

Chile Pedalers 2006

Northern New Mexico – Southern Colorado Tour

By Tom Mayer

Sun, wind, and a spectacular, austere landscape have tested those who choose to live in and visit the Southwest for centuries. These elements have fashioned rugged and resourceful people of many cultures who have managed to survive, and in some cases thrive, in the face of drought, deprivation, extreme climate, and limited resources.

How was a small group of scantily clad, middle-aged (pushing elderly in some cases) adventurers accustomed to 21st century decadence expected to meet these insurmountable challenges with only their tandem bicycles to propel them onward? Who knows? They could run out of beer, or become stranded in a town without Starbucks, or find the hot tub out of order.

The Chile Pedalers met these challenges, and more, on our 2006 tour in northern New Mexico and southern Colorado. Visiting ancient Hispanic and Indian villages, modern Indian casinos, New Age hot springs, artistic refuges of California run-aways, and throwback cowboy havens, we traversed over 400 miles of mountain passes, high, flat valleys, and New Mexico 'rollers'. To enhance the experience we ordered up extra helpings of hot weather and strong headwinds, and even a couple of New Yorkers.



Victors Drive-In...REAL milk shakes!

Dennis Cooper and dede Collins proposed the trip, scouted the route, made the arrangements, and even provided a case of beer. Joe and Janet Vertrees provided the sag vehicle and trailer, and Janet's remarkable electric skillet! Richard and Leslie Foust showed up battling a stomach flu, but rode themselves into shape in a day or two. Tom and Edel Mayer brought their unriden, one-day-old tandem not knowing what to expect from it. And Pat and Mary Clark gasped through chapped lips at the thin, dry air, praying for rain that never came. As with all of our previous tours, a challenging day's ride was rewarded with great companionship, copious food and drink, and a bit of wonderment at the varied towns we visited and accommodations along the route.



Questa Rest-a

Each day provided its adventures. Dennis chasing us down to retrieve the car keys that Joe rode off with; discovering an incipient forest fire that threatened the village of Las Trampas in the tinder dry NM mountains; a group of pilgrims in the middle of nowhere on their way to who-knows-where; celebrating Dennis' birthday with a home-cooked dinner in the oldest (and nearly non-existent) town in Colorado; the amazing apple pie

that survived being dumped and bumped, looking very appealing festooned with candles; passing "beautiful lakeside lots" for sale in the bone-dry San Luis Valley; the elegant and accommodating La Veta Inn, despite the balky electrical wiring; the never-to-appear Chinese food and the motel on its way to extinction in Trinidad; the restaurant in Raton famous for French toast – that didn't open for breakfast until 11 AM; the 'Mule Days' festival in Cimarron; mud packs in the hot sun followed by a soak and a massage at Ojo Caliente.



Dennis shows off his biker lungs

The riding was equally eventful, with the spectacular and challenging 'High Road' to Taos; the breath-taking mountain passes of La Veta and Cucharas; the volcanic dikes radiating from the Spanish Peaks; wild iris at the top of Cucharas Pass; beautiful Cimarron Canyon and the high valley of Eagle Nest and Angel Fire; the seemingly endless San Luis Valley with Blanca Peak beckoning on the horizon; the pronghorn antelope keeping a wary eye on us; the angry redtail hawk whose nest we disturbed by resting under the only tree in sight on the wide-open plains. But also the headwinds that made the flat ride to Cimarron the most difficult of the trip, more flats and blown tires than we've ever experienced on a tour, and the horrible road surface to Ojo that threatened to turn our butts to hamburger.

Many of these roads and towns were familiar to us from other rides and excursions. But the chance to spend nine days on a bike shows you amazing and unexpected things even in your own backyard. We're glad we got to do it, thankful for the great organization by Dennis and dede, the wonderful companionship of our fellow travelers, the safe return of everyone to Santa Fe, and delighted to have Pat and Mary join us so far from their home in Vermont.

