

Great American Tandem Experience

Ride to the Top of the World

(Or near enough for two old people from the flatlands.)

Frisco, Dillon, and Sapphire Point



Prologue

Breckenridge is some combination of quaint, eclectic, artist enclave, ski-resort, and tourist trap. There may be some redundancy in there. June and July, 2018, were unusually hot in the Northwest and the Colorado Rockies were no exception. The natives were complaining. It was the summer of the Paradise Camp Fire.

The temperature was forecast as a moderate 68° when they planned to launch in Frisco on their Cannondale tandem bike to ride around the Dillon Reservoir. They knew the temperature was expected to be over 90° before they finished. They knew the elevation was 9,000 feet in Frisco and they would need to climb 500 feet to make it all the way to Sapphire Point. But the trail, including the mountain, was described as easy to moderate. They had been riding in heat for six weeks and in mountains for two. And they had logged enough miles in Boulder and Denver that they didn't need to make it all the way to the top to reach the fifty-mile goal for Colorado.

They weren't concerned.

The Ride

They parked near the Frisco Adventure Park and set off on a different sort of adventure. The start of the trail followed the shore of the Reservoir, paralleling Frisco's main drag. The slowish ride through town, without traffic, is always the best opportunity for conversation on a tandem, when there is less wind noise. But it is always difficult for the stoker to hear the captain; even more difficult to understand when she can't see the speaker's face.

While the stoker has a restricted view of the world, she does have more opportunity to observe. The captain is generally preoccupied with the 15 feet of trail immediately ahead of the wheel. Conversation tends to run along the lines, "That's an interesting house/church/flower on the left," which is usually behind the captain by the time it comes into the stoker's field of vision. Or perhaps, "I've been thinking we (read 'you') should get the car washed and organize the back so we aren't hauling anything we (read 'I') don't need." Even at low speeds, the conversations tend to be one way.

They did learn some stuff from historic plaques and parks. Frisco is now heavily dependent on tourism, centered on skiing and the Dillon Reservoir, which is 15 times the size of the Des Moines Reservoir, which is officially the Dale Moffit Reservoir, which I didn't know until I tried to find it on a map. In spite of its name, the Dillon Reservoir is the reservoir for Denver.

Frisco has been a mining town, a railroad town, a Native American town since at least 5,000 BCE. And before they built the Reservoir, marina, and bike trail, it was a good first approximation to a ghost town. Compared to the Native American phase, the mining, railroad, and ghost phases were relatively recent and relatively short-lived. While it was still a mining town, a saloon (they had more than one) was converted into a school house, about the time the wives arrived. Inside the converted saloon looked a lot like Whitman School in Warren County, Iowa, which has a less colorful history if more distinguished alums. Without the reservoir, the natives had to make do with fishing in the Snake, Blue, and Swan Rivers, which all managed to wander through here and still survive in some sense, post Reservoir.

After it got out of town, the trail was squeezed between the reservoir and a highway, sometimes on the shoulder. It wasn't particularly challenging or interesting but it did have some ups and downs. One very nasty down approaching the City of Dillon, on the north shore, and nasty downs become even nastier ups on the return; incentive to make it a loop, rather an out and back. It was better after Dillon when the highway went its own way and the tandemers became lost in their own thoughts about what it must have been like a couple hundred years ago, not to mention 7,000.

They started the climb to Sapphire Point. They were now about 9,100 feet with an air temperature above 90°. There isn't much in the way of trees at 9,100 feet. Except for occasionally asking themselves, "Why" and each other, "Are we having fun?", they kept pedaling. They met a woman hiking down who said something profound like, "It shouldn't be this hot up here." No more or less profoundly but less truthfully, the intrepid cyclists responded, "We're not from around here; we're used to it." In addition to the shortage of real trees, there was a marked shortage of real restrooms, which was compounded by the shortage of real trees. And they pedaled on.

As with long drives and sermons, no matter how alert and attentive, one frequently wonders later, "What was I thinking about all that time?" and "How did we get here?" This ride was even more so. They don't remember getting hot or tired. They don't remember when, where, or why the decision to turn around and forego the Sapphire Point overlook and the loop route. There were no ill effects or other evidence of sun stroke, dehydration, altitude sickness, or bad fish at lunch.

They know, because the GPS computer tells them so, their minimum elevation was 9,005 and the maximum 9,127. The computer also told them they climbed almost 500 feet (and descended about the same). There was a gap in the record when the GPS lost its satellites; this typically happens indoors and in tunnels, under large trees, or next to tall buildings. There were none of those anywhere near Sapphire Point. Undoubtedly, something to do with Tenderfoot Mountain. What was it they mined around here?¹

A gap shows up on the GPS gif file as a straight line connecting the two known points bounding the gap. The gif for this trip has a very short straight line, lasting only a few seconds, starting at the GPS-recorded turnaround point,

On the way down they passed the same hiker they had met on the way up, who commented, “That was a good long ride. Great work on a hot day.” On the downhill, there wasn’t time for a response even if they had had something clever.

