

Trip report: Desert reunion, March 21-28, 2004

Participants: Colette Wiseman, Ela Ben-Ur, Arrin Katz, Pat Brown, Brian Bingham, Tim Hall, Otto Loggers, Ron Hall, and Robert Zeithammer

It took 144 gallons of water, 132 cans of beer, roughly 20 pounds of meat, 4 days, and 1 Chevy Suburban to get 8 mountain-bikers through 100 miles of desert. Sure, it could be done with slightly fewer supplies, but car-supported camping is not about going light, it's about being comfortable. Just to be perfectly clear, camping comforts do not help much with the actual mountain-biking. When a day's plan calls for thirty miles and over 3000 feet of elevation gain, the camping chairs, grills, and even the portable shower riding in the car behind you do not make turning the cranks any easier. So it is quite a notable accomplishment that all of us completed the White Rim Trail in good style and with strengths to spare.

The White Rim Trail, a byproduct of Uranium prospecting in 1950s to blow up the USSR, is a dirt-road loop through some of the most scenic backcountry of the Canyonlands National Park in Utah. You drive to the top of "Island in the Sky" mesa at over 6000 feet above sea-level, leave your car, and drop eastward about half way down towards the Colorado river via the amazing and harrowing Shafer switchbacks. Four days later, you emerge from the west, huffing and puffing after climbing similarly steep switchbacks from the Green river. And the entire time in between, you bike on the relatively level White Rim past vast vistas of endless canyons and towers, through the land of standing rocks, in amazement at the massive scale of everything around you.

Everything is red – the rocks are red, the trail is red, the dust covering your entire body is red. The sunsets are red, your silver bike is red, and you see red each time a sudden punishing uphill or a soft sandpit sends you off that red bike. But it's all good when you recline in a camping chair, grab a choice brew like Milwaukee's Best specially brewed to have only the 3.2% of alcohol allowed in Utah, and talk about the day's adventures with your friends. And since they are all MIT geeks, out comes the laptop that has the topographic software to quantify every detail of the next day's ride, and that can display all those digital photos for the "show and tell" about everyone's recent adventures. "Who are these people?", you might ask. The longer you have been in MITOC, the more likely it is that their names ring a bell. Two former treasurers, two former Camelot managers, all avid trip-participants, and a former biking chair. Motivated by our shared general desire to "be out there doing cool stuff", we all got together for a pretty intense spring break bootcamp in Moab. On the way there, we hit the slopes of the Colorado Rockies for a few days to catch some spring skiing. Then we worshiped the gods of mountain-biking at the mecca of Slickrock Trail, sometimes prostrating ourselves by falling flat on the hallowed sandstone while still clipped into our pedals. Right after those grueling 12 miles, we spent half a day buying aforementioned supplies and packing them into Ron's Suburban (aka "The Beige Bullet" when contacted via a walkie-talkie.) And only then, warmed up and desert-ready (i.e. wasted and already sunburned), we headed into the heart of the Canyonlands.

After emerging from the backcountry, we drove a local all-you-can-eat pizza-joint to bankruptcy, showered off the red dust in a motel, and the next day headed for the Arches National Park. To top the week off, how about some more mountain-biking in Fruita and some more skiing on the way back to Denver? With more digital cameras than people, we got [the pics to document it all](#), please check them out at. And I hope you can join us on another adventure in the future. If you are graduating soon, don't despair, we are the living proof that life goes on even after you move far away from Camelot, circuses, and the fabulous gear room in W20-461. If you want to find others like you, join mitoc_alum@listserv.mit.edu, or just organize a cool trip and invite all of us along.