



Bicyclist rides gold on Badwater Road with Telescope Peak in the background.

ROB JONES/COURTESY

Death Valley dreamin'

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Bicycling through the superbloom of spring flowers is other worldly.

Editor's Note: Flagstaff-based outdoors writer Rob Jones spent a week in Death Valley in February bicycling and hiking. Below are excerpts from his trip report. For the full account, visit his website at <http://wildernessvagabond.com/>

ROB JONES

Special to the Daily Sun

It is **Day 1**, and I'm riding the old Trek bicycle (circa 1983) to Texas Springs Campground, warm wind blowing through my unhelmeted hair, swirling about my loosely sandaled feet.

Yellow flowers of the desert dot the colluviums gradually slumping toward the basin floor, with a backdrop of the crenulated Funeral Mountains. Gorgeous.

It's been an uneventful trek from the chilly heights of the Colorado Plateau to this rain shadow desert drain. I am on another visitation of the Death Valley Winter Escape organized by Cheryl Soshnik of the Wasatch Mountain Club (WMC).



ROB JONES/COURTESY

Desert gold fronts the Black Mountains in Death Valley.

A botanical site notes that "The Australian pine, also known as "ironwood," "horsetail tree," "she oak," "beefwood," "Australian oak," or "whistling pine," has a pine-like appearance but is not a pine (*Pinus*), an evergreen, or a conifer. Rather, it is a deciduous tree whose branchlets of scale-like leaves are mistaken for needles, and whose round brown fruits resemble acorns."

Day 2: 41.5 miles from Furnace Creek to Badwater and back via the Artist Loop.

The Artist Loop grade feels like more than the 12 or 14 percent it is. A puffer. Inching up the incline, the angle lessens and, wait, there's Mark S. stretching the tube from his overturned bike. Blowout. Riding too fast? After the repair, we continue to Artist Palette for lunch. It's warm, almost too warm, but just right for the plunge back to the main road. The heat of old sol is gratefully accepted.

Lunch at the Palette is fol-

lowed by a deep dive, thundering the curving tarmac, then, yikes, back uphill to the real highpoint before twisting downhill, back to the main road and the return leg to Furnace Creek.

Flowers of purple, white, mostly yellow grace today's ride.

A deluxe warm sunshower eases off the road grime and helps transport me into a lasagna dinner before observations of the new moon sky, in this official Dark Sky Park. Brilliant, and it would be stunning if not for the intrusive light emanating from the winnehogos.

Day 3: 44.4 miles and 4,000-foot elevation gain on the road to Dante View.

The grade grinds without heel. And it's getting steeper as we approach Dante View. The last portion of the 13-mile Dante View Road is a 15 percent grade — a lactic acid wonder.

I start today's ride with Rick and Mark, then Rick continues toward the divide and Mark and I take the road toward Dante View. It's another lovely day, with a mild breeze, lots of sun, and rising temperatures. We ride past the devastation of miners who have done the corporate welfare

Death Valley

From B1

thing: privatize the gain and socialize the loss — take the money and run, leave toxic and other waste for the public to deal with.

Creosote bush dominates the colluviums, the alluviums, replete with poisonous roots to keep other plants distant.

Up above the trailer parking area (too steep ahead for vehicles with trailers) near the Greenwater Road, grind. The grade continues. I conk out and float back to the trailer turnaround for a lounging lunch, where Mark joins me after grinding a bit farther, nearing Dante View. I've toted extra water and a full lunch for this epicurean episode.

After lunch, there's nearly total downhill back to camp and a luxurious sun shower. Of course, the 2nd law of bicycling interrupts — "The wind is always in your face!" — and we have to pedal some on the way downhill.

Day 4: Stovepipe Wells, 50.6 miles.

The bright yellow composites (Desert Gold) range up the alluvial fan toward the corrugated mountains. Cheryl the flower girl rides along this smorgasbord of color, bound for Stovepipe Wells.

It's a glorious day, a bit cool at the start of the ride, then warming with calm winds. The course today is more mellow than the previous two days.

Temps warm, yet it's not hot. The riding is a cruise, an enjoyable one. Rolling from below sea level, to sea level, down, up, roll. Past the Devil's Corn Field and the Mesquite Sand Dunes to Stovepipe Wells. Lunch is enjoyed in the shade of the general store patio.

It's tough to ride a continuous cruise on the return to Furnace Creek. How



ROB JONES/COURTESAY

Desert five-spot.



ROB JONES/COURTESAY

A notch-leaf phacelia.

come? Well, it's because the festival of flowers interrupts me. "Wait, have I seen that flower before?" I ask myself. "I better take a photo of this show, it may not happen again when I

am here."

I ride to the Furnace Creek general store to trip the odometer over to 50 miles, then return to camp for a hot shower, journaling, post-ride

snacks with a savored cerveza, and dinner, followed by an NPS program about coyote voices and then some star gazing with Bob G.'s telescope before the tent calls.