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PLACES TO RIDE:

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ISSUE 154 \$4.95



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SAVING COLORADO'S BEST RIDES

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ON THE COVER: "Buffalo Soldiers in the Heart of America," illustration by David Poe

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Adam Hunt

Adam Hunt is a long-time mountain biker, writer, photographer and cartoonist. His articles have been featured in *California Bicyclist Magazine*, *Library Journal*, *Premier Guitar Magazine*, and *Mountain Flyer Magazine*. Adam has also worked for *The Marin Scope*, *New Bayshore Times* and *Eclipse Comics*. When Adam is afflicted with cases of insomnia, he writes two blogs, *Reinventing Irreverence* and blog entries for the Bicycle Trails Council of the East Bay. Adam has worked in numerous California bicycle shops as well as Paul Component Engineering, Bianchi USA and Jericho Bicycles. During his downtime, he continues to go backpacking and damage his hearing with what he laughingly calls guitar playing. He lives in Berkeley, California with his wife Cheryl and their cat Snack the Destroyer.

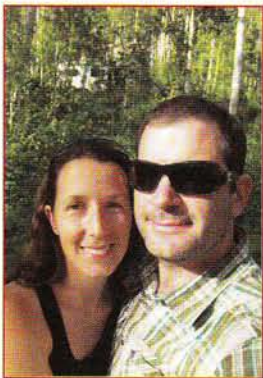
Adam chronicles the forgotten journey of the men of the 25th Infantry Bicycle Corps in his feature "Iron Bicycles & Buffalo Soldiers."



Nat and Rachael Lopes

Nat and Rachael Lopes founded Hilride, a Berkeley, California-based consulting firm specializing in park design and planning, media production and tourism development, in 2007. Together they have ridden and documented more than 900 riding destinations in all 50 states, nine Canadian provinces and 15 countries around the world, from tropical rainforests in Hawaii's Volcanoes National Park, to boreal forests in Fairbanks, Alaska, to the terminal ranges of the Dinaric Alps in Croatia. Their mission is "to realize the potential of the global mountain biking movement as a force for economic development, environmental conservation and the promotion of healthy active communities."

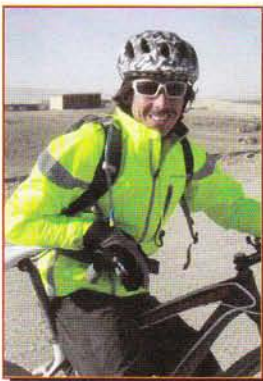
While Nat and Rachel have ridden epic trails around the world, they still have a special place in their hearts for Colorado singletrack. Colorado's Roadless Project is the subject of this issue's Access Action.



Caleb Andrew Craft

My job as a Contract Firefighter has taken me all over the world, from 130° heat in the deserts of Iraq to amazing waves in Costa Rica and Australia. Two things have stayed true in my heart while I have traveled the world. First, no matter where I'm at, I call Missoula, Montana home. Missoula has some of the most epic singletrack trails in the state of Montana. Second, cycling has been a burning passion of mine for a number of years—I love every aspect of riding, ranging from long road rides with my club, NRO, to shredding awesome singletrack trails. I live in a war zone in Sharana, Afghanistan and I brought my passion for riding with me. I could be anywhere in the world, and as long as I have a saddle between my legs, I've got a smile on my face.

Andrew makes the most of his surroundings and shares his passion for riding in this issue's Last Chance for Gas.



THERE IS AN ART, OR RATHER A KNACK TO FLYING. THE KNACK LIES IN LEARNING HOW TO THROW YOURSELF AT THE GROUND AND MISS.

-Douglas Adams, *Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*

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A place to express yourself, a place to share knowledge. We welcome any and all contributions. Stories, photographs, artwork, letters, beer. It all finds a home here.

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We publish every six weeks from February 15th to November 15th. No issue in December or January.

