

## The Mt. Baldy Trip

A TRUE STORY

WITH A BEGINNING, A MIDDLE, AND AN END, BUT ABOVE ALL, A MORAL.

AND THE MORAL IS: NEVER PISS OFF A GUY LIKE ME AND ASK IF I KNOW ANY GOOD BIKE TRAILS.

SO LET'S BEGIN THE TALE OF

"THE RIDE FROM HELL"

It all started simply enough. Dan Dan says, "There is a trail running from the top of Mt Baldy and over the back side. It's called the Old Mt Baldy Trail. Runs from a little over 10,000 feet down to about 4000 feet. Perfect spring weather for a ride." He had climbed the trail in the snow some years before so we knew that he knew what he was talking about. How could riding a trail downhill be any more difficult than climbing it uphill. We are men after all.

We planned to meet on the mountain the night before and rented a cabin in Mt. Baldy village.

Christ that was a shit hole if ever I stayed in one but I had not expected too much any way. No complaints. I forget what breakfast was like, totally unmemorable except for the company of Danny and Dan Dan.

We traveled down to what would be the end point of the ride and dropped off Dan Dan's car then rode back up to the chair lift in my car, paid for our lift tickets and ascended blissfully with our bikes to the 7000' level. No problem.

By about the 8000' level riding became impossible. Expected. It was time to get off and carry the bikes. No big deal except my bike weighs a ton and after reaching the 9000' level it was a ton and a half.

The sun shone brightly on us three mortals but what were those little dark clouds hanging over the high desert to the north? Too small and too far off to ever be problem any way. Trek on.

We made it to the top. 10064' to be exact. Had our pictures taken, standing proudly on the summit monument. Why is it called Mt. Baldy? I don't know. The monument is inscribed with its proper name, Mt. San Antonio. I like that better any way. Why not? It's my name. Kind of made me feel like a kindred spirit on this impressive rock.

A forest ranger approached and pointed at our bikes and asked "What are those things for?". What a smart arse. We told him politely "Bikes of course. We're riding down the Old Mt. Baldy Trail"

"Never been done before. And you'll never make it if you try."

Undeterred we zoomed off. "That silly bugger doesn't know his arse from a hole in the ground." I mumbled all knowingly to myself.

Dan Dan led the way on his lounge bike. ABS brakes, triple suspension and all that crap. Danny and I followed faithfully on our rugged and trusty 12 speeds.

Dan Dan disappeared with Danny in hot pursuit, leaving me in a cloud of gritty dust. By the time I entered the dust cloud I discovered that the solid mountain, my kindred soul mate, was nothing but shale and gravel and I promptly went into an uncontrollable slide and landed on my arse.

Recovered quickly and set off down hill again. "Where are those bastards." I wondered. They had totally disappeared and there was no trail. Just crap. I circled around looking for signs of bike trails. Anything. Nothing. Instincts took over and off I went. I gathered speed rapidly. Surely I'm on the trail. Not so sure. Going faster. I need a sign. No sign. A miracle. I see Danny down to the left on a ledge standing next to his bike. A ledge. A fucking ledge coming up and I'm doing 30 mph on shale. "Hug the wall, Hug the wall." I think to myself. "Get off the seat and sit on the bar, stick your right leg on the ground and brake gently" "Standard procedure" "That 800' drop on the left is not gonna scare me" "Oh shit" my right leg reaches down to the ground but the ground has gone "Where's the ground?" "Space" "Fuck!" Christ, I've extended my right knee and torn an extension muscle. "Fuck!" again but louder. Crash. The sound of that one word is worth a thousand pictures

"You O.K. Tone?" "Sure Danny, thanks for waiting. Where's Dan Dan?" "Somewhere ahead I guess" How come that bugger is always in front?

Riding a little slow with the right leg almost out of commission I soon lose sight of Danny but you can't miss the trail at this stage, there's no where else to go, and I know Danny will wait for me.

Sure enough there's Danny. The trail had narrowed down to a point where it became the vertex of an inverted V. 9 inches wide and about 100 feet across with a 60 degree drop of 1000' off to the left and on the right a 45 degree slope down to a ledge that appeared to drop off into nowhere. It actually does. A sheer 2000 feet of nothing. I checked it on the topo later. There was a bit of a breeze. No problem. Bit hard to walk the narrow ridge with a bike over the shoulder. Not enough room to walk and push the bike. So ride it is. I backed up about 10 feet so that when I rode onto the ridge I'd have some momentum. I could sense Danny watching from the other side. Pressure from all directions. "He and Dan Dan had made it so here comes The Tone."

I made it across faster than I typed this sentence.

"Never ever gonna do that stupid stunt again" I promised myself. I catalogued the thought in my brain's reference section. Who knows? I might become partially senile and attempt this same stupid maneuver again.

