

OUTDOORS & RECREATION

Hut-to-hut mountain biking near Fruita

Find sweet solace through true backcountry experience

By **DUFFY HAYES**
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FRUITA — I hesitate to write this story, for fear of letting the secret out.

But hidden along the dusty roads, rough jeep trails and web of singletrack paths that interlace the scenic Uncompahgre Plateau near Fruita in western Colorado, five brand-new backcountry huts can be found scattered among the solitude. And they're waiting for hardy mountain bikers to find them.

The spanking new huts are the creation of Kevin Godar, whose company, Colorado Backcountry Biker, creates multiple-day mountain bike tours for adventurous folks from across the country. Through a series of special-use permits, Godar has established a nearly 200-mile route that winds its way through some of the most spectacular mountain bike terrain you'll find anywhere — jeep trails, Forest Service roads and some of the best singletrack in Colorado link up Godar's five new custom-built backcountry huts.

This is not your ordinary backcountry hut experience, though — and that's by design. Godar, a former software salesman, has a different vision of backcountry touring than your typical shack in the woods, stocked with warm beer and canned tuna.

"If you ride 25 hard miles in a day, you deserve a cold beer and fresh food at the end of it," he said.

Godar regularly plans three-day, five-day, and seven-day trips on the route, but he custom planned a two-day, one-night adventure for me. Early the first morning, he literally dropped me off in the middle of nowhere — just me, my bike, a few tools, a map and directions, and liters and liters of water.

The oasis awaits

A hard, spectacular day of riding that mixed woody creekside single-track and jeep road cruising across vast plateaus culminated in the highlight of the day — happening upon the hut that would house me for the night and re-energize my batteries for the next day's ride.

Finding that hut was nothing short of exhilarating. Nestled among the aspens, hidden from view of the trail, the idyllic one-room cabin was like an oasis in the desert.

The front porch faces west, and a blood-red sunset sank into a spring-fed pond just steps from the hut's front door that evening. The setting is serene, solitary and pastoral — your only neighbors are the cattle and horses that roam free on the expansive BLM land that surrounds. Cattle bones litter the yard, but it's not gruesome. They simply remind you where you are, in the true outer reaches.

The real treat, though, comes when you open the hut's front door. The spacious single room is anchored with a wood-burning stove, and six comfortable bunks hug the cabin's walls. (Eight people can be accommodated comfortably, however.) Countertops stocked with all imaginable supplies make for a nice kitchen prep area, and several massive water tanks provide the closest



The author clips in at a turnout atop the Uncompahgre Plateau, preparing to descend 3,000 feet in five short miles to the town of Gateway below. Special to the Daily Summit Daily/Duffy Hayes

thing to running water that you'll find in the middle of nowhere.

The ultimate indulgence: the food. The pantry is a godsend. Godar has stocked it with a litany of healthy (and some not-so-healthy) food at your fingertips. Cookies, candy bars, trail mix, soups, canned fruits, canned meats and (the obligatory) tuna fish, mac 'n cheese, pancake mix, pretzels, chips and salsa, PB&J, Starbucks coffee, Power Bars, granola, oatmeal — Godar even had stocked my favorite cereal, Kashi Go Lean Crunch! All are a real sight for sore eyes when you turn the handle of the pantry to reveal the goodies inside.

I saved the best for last, though. Godar also provides a cooler full of fresh items brought up to the huts daily. Fresh meats and produce, cold milk, cold beer, fresh eggs, cold cuts and cheeses, butter and ice line a waiting cooler — it's like a chilly treasure chest after a day spent on the hot and dusty trail.

My evening's meal: fresh grilled marinated chicken kabobs with peppers, pasta salad, and a few ice cold Tecates. I chose a Three Musketeers for dessert.

Along with a stock of fresh food, Godar also delivers one piece of baggage per person to the hut each night. Stinky, sticky bike duds are swapped out for clean clothes. I brushed my teeth. Flip-flops never felt so good.

The silence in the hut is truly golden; the only sounds you'll hear as you lay your head to rest are the rustling of the wind, the wing flap of a stray moth and the intermittent glub-glub of a water tank fashioned into a makeshift sink.

You will sleep well.



Your oasis in the backcountry — one of the newly built, custom huts on the Colorado Backcountry Biker tour. Summit Daily/Duffy Hayes



A fully stocked pantry awaits you at each of the backcountry huts along the route. Summit Daily/Duffy Hayes

BIKING: A hut-to-hut journey

From A15

From bliss back to burn

My second day of riding confirmed one thing for sure, though — these tours are not for the faint of heart, nor are they for the novice rider. I happened to be riding on the warmest day of the year, taking on a nearly nine-mile climb during the hottest part of the day. Some of the riding on both days did get fairly technical, and each day included at least one grueling hike-a-bike section.

Sticking to the route can be a bit tricky in spots, too — this is the first season Godar has run tours on it, and you have to be ultra-careful not to stray from the exact directions he provides. A bike computer is nearly a must to follow along and not get lost.

Yet on my second day, after a beastly mid-day climb, all the hard work paid off. The final stretch of the trip was a five-mile, 3,000-foot roller-coaster descent ending in the little gem of a town called Gateway.

Tours wrap up at a brand new resort complex in town, called the Gateway Canyons Resort, where visions of a real hotel with real air conditioning come true. Godar has partnered with the resort, and riders on the tour are treated to a night's stay at the Canyons as part of the package.

While it's hard to recommend Summit Countians take on one of Colorado Backcountry Biker's tours during the mid-summer months — these are the couple of months when local trails around town are most rideable and tem-

peratures most comfortable — Godar will run out rider groups from May 28 until Oct. 6, making his hut system an ideal destination for Summit folks on exodus during shoulder seasons.

People who have taken the tour are returning to their real lives changed people, as evidenced by some of the testimonials from this first year.

"If you ride 25 hard miles in a day, you deserve a cold beer and fresh food at the end of it."

KEVIN GODAR
Owner of Colorado Backcountry Biker

"How do I say thank you for creating the adventure of a lifetime? I can honestly say that I experienced one of the greatest adventures of my life," one city slicker wrote after his tour.

"The huts are all so perfect and the views are spectacular. Evening on the porch looking down into the valley was surreal," another wrote.

"Beyond epic," another described.

To reserve your next adventure, go to www.backcountrybiker.com for all the details, e-mail Godar at keving@backcountrybiker.com, or ring him up at (970) 858-9005.

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