would take a while to get there. In fact, the inverse happened here as well: because I could *not* see the destination (Loveland Basin), my anticipation for it made me impatient—therefore, making it tedious. As mentioned before, I heard that this stretch could be a cooker because of the sun's heat concentrating at the bottom of this canyon; the perfect cloudless conditions made the mild heat seem more intense and punishing.

Another thing that was new to this flatlander is that the state of Colorado allows cyclists on interstate highways—as long as the riders stay to the right. It was during this stretch that we were directed to enter onto the I-70 shoulder for the next six or so miles (at least I think that's how far it was...I wasn't thinking with the greatest clarity). The shoulder was paved in black, which added to the heat; it had little black rocks on it, that it made it hard to see what I often try to avoid; and one can never get an idea of how narrow a shoulder really is until shared with hundreds of other riders with speeding vehicles whizzing by. Nonetheless, I plodded along steadily, trying not to go too fast; I wanted to get to Loveland Basin to assess where I was and how I was doing.

I do feel that I broke down in one component of my strategy during this stretch. During the winter, I had worked out with the Spinervals series by Troy Jacobsen...including a hill-climbing workout. In all of the videos, he frequently has the riders/viewers stand to “stretch the hamstrings” periodically. I picked up on the value of this and had even incorporated into training rides; yes, it does stretch some muscles other than your quads, but also creates a little relief to your ass. I had attached to my handlebars my watch that gauged altitude (I'm always one for gadgets); but I had also set the countdown timer at 10 minutes to be my reminder to stand up every once in a while. What I didn't do is set it to repeat: my timer went off 10 minutes into the ride, but I thought it odd that it didn't do it again. Realizing my error, I decided to just be mindful of that and stand occasionally, not out of need but because it was a part of the plan. My focus had become “get to Loveland Basin” and not “stick to the plan.” Everything about the ride and riding was becoming tedious, including the sensations associated with “the most comfortable saddle I've ever had.”

Finally, the Loveland Basin exit neared and it was finally a sight for sore eyes...and all else. The possibility of abandoning had come to mind, but I thought that getting off the bike for a while would create a relief physically and mentally. I was having a good day; I was just tired and felt I had reached my limit.

LOVELAND BASIN STATISTICS: 56.39 miles, 4:29:10 riding time, 12.5 mph avg.

I noticed at the aid stations that the process to refill bottles made the food lines much easier to get through. So I got a sandwich and some fruit and began to stand in the line for fluids. Even in that time, I was feeling better and realized that my day could have been worse. I remembered back to last year and my attempt to do the Ride Across Indiana (RAIN) at which I started too fast, was overcome by heat, and jumped on the bus 90-some miles into the 160-mile event. At that ride's lunch stop, I saw a rider that I had ridden with earlier that day. I told her, “I'm done”; but she said, “Just think of the rest as a metric century” to encourage me not to stop—I stopped anyway. While standing in *this* line, a woman behind me told her friend that she was done for the day—she had already had two flats, was tired, and felt she didn't need to prove anything by completing this ride again; in fact, she was ready to sell her bike. I turned and tried to encourage her by saying that the day was half done and that she should finish

anyway—she was unmoved. This is when my first impression of her was fulfilled. When I first hear her and turned in her direction, she gave me the impression of being one of those people that will complain to an extent to bring everyone else's world down with her. Her negative response to my suggestion had a tone that made it seem that *we* were the crazy ones for doing this ride. At that point I resigned to the fact that she will always be a troll—in height and personality.

I finally got to the beginning of the beverage line and reluctantly got some more Accelerade; this time I decided to try a different flavor and put it in my *smaller* bottle.

I wandered back to my bike and just squatted down next to it to stretch my muscles out and to not sit on the rocky parking lot of this ski area. Here I met the “poacher.” He was pouring what looked like packaged tuna onto some sort of pita, and shortly into the conversation he was complaining about the food. “It looks that you have yourself to blame.” He explained that he was “poaching” the ride and had brought his own.

