



A rail trail on Day 5 provides a welcome relief from dodging traffic.

Photos by Robin Perkins/Courtesy

# A junket to remember

Circumnavigating the Tetons and Yellowstone is a bike touring dream come true.

**ROB JONES**

Special to the Sun

Curving the sinuous bike path weaves past blooming arrowleaves, with a backdrop of the instant-mountain Tetons, abruptly cleaving from the glacier-scraped meadows and seeking the sky.

I am enjoying glorious touring on the Venerable Monster, a

## **OUTDOORS**

specialized expedition touring bike, circa 1984.

We are meandering the moraines north of Jackson, Wyoming, heading the 46 miles to Colter Bay Campground.

It was snowing here last week, yet today the weather is lovely. Today, we are riding in shorts. I'm riding with other members of the Wasatch Mountain Club.



Moran and arrowleaves color the landscape heading north from Jackson toward the Tetons.

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## OUTDOORS

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Back on the road shoulder, Dave and I ride together toward the monstrous crystalline Teton teeth, chatting about the here and now as we've done on a large number of shared backpack trips.

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The bike path from the town of Jackson to Jenny Lake in Grand Teton National Park is 22-miles, one way. Recently paved and separated from the vehicle road, this is a must ride for people traveling with kids or just wanting a peaceful tour. You enter the park on this path, so entrance fees apply. Stopping in Moose, the visitor center, or hiking to Hidden Falls are fine destinations on this path.

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The streaks of white-water stretch through the cascades of the Lewis River Gorge far below. I can occasionally hear the music of tumbling water as we grunt toward Grants Campground in Yellowstone, a 42-mile day. Riding the VM barge down to a crossing of the Snake River, my top speed is a fast 36 mph, given the load on the VM (total bike weight 85-90 pounds).

A long and steep climb starts after entering Yellowstone, and the shoulder narrows as we climb toward the Continental Divide. Eventually, we reach Lewis Falls for lunch. From here, the rollers are not low-low gear and we pass over the Divide. The aroma of lupines and distant



Robin Perkins/Courtesy

The Jackson Loop required several crossings of the Continental Divide. This one came on Day 2.

rain arrives.

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The 35 mph rolling freefall levels, then climbs again. A second crossing of the Continental Divide today, this time at Isa Lake, splitting water toward each ocean. Argh, the Continental Divide has had me for breakfast: Continental Breakfast. Today, Day 3, we're riding the 53 miles to West Yellowstone.

The route slides into the busy Old Faithful area. Sandwich No. 1 is enjoyed sitting on the porch of the general store. Yummy.

Mindful of the blossoming thunderheads, I head for Madison Junction, along the Firehole River, and a smidge more road shoulder, too. Whiffs of sulfur and brimstone waft past.

At Madison Junction, I turn toward West Yellowstone - still gradually downhill, this time along the Madison River.

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Long tendrils of expelled vapor condense in the cool morning air as rain drums on the shower cap covering my helmet. It's Day 4 and 65 miles to Ashton, Idaho, via

the Mesa Falls long-cut. Another crossing (No. 4) of the Continental Divide at Targhee Pass, this time at 7,072 feet.

Going downhill, I see sandhill cranes dancing in the meadow mist. It stops drizzling by Last Chance. Relief.

Turning onto the Mesa Falls Road, Kevin, Matt, and I sail tents tethered to the information signs to dry them during a lunch stop.

A side road drops to Upper Mesa Falls - 114 feet high. A hard level of volcanic talc creates

the falls.

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After hours of drenching and drizzling rain, Matt and I coast into tiny Teton with cold fingers and craving something different. Hot cocoa and we're once again able to navigate the baggage barges. It's Day 5, a day without sunscreen, and we're sloshing the 47 miles to Victor, Idaho.

Outside Driggs, we find and enjoy a paved rail trail. Deluxe touring.

We wait out the next blasts of rain under the eaves of a bike shop in

## IF YOU GO...

The Jackson Loop is 278 miles by bicycle. From Jackson, Wyoming, we pedaled north to Grand Teton and Yellowstone National Park. We rode out of Yellowstone via West Yellowstone, Montana, and into Idaho to Ashton - touring the more scenic and quieter route past Mesa Falls. From Ashton, we traveled to Teton, Driggs, and Victor before returning to Jackson over the Teton Pass. The complete report can be found here: <http://wildernessvagabond.com/bike-jackson-loop2014/bike-jackson-loop2014.htm>

Victor. Serendipitously, we join Cheryl at a friend's house. For us, it's a 13-dog night because Cheryl's friend runs a dog-boarding business.

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Grind, grind, the lowest gear is barely adequate for this 10 percent grade. It's passover, Day 6, 24 miles and climbing over Teton Pass (8,429 feet) to Jackson to complete the loop.

It's cool on top and the mammatus clouds brew darkly to the West. Time to fly downhill.

As the 10 percent grade eases, I find a bike path at Wilson, where I see Rusty explode into town from the main road. It's a fine day of sunny touring from here, slightly downhill and downwind (imagine that?). Too soon, we're on another bike path to where we parked the cars and the end of the Jackson Junket.

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