

DIRECTOR'S DIARY 2009



By Chandler Smith
Ride The Rockies Tour Director

It was with increased confidence that I set out this spring to scout the 2009 route. With one Tour behind me I had a better understanding of the realities of a six-day ride spanning multiple counties with varying terrain

throughout the Rocky Mountains. Fully warmed to the idea of a spandex kit and the wonders of chamois cream, the prospect of trekking 380 miles of alpine roads was now invigorating. With the support of an amazing crew and encouraging wingmen, I successfully charted and documented this year's route. What follows is a sneak preview of this year's tour -- a collection of observations and guidelines that will make your ride as safe, pleasant, and comfortable as possible. Enjoy!

DAY ONE, JUNE 14

GLENWOOD SPRINGS to HOTCHKISS

80 MILES

Leaving Glenwood Springs en route to Carbondale and Aid 1, you will travel the Rio Grande Trail for a short clip before connecting to county roads, offering magnificent views of Mt. Sopris. As the route winds through White River National Forest along the Crystal River, slow gradual climbs past Redstone (Aid 2) and Marble will bring you to the base of McClure Pass. This ascent is the one challenging climb of the day and the first of three passes you will tackle during the week. Three miles of 8 - 12% grades will have you asking "do I have anymore gears?" Fear not, for shortly after you will be rewarded with a fun descent and a series of rollers through the canyon as you make your way

toward Somerset. After cautious navigation across a wood plank bridge you will travel through the vineyards of Paonia's wine country before arriving in Hotchkiss.

WORD TO THE WISE RIDER: Be cautious of rumble strips in and around Somerset and a narrow shoulder between Paonia and Hotchkiss along CR - J.75.

DAY TWO, JUNE 15

HOTCHKISS to GUNNISON

80 MILES

Top of the morning to you! The first ten miles from Hotchkiss to Crawford (Aid 1) is a steady 1-2% grade. Although the gradual climb continues for most of the ride from Aid 1 to Aid 2, you can catch your breath during a short descent prior to the stop. Yet another series of climbs awaits you as you make your way to Hermits Rest (Aid 3) but the views along the way will keep you feeling strong and inspired. Your traverse from Hermits Rest to Pioneer Point (Aid 4) takes you along the North Rim of the Black Canyon and is followed by a scenic descent to US-50. Pedal cautiously on US-50 as rumble strips abound. With good fortune, a nice tailwind will push you along the Blue Mesa (Colorado's largest body of water) on into Gunnison.

WORD TO THE WISE RIDER: The North Rim of the Black Canyon offers quintessential views of Colorado but don't forget to keep your eyes on the road.

DAY THREE, JUNE 16

GUNNISON to SALIDA

66 MILES

Although it is hard to top the scenery of day 1 and 2, I found the stretch from Gunnison to the base of Monarch to be one of the more tranquil legs of the



Tour. Tailwinds carried us through Sargents to Aid 2 as we pedaled along a wide shoulder on US-50 running adjacent to Tomichi Creek. If fear overtakes you as Monarch Pass looms above, I advise slow and steady with a good cadence. How slow? I drafted a caterpillar! This pass, the second in the Tour, is 8 miles of steady/gradual grades, averaging 6% the entire duration. Don't be discouraged as you near the summit and another significant climb appears; it is merely a service road and not part of the Tour. Take heart, you are near the top. The ride from the summit to Salida is a screamer. You'll be there in no time. Control your speeds and use caution as you descend into the Banana Belt.

WORD TO THE WISE RIDER: I wasn't kidding about the caterpillar.

DAY FOUR, JUNE 17

SALIDA to LEADVILLE

59 MILES

Departing Salida you may encounter heavy cross winds and headwinds riding toward Aid 1 and

into Buena Vista, but with a good night's rest and an early start, it should not land you in a SAG wagon. The day's trek will take you along the Upper Arkansas River offering pristine views of the Collegiate Peaks as far as the eye can see. US-24 affords a bicycle friendly shoulder into Buena Vista but then becomes rather narrow as you ride toward Leadville. Use caution, be predictable and hold your line.

WORD TO THE WISE RIDER: Pace yourself today and reserve your energy for Independence Pass.

DAY FIVE, JUNE 18

LEADVILLE to ASPEN

55 MILES

Independence Pass, always a favorite of Ride The Rockies cyclists, will not disappoint in 2009. With a good climb ahead, I recommend you leave on the early side. When departing Leadville, be sure to dress appropriately as the weather will most likely be chilly. To keep things interesting we have introduced a twist in the 2009 route. You will bypass a section of US-24 and Colo. 82 for a short jaunt on CR-10 and CR-24. Aid station 1 is perched on the dam of Mt. Elbert Forebay Reservoir offering a spectacular 360 degree view, one of the best in the Tour. Now for the catch; nearly 1.5 miles of the climb to Aid 1 is hard packed dirt. Fear not, 2000 cyclists succeeded on similar terrain in 2008 when climbing Cottonwood Pass. It will be worth the trek and provides a much more scenic and safe route into Twin Lakes (Aid 2). From Twin Lakes you begin your approach to the base of Independence Pass, the second highest paved pass in Colorado averaging 6.5% grades. Use caution on both your climb and descent as there are several narrow sections where vehicles, cyclists, and marmots must yield to one another.

Ride smart and single file on your way into Aspen. After winding through downtown Aspen, you will connect on to a bike path taking you to Aspen High School.

WORD TO THE WISE RIDER: As you leave Aid 1 at Mt. Elbert Forebay Reservoir, ride safely and control your speed during the descent onto Colo. 82 which contains a series of switchbacks.

DAY SIX, JUNE 19

ASPEN to GLENWOOD SPRINGS

40 MILES



You have made it this far, so sit back and enjoy the final day of Ride the Rockies as you pedal along the Rio Grande Trail from Woody Creek Canyon to Glenwood Springs. Barring headwinds you should have a leisurely trek with the majority of the ride being downhill. Navigate cautiously across a number of intersecting driveways and be mindful of other cyclists and pedestrians on the trail. Soak in the quaint town of Carbondale at Sopris Park before the final 11 mile push to the finish line at Sayre Park.

WORD TO THE WISE RIDER: The Glenwood Hot Springs are sure to ease your weary muscles after six days in the saddle. Check them out!

RIDE THE ROCKIES ELEVATION CHART