He was from Denver and had an older Ride the Rockies jersey on—the one with the Japanese artwork. I asked if he had done this ride before; he had. I knew that the next landmark was Loveland Pass and asked what this next stretch was like. As I peered up the road, I noticed that all I could see was *climb*; in fact, it climbed until it turned right and disappeared from view. It reappeared in the distance before banking right again, vanishing completely. “This is just a short climb,” he said. I asked how far—“About four miles.” *Four miles*, I thought; *I can handle that*. Looking on a map, it is hard to determine distance...especially when it is unfamiliar territory. But we all know how far four miles is; “Besides,” the poacher added, “it’s nothing like what you just did. That last stretch was hard; this is just a short climb.”

Even for an Omahan and a Nebraskan, I felt encouraged though I knew that this mere four miles was all climb. I geared up—physically and mentally—got on the bike again, geared down, and was ready to go. My strategy: just get to the top. I rolled to the beginning of the climb at a slow speed and felt destined not to go much faster.

Highway 30 in Nebraska is a tedious stretch to ride—I mentioned it earlier. Here’s why: I drove that stretch a lot growing up and knew that every time I left a town that I’d be able to see the next...each 11 miles away (must be a railroad thing). Riding that road on a bike just messes with one’s mind. Eleven miles really isn’t that far, but the fact that it is that next grain elevator on the horizon is like watching the second hand on a clock for an hour—time slows! Add wind...well, that’s another story.

The switchbacks on Old Highway 6 were the same: if you focused on the next turn, it would seem an eternity to get there. So I didn’t do that—I shortened my vision. “Hey,” I thought to myself, “look at that next rider. Am I going faster, slower, the same speed?” This tactic reminded me of something I learned in some free golf lessons: don’t aim at the pin off in the distance; instead, find a closer point on the same line and aim toward it—it is more than likely going to remain in your line of vision when addressing the ball. So looking at the colorful jerseys or makes of bikes or revolving feet of that next rider was more interesting than that turn off in the distance.

The weather began to get gray at this point, too. Occasionally, a light mist started to fall, and I hoped that a sheen was not coating the downside of Loveland Pass. For the most part, anything larger than minute drops held off.

Shortly after the Georgetown aid station, we made our way to the bike trail that paralleled the interstate. To get there, we passed a train depot and rode a steep climb that, once you got to the top, over looked where we had just been 50 or so feet below. As I mentioned earlier, the first two righthand switchbacks could be seen from the Loveland Basin aid station. Now I was on that second, more distant switchback looking down—probably 500 or more feet—on where I had come from. Wow! What a view! Too bad that stopping momentum now may be deadly; but for a fleeting moment, I had an amazing sight.

Once I brought my attention back to the direction I was going, it appeared that the top of the pass was within sight. At that turn, we were clearly getting above the tree line—I had learned on our train ride to the top of Pikes Peak earlier that week that the trees ended at 10,500 feet or so. Loveland Pass

was at 11,990 feet, and my altimeter watch on my handlebar was getting closer and closer to that mark. The road was also flattening out and the pace was slightly increasing, but that may have been from adrenaline as well. Signs started marking the road to pay attention to what time it was because a photographer was shooting riders as they neared Loveland Pass. It was about 1:00 P.M. when I had my photo taken and less than a mile later I rounded out the top to the sign indicating that I was indeed at the top: Loveland Pass!

LOVELAND PASS STATISTICS: 60.23 miles, 5:03:50 riding time, 11.8 mph avg.

This was what it was all about! Being at the top of one of the highest paved roads in the US was one thing in itself, but the view was sublime. Despite the overcast skies, what was in view was awesome! I really felt that I was at the top of the world; and I even tried to call people from such a perch, but Nextel coverage doesn't come this close to heaven. There was the touristy sign and place to climb around, but I really had no reason to—I was already overwhelmed at the view, I had no camera to document it or my being there, and I had only traveled four miles in 35 minutes from the last time I stopped. I had seen and done all I could do, said hello to the poacher who rolled in behind me, and got ready to ride again. I was ready for a blazing downhill!

