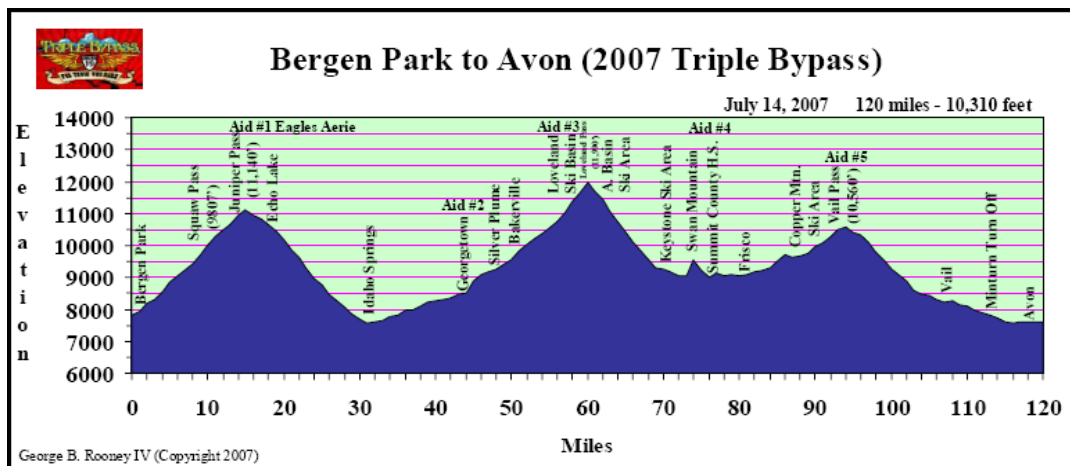
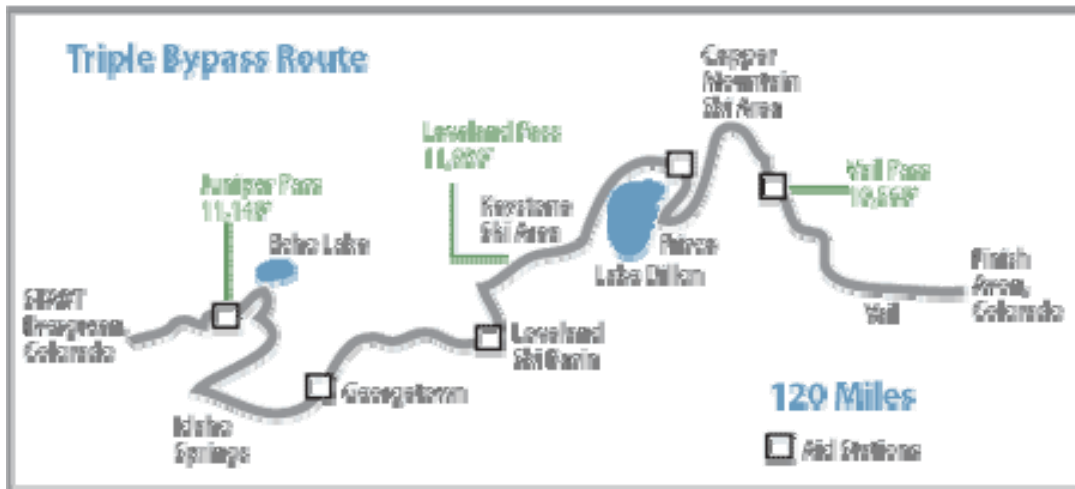


The Triple Bypass

Earlier this month, I participated in the **19th Annual Triple Bypass**, an event that started in Evergreen, Colorado, and ended in Avon, Colorado...an insane **120 miles later!** Although I was asked to write about the experience, I found it difficult to get started because I wondered how I could possibly describe in writing how unbelievably exciting and challenging this ride was. It was quite simply the most physically demanding and rewarding thing that I have ever done in my life.

To begin, here is the map of the route and the elevation profile:



As you can see from the maps above, the ride was 120 miles with a total of 10,310 feet of climbing. The ride included three mountain passes and one “hidden gem.”