DEADLINES FOR ADVERTISING SALES AND EDITORIAL SUBMISSIONS:

ISSUE	PUBLICATION DATE	DEADLINE
#154	February 15	December 16
#155	April 1	February 3
#156	May 15	March 17
#157	July 1	April 28
#158	August 15	June 9
#159	October 1	July 21
#160	November 15	September 15

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Issue #154, February 15, 2011. DIRT RAG (ISSN #1082-6785) is published seven times a year, every six weeks from February 15 to November 15 by Dirt Rag LTD, 3483 Saxonburg Blvd, Pittsburgh, PA 15238, 412.767.9910. Subscriptions available for \$19.99 per year at above address. Periodicals rate postage paid at Pittsburgh, PA and additional mailing office. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Dirt Rag LTD, PO Box 5040, Brentwood, TN 37025-9825



DAVE WIENS AND
ANDY SHABO ON
TRAIL 401
PHOTO BY RACHAEL LOPES

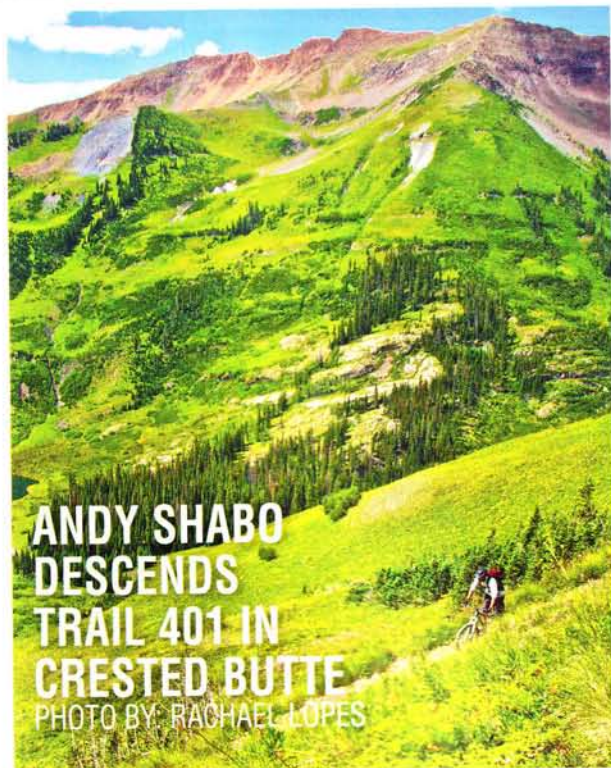
ACCESS ACTION

THE COLORADO ROADLESS PROJECT

BY NAT AND RACHAEL LOPES

The Colorado Department of Natural Resources is proposing to rewrite one of the most significant environmental laws in U.S. history. At stake in Colorado: a way of life, a \$4 billion annual recreation economy, and some of the most epic mountain biking in the country. For the rest of us, these changes could affect the management of nearly 1/3 of all U.S. Forest lands and potentially open millions of acres to industrial development, impacting some of the largest intact ecosystems in the United States, which provide millions of people with clean air, drinking water and some of the best hiking, climbing, paddling, skiing, and mountain biking anywhere on the planet.

Despite having spent the last seven years riding and documenting destination riding areas across North America, the six weeks we spent this summer documenting Colorado's roadless areas rocked our world. We had traveled and ridden in Colorado before, but this was the first time we had the opportunity to ride the big mountain epics in the heart of the Colorado Rockies.



ANDY SHABO
DESCENDS
TRAIL 401 IN
CRESTED BUTTE
PHOTO BY RACHAEL LOPES



DESCENDING THE SILVER CREEK DRAINAGE ON THE MONARCH CREST TRAIL

PHOTO BY RACHAEL LOPES

COLORADO TRAIL (KENOSHA PASS - GEORGIA PASS), JEFFERSON

Pike-San Isabel National Forest, Jefferson Roadless Area

We set out with the mission to document the most iconic rides in Colorado's Roadless Areas, and for our first ride we headed to the Jefferson Roadless Area in the Pike-San Isabel National Forest to check out the 32-mile section of the Colorado Trail from Kenosha Pass to Georgia Pass. We met up with IMBA Executive Director Mike Van Abel, IMBA Communications Director Mark Eller, photographer Mark Woolcott, and Matt Sugar, central mountain region director for Senator Mark Udall.

At the trailhead, Van Abel stated that "mountain bikers love Roadless because Roadless is good for mountain biking, it's good for the economy and it's good for the environment." He explained further, "Roadless designation provides a similar level of protection for the environment that Wilderness designation does with the important exception that Roadless is open to mechanized uses, and specifically, to mountain biking."