Geography is amazing: almost immediately I could tell that I was going downhill...not just downhill, but down-mountain! There were a couple of initial switchbacks, and we (nearly all of the riders) were already catching up to an 18-wheel tanker truck that was slowed by the terrain and the riders ahead of him. Many of us just went by him. That doesn't happen very often; I always think of Dave Stoller in *Breaking Away* as he drafted past 50 mph (even if he was in the wrong gear). Later I passed about five passenger vehicles. As much as I am in favor of the "Share the Road" concept for autos and cyclists, it was pretty clear who controlled this road on this day.

It was at this point that I really got the feel for speed! I thought hitting 47 or so mph down Squaw Pass was a rush—especially as I darted through the cool, clear morning air on the shadow side of the mountain. The backside of Loveland Pass, however, was beyond compare. At one point I rounded a curve and noticed a long straightaway ahead of me. I was already edging into the mid-40's, clamped my hands in the drops, and thought, "Let's see how fast it can go." I think I hit 48 before nearing the next round in the road. A short while later, I was riding up on the hoods and glanced to see that—without trying—I was already at 48 mph; I looked ahead and saw that I had a pretty straight stretch before me and immediately put my hands in the drops and tucked it. I accelerated and I dared to look at the odometer on occasion to watch it approach and surpass 50 mph! When I checked my Max Speed at the next aid station, it read 50.9 mph. I will give a lot of credit to the bike, the tires, the road, but that was a *smooth* 50 mph! I never felt out of control.

It wasn't long after that that Keystone appeared out of nowhere and we continued to fly down through that town until we turned on County Road 1. Looking at the elevation profile, there is a "bump" after the Loveland descent—this is Swan Mountain. My legs were rested just enough to be ready to climb again, but had rested long enough the "feel" that they had been coasting for a little while.



I heard an interesting conversation on this climb. Two older guys—veterans of the Triple—were speaking of what this ride had become monetarily. They listed all that I knew that went into the registration fee—obviously the food, materials, the jersey, etc.—and I thought that \$98 (early registration cost) was a reasonable fee for what you got. But they had also mentioned that chartering the bus back to Evergreen—something I didn't have to worry about, but had done last year at RAIN—added another chunk of change; by the end of the day, it was a \$200 event. Still my naïve and first-time TBER mentality says that it is still worth it; had I been on the ride 10 years ago and had a previous price to compare it to, I might have a different opinion. I will say two things in defense of the cost: 1. the adage “you get what you pay for” is true—especially for this event, since I can not think of another ride that had all of its bases covered for the riders and all else involved. And 2. with 3500+ riders setting a new total number of riders mark, Team Evergreen earned every cent of it.

Once again, the descent didn't seem as long as the climb...it never does. Once we got to the bottom, we were greeted by a quartet representation of—I assume—the Summit County High School marching band lauding our arrival. We crossed the road, rode into the front drive of the high school and were at our next aid station.

FRISCO STATISTICS: 77.08 miles, 5:47:13 riding time, 13.3 mph avg.

I saw the poacher again...it was becoming a running joke. I was also amused that his discovery at the top of Loveland Pass was true: he had run out of water; I hope he stole a refill of water for his Camelback. We both, coincidentally, used this opportunity to call people: he was calling his girlfriend so she knew when to pick him up; I finally had service to touch base with Darci (as I had been doing periodically) and leaving a message for Larry what a ride this was turning out to be (later, when I heard of the ride *he* had that day, I'm glad mine was a better story).