Down to about 7000' proceeded by numerous almost unridable switchbacks. Reached the upper level of the tree line. Tree stump line actually. Looked like a forest fire and been through here. We caught up there with Dan Dan and regrouped for the next phase. I took out my topo map. Where are we? Time for a drink of water. Thunder. That's weird. No clouds. A gust of wind. Chilly. Rain drops. Where are we? Says here on the map, Lightning Ridge. Those trees didn't get burned by fire. They got struck by lightning. Two guys suddenly run by us heading downhill. "Better get a move on", they cry out. Christ almighty with all this thunder and lightning we didn't need any prompting. Where did those clouds come from? Dumb arse! Talk about arsens. I'm beginning to think that it's my arse and the mountain that are kindred spirits.

Down to the 5000' level. Wet. Safe. "Where's Dan Dan? Lounging back, somewhere ahead no doubt. Where's Danny? Probably waiting for slow poke Tone. I better hurry and catch up. Got to show some form. I'm an Aussie. Woops. Missed that turn but that soft looking green bush below will break my fall. The momentary feeling of weightlessness. Something to do with gravity at work. I'm upside down. There's a bike on top of me. Nothing broken. The experience of having broken every bone in my body assures me this is true. Relief. Strange feeling. Can't move. I try. Pain."

I don't know where Danny came from but miraculously he appeared above me looking down on this silly bastard who had landed spread eagled in a clump of buck brush with 1 to 2" thorns acting as a cushion. This buck did not appreciate it. One thorn had penetrated my right shin an inch or more. Funny. It didn't bleed. Ummmm. Swelling quickly. Prefer for it to bleed... Happiness.. Nothing broken. Experience!!!!

Danny extracted me. A few additional scratches. Left leg still good. Right leg a bit dicey now. Otherwise, hot to trot.

Down another 1000' through a trail not meant for bikes. Narrow. Less than handle bar width. Buck brush 6' high on either side. Go slow. Look well ahead. Above all don't look down. Steer straight. Don't stop or you'll get some more owees. Just keep that left leg cranking the pedal.

Out of the buck brush. Feels great. I see a creek below. Way below. Some jagged rocks appear on my right, a sharp downward bend coming up rapidly. A few minutes earlier it all seemed too slow, now a minute later, seems too fast. I sense a loss of control. Hang to the right, it's the best alternative. Not that much. Through out a right leg. Leg does not respond. Too late. The sound of a plastic helmet being squeezed between a rock and a hard place (my head). Not a bad crash. Broken pedal clip. Broken rear brake handle. Could be worse. Have a workable front brake, a good left pedal clip and now a beautiful creekside trail gently winding down to a little village where our car awaits us.

The trail henceforth is truly a delight, but when you come round a bend at a relatively slow speed of 20 mph and not expecting a fucking tree laying across your path, it gives you pause, but in my case with front brake only, it propels you into another dimension.

After this tumble nothing hurt anymore. I was completely anesthetized to physical pain. I was soon to learn that from now on the pain would be mental.

Back on the bike. Going slow now. Right leg dangling. Toe clip dangling. Poised and ready for the next surprise. Can't be far to my journey's end now. Another bend. Another bend. Another bend. This fucking creek is starting to look not so dammed beautiful to me anymore. Another bend. All the bends looking like the previous one. Another bend. Count "bend" another one hundred times.

The ride terminates suddenly. I'm in someone's back yard. Feels like a Hollywood movie. Christ almighty, it's a creekside village of people from the 60's. What's that I smell. Some strange weed no doubt. Weird looks from faces hidden behind curtains. People disappear into doorways. "Where did those bikers come from. Surely we are protected

from those sorts by our beautiful big mountain." You can almost hear them think as you glide by. I don't see any guns popping out from doors or windows. You never know. I brace for the sound of shots and receipt of a bullet or two. "Fucking trespassers" I'm in their mind now. No problem. I won't feel the pain. I tell myself that this is all mental now. Just a few more houses. Woops again, a dammed fence. Barbed wire. Broken glass. A flight of moss covered slippery rocks. Oh shit! Now we have to climb out of this bloody Shangri-La. I don't need this. Where's Dan? I'm gonna throttle the bugger.

A month later, fully recovered, my daughter asked me to co-sign on a car deal. We went to the dealers to pick up the car. We got there about 9:30 p.m. The deal had already been done but an arse hole, Charles was his name, who had the papers, was in charge that night and he was locked in his office trying to "make it" with a female customer. No matter how we gesticulated through the glass wall of his office, he would not respond. We didn't get the final papers till 11:45 p.m.

My daughter wanted out of this fucker's office at this point but I begged her to wait a moment longer. The guy had said at some point that he was into mountain biking. "Just bought a bike actually." What a pompous arse.

"Well Charles" I said. "Let me give you the directions to the greatest bike ride in the world." His eyes widened in anticipation. I hunched over, looked behind me secretively, then looked straight into his eyes like a true friend and whispered conspiratorially "Are you familiar with the Old Mt. Baldy trail?"

P.S. Charles no longer works at the dealership. He and his bike were never heard of again.