Starting out at 10,000 feet, the trail wound its way through several drainages of dense pine, fir and aspen forest before giving way to higher elevation meadows and, eventually, the pass at more than 13,000 feet. The singletrack had sections of hectic roots, rocks, and short, steep climbs under the trees, and some wide-open flowy sections in the meadows. Along the way, Sugar explained, "Land use issues are very important to the residents of Colorado. I spend a lot of time traveling around the region working with the various interest groups trying to find common ground."

Stopping for lunch on a rock outcrop we surveyed the land, talked about common ground, and discussed the future of Colorado's Roadless Areas. Right now, there are 4.2 million acres of land in Colorado protected by the

2001 National Roadless Rule, which limits the construction of new roads and the associated industrial development of the forests for mining, logging, powerline corridors, etc. The rule ensures that a wide range of recreational access, including for mountain biking, is maintained for the benefit of the local communities, local outdoor tourism-based economies, and the millions of visitors who come to enjoy these amazing public lands each year. Colorado's proposed changes to this rule would roll back many of the restrictions on road building and the subsequent industrial development of the natural resources, which could potentially impact backcountry experiences on hundreds of miles of the best trails in Colorado. If other states follow suit, it could impact more than 60 millions acres of our National Forest lands currently protected as Roadless. Van Abel summed up IMBA's position: "We believe strongly that this use of the land for recreation has as much benefit, whether it's economical or for public health, as virtually any other use, and we work hard to support the National Roadless Rule enacted in 2001."

MONARCH CREST TRAIL, SALIDA

Pike-San Isabel National Forest, Chipeta Roadless Area

The 34-mile Monarch Crest Trail in the Chipeta Roadless Area in Pike-San Isabel National Forest outside of Salida is widely considered one of the top ten rides in the country, and is an official IMBA Epic Ride. Talking with April Prout, marketing director for Chaffee County Visitors Bureau, she explained how important this trail is to the local economy: "Tourism is our largest driver in the summer, and the Monarch Crest Trail is our premiere offering that brings people from all over the world." Chuck Rose, Salida's mayor, added, "We are a recreation economy, and we are famous

SHAWN GILLIS AND MIKE SEGASKI ON THE MONARCH CREST TRAIL

PHOTO BY: RACHAEL LOPES

for the Crest Trail. Our community enjoys an incredible quality of life, and access to some of the best recreation in the nation; it is why people come here to live."

We met up with our guides Shawn Gillis, owner of Absolute Bikes, and Mike Segaski, a retired program manager for the Salida Ranger District in charge of recreation, land uses and minerals, at the High Valley Center in Poncha Springs to catch the shuttle up to Monarch Pass and the top of the Sawatch Range. Groups from Boulder, Durango, Austin, Texas, Southern California, and Montreal, Canada joined us. "This is pretty typical," said High Valley Center owner Bob Mishata. "We shuttle close to 1,000 riders per season up to the pass."

The Monarch Crest Trail runs along the spine of the Continental Divide before plunging 5,000 feet into Salida Valley, and right from the start, the trail has that epic feel as you climb a ribbon of singletrack through the trees up to the alpine ridgeline. For the first 10 miles, the backcountry trail hugs the contours of the ridge with extended sections of fast, flowy, traversing, and moderate cruiser downhills. The entire time, huge mountain vistas fill your field of view. Segaski worked for 17 years on the 500,000-acre Salida Ranger District and explained, "Some roadless areas like here in Monarch Pass were logged back in the day, but those roads have been closed and restored, and Roadless designation prevents new roads from being built." Overlooking the descent into the Silver Creek drainage, he added, "None of this is Wilderness, that's the beauty. It can be very similar to a Wilderness Area and we are able to ride mountain bikes in it."

TRAIL 401, CRESTED BUTTE

Gunnison National Forest, Elk Mountain-Collegiate Roadless Area

Trail 401, outside of Crested Butte in the Elk Mountain-Collegiate Roadless Area of Gunnison National Forest, has some of the most stunningly beautiful landscapes in the country. Brilliant red molybdenum mountains rise from glacially carved canyons and seams of black shale to create a dramatic contrast against the electric meadows of wildflowers and dense forests. We met up with six-time Leadville 100 winner, Topeak/Ergon rider Dave Wiens, Andy Shabo, co-owner of Big Al's Bicycle Heaven, along with Jim Jacobson from the Bicycle Trails Council of Marin and Ross Kleinberg, both from California.