I feel sorry for cyclists in Colorado. One of my favorite SOBE/Gumby t-shirts is the one that says “Cornfields or Kybos.” As I have said before, the aid stations were well equipped! That didn't mean, however, that I didn't see a bike at the side of the road occasionally—I did—but usually within reach of some trees. In Colorado, though, the terrain is of extremes: either there are trees or not. During the Elephant Rock ride in June, I saw a pair of cyclists at the side of the road, and the woman was bending over with her helmeted head in her hands. My first thought was she must be ill—too bad and so early in the ride; once I rode by, I understood that she had actually dropped her shorts and was using a fencepost for support. At first, I was astonished, but then I looked around and saw no cornfields—nor any trees, just brushland—and when nature calls...one must answer. All the aid stations had facilities; frequently, the lines for the porta-potties moved quicker than those for beverages. But at this aid station, I couldn't believe what I saw: I turned to see a woman drop trow next to a short landscaping rock that lined the parking area. It reminded me of the crazy woman that talked to herself that Larry and I met on a ride in Kansas who looked to see the unoccupied public restroom barely 100 yards away, claim it was too far to go, drop on the other side of the pickup supplying the aid station, and do her business. Both of these women were out there for all to see—both on the road side of the action—and both had a more modest alternative and chose not to take it. Unbelievable.

As I was recording information and checking time, I realized that my target time to finish would not be met. This was one thing I mentioned to Darci on the phone who, coincidentally, had driven by this aid station about five minutes before I called. I suggested meeting at the Vail Pass aid station rather than wait longer at the end just to break things up for her and the kids. I was starting to tire of bike riding, so I got ready to ride...again...and was on my way to get the thing over with.

About 98 percent of the next stretch was on the bike trail. By this point, the mass of riders had spread out enough to make it not so congested, but there were times that it was clogged and difficult to pass. We never neared any civilized area of Frisco; I had found that Tour de Fat was going on that day, but if it was going on, we never knew from the trail. In fact, I hadn't even realized that I had left Frisco

until I started recognizing terrain from the trail from the ride that the Kernel (Mark E.) and I had made when we had a family reunion in Breckinridge.

We stayed next to that stream all the way to Copper Mountain (and beyond) and were gradually climbing the whole way, but the pace stayed steady at 12 – 13 mph most of the way. We lost our protection of the trees as we neared Copper Mountain, were battered by the sun that had emerged from the daily summer showers evident by the damp trails, and I needed to stop before the last little stretch to Vail Pass.

Some folks were talking about the distance remaining to the top of the pass; one thought four miles, a TB veteran said eight. When I got to the top, I would estimate that it was somewhere closer the four-mile estimation, probably five or six.

This, I thought was the toughest part of the day for me. The trail was steeper than from Frisco to Copper Mountain, the sun was more apparent, and the terrain was a lot more varied in an extreme manner: quick ups with no downs, sharp switchbacks, or a combination of both. Eventually, I could see where I was going; it just took a while to get there. Once there, the aid station was a welcomed sight.

VAIL PASS STATISTICS: 92.82 miles, 7:05:27 riding time, 13.0 mph avg.

I didn't stay long at this station. I did a quick scan for Darci and the kids, but didn't see them; when I checked my phone, her message indicated that they had left about 10 minutes before I arrived. That was okay; it would have been nice to see them, but there was no way I was going to SAG in at this point. Watermelon was the saving fruit of the day. I learned my lesson years ago that too many bananas during a long ride can create the atmosphere of a monkey house for me the next day; I love oranges during rides like these, but watermelon was especially refreshing today.

According to the elevation map, it was all down hill from here. I did get information from the poacher that this last stretch could be hard if there were a breeze from the west...and there was just such a breeze.

The first part was still on the bike path, which was fine until quicker riders bunched up behind some slower riders. Passing was nearly impossible until there was a long enough straightaway to get around them...if they were over to the right far enough. We crossed under the interstate and had a quick climb into the trees. Shortly after this, we were spit out onto a frontage road which allowed the glut of riders to pan out. Speeds on this descent didn't reach near what I had done earlier that day—I think this was due to a more gradual descent and this headwind that I mentioned.