The Dream

I’m fuzzy on the dates but we were still staying in the condo of Doré’s high school friend, Diane (nee) Dufford, in Breckinridge so it couldn’t have been more than a couple days after the ride. I think I dream a lot, like most people; but I rarely remember more than a vague awareness of having dreamt. The research I have seen, which is now 40 years old, concluded that people who don’t remember their dreams have really boring dreams. I remembered this one. I only had it the once.

I was standing in a field that more resembled an Iowa hay field than a meadow on the side of a Colorado mountain. There was no shade; the sun was blazing hot. The heat caused the air around me to shimmer, scattering the light and blurring the edges. It was very hot.

There was an aroma like freshly mown clover, which I always rather liked although I hated and avoided clover after it was dried and baled. I always rather liked mowing hay; in addition to the aroma, it was a repetitive task that didn’t require a lot of cognitive engagement. Unlike plowing, it was easy to see progress and, unlike cultivating, you could usually hide your mistakes. It was only when I started thinking about the task at hand and that there might be a more efficient way than however my father had told me to do it that I got into trouble. I don’t think this digression was part of the dream but it is part of the association in the retelling. This may not be a legitimate distinction and any self-respecting psychotherapist could make something of my making the association and the distinction and denying their importance.

The scene was a Minnesota prairie with yellow and purple wildflowers and buzzing insects, probably late July, which was about when I had the dream. In my youth, we would have classified this field as ‘unimproved’ pasture land with yellow and purple weeds. I sensed Grandma Kellogg walking through the flowers but she was too far away and has no connection to Minnesota that I am aware of. All this is more impression than visual; the light was unfocused, soft, bright, and white.

The prairie/pasture had a scattering of trees; the light was still very white and hot but I was chilly. There were a dozen or so, I didn’t think to count, very large bulls, probably at

¹ Gold, silver, copper, zinc, and lead. There are 148 active mining claims and 9,466 inactive.

least eight feet high or taller. This is lifted right out of a recurrent dream from my childhood. There was never the terror of a full-blown nightmare, but there was some anxiety. Maybe they weren't that large; I was just smaller. And before you go all Freudian on me, I associate earlier airings of this dream with trips to the Dairy Genetics bull stud in Des Moines with our father. These bulls were big and brown, like Herefords, not black and white, as I remember from earlier versions of the dream and would have expected. (And why would something called 'Dairy Genetics' have Herefords anyway?) They seemed curious about my presence in their midst. If there was any emotion involved, it was me being angry at them.

'Bull' no longer seems like the right word; 'animal' and 'creature' feel disrespectful, maybe 'being' or 'presence'. Their movement around me didn't seem to require legs, so walking doesn't describe it; more like a fish or snake but it wasn't floating, gliding, sliding, or rolling, and definitely not slithering. I shouldn't have brought snake into this. From my perspective, (but with the bright, diffuse light, my vision felt like I was wearing Doré's glasses with way too much correction) their forms changed as they relocated around the area. I can't say if their shapes changed or just my viewing angle. There was no hint of bilateral or any other type of symmetry, but if we don't need top to bottom or front to back symmetry, why do we need left to right. I seem to be flirting with something like spherical symmetry since the shape didn't depend on the angle, but they certainly weren't spherical. The topology is getting away from me; try something simpler: The image I retain is best described, but not well described as a side view of a very lumpy bull bison. The lighting or blurred vision made it difficult to see surface features or texture, if there were any.

The 'buzzing' of the unseen prairie insects was still there. The 'presences' seemed interested and, for lack of a better word, businesslike; certainly not threatening but not exactly welcoming. In spite of the warmth of the air, they seemed cool and I was still chilled. I felt some anxiety but never dread nor even discomfort.

I did sort of a video replay of events in my life, certainly not the highlights as far as I am concerned. Nor was it the 'my life flashing before my eyes' kind of thing that you hear so much about. Nor any long white tunnel toward the light. I saw my father and grandfather castrate a calf outside the barn at Milo. I was weighed by a nurse, I guess, at Hawthorne 'Round-up' before I started school. I had my tonsils removed and my mother had promised me ice cream but I couldn't swallow it. I split my forehead open when Paul and I were playing on a grain elevator left by the Trotters. (My fault, not his, this time.) I fell during a 4-H basketball game and was surprised that everyone was gathered around me as soon as I looked up. I put my Triumph TR-3 in a ditch coming home from an interview trip to Kansas City, which I never worried my mother about. (She just heard I had some car trouble, which is completely plausible with a TR-3 and probably more than she wanted to hear.) I landed my Cessna 150 on an island in Starved Rock State Park; landed on the second pass; the plane was afraid of water. That's as much of this as you need to know. Definitely not highlights and not a lot of fun.