The trail quickly gains elevation from the 10,000-foot Shofield Pass and emerges into an ethereal alpine highland of lush grasses and chest-high lupine and columbine. Cut into the thick vegetated mat formed by the bunched grasses, the trail grips the mountain and descends into Gothic Valley through stands of quaking aspen. Leaning into the turns, pumping the terrain, feeling the tires hook up in the rich soil and the wind, heavy with the intoxicating scent of the spring bloom rushing by—it is truly one of those riding experiences that you wish would never end.

Wiens said Crested Butte is one of his favorite places in the world, and it was easy to see why. He also said he was deeply concerned about the future of this area and the countless other Roadless Areas in the state of Colorado and throughout the rest of the country. "As a professional bike racer for many years, I've ridden all over the state of Colorado, all over the U.S. and the world, and I've seen a lot of amazing places. I've also seen a lot of places where natural resource extraction has really taken its toll on the landscape. In Colorado, and the nation, we have the opportunity with Roadless Areas to really protect some amazing places. And it couldn't be any more important, because once



**RACHAEL LOPES ON
HERMOSA CREEK TRAIL**
PHOTO BY NAT LOPES

you come in and do natural resource extraction and lay out a network of roads throughout an area, it's done, it's never going to be the same. It's really important that everybody get together and rally around these Roadless Areas, because they are absolutely amazing."

William Buck, Mayor of Mt. Crested Butte, explains, "We're a tourist-based economy—mountain biking is an important part of it, and Trail 401 in the Roadless Area is one of the premiere trails in the country." Looking towards the White Mountains in the West Elk Wilderness, he continues, "The wilderness is our crown jewel." Pointing towards Mt. Emmons in an undesignated Forest Service area, he says, "There is a large deposit of molybdenum there. Nobody wants it to be mined in their backyard, but we're talking about mountain biking, and molybdenum is a main component in chromoly steel. These are complex issues, but we feel that mining is not compatible with our recreation economy."

HERMOSA CREEK TRAIL, DURANGO

San Juan National Forest, Hermosa Roadless Area

The 27-mile Hermosa Creek Trail, outside of Durango in the Hermosa Roadless Area of the San Juan National Forest, was our final destination. As we wound our way into the mountains, our guide, Lisa Lieb from Hermosa Tours, gave us an overview of the area: "In Durango we have the San Juan National Forest with hundreds of miles of trails and some of the best mountain biking in Colorado. And we have the Weminuche Wilderness Area, the largest Wilderness Area in the state of Colorado at more than half a million acres. Protection of Wilderness Areas is critical for the long term conservation of the environment, and the local community strongly supports the protection of Wilderness, but the reality is that we can't ride there

and riding is a way of life in Durango and a huge part of our economy."

Following the Hermosa Creek drainage through one of Colorado's most biologically diverse forests, the trail gains 2,000 feet over a series of moderate climbs and rewards you with a 3,000-foot descent. Along the way, riparian zones of big ferns, maple and cottonwood trees dripping from intermittent spring rains give way to drier zones of pine and spruce and finally into the piñon and junipers of the foothills.

After the ride, we met up with La Plata County Commissioner Wally White, who has been involved in the Roadless issue for years, participating in Forest Service listening sessions and working with task forces and planning committees. He stated with conviction, "I believe the proposed Colorado Roadless Rule should be improved and strengthened, and that the 2001 National Roadless Rule should take precedence and be implemented in all of our states."

WHAT HANGS IN THE BALANCE...

Riding these amazing big mountain epics provided us with a powerful perspective. Mountain biking is a way of life in Colorado, an integral part of the tourism economy, and Colorado's Roadless Areas offer some of the highest quality backcountry experiences in the country, while also protecting many of the most important landscapes and ecosystems in the state. These areas deserve the highest level of protection established in the 2001 National Roadless Rule. As Mike Van Abel said, "Roadless is good for mountain biking, it's good for the economy and it's good for the environment." ☺

For more information on Colorado's Roadless Areas, check out www.coloradoroadlessproject.com.