



**ROB JONES RIDES** the Venerable Monster, his specialized expedition touring bike. The VM is 30 years old this summer. (Robin Perkins/Courtesy)

# Cruisin' to the lake — and back

Bike camping at Mormon Lake affords a scenic ride along the Lake Mary Road corridor — and a hike up Mormon Mountain, too.

By **ROB JONES**  
Special to the Daily Sun



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The herd rolls over the fence like a tan wave. Synchronized leaping. Glorious. The harem of cow elk waits in the forest for a gap when there are no vehicles — except for me, puffing up the steps to the crest

## Outdoors

above the Mormon Lake bowl. The wind is shrieking — predicted to top 30 mph today — so I don't hear any of the elk utterances. It's a fine day, except for the wind.

This is Day 1 of a mini-tour to the Mormon Lake area, and it is early May. I'm bringing all my food, camp gear, etc. because the closest food is at Mormon Lake Lodge.

I consider taking the long way around the lake to camp — then reject this idea because the wind blasts unchecked across the section by the “lake” overlook. Mormon Lake, when full, is reportedly the largest natural lake in Arizona, and the diminutive size and depth and the ephemeral nature of this “lake” tell us a good deal about this arid state.

Now, the sun is setting and the wind is howling still — yet mostly in the tree tops and not buffeting the tarp tent. Could be a cold night.

Total miles — Flagstaff to Dairy Springs Campground: 25

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The second law of bicycling: The wind is always in your face.

The first law is a unidirectional law: What goes down, must go up (the law does not address what goes up must go down, because this does not follow the law).

On Day 2, the second law slaps me in the face with full force, nearly stopping my progress and prompting



**THE VENERABLE MONSTER** sits in front of the Dairy Springs Campground sign across from Mormon Lake. (Rob Jones/Courtesy)

me to grab a lower gear. It's a good thing I have so many lower gears. Mostly, I ride in lower gears today, as I tour through the ponderosa pine forest and open parks to Happy Jack.

I pause behind the closed Forest Service station at Happy Jack for lunch and smile, thinking I've found a loophole in the second law — the wind continues from the south. Done eating, I quickly find there is no loophole, the law holds, the wind now gusts from the northwest.

A few snowflakes sweep past. What? It takes me riding to where the pavement narrows (seven miles from the South Mormon Lake junction) to warm up. Then, I occasionally get a reprieve from the second law, and soon I am drifting past the geese, goslings and herons near the fire station of Mormon Lake.

I rest a bit, then add more clothes and watch the birds the campground hosts have lured with their feeders — black-headed grosbeaks, Western tangers, chickadees, stellar jays, cowbirds, hummingbirds, ravens, Western bluebirds, lots of birds. The campground has emptied and the wind seems to be lessening.

Two hiking trails originate at Dairy Springs, and there is also a trailhead at nearby Double Springs Campground. These trails lead to scenic overlooks of nearby Mormon Lake and the surrounding prairies, forests and volcanoes. From the Dairy Springs area, the Mormon Mountain Trail (No. 58) leads about three miles to the top of 8,500-foot Mormon Mountain.

# OUTDOORS

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It shares a short distance with the Dairy Springs Trail (No. 136). From Double Springs, the Lake View Trail (No. 132) is a two-mile trail to an overlook.

Total miles – to Happy Jack and back to camp:  
35.5

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Day 3: Law Loophole.  
Return to Flag. 25 miles.

Yahoo. On Day 3, the wind is at my back. A violation of the second law of bicycling, yet I'll take it. The osprey hovers above Lower Lake Mary, wings crooked at the elbow, apparently looking for a snack. It's still cool and windy as I roll back toward Flagstaff, arriving in time

for the lunch buffet at the Himalayan Grill - wondrous post-touring food.

Total miles – Dairy Springs Campground to Flagstaff: 25. Total trip miles: 85

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Rob Jones is a Flagstaff-based outdoors writer. To read more about this trip, visit <http://wildernessvagabond.com> and search "Coconino Cruise 2014."

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