Then a passer-by said, "That was a good long ride. Great work." I didn't respond but thought, "It wasn't that long."

That's the dream; total fabrication from my sub-conscious.

Epilogue

This post has been aging, or gnawing, or nagging for a couple years. I seem reluctant to publish out of some apprehension about what the reception might be, at least partly spawned by the reaction of the few people who have first heard the oral version.

When you hang around with a lot of social scientists and other creative types, recounting dreams is not without risk. I know how I respond when I read accounts in the same general vein. Typically, disdain, skepticism, incredulity, or sarcasm. Or, all of the above. I am familiar with some relevant research, having read, for example, Carl Sagan's books Contact and The Demon Haunted World. I have had enough course work in psychology, normal and abnormal, to have some understanding of spontaneous temporal and schizophrenic command hallucinations and of the interpretation of dreams.²

Initial responses have been of two sorts. The first, clinical. "During a monotonous, challenging ride, disassociation is to be expected. The manifest content of the dream is pretty obvious. Do you want to talk about the latent content?" No! The second, personal. Annoyance, edging toward anger and frustration at my not taking seriously their taking seriously the story as evidence of either an alien abduction or a spiritual encounter. I haven't gotten any of the standard, "Is this another grab for attention?" or "Have you gone totally round the bend this time?"

My upbringing was some confluence of belief with disbelief, seasoned with generous measures of naivety and cynicism. As a fundamentalist, Calvinistic Protestant, I was taken, not sent, to two, three, or four church functions every week for eighteen years. This means "knowing" that several levels of *supernaturals* or *extraterrestrials* are actively involved in life on Earth; although perhaps not as actively as in Biblical times. On the other hand, I was always aware that the tooth fairy was my father; the Easter bunny was a marketing fiction, often manifested in the person of Mrs. Conley's daughter Virginia; Halloween ghosts were bed sheets and brothers the rest of the year; and the Christmas elf was a concept, not an entity. Per my mother, "We are each other's Santa." Perhaps that's where she went wrong. Or right.

I grew up to become an empiricist, probably always was, reading Bertrand Russell, John Dewey, and Ronald Fisher. In spite of the cynical influences of writers like Russell and George Bernard Shaw³, I endorse the Principles of the Enlightenment: Experience is the source of all knowledge and science is best way to understand that experience, and to validate (or invalidate) that knowledge; nay, the only way.

And, eye witness testimony is the least reliable form of evidence for that and most other purposes.

That is who or what I am and this is my experience. Knowledge and wisdom will have to wait.

When we consider totems, angels, leprechauns, demons, witches, imps, werewolves, fairies, ghosts, wizards, spirits, vampires, zombies, and alien invaders, there has been a

² I was not looking for my dreams to interpret my life, but rather for my life to interpret my dreams. *Susan Sontag*

³ Good judgment comes from experience; experience comes from bad judgment. (*Margaret Atwood*)

remarkably consistent and continuous stream of reports⁴ about supernatural experiences throughout human history. The reports go through phases and follow themes; the themes related to the current state of technology⁵, popular fiction, and general hysteria. Visits from little green men in flying saucers weren't happening until we understood the nature of the cosmos and approached the 'space age.'

For manifestations of the Virgin Mary et al, they seem to typically happen to young women in poor villages in Spain or South America and make very mundane demands, like build a shrine in my honor on this site. It never seems to occur to the visions that the powers that be in the village might expect some tangible evidence before rushing out to build the shrine, although such visions and shrines are very popular with local Chambers of Commerce. Wouldn't it would be much more helpful if they presented themselves to someone with the power or authority to make an actual, less self-aggrandizing difference?

Paraphrasing Sagan and others with respect to alien encounters and considering the astronomical distances involved, if all or even a fraction of the reports are accurate, then we must be sitting in the middle of one of the busiest intersection in the Universe⁶. Or we are being seriously stalked. If there is a super-advanced civilization⁷ out there that has the technology to deal with the distances, even in just our home galaxy, it proves one thing and suggests another: (1) we are not alone and (2) we are not the norm.

Why else would they be so interested in watching us?

Unless we are their Disney World.

⁴ The 'stream' is consistent and continuous; the 'reports' show a lot of variety.

⁵ "Any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic." (Arthur C. Clarke)

⁶ See *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*, (Douglas Adams)

⁷ "Any sufficiently advanced extra-terrestrial intelligence is indistinguishable from God." (Michael Shermer)