- The first was Juniper Pass – 3,000+ feet of climbing in 15 miles – to an elevation of 11,140.
- The second was Loveland Pass – 4,000+ feet of climbing in 30 miles, the steepest of which was in the last 4 miles – to a summit altitude of 11,990 feet (not 11,930 feet, as indicated on the route map).

- After Loveland Summit and before the next rest stop, there was a small climb which wasn't counted (you can see it on the elevation map at about the 74-mile marker) that I believe was 2+ miles with spikes of 14% grade. They called that the "hidden gem" – an extremely painful climb after the previous two.
- This was followed by the final climb of Vail Pass – another 3,000+ feet of climbing in 15 miles – to an altitude of a mere 10,560 feet.

From there, it was a 25-mile finish – approximately 20 miles of descending and 5 miles of flat path to the finish line. One point of interest – the last 45 miles was via a bike trail for the most part. This allowed for more comfort, with no vehicular traffic concerns, and a better focus on riding.

In all honesty, I don't feel like I did a dang thing right in preparing for this ride. My mileage was way below my intended amount due to injuries and, as we all know, the amount of rain this year. The most important thing I had going for me was a willingness to tackle the challenge and tenacity. I would have to tell you if you have one ounce of "quit" in you, this ride will bring it out. As I share this story, I will intersperse the miscalculations (I will call them "blunders") of the day hoping that, if you ever choose to commit to this ride, you will have the benefit of my experience.

Some of the "blunders" actually took place before the ride, so I will begin there. My first real blunder was **driving** Loveland Pass on Wednesday before the Saturday ride. If I had it to do over again, I would not do that. The view from the car was incredibly intimidating and made me wonder if completion was even possible with a compact crank. After partially recovering from the shocking views and realizing how much the rental car struggled to make those climbs, I simply made up my mind that, if I could not climb Loveland Pass with the gearing I had, worst case, I was determined to walk over the summit and finish the ride. Thankfully, I didn't have to walk. My actual ride experience was that a compact crank with a 27-tooth cassette sufficed; however, all of the locals used a triple crank, which I believe (aside from their ability to routinely train on those incredibly steep climbs) clearly made this ride more comfortable for them.

So, now on to the actual ride experience...

The beginning in Evergreen



The first climb was surprisingly comfortable due to the fact that it was early, the weather was perfect, and the adrenalin was flowing. I intentionally stopped (probably) 3 times to drink and give my legs a rest, which I still think was a really good thing to do. I am sure that the locals thought, "Oh my gosh, if he is stopping to rest already, this guy won't make it to the finish line." But they obviously don't know the CCC of Texas mentality. I reached my first goal, which was to arrive at the first rest stop (after climbing 15 miles) in less than 2 hours – and was feeling absolutely great.

But then disaster struck... While walking around the first rest stop to re-fuel and get ready for the next leg, I totally destroyed my left cleat and partially destroyed the right. I could not clip in the left pedal at all and only part of the time on the right. My second (pre-ride) "blunder" was convincing myself earlier in the week that my struggles to clip in were related to "altitude brain fog" and not impending failure of my worn cleats. Lesson learned: Make sure ALL of your equipment is in first-class condition – not just your bike. This "blunder" resulted in a 15-mile

descent (luckily) and a 10-mile climb to the next rest stop without being able to properly pedal (with power). At that point, I had to spend 1½ hours at the rest stop while my wife Donna (my personal sag) drove 30 miles away to have my cleats replaced at the only store that had the right brand.

My third “blunder” was when I assumed that the 15+ miles to the next rest stop – which I was told had an average 6+% climb – would take me 2½ hours. Donna was to meet me at the base of Loveland Pass where I would get the clothing needed for the descent. Having driven this portion of the course on the interstate and experienced how difficult it was for the car to make these climbs also factored into my time estimation. I guess the pressure to make up lost time, along with new cleats, made a huge difference. The reality was I arrived at the next stop an hour prior to the expected time. The problem with that was Donna was an hour away with the jacket that I needed to descend from Loveland Pass. After working up a sweat to climb the Pass, the descent is very cold. So, I had to wait another hour for my jacket. In hind sight, I should have started the climb and just had her meet me at the top of Loveland Pass because this 4-mile stretch probably took 45 minutes to climb.



