

Bicycling

in Rocky Mountain National Park

1979



GENERAL: Elevations ranging from 8,000 to over 12,000 feet (2,400 meters to over 3,700 meters), steep grades sometimes in excess of 6%, narrow roads with heavy summer and weekend traffic--all are challenges to bicyclists riding in and through the Park. But properly equipped and conditioned riders are rewarded with thrilling views of a mountain landscape and occasional wild-life sightings. Freed from the insulating confines of a steel and glass capsule, they enjoy the sounds and smells of a pure, clear setting.

TERRAIN: Approaching the Park from the eastern foothills requires a 2,500 foot climb through the winding canyons of Highways 34, 36, and 7, with only the latter having paved shoulders. The 16 miles of rolling hills on Highway 34 outside the Park's western entrance have paved, marked shoulders and a mild elevation gain. Grades within the Park seldom exceed 6%, but when combined with the high elevation, they demand long, slow climbs in the lowest gear. There are few level stretches in the Park.

ROUTE DESCRIPTIONS

TRAIL RIDGE ROAD: Riders passing through the Park on Highway 34, the mountain pass known as Trail Ridge Road, should be aware of its problems and be equipped for the hypothermic hazards: strong, gusty winds and possible summer temperatures near 35°F., mixed with rain or infrequent snows. Rain chaps are superior to ponchos under such conditions. Gloves or mittens should be carried.

An early start at daylight assures light traffic conditions and usually clear weather until late morning. This 46 mile, 6 to 8 hour trip involves a climb of 15 to 18 miles, depending on direction, a ride of 11 miles above treeline at 12,000 foot elevations, and a descent of 15 to 18 miles. The mid-point, Fall River Pass (Alpine Visitor Center and a snack bar), is the only shelter for people, but not for bikes.

BEAR LAKE ROAD: This 9 mile, mostly uphill road deadends at scenic Bear Lake. Very narrow conditions, hairpin turns, rough surface, and extremely heavy auto traffic make this road a cyclist's nightmare during June, July, August, and early September. Lighter traffic during the other months, especially on weekdays, make Bear Lake a pleasurable trip. It is open year round, but best avoided in summertime.

HORSESHOE PARK: Just inside the Highway 34 east side entrance, Horseshoe Park and the Endovalley Road offer several miles of nearly level pedaling surrounded by mountain splendor.

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SEASON: Usually the period from late June to mid-September offers the driest roadways. Gusty winds are often present after September, and heavy, wet snows occur in April, May and early June.

EQUIPMENT: Having an alpine gear makes bicycling enjoyable in this mountain area. It lessens the strenuous trip over Trail Ridge Road. A safety flag should always be used in the Park. Proven rain gear, gloves, long pants and plastic bag foot covers prevent numbing physical collapse from the chilling effects of rain, wind, and low temperatures at high elevations--conditions which often occur.

REPAIRS: Estes Park has the nearest east side bicycle shop; others are in Boulder (35 miles from Estes Park), Fort Collins (41 miles), and Loveland (30 miles). Granby (16 miles from Grand Lake) serves the west side. Spare parts and tools should be carried on trips through the Park.

Accommodations: Park campgrounds do not have shelters; the use of tents is necessary. An American Youth Hostel (Shadowcliff) is located about 2 miles from the Park's western entrance on the Tunnel Road east of Grand Lake Village. Operating from June 1 to Labor Day, it has storage and security facilities for bikes.

The H-Bar-G Ranch Hostel serves the eastern side of the Park with a similar summer operation. It is located 9 miles northeast of the Park on the Dry Gulch Road. Contact the American Youth Hostel Headquarters for details and other hostel locations in north central Colorado.

Many bus lines will transport bicycles at no cost as luggage if the rider is on the bus. This applies to the trip from Denver to Estes Park. They prefer a boxed bike and will not be responsible for damage.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION, WRITE OR CALL PARK HEADQUARTERS AT 303-596-2371,
ESTES PARK, COLORADO 80517.

- Happy Biking! -