From here, in my mind, it was cake. My spirits were up as I passed through the town of Vail; and why not? The rest was downhill, I was nearing the end, and I was about to accomplish the most challenging/satisfying ride of my life. Despite the wind, speed was lingering around 22 mph for the last 15 – 20 miles. Fatigue and a sore butt hadn't kept me from playing a familiar game: see the target and catch up to it. One such target was one that had passed me earlier in the day: I recognized the blue Giant jersey of the mountain biker riding the Salsa Campeon. I rolled up and asked how he was doing. He was tired, but doing well. He had mentioned that this was the greatest distance he had ridden in one day. Through our conversation, I described how I was doing especially being from the flatlands. I think he was impressed. We got caught up with some slower riders; once I was around them, I noticed that he had dropped back. I just kept going and started negotiating my way past the Vail ski area—this was the only area I felt wasn't marked well, but I saw an officer flagging riders at a crucial point and was on my way.

The rest of the way I was a loner. Riders were spread out enough that I didn't pass many, nor was passed by many. We were on a trail for a short while, but back on the frontage road again as we went through Eagle and neared Avon. The breeze in the graying skies was noticeable but my speed was still 22 – 23 mph, so I wasn't complaining; in fact, a rider had asked what I had thought of the winds at the end, but my reply was, "But we were going down hill!" At this point I just couldn't tell where I was in

relation to the other riders. I had started at 6:30 AM, but how early had some taken off? How early did that first rider to finish start to complete the thing shortly after noon? My theory is this: because of my training, I felt that I was passing more riders than those passing me—good for me; however, being a flatlander, I think I took more time at the aid stations to rest and recover. It just seemed that there were a lot of riders already at the end when I got there at about 5:15 PM.

AVON STATISTICS: 119.16 miles, 8:14:13 riding time, 14.4 mph avg.

The park was pretty crowded and I wondered where my family was. I got off, and called. Darci and the kids were at the nearby elementary school playing; they walked over as I got some of the catered BBQ. I also awarded myself a Tommy Knockers beer and a cigar that I had in my jersey pocket the whole way. Once I met up with my support crew, I was ready to pack things up and get back to Denver. I had finished the Triple Bypass!



LOOKING BACK:

I definitely want to do this bike again, but I would want to intensify my training a little. One thing that helped was using my indoor trainer to simulate long continuous climbs. Next time, I would simulate even longer climbs. I think spending the week before the ride in Monument was helpful for the altitude, but am not convinced that it was 100% necessary; I think I could do it without if I kept the same “slow and steady” mentality. Another thing I would do is start earlier...even just a half an hour—there was plenty of daylight at 6:00 AM.

Finally, I think it would be more rewarding to complete it with friends. I’m introverted enough that I didn’t feel “lonely” and riding is one of my tactics to escape anyway. However, there is something quite isolating about being the only person I know among 3500 other riders. Yes, this is an all-call for others to do this ride, and I would gladly join you. Since most who read this are also flatlanders of the Midwest, it will take some planning. Not so much in coordinating rides out there—although not messing with a charter service would be nice—but no one should do this ride without training for it; it isn’t one of those rides that one would just say, “Okay, I’ll do it next week.” I was thinking of this ride as early as February, had mentally committed to it by April, and was training specifically for it once school was done. I know a guy who brags of doing RAGBRAI with no previous miles; the Triple is not RAGBRAI.

Well, I hope you enjoy this stream-of-consciousness account of my Triple Bypass ride. I always tell people that as passionate as I am about cycling, watching it on TV is pretty boring...even the highlights. This essay, if you will, is probably more so; but I tried to keep it entertaining and lacking repetition. Read, enjoy, absorb, then line your birdcage with it.