As you might expect, one of my primary fears was cramping. In an effort to avoid that issue, I made a final “blunder” – over drinking. I honestly believe that I drank too much Accelerade (which was provided by the ride organizers). Alex told me he read an article that said you can actually consume so many carbs that your body can’t process it, and they just sit on your stomach. I really feel like this happened to me. Compounding that, I began having to stop about every 15 minutes for the majority of the remaining ride (60 miles) to relieve myself. Really time consuming!

One other minor “blunder” happened at the rest stop before climbing Vail Pass. With all of the problems up to that point and the unexpected “hidden gem” climb, I was really feeling about as bad as I could possibly feel and still continue to ride. Nothing I was trying to eat seemed to taste good or fulfill me, so in an effort to assist, Donna offered me a piece of pizza. One bite created nausea that continued for a full ½ hour while I am trying to climb Vail Pass. Honestly, at that point as I left the rest stop, Donna (as she told me later) was very concerned that I didn’t have enough left in me to finish the task.



Luckily, at the end of that ½ hour, something kicked in; and I climbed the remainder of Vail Pass feeling very strong. I thought it had to be the last ZipFizz finally kicking in. Additionally, I hooked up with 2 riders (Kin and Talimena Tammy from bikejournal.com); and that, I believe, was extremely beneficial to me. Riding with Kin and Tammy was a mental lift. Group riding diverted my mind from solely my own struggles. After talking to several people who completed this ride, attempting it solo (without a confirmed team or group) seems to increase the difficulty of it. For example, one rider (from Amarillo) I met, who had ridden the Triple Bypass twice, said he would never again ride it without a partner.

Summary:

Tenacity played a big part in the completion of this ride. At one point while climbing the last 4 miles of Loveland Pass, I literally could not stand looking ahead at the steepness to reach the summit. It felt like climbing (our) "Hilltop" for 4 miles instead of a few hundred yards. I just put my head down, stared at the white line on the road, and concentrated on keeping my tire to the left of it. Having made the top and coming down at 40+ mph without pedaling was somewhat of a reward. However, even though the last 25 miles were downhill to flat, I couldn't wait for it to be over. And rightly so, because my ride began at sunrise (5:40 a.m.) and ended at sunset (8:20 p.m.). With all of the "blunders" and required stops, it took me 14 hours and 40 minutes of which 9 hours and 48 minutes were literally on the bike.

The FINISH LINE at Avon!!!



It was grueling...but so worth it to know that I was able to push to those kinds of limits and accomplish a goal that seemed arguably out of my reach. A local rider gave me a great answer as to why anyone would do this ride. He said that it is a great way to experience the equivalent of a single-day mountain stage of the Tour de France... and I would add, it is a taste of the pinnacle of cycling "on the cheap" because you don't have to fly to Europe to do it.

Final recommendations if you decide to tackle this ride:

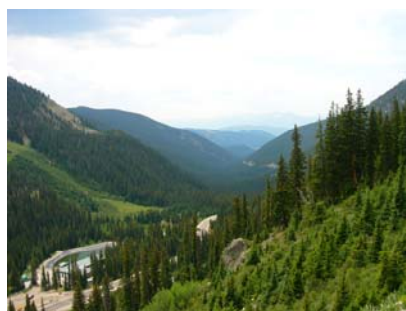
- ✓ Give yourself a week in the area, if you can, to do some riding and acclimate to the altitude.
- ✓ Inspect all of your equipment – not just your bike.
- ✓ Ride with a partner.
- ✓ On ride day, start as early as possible. (All of the locals begin at sunrise instead of the official start time.)
- ✓ Don't drink over 24 ounces an hour.

The obvious question is "Would I do this ride again"? You bet!

View from the top of Loveland Pass



View from the back side of Loveland Pass



Sunset on the final leg into Avon

